

Good afternoon, I am De'Carlton Seewood, city manager.  
Thank you for joining me today for this year's State of the City address.  
Before I begin, I would like to recognize a few individuals, including several who have joined us today.

Mayor Buffaloe, Council members Nick Knoth, Andrea Waner, Roy Lovelady, Nick Foster, Don Waterman, and Betsy Peters.

I would also like to thank several Council members who played an integral role in our success before they transitioned off of Council.

Thank you, Pat Fowler and Matt Pitzer for your service.

Additionally, I want to take a moment to extend my sincere thanks to all of our department directors and staff members who make this City what it is.

This is my second State of the City address in Columbia, and if there is one thing you should know about me it is that I am rarely the loudest person in the room.

For that reason, I am going to keep today's address short and sweet.

My intention is for you to take away the highlights of the many great things the City has accomplished in the past year, and to understand our priorities as we move into 2024.

In July, I will be delivering the budget message.

During that time I will delve into the details of our financial outlook, changes to our budgeting process and the specifics of funding for various initiatives.

Today is a chance for me to brag about our staff's many accomplishments and our great community.

This year, we have seen a lot of exciting growth.

Fiscal year to date, the City has platted more than 400 residential lots and has more in the pipeline.

We have also seen many new businesses come to Columbia.

Our business license office has already approved 371 new licenses and has more than 170 licenses pending approval.

That means more than 500 new businesses will call Columbia home.

While we still have work to do, we have made great strides in bringing jobs to Columbia, situating our community as a thriving manufacturing environment and working to position our community as a competitive employer.

During my previous State of the City address, I stated our employees are our most valuable asset, and this remains true.

Because without our staff there are:

- no parks
- no utilities and
- no one to respond to emergencies.

Over the last year, City leadership has remained focused on the compensation and benefits for all of our employees.

As of today, we are only a few months away from having a completed classification and compensation study to present to the City Council.

This study conducted by our consultant Segal, reviewed total compensation compared to market competitors.

A properly designed and maintained classification and compensation system will enhance our efforts to recruit and retain a highly qualified workforce.

I want to thank our staff who have been incredibly patient throughout this process.

Despite the fact the City faces staffing shortages across almost every department, staff has been working to maintain a high standard of service.

As each of you knows, the City is not alone in struggling to retain staffing, but while we are still working to recruit employees.

We have been able to fill leadership positions that play an important role in ensuring the City is moving in the right direction and helping build our culture.

Around this time last year, the City was searching for directors for:

- Human Resources
- Public Works
- Parks and Recreation
- IT
- and a Fire Chief.

Since then, I have been able to fill each of those positions with experienced and passionate staff members.

They are the reason we have been able to accomplish so many things over the last year.

And in May, I brought a new member of City leadership on board.

For the first time, the City of Columbia now has a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion officer.

This position is dedicated to looking at City practices, both internally and externally.

Their first challenge is reviewing how our internal practices impact equity within our organization.

Following a comprehensive, internal review, our diversity, equity and inclusion officer will then look at how practices impact members of our community.

I am so excited to see how this position will impact our work, and bring new and often unheard voices to the table.



While removing barriers is the most important step in getting citizens involved, education is similarly important.

In the fall of 2022, the City of Columbia introduced its first Civic Academy.

This interactive program allows residents to:

- meet with staff
- learn about the City's different service lines
- and how they impact citizens.

Our residents were so excited about our first Civic Academy that our inaugural class was filled within one day.

After receiving tremendous feedback and support, the City added a spring session and will celebrate this graduating class in June.

It is my hope these residents now feel more empowered to become involved in City programs. I hope they encourage their friends, families and neighbors to do the same.

As our City grows, we are expanding infrastructure to keep pace.

In October, Columbia Regional Airport opened its brand new terminal.

Community members, elected officials and even Truman the Tiger helped us celebrate the grand opening of this economic driver.

