

**MAYOR TED WHEELER
STATE OF THE CITY,
FINAL, AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY
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In my view, the job of Portland Mayor isn't just to solve the well understood challenges in our community – housing, homelessness, infrastructure, policing.

These issues will always be with us to a greater or lesser degree, and it will always be my job to help address them to the best of my ability with the resources available.

The greater part of the job of Mayor – and the whole City Council for that matter – and the harder part of the job, is helping to create a clear direction for the future of our community.

While these two things go hand in hand – the daily management of the city and the vision for the future – the focus of my speech today is to answer these basic questions: Who are we as a people? Where are we going? How will we get there?

Portland is experiencing a metamorphosis.

We are transitioning from being a big city with a small city feel, to becoming a global city with all the opportunities and difficulties that come with it.

These changes are accompanied by some trepidation, and that's ok. In fact, that reaction is entirely in keeping with our character. Portland used to be the alternative, and now – let's face it – we are in demand, and we are struggling a bit with that realization.

There are other aspects of our character we can draw upon, that will serve us well in these times – our sense of adventure, creativity, innovation... our willingness to work hard, and our belief that our best days lay ahead.

I have a tremendous sense of optimism about our future. I have confidence in our people and institutions. I have belief that we can work together to ensure that as our city grows, the things we love about this city grow in equal proportion.

Optimism. Confidence. Belief.

Let these be the qualities that we embrace today... because these are the very qualities that brought us to this place and time.

Today, when people think about Portland, they think about our coffee, our public transit, our restaurant and food cart scene, our commitment to the environment and sustainability, and our arts. But Portland hasn't always been known for scoring high on measures of livability. We started our existence – after the arrival of American pioneers – as a rough and tumble timber town.

I am a 6th generation Oregonian. My great-great-great grandfather came here in 1852 on the Oregon Trail. He came with his 21-year-old son whose name was Jon Kearns, my great-great-grandfather, who was a school teacher. They came here together from Indiana. They came here for many of the same reasons that inspired so many to head West to Oregon.

They saw it as a land nearly boundless with economic opportunity, and a hope for a better future. But it's very clear as I read through Jon's journal that they understood that opportunity could only be realized through hard work, through sacrifice, through taking risk.

Once here, Jon, the school teacher, decided to become a logger. If you think logging is dangerous today imagine what it was like in the 1850's. We know that sometime in the early 1870's he died in a logging accident in the forests of Oregon.

My grandfather, Colman Wheeler, started his career in logging too, not unlike Jon Kearns. But over the course of his career he achieved what a lot of us today still think about as the American dream.

He rose from woodsman to Chairman of the Board of one of the nation's largest forest products companies. It was called Willamette Industries. It was based right here, and it employed fourteen thousand people.

I still remember as a young boy this formidable person who in the industry was considered a giant. He had a big heart. It was nearly fifty years ago, but I still remember him driving me through downtown Portland, pulling over, and pointing out a group of men in line at a soup kitchen. He expressed his sympathy for what they were experiencing and how he wished he could do more to help them. It made a lasting impression on me.

He and his peers did their part and built the philanthropic institutions in this state, like the Oregon Community Foundation. They built many of the cultural institutions in this state, like the World Forestry Center, and supported the growth of educational institutions like Oregon State University. They helped build and support some of the community organizations that help people who struggle, like the de Paul Treatment Center.

They gave back more than they got. That is part of the Oregon ethos. It's part of the Portland ethos, too.

This ethos is on display with our approach to homelessness today.

Portland is a full partner in the work of A Home for Everyone and the City and County Joint Office on Homeless Services. Last year the city and county helped move more than 4,500 people move from homelessness into housing, and increased the number of shelter beds by nearly 800.

Already this year, the private sector has stepped up with additional shelter capacity. Government has collaborated with neighborhoods, advocates, and philanthropic organizations to create innovative, non-traditional shelter options like tiny homes

and ADUs. For the first time a neighborhood has voted affirmatively to welcome a tiny home village. Thank you to the Kenton Neighborhood for partnering on this innovative approach.

We know that traditional shelter doesn't work for everyone. So increasing the number and kinds of shelter available for those experiencing homelessness is critical. Together we are pioneering solutions that are a key part of our efforts to find humane alternatives for people living on the streets.

