

Text of the Salem State of the City speech

Written by Anna Peterson

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State of the City speech Feb 19, 2014 *As prepared for delivery*

Good afternoon, and thank you all for attending today's luncheon. I want to especially thank Salem Area Chamber of Commerce, Salem City Club and Salem Rotary for sponsoring the State of the City address each year. Special thanks to Dewey Whitten for her far too kind introduction and to Sam Skillern for the lovely and fitting Invocation. They are dear friends of mine, and like several of my friends these days, I ask much and they are always there to answer the call. I would like to introduce my most important friend, confident, wise council and partner of 43 years, My husband and former Chief Justice of the State of Oregon Edwin Peterson. Before you at the head table is a collaboration of the highest order, the Salem City Council. We work hard to understand the issues and needs in our City, and even when we don't agree on an issue, we still support and mentor one another, and share a commitment to making Salem the best it can possibly be. Ward 1 and Council President Chuck Bennett Ward 2 Laura Tesler Ward 3 Brad Nanke Ward 4 Rich Clausen Ward 5 Diana Dickey Ward 6 Sheryl Thomas Ward 7 Warren Bednarz, Ward 8 Dan Clem

Working with us are our highly professional city manager, department heads, Chiefs and Municipal Court Judge: Judge Jane Aiken City Manager Linda Norris Deputy City Manager Kacey Duncan City Attorney Dan Atchison Public Works Director Peter Fernandez Community Development Director Glenn Gross Fire Chief Mike Niblock Police Chief Gerry Moore Urban Development Director John Wales Human Resources Director Connie Munnell Administrative Services Director Deborah Bond Our city employees deserve recognition for their daily work and for the many ways they assist in food drives, toy collections, blood drives, and numerous other community projects to make life in Salem better. A special Thank You to our Volunteers, from the City Council, to Boards and Commission members, and all those who give time in the library, the Center 50+, the Police and Fire Departments, parks, historic properties and neighborhoods. They are vital to the smooth-running operations at City Hall and across our community Today's State of the City speech for the first time has a title: Salem: Strong, Vibrant, Safe and United. We are still the Collaboration Capitol. I don't ever want any of us to forget for a minute our defining quality—our foundation. Last year's speech was peppered with examples of collaboration, and those partnerships and similar projects could be the basis of today's remarks. But instead, today I want to show you the results of the collaborations that have made Salem stronger, more vibrant, safer and more united than we have ever been before. Let's start with a video. My thanks to the individuals and professionals who contributed to this video: David Dahle of Salem Strong Neighborhoods, Allied Video, Mike Gotterba and city staff, and for all those who took time to be interviewed. Tying it together, Brent DeHart whose fine voice again this year helped tell the story. Strength is measured in many ways: the number and size of business expansions and new construction, the number of workers adding to the economy, the value of products made here and sold across the country and around the world, and the infrastructure improvement that business and residents rely upon every day. They are the meat of today's report. First, let's remember that Salem really took charge of its economic development efforts starting in 2011 when the City Council required strategic investment of time and money in five industry sectors that had traditionally been most successful or showed greatest promise in the future. Agriculture, Aviation, Medical facilities and services, Metals production, and general manufacturing. Job growth and attracting private investment are the major focus