In this new facility, you will find modern amenities you would expect to see in airports in much larger cities, and travelers no longer have to walk through rain or cold temperatures to board their planes.

Additionally, this new terminal will help us better support local businesses and stimulate our local economy.

In just a few short months, the Columbia Fire Department will have a brand new fire station on the south side of town – Fire Station 11.

This station will allow the Department to maintain its critical and timely response in a quickly growing area of town.

Additionally, the acquisition of a new fire station on the east side of town is underway.

In January, Columbia Parks and Recreation received a generous donation of 201 acres for the John W. Alspaugh Park.

This park, located at the intersection of Vandiver Drive and Mexico Gravel Road, will be maintained as green space and a nature area, providing a beautiful space for residents to enjoy.

Members of the community will also notice upgrades to our park system.

This spring at Cosmo Park, The Tot Lot, a playground for children ages 2 to 5, was replaced with new equipment and the fitness trail was resurfaced.

Aging shelters, Lamb and Burford, have also been replaced at the park.

Improvements like this to our many parks help make certain they will be a resource for Columbia families for years to come.

Upgrades also ensure facilities continually modernize.

In 2022, golf carts at Lake of the Woods Golf Course were converted from gas to electric power, and the fleet of golf carts at L.A. Nickell Golf Course will also be converted to electric power in 2023.

By July, the expansion of the MU Health Care Pavilion at Clary-Shy Community Park will be completed.

This grant-funded project will provide covered space for all 96 vendors at the Columbia Farmer's Market, a staple for many Columbia residents and an attraction for visitors.

As Columbia expands, the City's Economic Development department works incredibly hard to bring new employment opportunities, including manufacturers to Columbia.

Swift Prepared Foods has opened its newest facility (Prince-sha-pee) Foods, which produces high-quality Italian meats.

Company executives were joined by local, regional and state leaders as they cut the ribbon on their new facility on April 6th.

The company invested more than \$200 million dollars in the new 325,000-square-foot facility located on Paris Road.

(Prince-sha-pee) Foods has already created 100 new jobs in the region and plans to hire up to 200 more people over the next year.

EquipmentShare, a nationwide construction solutions technology company headquartered in Columbia, announced in November 2022 that they will be expanding.

The expansion will include a new corporate headquarters and a technology development center.

This represents an investment of approximately \$100 million dollars and the addition of more than 500 jobs over the next five years.

Construction on the new campus has already begun.

REDI, our regional economic development organization's newest initiative, in partnership with Downtown Community Improvement District and Central Missouri Community Action, is a retail incubator called the Shops at Sharp End, located at the corner of 5th and Walnut.

This initiative intends to embrace the rich and vibrant history of the Sharp End and nurture minority business enterprises so they can flourish in our community.

The retail incubation program will provide workshops, training, business coaching and access to resources.

As Columbia continues to grow, we continue to see an increased demand for social services.

One issue our community is facing is homelessness.

This is a topic where we are making progress, but we know there is still work to be done.

For years, the City has partnered with community organizations like:

- Room at the Inn,
- Salvation Army,



-Turning Point  
-and many more.

These organizations do fantastic work but have limited resources and manpower. So far this fiscal year, we have spent more than \$400,000 dollars in funding to our community partners that are providing services for the unsheltered, and we have budgeted more than \$1 million dollars for social services.

In October, the City purchased the Ashley Street Center, formerly VFW Post 280, for approximately \$865,000 dollars for an overnight warming shelter. This was the first full winter Room at the Inn had a permanent location, and staff saw an increase in the number of people utilizing those resources. Now that we are into the warmer months, we are making updates to the facility. Newly added showers will provide a place for individuals to refresh, an upgraded kitchen will allow staff to prepare warm meals and a newly paved parking lot will allow Go COMO buses to continue to service the facility.

For the first time this winter, the City partnered with Turning Point to provide an additional space, which helped us secure a warm, safe place for anyone in need. We look forward to continuing our partnership with these organizations and their volunteers.