We are a city and a people born of the pioneering spirit, to be sure. But that's not the entire story. There is more to our history than that, and some of it isn't pretty.

The author Ralph Ellison, in his essential work, *Invisible Man*, said this:

"I feel the need to reaffirm all of it, the whole unhappy territory and all the things loved and unloveable in it, for it is all part of me."

Ellison believed, and I share this belief, that by telling our story... our whole story, good and bad alike... we can begin to change society.

Portland has a dark and clouded history around race. This history must be brought to light. The true facts must be reaffirmed.

We are taught that Portland was founded by men - white men - who traded land claims among each other and flipped a coin to decide on a name for the city.

But long before Asa Lovejoy and Francis W. Pettygrove founded Portland, the land belonged to the Upper Chinook. They had been here centuries. And with the arrival of Europeans, including my own ancestors, their tribes were devastated.

These early events would establish a pattern. Non-whites, particularly black people, would continue to be marginalized and pushed aside.

Indeed, when Oregon was established as a state in 1859, by law black people were not allowed to live here. Oregon was the only state with such a prohibition.

By the 1920s there were as many as 200,000 Klansmen in the state. What was true in Oregon was certainly true in Portland as well.

When World War II arrived, our city and our shipyards did in fact invite black people here. Portland wanted black workers... but not black neighbors. Thus, Vanport was created - just outside of the city limits.

Life there was difficult. Then, in 1948, the Columbia River flooded Vanport, leaving 18,000 people homeless... 25% of those people were black.

The causes of the displacement of black people in Portland were not limited to acts of nature.

Development in the Albina community drove mostly black people from their homes to make room for freeways, stadiums, and hospitals. These new developments were seen at the time as representing progress, but the toll taken on the black community that was displaced was willfully ignored by city leaders.

Standing here today, I cannot convey the full measure of these events, but they were lived by real people, and their stories are full of rich, human detail.

While I cannot do justice to the personal toll these events have taken, I can tell the history. As the mayor of Portland I think it is important that I speak these truths.

I also know that as your mayor, I should not just talk. I should listen.

And when I listen, this is what I hear. These blights on our collective consciousness – the blight of racism, the blight of displacement, of unequal opportunity, and homelessness, and invisibility – they were not limited to the Old West.

They still exist today.

Unemployment is three times worse in Portland for black households. Success on measures for housing, health, and educational achievement all lag badly. The wealth gap has gotten much worse.

The city is becoming more diverse as more people move here, but the black population is shrinking.

Interactions with law enforcement tell the same story. Black people are disproportionately charged for petty crimes like jaywalking, spitting in public, or failing to cross the street at a right angle.

While the police only represent one part of our biased criminal justice system, I am committed to increasing trust between police and the communities they serve. I am dedicated to returning to a full community policing model to get more officers out of their patrol cars and onto walking beats. This is a best practice that will reduce crime and improve interactions between the police and communities they serve.

I want to improve police training around implicit bias – the understanding that we all, unconsciously carry attitudes and judgements that influence our behavior and actions – and will work with Portland Police Bureau to fund that training in this year's budget.

And I am actively working with the PPB to craft directive language that specifically outlines de-escalation tactics accompanied by rigorous training to ensure their focused implementation.

I will work with our judges, District Attorney, County Sheriff, Police Chief, and others to reduce the disparities in our criminal justice system.

Portland has developed a reputation as a progressive community. We promote this idea of ourselves. But I say that we cannot truly be a progressive community until we rid ourselves of the residue of our unequal past.

So, today, I make a call to all of us – our people, our institutions, our city as a whole – let us leave the Old West behind.

Let's come together and create a New West that affirms our highest values and abandons our basest instincts.

In many ways this New West is already emerging. Oregon, Washington, and California are recommitting ourselves – on issue after issue – to our shared progressive values. We are doubling and redoubling our efforts to achieve real progress.

Many people have referred to the West Coast as the last line of defense against forces that seek to roll back the progress we've made on health care, on education, on the environment, on reproductive rights, on LGBT issues and issues of race.

While this may be an apt description, I say this: I am not satisfied with Portland merely being the last line of defense. I want our great city to be the first line of offense.