of the city's economic development plan. The City's role is to manage public resources like tax incentives, grants, loans and access to urban renewal projects to attract private investment. It's a formula that's paying off: NORPAC is making a \$5 million capital investment to consolidate their corporate office on Madrona next to existing NORPAC food processing facilities. By moving sales and marketing divisions from Lake Oswego, and corporate offices from Stayton, 100 new jobs will be added to Salem. Next door, Henningsen Cold Storage Co. is investing \$25 million to build a new 240,000 sq. ft. cold storage facility that will add 40 new jobs and much needed new cold storage capacity to our region. This facility will directly serve NORPAC, thus freeing up precious cold storage space elsewhere for our growing beverage and food processing companies. Garmin AT's Aviation and Aerospace Technology, which is located on Salem Airport land on Turner Road, is investing \$11 million, building a 54,000 sq. ft. R & D facility and adding 70 new jobs, mostly engineering positions. As Dr. Bud Pierce said in the video, the medical industry is a major economic engine in Salem. This last year Salem Clinic opened its newest facility on Kubler Road, adding 10 doctors and about 50 support staff and an innovative patient care system. Avamere is investing in the same area to build a high quality transitional nursing center with 78 beds. Salem Hospital is planning a new rehab facility on the former School for the Blind property, and has begun a parking structure to better serve employees and patients coming to the hospital 24/7. It's one of the busiest medical complexes in the state, and we are pleased with their newest quality rating and variety of medical procedures and services. When patients don't have to leave town to receive care, everyone benefits. New construction and remodeling of historic buildings in the downtown are all the buzz these days. The Doty project is an innovative investment to bring residential units, an accounting office, additional office and retail space, and an Italian grocery to two buildings at the intersection of State and Liberty. The former McMahan's Furniture site will become State Street Square, a mixed-use building with underground parking, a rooftop garden and perhaps a rooftop restaurant to capitalize on the fantastic views from the top floor. The private investment and resulting construction jobs will spur more activity on State Street as well as provide a shining future for this important area of downtown. Like a Phoenix rising from the former Boise paper converting facility, Pringle Square will change our downtown skyline and bring a new level of development and use to the waterfront and downtown. People living and working on this site will have one foot in downtown and one firmly planted in one of the richest urban recreation and natural resource areas of the state. With a total 168 market rate apartments, 15,000 sq ft commercial space and parking underneath, this complex will set a new standard for urban design. Plans also call for an office building and post-acute rehabilitation care facility. The City Council and I unanimously voted to approve the plans for this development and the city purchase of the "Park Parcel" because we are confident it is the game changing development not only for downtown but also for Salem's future. Bringing together residences, commercial space and the rich natural resource of Riverfront Park and Minto Brown Island is an unbeatable combination. Another important combination has been the public that passed the Streets and Bridges Bond in 2008. This year, more than \$52 million has been awarded for design and construction contracts. About \$48 million of these contracts have been with local firms in Marion and Polk Counties. So ask yourself: Do all these projects and additional jobs make Salem strong? Well...yes...perhaps, but here's the real reason I say that Salem is strong: These projects have been undertaken by private families, local businesses and historically sound corporations. They know Salem, and are willing to invest their hard earned money, time and talent right here, right now. And what really makes us strong is that the message will reverberate across the region and the nation that Salem is a promising location and the City of Salem is a government willing to go the extra mile and provide the extra service that are building our reputation as a promise land for investment. That's our greatest strength! The strength of a City also needs to be measured by its municipal financial health. City of Salem has consistently been conservative in its spending and cautious in the way it allocates revenue to provide basic city services and quality of

