

Mayor Tom Barrett's 2014 State of the City Address

Milwaukee February 24, 2014

As Prepared for Delivery

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Good Morning, Milwaukee! Well, it's been a long cold winter and the voices we've just heard are a welcome addition of warmth, a glowing reminder that there is lots to love in Milwaukee and many great things happening.

Thank you to the speakers who have talked passionately about their love for our wonderful city.

Welcome to all the elected officials who have joined us this morning.

I'd like to recognize County Executive Chris Abele and School Superintendent Greg Thornton.

I'd also like to congratulate our new Milwaukee Common Council President Michael Murphy.

And Frank Almond, thank you for joining us today. Thank you very, very much. The recovery of your Stradivarius was great news for you, great news for the city, great news for the Milwaukee Police Department, and for the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra. It was a homerun!

There is even more great news as the Symphony is nearing a successful conclusion to its \$5-million fundraising effort.

I love the Symphony, and I am pleased this community has stepped forward to keep the musicians – and their remarkable instruments—playing.

One of the things I love most about Milwaukee is that people step up.

They get involved.

They commit resources and they know the challenges we face are challenges we can overcome.

They share a vision that our great city can be even greater.

It was a shared vision that led us here today. Since 1969, Journey House has been an anchor in the Clarke Square Neighborhood; growing from a storefront to this beautiful facility.

Michele Bria's determination and the commitment from multiple partners including the City, the Zilber Foundation, Principal Wendell Smith, Longfellow School, the Richard Burke Foundation, and the Merten Charitable Trust turned this vision into reality.

It's all about commitment to neighborhoods.

Commitment to neighborhoods is the driving force behind my Strong Neighborhoods Plan.

My Plan addresses the impact foreclosures have on Milwaukee neighborhoods. It recognizes that even in the hardest hit neighborhoods, there is strength.

There are good people, committed organizations and yes, some very positive indicators.

For example, the Ezekiel Hope program recently completed a renovation on the northwest side of a foreclosed property purchased from the City.

When Don Utech, chairman of Ezekial and Jim Gaillard, vice-president of finance, finished their renovation in January, they were under budget, had contracted with five minority businesses and provided lead abatement training for 14 contractors.

We look forward to this project growing and I will be excited to welcome home owners to their new home.

On a larger scale, we're working with organizations like ACTS Housing. ACTS has a unique model that connects committed buyers with the dream of owning their own home.

ACTS has also stepped up to reduce the impact of foreclosures. In the last couple of years, it has helped more than 60 families buy and fix up foreclosed homes.

Our rent-to-own program is already up and running and we expect to close on several sales in the next few months, with many more tenants interested. Our goal is turning 30 renters into homeowners.

2014 tax delinquencies are down 10% from last year, thanks in part to simple policy changes that Alderman Bob Bauman and City Treasurer Spencer Coggs made last summer to our tax collection policy.

That's 1,500 fewer properties in the tax foreclosure pipeline.

Smart investments in neighborhoods produce dividends. That's the idea behind the Targeted Investment Neighborhoods program.

Earlier this year, I announced the latest additions to this program.

Pulaski Park, right here on the South Side, St. Joseph's, and Martin Drive on the North Side, are neighborhoods where focused efforts are sustaining and increasing owner-occupancy, strengthening property values, and improving the quality of life.

Right around the corner on South 22nd street, our Youth Builds partner, the Milwaukee Christian Center, built two single family homes. The first home sold in September and the second has an offer pending. That's great news.

Even better is that through the City's investment, 50 young people between the ages of 17 and 24 received real hands-on training in the construction trades.

Mac Weddle and Northcott, our other Youth Builds partner, are doing similar great work on the Northside.

Strong Milwaukee neighborhoods are linked to a strong Milwaukee economy. My goal is to continue Milwaukee's status as the driving force in the region and the state. That means we have to continue to attract and retain companies and jobs.

On the northwest side, Hellermann Tyton employs hundreds of people. Its products are used in the automotive, aerospace, and telecommunications industries. And now the company is expanding.

Hellermann Tyton will be adding fifty-thousand square feet to its Good Hope Road facility and a minimum of fifty new manufacturing and technical jobs over the next two years. And the City has partnered in that expansion.

Here's another great example of success: Rishi Tea.

We heard about it this morning.