When we talk about homelessness, it is essential to note that housing is another barrier many in our community face for a variety of reasons. Lack of affordable housing and other obstacles can make getting out of homelessness difficult.

While, historically, the City and other organizations have focused on providing shelter in the colder winter months, the City is now looking at utilizing resources and partnerships to provide shelter year-round. Outside of shelter, we also need to explore ways to make permanent housing more easily available and affordable for all of our residents.

Through the American Rescue Plan Act, the City has provided funding for projects that will make affordable housing more easily available. In February, the Council allocated \$2 million dollars of HOME ARPA funds for the Columbia Housing Authority's Kinney Point project. This new development will include 24 affordable housing units at the corner of Sexton and Garth. This new housing will primarily benefit individuals experiencing homelessness and individuals and families at-risk for homelessness.

Additionally, in April, the Council appropriated \$2 million dollars in ARPA funding for Columbia Housing Authority's Park Avenue Project.

This project will replace existing housing units that were constructed in 1964.

The project will include the construction of 79 new units of varying size.

Projects like these will help close the gap for those wanting to plant roots in Columbia.

One of the things that I find most impressive about Columbia is the passion the community has for volunteering.

So many residents here give back and help keep Columbia beautiful.

Each year, the Office of Neighborhood Services coordinates hours of volunteer work, and we have seen those hours gradually increase since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Volunteering provides many benefits to the City.

Volunteers tell us they are motivated by:

- public service,
- opportunities to be outdoors,
- and making an impact on sustainability.

There are a few numbers I think deserve to be highlighted when talking about our volunteers.

In 2022, more than 6,000 people volunteered with the City of Columbia sharing more than 30,000 hours of service.

During that time, they have maintained:

- 92 Adopt-A-Spot Litter Control areas
- and 104 Adopt-A-Spot Beautification areas.

In 2022, they also picked up:

- more than 8,000 bags of litter
- recycled more than 3,000 gallons of paint,
- and adopted more than 16 miles of trail in Columbia.

In April, more than 1,500 volunteers registered to pick up litter at more than 100 locations along streets, trails, streams, and in our parks as part of Cleanup Columbia.

This was the 27th annual citywide cleanup event.

Please take a moment with me to applaud all of the work they do.

One of the things that I feel often gets lost in the shuffle at the City is the various awards we receive each year.

These awards highlight staff's ability to excel in public service and in their respective service lines.

There are a few standout awards from this year I want to highlight.

In March, Water & Light earned the Energy Star Sustained Excellence Award for the fourth year in a row.

This award highlights Water & Light's long-term commitment to fighting climate change and protecting public health through energy efficiency.



These initiatives also help us reach our goals outlined in the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan.

Also in March, the City Finance department received the Government Finance Officer Association's Distinguished Budget Presentation Award for the Fiscal Year 2023 budget. In order to receive the award, the City's budget had to satisfy nationally recognized guidelines that measure how well the budget serves as a:

- policy document,
- a financial plan,
- an operations guide
- and a communications device.

If that is not impressive enough, this is the 27th year the Finance department has received this award.

I am so impressed by the hard work that we received recognition for, but now I want to shift focus to some of our initiatives in the coming year.

Go COMO, our City's bus system will undergo a comprehensive transit study this year. The study will consider strategies for increasing public transit's ridership and for making public transit a more practical and attractive option.

The study will also help us find new ways to reach staffing levels that will keep schedules consistent and evaluate the expansion of service to areas of Columbia that need public transit most.

The expected completion date for the study is the summer of 2024.

Traffic crash fatalities have been on the rise across the country since 2020.

In 2022, nine people in Columbia lost their lives and another 57 were seriously injured.

Although Columbia has not seen the increases some cities have, traffic crashes are preventable and there is no number of injuries or deaths that is acceptable.