life. In the General Fund, we are forecast to have slight revenue growth, and therefore we need to hold the line on spending in order to maintain adequate reserves for the coming year. But future projections for revenue and expenditures cause us to be extremely cautious. While we have cut spending so that we are “at the marrow” so to speak, we can do little to stop the increases of health insurance and the retirement system increases in PERS. I will not try in this speech to delve into the complexities of municipal finance. But believe me when I say that our City Councilors and Budget Committee members are well aware of the limitations we have to affect real change unless the State Legislature addresses the stress that PERS funding causes on local governments. With this tepid report on our city’s financial future, why would I say that our financial situation is part of our strength? Because as a City, we have proven in the past that we will make the tough decisions and chart the conservative path. Our bond rating is AA2, and that’s why I say we are financially strong. Housing recovery has been slightly helpful. Ongoing gains in residential sales and increased building activity and the value of residential construction rose in 2013. Tourism and travel activity supported our region, and we have seen higher lodging revenues and jobs in the leisure and hospitality sector. That translates to increased Transit Occupancy Tax revenues. These are good signs—but cannot bring the growth compared to past recoveries. We must continue to reach new companies and expanding markets. With SEDCOR we do just that. I meet Friday with a Hong Kong trade delegation, and in March we’ll be at food shows in San Francisco and Los Angeles. I’ll travel again to Japan in April to meet with Panasonic, Yamasa and IMEX leaders to further strengthen those ties and seek out new companies compatible with our Mill Creek Corporate Center and our Renewal Energy Park. Recruiting new companies, and asking existing ones to stay here is important work. City programs like tool box grants and loans, tax incentives and incubator assistance go a long way. But corporations today, and the employees of tomorrow are looking for more—they are looking for quality of life, new entertainment, and recreational opportunities right out their front door. In other words, they are looking for vibrancy. And we have that, and more is coming. From the many music and performance groups who entertain throughout the year, to a new concert series in Riverfront Park, to jazz nights in local venues, we have a wider selection than ever before. The City owns several historic properties that provide a home to numerous arts and cultural organizations. The Oregon Artists Series Foundation and Salem Public Arts Commission are filling the Convention Center and sculpture garden with works by renowned artists. Join us March ___ as we dedicate a sculpture by Hispanic artist _____. New parks and gardens opened last year. Hoodview Park in NE Salem and the Bush Park Rhododendron Garden joined a long list of community parks. But more is on the way. I am convinced that Natural Resources and Recreation must be our next economic development initiative. Studies show that just having a park in a neighborhood, and large urban parks easily reached by all boost property values and are a driving force to a healthier population. We are poised for this new wave. Construction begins in April on the bridge to Minto Brown Island. We purchased land on Minto Brown for trails and to connect the bridge to the rest of the park and to be an outdoor classroom on ecology and habitat. Fun runs, and a marathon are already being planned for the opening festivities, and I am hearing from a growing number of people who want more boat docks and a river trail from Wallace Marine Park to other sites along the Willamette River. We have not forgotten Downtown. Former efforts to spur shopping and entertainment are now boosted by an advisory group that works with City Manager’s office to organize First Wednesdays, special promotions and events. I know that parking issues and a contentious struggle over parking meters have dragged us down. This Council is committed to working out these rough spots—but not yet. We need the hard data and personal experiences of merchants and property owners and shoppers before we do anything. Let me make one thing perfectly clear about downtown parking problems. They were not caused by the Parking Task Force that Councilor Bennett and I led. They were not caused by this Council that enacted an ordinance to allow “park anywhere you like for as long as you like.” They are caused by apathetic downtown businesses and

property owners who did not speak up, even when we provided clear and open contact with the Parking Task Force, even when Councilor Benner, our City Manager, our Urban Development staff and I sat street side for several days to gather input. When people are enticed by promises of free parking for all who sign petitions without understanding that there is no FREE, you end up with a problem. We'll fix it, but when we do, it will be with a very clear understanding on the part of everyone downtown and across the community that there is no such thing as free parking. Let's talk about something positive. We are a safer community than we were several years ago. The basic services provided by our fire, police and ambulances are now magnified by resident and business involvement across the community. Neighborhood Watch and Crime Prevention training bring more eyes on unsavory and unlawful activities, and greater understanding on how to keep our families, homes and businesses safe. The Salem Police Foundation has already raised much needed money for equipment and supplies that city budgets just can't cover. The Community Police Advisory Committee continues to be a conduit between the public and our police department. The Community Police Review Board is a recognized avenue for dispute resolution. The Safe Streets and Parks Task Force that I formed about one year ago launched a campaign to reduce pan handling on sidewalks and at intersections. Downtown and parks patrols have been fortified by linking with businesses and the faith community to reach out to homeless people and help them move off the streets and out of our parks and into shelters and transitional housing. And here is the innovative twist on panhandling. We are asking the public to stop giving money and food out on the streets. Instead, donate to recognized social service and non profits with a track record of success at moving people to a more stable and self-sufficient life. But who is safer? You and I, who can go home at night and lock the door. That's not the solution, that's merely avoidance. Avoidance of a growing homeless population caused by as many different circumstances as there are people. Sure, mental illness, and addiction rank high as underlying factors. But this economy is forcing unemployed families, and often mothers with children, to sleep in their cars, on friend's couches, or camp in our city parks. United Way and I formed a Shelter Workgroup to sort out what we have and what is needed in the way of safe shelter and affordable housing. But solutions are a long way off, and we need your help. When I had the opportunity to volunteer two nights at the Warming Shelter, word quickly spread that the mayor was there, and that I wanted to listen to their thoughts and needs. And do you know what they asked for? Not money, not food and shelter, not handouts or an easy ride. They asked me for toilets. Toilets open at night. I was ashamed. Ashamed that with all our resources and comforts, we had not thought to provide for the most basic of human needs. We get angry when the sidewalks and doorways are soiled. And we think we have no responsibility? Well...I made a promise, so don't be surprised when I search the city budget to fund a few port-a-potties. Before I leave the issue of Safety, I must talk about the seismic upgrades to the Civic Center and Library and a much needed police facility. This is not a new issue. This is not an issue or plan that has been secret or under wraps at City Hall. Even before I was mayor, I served on a Task Force to explore the needs for the police department and to see how the Civic Center could go forward another 40 years. For the last year and before that, City Council and staff have held work sessions and almost 40 informational meetings across the community to explain the needs for seismic upgrades to civic center, library and parking structures. We must find more space for the police department personnel, and for evidence lockers, equipment and vehicles. It is not prudent to lease space all over town and cram officers and staff into make shift cubicles in the basement of City Hall and expect a good outcome. Like many of you, I am watching the numbers and listening very closely to the community--- we need to do a better job of getting facts and figures and reasons out to the public. We must explain that we are not just building a big building for the police department. This project would also address the \$16 million in deferred maintenance as well as seismic upgrades throughout the entire complex. We have run the numbers on many sites across the city and provided open discussion on the decision to keep police on the civic campus. The Council has given thoughtful well-considered