Three weeks ago I joined Rishi's Joshua Kaiser and Ben Harrison, both MPS graduates, as they broke ground on a new headquarters and their new production facility in the Menomonee Valley.

In its new central location, Rishi will be close to a quality, available workforce, and ready for continued growth.

Another expanding company, Solaris, has identified a site in the Menomonee Valley where it will build a new manufacturing facility this year. The maker of specialized medical garments is looking to continue its growth right here in our city.

With the Menomonee Valley Industrial Center nearly complete, we are focusing on similar business parks at Century City and the Reed Street Yards.

At Reed Street Yards, which is just south of the Harley-Davidson Museum, city-financed infrastructure – green infrastructure – is now in place. Businesses are already showing interest.

The land at Century City, the former A.O. Smith site, is ready for investment and a new century of manufacturing and jobs.

At Century City, a prominent new building---a site for manufacturing---is set to come out of the ground this year. General Capital is our partner in this effort and the Milwaukee Economic Development Corporation is on board, too.

This first new building at Century City will include fifty-thousand square feet of space with the potential to double its size in future stages. Already there are a number of companies that we are approaching to locate there.

I appreciate Aldermen Wade and Alderman Hamilton for their commitment and help in making this a reality.

Just across the street from Century City, the Sewerage District and the City are working together, planning and designing a flood mitigation project to reduce flooding and create a green corridor near DRS Technologies.

DRS has been a key partner that has provided land to maximize the benefits of this sustainable project.

The work will transform the 30th Street Industrial corridor into a major modern employment center and economic hub.

Milwaukee's downtown is the greatest center of commerce in the entire state of Wisconsin. And it's a neighborhood too. Northwestern Mutual recognizes that, and it is making steady progress toward its new fabulous tower where it will retain and add thousands of jobs. Thank you, John Schlifske. We are grateful for your commitment to your hometown. Thank you for your commitment and for investing in this City.

The southeast corner of 4th and Wisconsin has long been anchored by Boston Store. It is a valued retailer, and Bon Ton, Boston Store's corporate parent employs hundreds of people in their offices here. Bon Ton's payroll there is between \$50- to \$60-million annually.

We are working to solidify the entire Bon Ton presence on Wisconsin Avenue. Part of that is a proposed Tax Incremental Financing plan to lock in the Boston Store lease through early 2018. West Wisconsin Avenue has a bright future – a future that will be even stronger with Bon Ton in place.

I strongly urge the Common Council to approve this proposal.

The West Wisconsin Avenue Development Corporation will be conducting an exciting design competition for the lot at 4th and Wisconsin.

What we want to see is a proposal that creates a major destination and includes public spaces, small businesses and public art.

We are also moving forward with work that will improve the connections between downtown and the lakefront. Great cultural amenities will be closer, and our greatest natural asset, Lake Michigan, will be even more accessible.

Buildings are popping up in other parts of the city as well.

A new office building is under construction at the Brewery.

A mixed-use development at First and Greenfield will add a grocery store in Walkers Point and a distinctive entrance to UWM's Harbor Campus.

Thank you Alderman Perez for your involvement in this project.

2014 is an important year in assessing and determining Milwaukee's and the region's needs for cultural and entertainment venues.

I am proud the Bucks have called Milwaukee home since 1968, and we need to work cooperatively to make sure downtown Milwaukee remains home to our region's largest, indoor entertainment center.

And let me emphasize, the key word is cooperatively. We all have a stake in strengthening the very places that help define us.

We will continue to help individuals turn good ideas into job-creating businesses here. We work with BizStarts, Scale Up, Generator and other groups that are promoting business growth.

One big issue is raising capital, especially for start-up and very small businesses that have limited access to traditional financing. The internet is helping us to address that problem.

KIVA.com uses its web site to match small loans from average citizens with micro-enterprises all over the world. For example, if Kiva were located here, a seamstress could seek a small loan to buy a new sewing machine and someone in Dallas could help finance it.

We are in discussion with KIVA to bring its internet lending to small businesses right here in Milwaukee. The Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation is our partner in this venture.

When Milwaukee becomes a KIVA City, ambitious local entrepreneurs will have a new source of capital to create employment and grow our economy.

Milwaukee is breaking new ground in entrepreneurship and setting the stage for growth.

Last year, we partnered with American Express OPEN, the Greater Milwaukee Committee, the State, and UWM to launch an entrepreneur ecosystem called Scale Up Milwaukee.