In the year to come, our City will show what it means to master the basic requirements of governance and address challenges that seem intractable. We will show what it means to live our values and generate new, compelling ideas. We will take the best aspects of our collective histories and traditions and adapt them to the 21st Century.

We will not merely be an example of what the New West embodies... Portland will set the standard.

So, what will this look like in practice? Take housing:

None of our goals in any area of public policy can be met, and none of our aims can be fully accomplished, unless those I am elected to serve have access to a safe, affordable place to live. No family can truly thrive unless they have a place to call home.

A safe, affordable place to live is a home base for any family. It's a place from which parents go to work and kids go to school. It anchors that family to a community. It's where parents and kids do the most important thing any family can do: spend time together.

Portlanders, in the last election, voted for a first-of-its kind infrastructure bond – one that will create a significant amount of new, affordable housing that is accessible to lower income people all across our city. My fellow commissioners and I supported this bond because we believe that teachers, firefighters, custodians, restaurant workers and others who work in Portland should be able to live in Portland.

When I took office, one of my first acts was to direct the Housing Bureau to press pause on making commitments with those funds. My desire was to pull together a table of community experts to develop an overarching strategy and clear priorities for the use of those funds.

I am pleased to announce that this effort is moving forward and that I have appointed Stephen Green to serve on the Bond Oversight Committee along with the appointees of my council colleagues. We have created a Stakeholder Advisory Work Group to help them with their important work.

Over the coming months, we will finalize a strategy to create 1,300 affordable housing units in Portland, which will house 3,000 people. Of those units, almost half will be deeply affordable – affordable for those with 30% or less than the median family income (This is \$22,000 for a family of four). Half of the total units will be sized for families.

This effort represents an ambitious start to addressing housing affordability in Portland. It also provides us with an opportunity to build trust with our citizens in the area of fiscal responsibility. We are going to spend their dollars wisely in a way that makes a tangible impact in people's lives.

The cost of housing is the major obstacle to securing housing, but it is not the only obstacle. Renters, in particular, face many hurdles, including applications, credit checks, security deposits, and more. Additionally, tenants and landlords alike are often not aware of their rights and responsibilities under the law.

This year the Council passed relocation assistance for renters priced out or moved out of their homes, and the state is considering whether to allow cities like Portland to adopt a just cause eviction standard. I support those efforts, and more.

That's why, in this year's budget, I will propose the necessary first steps toward creating the Office of Landlord Tenant Affairs.

This office will centralize services and functions that are now spread across several program areas.

We will step up enforcement of fair housing laws. Currently, the Housing bureau provides funds for fair housing testing and follow-up support for 60 households. My budget will increase that number fivefold, adding 300 additional households.

We are also going to improve our data-gathering and reporting technologies to do what other cities have long done: license commercial landlords, register all rental dwelling units, and track and analyze eviction notices.

Ultimately this will help us protect tenants and landlords, alike. And I will work with representatives of both groups – over the long-term – to create a system that is functional, equitable and affordable.

Within two years, the office will roll out a new online rental application platform using software created by Portland Entrepreneur Tyrone Pool. His story is inspiring.

Once homeless, he has used his talent to create a platform called NoAppFee.com that helps ensure everyone who applies for a rental unit is treated fairly.

The app won the Portland Development Commission's 2014 Startup PDX Challenge, and now we're bringing the technology to city government.

If the path to a vibrant city begins with a safe, affordable home, the next place that demands our attention is how to maintain, and ultimately upgrade and modernize roads, sidewalks, crosswalks, bikeways, parks and other civic infrastructure that is so critical to the vitality, safety and livability of Portland.

Make no mistake, the funding gap is enormous. The City of Portland has a repair and replacement funding gap of at least \$270 million annually. Roads, parks and other civic assets make up over 90% of this gap.

Significant investments in these areas have been elusive for too long.

In the years ahead, I propose an innovative new financing strategy to significantly ramp up our investments in these assets. Starting in 2020, several Urban Renewal Areas will expire, returning tax increment financing to the city. I will offer my colleagues on the City Council a proposal to incrementally bond against these revenues, to make bold investment in our transportation system, roads, sidewalks, parks and public buildings.

