



**Community Briefing and
News Conference**

**2016 - 2019
Strategic Plan**

**September 4, 2015
City Hall
Columbia, Missouri**

**Remarks
City Manager Mike Matthes**

Thank you for coming today.

Rarely do I have an opportunity to address a topic that is so near and dear to my heart. Many of you received from me an "Invitation to Serve."

And your presence here today gives me a great deal of hope, because our community is confronted with a significant problem. I am quite certain that City government will not be able to solve this problem on its own.

We need you.

Over the past year, I have become increasingly concerned about the widening gap between what I have been referring to as "Our Two Columbias." Poverty is increasing in Columbia for all groups -- white, black, Asian, Hispanic -- and it is increasing most profoundly in the black community.

I'm going to tell a story this morning about how the City Council developed the City's new strategic plan and why it is more important than our last plan.

This last winter, we began studying the community. We did this to prepare the most accurate picture of our city, to present to the Council, so they could clearly see who we are and how we are doing as a community.

We found a number of excellent things that can make us all proud to live in Columbia. The economy overall has recovered from the Great Recession. We are a growing city with 3.5% unemployment (lower than the state or the nation).

Graduation rates are improving. We're seeing positive growth in business startups and entrepreneurship. Violent crime rates are at their lowest point in 30 years. Most people love living here: 79% in our most recent survey are satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of life they have made here.

And although these are positive and promising indicators, we also learned some troubling truths. Unemployment for African American residents is almost four times the rate for white Columbians. A typical black household makes only 60% of the typical white household. We have lost half of our manufacturing jobs and replaced them with minimum wage jobs with no benefits.

Clearly, not everyone in Columbia is thriving.

We realized that we needed to learn more about poverty in Columbia, so I asked Angela Hirsch from Central Missouri Community Action to conduct a poverty simulation at a pre-Council meeting. It was eye-opening, to say the least. The simulation showed us all how hopeless it can feel just to try to pay the bills without things that so many of us take for granted, like housing we can afford or reliable transportation.

Poverty can feel like a prison. Escaping it seems so impossible. As we reflect on what we can do to provide escape routes, it is easy to say, "I don't know how to fix that problem," or, "Poverty has been around forever - you can't fix it."

I have heard people say, "The City shouldn't try to deal with social problems." But after all, we've been in the social service business from the very beginning. What is our Police Department if not a social service? What is our Public Health Department or Neighborhood Services, if not social services?

The idea of doing something to shrink poverty is an intimidating idea. Can we even do it?

If there was ever anyone who understood poverty, I think it must have been Nelson Mandela, who survived Apartheid and poverty in South Africa. He had this to say:

"Overcoming poverty is not a task of charity. It is an act of justice. Like Slavery and Apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. Sometimes it falls on a generation to be great. YOU can be that great generation. Let your greatness blossom."

So, with all of those thoughts in mind, Council and staff embarked upon the creation of a strategic plan that would try to impact poverty, which is a root cause of so many barriers to success. For example, it's hard to learn in school when you're hungry. Teenage pregnancy and dropout rates and criminal behavior are some of the other negatives that poverty tends to exacerbate.

When I starting working in city government, I took an oath to abide by a code of ethics administered by the International City Management Association. The fourth tenet of that code states that we "Recognize that the chief function of local government at all times is to serve the best interest of all the people."

Because of this, and my own ethical code, I can't be content with a situation where the majority of our community has an excellent opportunity for an exceptional life, while a smaller group has a far harder experience.

What you will not see in this strategic plan are specific mentions about our normal day-to-day operations. There are certain things that a city does and will continue to do, such as pick up your trash and provide clean drinking water. These standard services are not addressed in this strategic plan, but don't be concerned. We will still continue to perform all of our services at a high level. Day-to-day operations will continue as before.

This strategic plan moves away from the whirlwind of daily operations, addresses what we aspire to accomplish as a growing community and offers tactics on how to achieve success for all citizens. And we will do so through five main areas of concentration: jobs, equity, public safety, infrastructure and a high performance workforce.

Our first strategic priority area centers around the economy. It all starts with a job and a living wage. I know of no path out of poverty that doesn't include a good job.

Did you know that back in 1968 the purchasing power of the minimum wage would be the equivalent of \$10.55 an hour today? And yet the minimum wage in Missouri is \$7.65. Our plan directs us to establish a baseline of current living wage jobs and then to increase that number.

We need to attract new businesses and expand existing ones that pay a living wage. The median wage gap between white and minority households in Columbia is increasing, and we want to reduce that gap by at least 5% in three years.

The skills gap in the labor market is also increasing, and we have strategies now to reduce that by 10% in three years. By creating a “work-ready community” through our partnership with REDI and through programs such as Project Lead the Way, Job Point, CARE and Cradle to Career, we can address these gaps.

We want to expand air service and build a new terminal which has the power to significantly increase commerce. We want to make the city friendlier to disadvantaged business enterprises. We want to make Columbia a city where people from all walks of life have a fair shot at success and prosperity.

Our second strategic priority focuses on social equity and addresses the question, “How can we strengthen our community so all individuals thrive?” To me, social equity means correcting the imbalances that keep people from breaking the cycle of poverty.

It means offering an intentional “leg-up” to provide opportunities to those who need the most help to develop personal responsibility and improve their odds for success. This is not a government hand-out. I know from personal experience, however, that without access to education, living wage jobs and support services, it’s nearly impossible to break the chains of poverty.

This I know: your income determines where you live. We are going to identify three areas of our community where the data tell us there are dire needs for community building and social equity. To choose these three areas, we will analyze all of the information we have about our city, looking not just crime-related maps, but also at free-and-reduced lunch maps, household income, fire calls and energy usage maps, among many others.