Milwaukee is the first U.S. city to launch a project of this kind and I'm pleased to announce that today American Express is again committing this year to expand the work of Scale Up.

A lot of good work is underway. I want to add another form of encouragement for ambitious business people.

Later this year, I will sponsor the first Mayor's Entrepreneurs week, which will be both a celebration and a resource to support entrepreneurs.

People interested in turning a business idea into a growing enterprise will be able to get technical assistance, business support, and solid direction for future growth.

One key to growing businesses and putting people to work is the direct connection between the employer and a well-trained employee.

My Mayor's Manufacturing Partnership has caught the attention of the White House. Through my manufacturing partnership, we are supporting competitiveness by working with employers to fill positions with skilled workers.

Prominent local companies like GE Health Care, Harley-Davidson, HB Performance Systems and Master Lock have all participated in this initiative led by the Milwaukee Area Workforce Investment Board, the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership and MATC.

We've recently launched another training effort---the Dombrowski Training Program named after a long-time City employee who donated his estate to the City. Think about that City employees!

We thought it fitting to honor the memory of David Dombrowski by naming a new training program after him.

Members of the Dombrowski Landscape Crew get a unique opportunity to earn special certifications. And the best part...when these 30 individuals complete the four-month training program, there are jobs waiting for them.

For people coming out of the criminal justice system, it may not be as easy to find a job. Through a program with Wisconsin Community Services, our Department of Public Works hired 40 temporary workers in the spring and 48 in the fall.

What we learned is that these people are hard-working and motivated. They are solid employees who need a chance.

I strongly encourage private employers to take a look at hiring workers who need a second chance. Clarence Johnson, WCS's associate director, is here today, and I am sure he would be happy to discuss how employing people coming out of the justice system can work for you.

For Milwaukee teens, having their first job and the learning experiences associated with work is important for their development into responsible working adults.

We should all be concerned about Milwaukee's future workforce. That's why I am so passionate about my Earn & Learn summer jobs program.

I want to offer 3,000 teens jobs this summer. Please fill out a pledge card today for jobs at your company or make a donation to my Earn & Learn Fund.

For every \$2,000 we bring in, a teenager will get a job and hope for the future.

Corporate support for Earn & Learn has been generous.

Since 2005, 19,000 young Milwaukeeans have participated in this program. But we can't stop.

That's why I need you to step-up and help us put more young people to work this summer.

Strong, sustainable neighborhoods and local businesses are the cornerstone of a sustainable city.

My vision for community sustainability is the ReFresh Milwaukee plan. Five years from now, I want Milwaukee to be known as one of the most sustainable cities in the nation.

One area of focus in ReFresh Milwaukee is on improving the energy efficiency and overall sustainability of our buildings and businesses.

For the past two years, my ME3 program provided technical assistance and grants to manufacturers. This year Milwaukee is the first City in the nation to self-fund an investment like this in sustainable manufacturing.

Because of ME3, companies like R&B Wagner and Visual Impressions have been able to increase sales, hire and retain employees and invest in new machinery and capacity.

22 manufacturers have lowered their electricity use so much the savings could power 430 homes.

Milwaukee has a strong cluster of energy efficiency, renewable energy, and power and control companies, which are well positioned to grow.

The Midwest Energy Research Consortium, or M-WERC, is a regional partnership of more than 60 companies, universities, and others in the energy, power and controls industries.

I'm pleased to announce M-WERC is poised to launch the Energy Innovation Center at the Century City Tower on N. 27th Street. This Center will serve as an incubator for new companies.

Thank you to Alan Perlstein and John Bobrowich for their leadership on this issue.

We identified the Inner Harbor on Milwaukee's South Side as a catalytic project in my Refresh Milwaukee Plan, and I'm happy to report that today we are ready to launch a new phase of this initiative.

We are announcing Inner Harbor 2020 - a major cooperative effort of the private and public sectors. Our goal is to bring about a significant transformation of the Inner Harbor by 2020.

I will be working with Bruce Keyes, who was instrumental in Menomonee Valley Partners and our Bikeshare program, to direct the Inner Harbor 2020 program. This critical work will strengthen and enhance our connection to Lake Michigan.

HOME GR/OWN is a nationally-recognized idea that increases access and demand for local healthy food.