This plan does not require new taxes. Rather, with my colleagues' agreement, we can start leveraging these guaranteed revenues beginning next year – and we should. This investment will be a priority in the budget process. We can no longer put off needed investments in this area. The time for talk is done. The time for action is now.

Over the coming decade, we will have an incredible opportunity to shape to look, feel, and fundamental character of our city. Growth is coming – we can't stop that, but we get to decide how and where that growth happens, and what opportunities that it creates for us and future generations.

Consider the possibilities: as the US Post Office vacates its site in NW Portland, we have the chance to create an entire neighborhood in the heart of the city from scratch. What we have here is a completely blank slate.

Development organizations with global credentials have offered compelling visions, including elements of sustainability, greenways, housing, and street-level businesses. Some want to attract a Fortune 100 employer as an anchor tenant. Others want to focus on higher education and job training. Many of these concepts can exist in combination.

Our plan is this. Next month I will announce a steering committee that will advise PDC as it prepares to release an RFP for a master plan for this site this summer. We will lay out some goals and guidelines and then rely on the creativity and talent of those who wish to participate. The public should get a chance to weigh in on the ideas we're presented with.

Let's think big. Let's make this last central city neighborhood one we can all be proud of. And then let's build it.

Speaking of visionary opportunities, another area that has received a lot of talk and very little action is the redevelopment of the Rose Quarter.

What is now a concrete desert that is mostly quiet by day can become a vital hub of economic and cultural activity. Along with the flourishing Lloyd District, this area can become a Downtown for the Eastside with a diversity of housing, public spaces, thriving employers, and transit options.

Over the past year and a half I have been approached by several groups looking to redevelop the Rose Quarter. Their ideas are each compelling in their own way, and they do not all necessarily compete with one another. Some in fact, are complimentary.

I am particularly impressed with proposals that find creative ways to not only avoid gentrification and displacement, but actually reverse its most negative impacts by bringing back people into the community who were the most impacted by the original Rose Quarter Development. Let's be the first city in the country to not only address the worst aspects of gentrification and displacement, but to actually reverse the trend.

Instead of each of these groups approaching me and my fellow commissioners to pitch their ideas one at a time, let's begin a process in which everyone shows their cards, we involve the public, we discuss financing and we move forward with a strategy.

People have been discussing this site for decades. It's time to get moving on a real plan. I believe we can get it done, and importantly for many of us, I believe we can preserve Memorial Coliseum in the process.

Other large scale developments that will take place during the next decade include, The Zidell Site near the Tram and OHSU, the area controlled by OMSI, Centennial Mills, and some of the URAs on the Eastside. All of these areas will be transformed during the next decade or so through public-private partnerships.

While casting a view to the future, we cannot repeat the mistakes of the past. In every case, we must make sure that where future development opportunities take place, those who are impacted the most have an opportunity to benefit as well. And those who were pushed aside in the past are offered a seat at the head of the table.

Whatever we do, I am determined that it benefit everyone in the community, and that any housing that is created includes all levels of affordability.

And however we do it, I am determined that we lead the nation in ensuring that women, people of color, and underserved communities participate in the economic benefits of the project through a strong commitment to minority and women-owned contracting principles.

We have a chance to reshape the face of our city. I also believe we have a chance to reshape our spirit.

We Portlanders are a people adjacent to the river, but we are not truly a people of the river. This is peculiar, because we are nestled among two of our nation's largest rivers.

In millennia past, the Willamette River was the very source of life for those who lived along the banks.

But then we turned our backs on it. It became an open sewer and a dumping ground for toxic industrial waste. For decades, the idea of having close proximity to the river was absurd, and instead we walled it off with freeways and rail lines.

In the years ahead, that's all going to change.

Former Mayor Vera Katz called for a river renaissance that led to the construction of the Eastbank Esplanade. I want to take that renaissance to a whole new level.

Thanks to my colleagues on the City Council, we've made tremendous progress on some of the essential, hard work to clean up the river. The Big Pipe project has dramatically improved water quality and now the city is pushing forward to clean up the Superfund site in the lower Willamette. Wetland restoration projects are underway up and down the river. The Willamette even has its own swim team, the River Huggers.

