



City of Arts & Innovation

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Contact:

Phil Pitchford

Public Information Officer

951-826-5975

ppitchford@riversideca.gov

Mayor Patricia Lock Dawson Urges Riverside to Reach for Greatness, Eliminate Youth Homelessness in 2023 State of the City Address

Greater emphasis on economic development, comprehensive approach to homelessness

RIVERSIDE, Calif. – Riverside is poised for greatness and can achieve that through a renewed focus on economic development, but it must also continue to make progress on reducing the incidence of homelessness with a focus on eliminating youth homelessness in the coming year.

“I didn’t run to be the Mayor of Riverside to just be good,” Lock Dawson said. “I ran because I believed – and still do – that Riverside should expect excellence. Let’s propel Riverside to greatness!”

Lock Dawson officially launched the Mayor’s Challenge to End Youth Homelessness, noting that prevention is the key to reducing homelessness overall. Youth who are homeless are more than five times more likely to be chronically homeless as adults, and foster youth are especially vulnerable.

“No young person should have to worry about shelter, or sleep on the streets when they should be attending school or becoming a member of our workforce,” Lock Dawson said. “We did it for veterans, and now we can do it for our youth.”

Lock Dawson thanked residents for their past approval of Measure Z and their commitment to shopping local. Riverside is in a strong financial position in part because general sales tax revenues have increased more than 30 percent since 2019, and sales tax revenues for Measure Z have increased by nearly 34 percent during the same period.

Lock Dawson pointed out that the city has invested heavily in infrastructure during the past year, more so than in the past 15 years. In 2022, for example, more than 25 miles of roads were repaved; nearly 160,000 square feet of new sidewalks were built; 127,000 square feet of potholes were repaired; and more than 18,000 street trees were trimmed, doubling the investment in tree trimming.

She praised the Alford and Riverside unified school districts, as well as the city’s four colleges and universities, for continuing close partnerships with local government and preparing students for bright

futures in Riverside. She said her office's Campus Riverside initiative will help retain local students and build the local workforce through increased internships and job development.

"We are positioned for investment, opportunity and prosperity," Lock Dawson said. "Riversiders are resilient, ready for action and committed to designing a better tomorrow, today. We are going to design a Riverside that works for all of us."

Noting that homelessness was identified as the top concern in the most recent Quality of Life Survey, Lock Dawson emphasized that Riverside has sought to strike a balance by continuing to offer services to people experiencing homelessness while investing in programs designed to ensure public safety in public spaces.

"Yes, we all have rights, but we all have responsibilities as well," Lock Dawson said. "Our approach must continue to reflect both these realities."

The new program Project Connect is designed to help people being released from jail from becoming homelessness. A new agreement with the County of Riverside ensures closer coordination of services. And the city's new Homeless Action Plan charts a path forward with specific goals.

Other investments include the new Parks and Neighborhood Specialists (PANS) program; the continued investment in the Public Safety and Engagement Team (PSET); and a new PSET for wildland areas like the Santa Ana River bottom, Hole Lake, and Sycamore Canyon.

The latter programs are designed to reduce the risk of fire that has threatened both homeless individuals living in wildlands as well as nearby neighborhoods that are threatened by fires.

"I reject the notion that it is inhumane to enforce laws to prevent these kinds of encampments," Lock Dawson said. "The reality is that it is inhumane to allow people to languish in conditions unfit for any human. We need to ensure that we are exhausting every single remedy so that we can solve this problem."