Our HOME GR/OWN team is part of ReFresh Milwaukee and will redevelop more than 20 vacant lots this year...more trees, more flowers, more vegetables.

Over the past year, one of the accomplishments I am most proud of is reducing teen pregnancy.

In early 2008, I set a goal to reduce the teen birth rate 46 percent by 2015. We have not only met our 2015 goal, but we have already topped it, reducing teen births in the city of Milwaukee by 50 percent, by 50 percent.

And, we're not done. To keep these rates low – and to drive them even lower – we need a continued, sustained effort. Thanks to Mary Lou Young, her team at United Way and members of the Teen Pregnancy Oversight Committee, we'll do just that.

We are applying this same model to reducing Infant mortality.

Two years ago we set an aggressive goal to reduce the number of infants who die before their first birthday by 10% and simultaneously reduce the African-American infant mortality rate by 15% by 2017.

Since we set that goal, we have already seen a 14.3% drop in the infant mortality rate. While we are pleased with this progress, we can't celebrate. We can't celebrate when the African-American infant mortality rate remains stubbornly high.

A part of our work is promoting safe sleep and we will continue to do that, but you should know that for every infant who dies because of an unsafe sleep environment, four infants in our city are dying because of complications of prematurity.

That's the headline story you haven't seen.

Reducing premature births requires us to build community partnerships, offer health education, and provide direct services to those young women who need it most.

We will not turn our backs on reducing infant mortality. We must continue to work on this critical issue.

Despite the loud criticisms directed at the Affordable Care Act, there are quiet successes happening across the nation. Today the website is working.

Having more people with affordable health insurance makes sense.

The State's fiscal Bureau estimated that Medicaid expansion would have saved the State of Wisconsin \$340 million through 2021. Unfortunately, Wisconsin refused those federal dollars.

Even with the State's questionable decision, we are moving forward.

The Milwaukee Health Department is assisting individuals and helping them to enroll through the health insurance marketplace at 66 sites citywide.

The deadline to purchase insurance through the health insurance marketplace is March 31. That is just 35 days from now.

Let's get people covered. Let's ensure that more people in our community get access to the health care they need and deserve – because we will be a healthier community for it.

The Health Department isn't the only City Department concerned with the health and safety of Milwaukeeans. Our Fire Department, under the leadership of Chief Mark Rohlfsing, achieved a record low number of fire fatalities last year.

From the Survive Alive House, and the FOCUS program, to the remarkable, lifesaving emergency medical responses, our Fire Department deserves the credit for this record low number of deaths.

Alderman Terry Witkowski is also working to keep fire fatalities low and make Milwaukee an even safer community.

The Milwaukee Police Department continues its data-driven efforts to improve the quality of life in our City. Through the focused deployment of personnel and technology, the department has produced a 26% reduction in crime since 2007.

That means 12,000 fewer crime victims in our city over the past six years.

I'm proud of the work of Chief Flynn and our brave men and women.

We have continued to maintain strength levels despite a dramatic decline in State Shared Revenue. In fact, the 2014 budget includes 120 new police officers.

Thank you Aldermen Puente and Bohl for supporting these additional officers.

There is more work to be done. Let's face it: last year's homicide numbers were too high.

In Milwaukee, we know that the great majority of our shootings and homicides involve young black male victims and young black male suspects.

Reducing the unacceptable level of violence will remain a primary focus.

Tomorrow, the Chief and I will be going to New Orleans to attend the inaugural convening of Cities United, an effort focused on reducing violence among young black men in America's cities.

Our crime reduction efforts rely on community partners, including groups like LISC, Running Rebels, the United Community Center, and Safe & Sound, the faith-based community, and foundations. Thank you all. Thanks to the block watch captains and all who want a safer city.

I want to take a minute to talk about families.

Two-thirds of our black children live apart from their dads compared to one-third of our Hispanic children and one-quarter of our white children.

By building on existing programs like my Fatherhood Initiative that has served over 8,000 men, we can and must create a Milwaukee where every child has an involved father or father figure.

Let's work to keep families together. Let's also stop government from tearing families apart.

Milwaukee has always been a city of immigrants. I support comprehensive immigration reform. It is important to Milwaukee families, in particular Hispanic families, and respectful of people who contribute to our economy.

Families include loving and committed couples, regardless of their sexual orientation. It's time to revisit this issue in Madison. I want same-sex couples who want to get married in Milwaukee to be able to do so, and not have to go to Minneapolis, Chicago, or Iowa.