We will reach out to neighborhood leaders and work with them to develop a plan specific to each place. We will reach out to our partners (many of you here today), and we will bring all of our combined efforts to bear in those places to address the issues identified by those neighborhoods. Imagine what we can do together, focused.

Our third strategic priority is centered around public safety and asks, “How can we improve citizen satisfaction?” No matter where you live, you want to be safe and feel secure.

As I stated before, violent crime rates are at their lowest in 30 years, yet events in Ferguson and around the country have created mistrust and fear. Ballot initiatives to increase our public safety workforce were rejected, which means our efforts at community policing will remain limited. Still, our goal is to improve citizen satisfaction with police services 6% by 2019.

We also will strive to increase citizen perception of safety by 6% in three years. We will conduct an optimization study to seek innovative methods to decrease officer workload so we can focus on community policing. If we can achieve this, we will seek a ballot initiative to increase staffing in 2017. Our Fire Department is equally understaffed and, with the help of public support at the voting booth, we will increase Fire personnel in 2017 as well.

Our fourth strategic priority area is infrastructure. We do not want to leave anyone behind. Every neighborhood deserves sidewalks, streetlights and parks.

We have a long history of planning for the future through comprehensive plans, capital improvement plans, plans for each of our utilities, the East Area Plan, the Sasaki Plan and many others. Over the past two years we have seen ballots pass to support sewers, storm water, electricity, roads, police sub-stations and fire trucks, all with significant margins of success.

Strategically we have challenged ourselves by asking the question, “How can we build the future today?” How can we provide better transportation services for all and specifically for those who depend upon it as their main access to provide for their families? By continually examining ridership usage, we will evaluate and implement recommendations from a transit consultant to improve transit services to key areas in our community.

We will continue to implement our complete streets policy to make sure everyone has the opportunity for a walkable, bikeable and drivable neighborhood. We will strive to maintain our current portfolio of natural areas and, working with all our constituents, we'll identify additional parks and preservation opportunities as the city grows.

Our fifth and final strategic priority area turns the magnifying glass on ourselves and addresses the area of operational excellence. We can't hope to achieve progress in these first four priorities without a high performance workforce.

We want to continue our employee-focused compensation philosophy and implement coaching-based supervisory practices. We will maintain and expand upon our reward and recognition programs and train aspiring leaders through our City University program and, above all, increase communication with our employees through a new City-wide continuous improvement system.

Our Contact Center is on track to provide a one-phone number contact point for all City services by 2019. When we created the Contact Center there were 154 different phone numbers for residents to use in the phone book. We hope to reduce this to just a few, so that residents will have one number to call no matter their question or need and reach a real person who can answer any question they have, take ownership of requests for help and set that service up in ways that are convenient for our residents.

That's it. That's our plan. We will continue to provide a high level of service to all of our citizens, just as before, and working with partners we will endeavor to lighten the burden of poverty by creating new and enlarging existing escape routes out.

People have said we need to create jobs, and they are right. But look around us.

We have REDI and the Columbia Area Jobs Foundation. We have Angel Investors and incubators for new companies. We have an amazing Chamber of Commerce. We have Veterans United and many other private employers who are growing and hiring. We also have many economic development tools we have not used that are proven to create jobs. We are capable of creating jobs.

Critics will say, and rightly so, that many impoverished people are not ready to work, they don't have the skills they don't know how to work. But look around us.

If there has ever been a community built on education, we are it! Think of what we already do to prepare people for that job that can pull them out of poverty: amazing public schools; Moberly Area Community College has an impressive presence here in Columbia; the Career Center; Job Point; CARE; and let's not forget Columbia College, Stephens College and the University of Missouri. We are capable of helping people get ready to work.

People will say we need more affordable housing, and they are right. But look around us.

We have the Columbia Housing Authority, we have Habitat for Humanity, Job Point builds affordable housing and we have tax credit programs that incentivize the private sector to build affordable apartments. We have CDBG and HOME programs. We are capable of increasing the amount of affordable housing.

People will say we need to make housing energy-efficient so working poor families can afford to keep the house they buy or rent, and they are right. But look around us.

We have the Water & Light Department that subsidizes energy retrofits for homes. We have Federal weatherization programs and we have a modern building code which results in new housing that is far more energy-efficient than it used to be. We've even built a net-zero home and it was affordable. We are capable of building more net-zero housing.

Finally, people will say we need to do something about wages. And they are right. Our national minimum wage just does not keep up with the actual cost of living, for anyone. Now, you know what I'm going to say: But look around us.

St. Louis and Kansas City are taking steps to increase their minimum wage. Subway is advertising \$9.00 per hour to start (that's \$1.35 per hour more than Missouri's minimum wage).

Stephens College has increased its own minimum wage to \$10 per hour. We are getting ever nearer to 1968. It is my hope that we can, through our efforts, encourage many other employers to follow Dr. Lynch's leadership and do the right thing by the people who make our businesses, our universities and our cities the places where we love to work, live, learn and play. We are capable of paying human beings a living wage.

What I see when I look around is that we have what we need to shrink our poverty rate. The tools and partners are here. If we have the courage to try, we can do this, together.

We have resources, expertise and the passion to create one Columbia from two; one that provides opportunity for every citizen who lives here. From the student who graduates and decides to start a business, to the retiree who has decided to spend his remaining years in a community full of vitality and art, to the single parent who struggles to make ends meet, to the person wanting to break out of the cycle of poverty but sees no path out, we owe them all our best effort.

Thank you for your time.

That concludes my remarks. The draft strategic plan is available on the City Council's web site, and there are some printed copies available today.