The time has come to embrace ideas that broaden our appreciation and understanding of this natural treasure, and increase public access to the Willamette.

Over the next several months and several years we'll begin to activate public spaces, beaches, and access points to the Willamette River in downtown Portland.

We will begin our work this summer, with Portland's first pilot beach program at Poet's Beach located on the Westside of the river directly off the Greenway Trail near the Marquam Bridge.

Over the next year, in partnership with businesses and the community, we'll begin work on developing a multi-user river recreation facility at a site referred to by many in our community as Audrey McCall Beach. This site is adjacent to the Hawthorne Bridge on the Eastside of the Willamette River and has become a popular place for swimming. Work will include replacing the floating wood platform on the Eastside near the Hawthorne Bridge with a new multi-use dock that will accommodate both non-motorized watercraft and swimming.

Next up will be Audrey McCall Beach itself. I believe Audrey McCall Beach has great potential to radically enhance our relationship with the Willamette River. A broad stakeholder plan is done, in place and we're ready to move on it.

The vision isn't unlike Copenhagen's world-famous Harbour Bath. Imagine floating docks for swimmers, a kayak launch, shower facilities, an overlook platform and pier, and a beautiful beach and improved access to the beach from the Eastbank Esplanade.

These projects have the potential to revitalize our relationship with what is essentially our city's largest unofficial park, the Willamette River.

There is another vision, with regard to the river, that we should begin looking at with serious intentions. I mentioned that we walled off the Willamette with highways. First the Harbor Freeway where Tom McCall Park is now, and later the Marquam Bridge and I-5 on the Eastside.

The latter has further separated us from the river, created a physical divide between east and west Portland, stunted development opportunities, and created an environmental hazard damaging both water and air quality.

This multi-generational mistake will probably not be resolved in my lifetime. But someday it will be. Someday the economic value of the land, along with the health and social benefits, will outweigh the cost of burying it. I will ask the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability to begin early concepting for the burial or removal of I-5 on the Eastside. If future funds are identified at the federal level, I want Portland to be prepared to take advantage of the opportunity. We need to start building support now, so that perhaps future generations of Portlanders can complete it.

Some might call me crazy, but I was in Boston when they started talking about removing the highway running between the downtown core and Boston Harbor. People thought it would be impossible at first. It took them a quarter of a century, but they did it. Seattle is in the process of re-visioning the area of the Alaska Viaduct.

Portland has done it before, by turning the Harbor Freeway into a significant park and community gathering space. We can do it again by addressing I-5 on the Eastside.

I believe that by engaging with our natural environment in a very personal way, it will reinforce our commitment to addressing the environmental challenges we face on a larger, planetary scale.

Any vision for the future of our city needs to acknowledge that climate change is one of the most pressing policy issues of our time, and the most pressing global issue we face. It isn't just our planet that's at stake, it's our very existence.

Portland and Multnomah County have proven that we can significantly increase jobs and population AND reduce carbon pollution. The tradeoff between jobs and the environment is false.

Most of our actions to address climate change are within the framework of the city/county Climate Action Plan, which C40 calls the strongest in the world.

A progress report on the Climate Action Plan is coming soon. It will show that in 2014 local carbon emissions are 21% below 1990 levels and 40% less on a per capita basis. This is despite our rapidly growing population and economy, and is due to the combined efforts of business, individuals and the community.

Portland and Multnomah County's goal is to reduce emissions 80% below 1990 levels by 2050 and 40% below by 2030. As one of the world's most inspiring and innovative cities tackling climate change, today I renew that commitment... I support the Climate Action Plan, but I want to go even farther.

In tandem with organizations and jurisdictions across the city and county, I'll be releasing my climate agenda next month, informed by nearly a year of community conversations and stakeholder meetings.

That agenda will include:

Establishing a 100% renewable energy goal to meet all of Portland and Multnomah County's community-wide energy needs with renewable energy by 2050.

Working with utilities to accelerate the transition to zero-carbon electricity and minimizing dependence on fossil fuels.

Leading by example through a series of actions, including establishing an "EV first" purchasing policy; adding at least five renewable energy projects at City facilities; moving forward with the Green Loop; and by launching a Community Solar initiative to make it possible for all residents to access the benefits of renewable energy.