Let's talk about education.

Every student in our city deserves a high quality education. We rely on our schools to level the playing field for children born into poverty. Great teachers are an important part of it.

Let's celebrate award-winning teachers. At Ronald Reagan High School, I joined in presenting Sarah Berndt with the prestigious Milken Educator award.

Three teachers from Alba school won People Magazine's Teacher of the Year award. Please join me in congratulating

Brenda Martinez,
Radames Gallarza, and
Elissa Guanero

MPS students are achieving great things. Kevon Looney has been selected to play in the McDonald's All-American game and will be playing basketball for UCLA season. I was at his game last week when he scored his two-thousandth high school point. The best move he made was presenting the ball to his mother and father.

Shampriell Morrise, a student at the Milwaukee School of the Arts, was named one of the "best and brightest young artists in the nation."

Those are the future of this city.

Education is challenging work. And we rely on the City to provide bond financing, like for this facility right here, after-school and summer library programming, public safety, immunizations, and investment in neighborhoods where children live and where schools are located.

That's why I will be engaged in the selection of the next Milwaukee Public Schools Superintendent. It's critically important that the Mayor and the School Superintendent have a strong working relationship and a level of trust to move issues forward.

The world recently lost a great man in Nelson Mandela, and we should all take heed in his words of wisdom. To quote, "overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity - it is an act of justice."

Let me sum up the concept of "educational justice" in just five words -- I Have A Dream Milwaukee.

I launched the I Have A Dream Milwaukee program in 2008 at Clarke Street School along with many supporters including Ted and Mary Kellner, the Brady Foundation, Milwaukee Public Schools and the former Legacy Bank.

I Have A Dream Milwaukee is a college readiness program that guarantees every Dreamer college tuition and other support services.

The program now serves 52 Dreamers. They started in the first and second grades, and are now sixth and seventh graders.

Here today representing the 6th graders are:

Allontay Haynes and
Dashainell Thomas

And representing the 7th graders:

Juanita Lipsey
Olivia Roberson

I want to thank our Dreamers for believing in themselves, that they can conquer anything and achieve their dreams and all of the adults who are encouraging them along the way.

A foundation for education is access to information. Our library system is continually evolving and responding to needs of the community.

We are bridging the digital divide by providing technology and digital access in all our libraries.

I recently introduced my multi-year plan to upgrade our libraries. With a budget of \$21.5 million we will rebuild four branches and renovate another.

By year's end, we'll be opening the doors at the new East Library, a technology-rich 21st-century facility.

Our summer reading program and our Teacher in the Library program continue to ensure that our children maintain their academic achievements in the summer and get the help they need during the school year.

Our libraries get great support from Aldermen Hamilton, Kovac, and Alderwoman Coggs who are active on the Library's board and I thank them all.

In my time as Mayor, a job I love and am so honored to have, I have focused on moving our city forward by investing in neighborhoods, working to retain and bring family-supporting jobs, and building partnerships to address the needs of our children and improve the quality of life for this generation and the next.

I'm extremely pleased to have maintained a municipal pension system that is fully funded and performing exceptionally well – and we are doing this at a time when many cities are facing massive pension shortfalls. We continue to maintain a high quality Bond rating with both Moody's and Standard and Poor's.

I'm pleased that my administration and the Common Council can have legitimate disagreements but still come together and make the investments that are needed today and that will pay dividends for years to come.

And I'm so proud of the work of our City employees. This winter has been especially challenging for our Department of Public Works. I know Alderman Joe Dudzik, and all he elected officials, join me in praising the department for its hard work in the cold and snow.

It's fitting that we're here in Journey House, "the gym that Joe built." Joe Zilber invested in Milwaukee in so many ways. Later in life he not only invested with his resources, he invested with his heart. From his work at the Brewery to his generous contribution to the Zilber Neighborhood Initiative, Joe left a legacy that injected new life, new partnerships and more opportunities into Milwaukee.

We don't all have the resources that Joe Zilber did, but that doesn't mean we can't match his civic pride, his philanthropic spirit and his love for Milwaukee. So, please support my Earn & Learn program, get involved in your neighborhood, a civic venture, the arts, a new business start-up – the opportunities are here.

I need you. Milwaukee needs you and we all need each other!

Thank you for all you do to make Milwaukee an even greater city.