As an early adopter of a Vision Zero approach, Columbia remains committed to increasing safety for all road users. We would like to see an increase in the number of people:

- walking,
- biking and
- taking public transportation, and we will continue to work to reduce the number of traffic fatalities.

This year, the City of Columbia received \$1.4 million dollars in grants from the U.S. Department of Transportation for studies to address road safety.

The City will use that money to conduct studies that will fundamentally change transportation and bring us closer to our goals.

This funding will help us find ways traveling around Columbia can be made safer, with a specific emphasis on:

- safe walking,

-biking

-and public transportation.

This work will include updating our Complete Streets standards, developing a map to inform people where the most pedestrian-friendly routes can be found and studying traffic signals to determine how to make them safer for those who walk and roll.

These studies should begin later this year and will help shape our traffic safety work for years to come.

Coming to Columbia three years ago as Deputy City Manager, I was surprised to learn that trash is one of the more contentious issues in Columbia.

Who knew roll carts would be the issue that divided the community so strongly?

That being said, after several years of discussions and changes, roll carts are coming.

In March, the City Council voted to implement automated collection.

Automated collection will be a much safer process for the employees in our Solid Waste Utility. This move to automated collection will allow us to keep the staff we have, and ensure better working conditions.

I know that change can be scary, but I assure you the City is committed to making this transition as seamless as possible.

The City's Solid Waste Utility has budgeted for a consultant to assist with this transition.

City staff and volunteers will work closely with residents to answer questions and walk through this process.

Due to deferred costs of replacing vehicles, and savings from the City no longer purchasing City-logo bags, we have enough money in our budget to cover the cost of the conversion to automated collections.

More importantly to our residents, this change will not impact the base rate, but will still incentivize residents to reduce waste by using a usage-pricing model.

Residents will receive a 65-gallon cart for no extra charge and can choose whether or not they want a 35-gallon or 95-gallon cart for an adjusted rate.

You can see this breakdown on the slide.

This change will go into effect in early 2024.

Earlier I spoke about the City's Civic Academy where residents have the opportunity to learn more about what their local government does for them.

This year, the Police Department will be unveiling its own opportunity for learning called the Columbia Police Department's Citizens' Police Academy.

This course will allow residents to take an even deeper look at the work of the department.

The Citizens Police Academy will include doing a ride-along with an officer and learning more about what it means to protect members of our community.

Applications opened on May 5th and the first class of the academy will be on June 21.



I encourage all of our residents who are interested in learning opportunities like this one to expand their knowledge about public safety in their own community.

Beginning in 2024, the City looks forward to hosting a series of exciting events. The Columbia Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB), Columbia Sports Commission, and local partner organizations submitted proposals to the Missouri State High School Activities Association (MSHSAA) for four competitions that were all awarded.

These competitions will be held in Columbia into 2029. Columbia will host the:

- state basketball championships
- state boys wrestling championships
- state cross country championships and
- state music festival.

Altogether, these events alone are expected to have a direct yearly economic impact of more than \$6 million dollars.

Events like these stimulate our local economy and introduce people to our amazing community. These visitors eat at our restaurants, shop locally and stay in our local hotels.

It is my hope that some of those families, business travelers and individuals who have stayed in our hotels will make Columbia a regular stop during their travels.

With all of this being said, I think it is fair to say that our City is strong and growing rapidly.

With that growth comes many challenges, some of which we are still working to address.

The City continues to battle vacancies which have led us to have to make difficult decisions.

We continue to work with partners to address issues like community violence and homelessness.

We can get lost focusing on these growing pains, and understandably so.

They are complex and important issues our community faces.

But despite these challenges, we still accomplish many great things every day.

I do not want our staff or community members to forget all we are capable of, especially as we face existing and new challenges head-on.

I am proud to lead a group of passionate and intelligent people, and I am incredibly thankful for the support so many of you give the City and myself every day.

I look forward to seeing what this next year brings.

As I wrap up, I want to show you a video highlighting our amazing community.