direction to staff to keep the police department on the Civic Complex. We stand by that decision, because it is the one that provides the best return on the dollars spent, and best matches the organizational management of the department and the rest of our City functions. Community policing takes many roles, from officers in patrol cars to police personnel interacting on facebook, twitter and through other social networking. Public involvement is greater than ever. It is really this collaboration between the community and police that bring the greatest safety to a neighborhood, a business, a residence. The location of the police administration, and the base camp if you will from which officers fan out across the community is the essence of modern community policing. We need to make the smartest decisions now to carry us forward for 40 + years. Heavy lifting is ahead on this issue, but I am confident that like the Pringle Square project and hopeful with the surplus State Hospital property on the North side of Center Street, our community will unite and support a vision and plan to move us forward. Unity in a community is a delicate balance. In Salem, our City Council and city staff are working harder than ever to unify different voices, different backgrounds and different goals so that progress can be made that everyone can feel good about. One of our most important Council committees recommends Boards and Commissions Appointments. We have been working hard to recruit a more diverse, and a younger residents to fill the many seats open each year. We are making progress, but we need your help to fill these important advisory positions. The Council last year approved the formation of a new group, the Mayor's International Council. Its purpose is many-fold. To advise the mayor and Council on issues that pertain to cultural awareness and acceptance, to bring greater recognition and understanding among diverse parts of our community, and to celebrant the rich fabric that we are all weaving into the Salem tapestry. I'd like to recognize and thank the Chair, Salem attorney Michelle Vlase Ing, and the Vice Chair, Dr. John Choppala. Would the members of the International Council please stand so that people will know who you are. Thank you so much for your service to Salem. I am looking forward to exciting results from your vision and efforts. I cannot talk about unity without recognizing an important group of people who are often absent from the meetings and events that I attend. So many times I ask myself: Where are the women? Why was I the only woman in a room of men meeting with Congressman Kurt Schrader? Why are the applicants for commissions and committees only men? Why do we have so few women who even apply for the Budget Committee? Why do we have four open City Council seats and only one woman running? Why don't you show up? Why won't you help shoulder the work and help pull this barge? Your absence today is as glaring as in 1990 when Lester Green recommended me to be the first woman on the Commercial Bank Board, a board that had been in existence for decades. And where are the Lester Greens today, moving women forward and placing them into positions of responsibility and power? I encourage men and women here today to look around you---see the potential that is not being tapped, that is not stepping forward. Bring her with you to Rotary, to the Chamber meetings, to Salem City Club, and then ask her to get involved and take a leadership role. Hook a sister up! Tell her she can be the next Manager, the next Partner, the next CEO, the next Mayor. Hook a sister up! Time is short, and your patience has been remarkable. I hope in closing that I have given you some things to think about, some projects to join, and some ideas about your future role in Salem. Thank you.