Minimizing risks for communities most vulnerable to climate change impacts like heat waves and flooding, with a particular focus on communities of color and low-income populations.

We have a vision for the future and the determination to follow it. Because our future demands it.

I've spoken today about our built environment and our natural environment. Both are critically important. But more crucial still is our people.

When I think of what we are building as a community I reflect on my dedication to building a community for all ages. Older adults are assets, and we must engage people of all ages socially, civically and economically.

Portland is already committed to becoming more Age Friendly. We are already making progress with partners like Portland State University, AARP, Elders in Action and others.

As mayor, I have a significant role to play, along with my colleagues on the City Council:

I am proposing that we commit the city to being a best practices employer model for a multigenerational workforce by exploring flexible workplace practices such as

phased retirement, job sharing, knowledge transfer initiatives, and project-based or episodic work. It is worth noting that these flexible practices are popular both with our most experienced citizens and the millennial generation.

I believe we should use the “age-friendly” lens as an equity filter in developing and reviewing all city policies and practices. We need to think proactively about intergenerational issues as a deliberate part of everything we do.

We should work with Multnomah County, All Hands Raised and the City of Portland’s Children’s Levy recipient organizations to engage older adults in their work with children and families.

And we should strengthen business ties to the longevity economy by working with PDC, Portland Business Alliance, Greater Portland Inc., ECONorthwest, and others in developing concrete action steps to engage older adults in our economy as consumers, entrepreneurs and as an emerging workforce.

Finally, we must acknowledge that different groups of people experience aging differently with different challenges. We need to be aware that people of color, women, people with disabilities and people with lower incomes face different challenges in their golden years. We need to be deliberate in our age-friendly strategies to address that reality.

Mayor Eric Garcetti has declared that LA will be the most Age Friendly city in America. I give him credit – he’s on to something very important. But I’ll take that challenge. Portland has, and will continue to lead the nation as an Age Friendly City.

A city capable of achieving the goals I’ve laid out today demands a government that works together, traveling in the same direction, driven by common purpose.

When I was running for mayor I was asked time and time again, “Who are your three votes?” Over and over I was reminded, “All you need to do is count to three.”

I reject that thinking. That embodies the old ways. I don’t want to govern by faction. It’s divisive. It’s transactional. And it’s shallow. Instead of governing by faction I want to govern by consensus.

So far this year my council colleagues and I have passed some challenging and even controversial legislation – strengthening government oversight and accountability by giving the Auditor more independence, addressing housing insecurity by protecting tenants, preserving everyone’s right to be heard in council chambers by establishing a common sense code of conduct, and protecting human rights by passing a Sanctuary City resolution.

Each of these passed unanimously. All five of us joined together in these important decisions. I want that to continue.

We will have our disagreements, but on the whole I see the value in leveraging the diverse skills and experience that my fellow Commissioners bring to the job. Already

this year... in just my first few months in office... my colleagues have moved Portland forward in substantive ways.

Commissioner Eudaly and I share many of the same views on housing. She is a tireless champion and her work makes a difference in the everyday lives of Portlanders.

Commissioner Fritz shares my commitment to ensuring Portland is a welcoming city for everyone, and that Eastside residents have the same access to services and resources as the rest of the city.

Commissioner Saltzman has shown tremendous progress on the tough transportation issues that have seemed to stymie those who came before.

And Commissioner Fish is dedicated to leading on cleaning the Portland Harbor and creating good jobs and skills training opportunities while doing it.

Portland, we have a strong city council, one that represents the best of what we can accomplish by working together.

And work together we must. Not just the members of the city council, but all of us. That is what will make our city great.

Some call Portland the Rose City. Some call it Stump Town. Blazers fans call Portland Rip City, while Timbers fans call it Soccer City USA. Some people just call Portland Weird.

And guess what? We are all that and more. My final thoughts are these.

We are not some monolithic, homogenous city, and we don't want to be.

By coming together, embracing our shared values and acting on them, we can ensure that Portland's character will endure for generations to come. That Portland will continue to be a place for all people. That we will continue to be an example to our neighbors, the nation, and the world.

Thank you.