

SPEECH: 2015 Temple City State of the City Address
SPEAKER: Mayor Carl Blum
TITLE: A Team Effort
DATE: Jan. 26, 2015

INTRO

Good evening fellow residents, friends and honored guests. I'm Carl Blum, the Mayor of Temple City. On behalf of the City Council and City staff, it's my honor to deliver the 2015 State of the City address.

First, I'd like to acknowledge my colleagues on the Council, all former Mayors, with whom I am very proud to serve: Mayor Pro Tem Tom Chavez, Councilmember Fernando Vizcarra, Councilmember Vincent Yu, and Councilmember Cynthia Sternquist. My comments tonight, in fact, address what we have accomplished, not as individual Councilmembers or Mayors, but as a team that has reenergized this city.

I also want to thank our tireless City staff—I ask them to stand when I call their name: City Manager Bryan Cook, who joined us this past year, Administrative Services Director Tracey Hause, Parks and Recreation Director Cathy Burroughs, Community Development Director Michael Forbes, Assistant to the City Manager Brian Haworth and City Clerk Peggy Kuo. I believe these dedicated people reflect the best ideals of public service and what government can do to help make people's lives better.

In addition, I'd like to recognize other key players who make Temple City what it is: our City commissioners who advise the Council on issues from planning and parks and recreation, to public art and traffic and safety; personnel from the County of Los Angeles sheriff's and fire departments; Temple City Unified School District; and Temple City Chamber of Commerce. Let's give them all a round of applause.

We also have representation from members of our business community, as well as religious institutions, private schools and educational centers, youth sports leagues and scouting programs, Sister Cities, and service organizations like Kiwanis, Blue Star Banner Program, Temple City Chinese American Association and the Amida Society. I apologize if I've missed anyone in the audience, but I think you get the picture on what it takes to be a city.

QUALITIES OF A GREAT COMMUNITY

When most of us drive into a community for the first time, we immediately begin making judgments. Every so often we encounter a particularly impressive place that we know we'd like to return.

What makes a community desirable?

Surely, it has to be clean, with well-maintained public facilities and private property that reflect a pride of ownership. I personally love tree-lined streets and parks, so I like to see that the landscaping—the “urban forest,” as we say—is robust and well cared for. And public art, something very prevalent in advanced cultures is visible throughout the community. It tells you not only who they are but that they have a passion for expressing their history and culture through their environment. And, of course, you have to feel safe. When I see these qualities, I know I've arrived at a special place, and I'm proud to say that now, in 2015, Temple City is clearly emerging as that kind of place.

A LOOK BACK TO 2009

Much of what I've described about a desirable community are the physical trappings of good governance. But there is also a philosophical, or even spiritual, life of a city. Back in 2009, a corruption scandal resulted in the defeat of two long-term Councilmembers and the resignation of two others. The city government was in the midst of chaos—City Hall operations had almost come to a halt. That's when two of my colleagues were first elected and two of us were appointed to fill vacancies. That meant there were four new Councilmembers each with less than a year's experience on the Council. But I want to recognize the leadership of Councilmember Fernando Vizcarra, the lone person left on that previous City Council. Hanging tough, he held things together as we transitioned to the new team of leaders.

The centerpiece project at Rosemead and Las Tunas—the focal point of that scandal—remained a vacant lot, mired in a lawsuit. Compounding our problems was the recession, which resulted in large numbers of vacant storefronts along Las Tunas Drive. In addition, the State was raiding local funds to address its own budget deficit.

There was a lot of work to be done to bring Temple City out of that funk, and we went to work immediately. One of the highest priorities was to establish a totally new vibe, a new philosophy of transparency and engagement. To meet our challenges, we had to become a proactive and high performing team.

We immediately began televising City Council meetings to demonstrate a commitment to transparency and we brought new leadership to City Hall staff. In addition, we immediately adopted the concept of a high-performing City Council and staff, and made exceptionally high ethical standards a cornerstone of our philosophy.

We also recognized that ours had been a government that simply reacted to problems, a status quo kind of attitude that lacked creativity and was rarely proactive. Simply put, we were on the decline and a turnaround was badly needed.

Our new City Council acted quickly, replacing a long-term City Manager with a new, ambitious leader who brought in a highly professional staff—some of whom, I'm pleased to say, are still with us. Our first job was damage control and rebuilding confidence in local government.

50TH ANNIVERSARY

Fortunately, there was a major event approaching that could not only distract residents from our problems but reenergize the City's spirit. That was Temple City's 50th Anniversary, held in 2010. Orchestrating this yearlong celebration was not simply an event-planning exercise, but an opportunity to officially turn the corner on the City's most challenging issues. Our goal was not just to celebrate our 50th anniversary of incorporation but to start planning for the next 50 years—a clean slate for progress, innovation and citizen engagement. That celebration laid the groundwork for many of the achievements we've witnessed since.

The attractive bust of city founder Walter Temple and the mural on the west wall of Temple City Library were our first efforts at public art. Now, we not only have a Public Arts Commission, but have already installed over 25 pieces of art along Rosemead Boulevard—in fact, a couple of new ones are here on display. As part of our development agreement with the Olson Company, public art will be provided at the Linden Walk subdivision on Lower Azusa Road—something we hope to achieve with other developer partners. And the future revitalization of Las Tunas Drive will include significant artwork. Public art reflects our community's creative spirit and the cultural diversity that makes us strong. It also sends a signal that this is a community that is not satisfied in just doing the basics, but aspires to more—in other words, a high performing city.

ROSEMEAD BOULEVARD

Other matters demanded our attention, projects that would begin to transform Temple City into an award-winning model municipality. No project, in my estimation, was more important than the Rosemead Boulevard Safety Enhancement and Beautification Project in setting a tone for our city. We took control of the former Caltrans highway in 2008, and were provided \$386,000 with the transfer of ownership. We could have used that money for repaving, but the roadway would have continued to be an eyesore, as it is throughout much of its route in the San Gabriel Valley.

But a major transformation was needed. Scrapping the original, relatively modest plan for the street, we thought big and thought smart, snapping up every grant we could find and designing a state-of-the-art boulevard that would not only be friendly to cars, but to pedestrians, transit riders and bike riders as well. Today, the stretch of Rosemead Boulevard that runs through Temple City, beautifully landscaped and most smartly planned, is a source of community pride. It delivers the message that Temple City is one of those places worth visiting, worth exploring and proud to call home.

STUDY, STUDY, STUDY

We also embarked on a number of studies, all of which involved community meetings that reinforced our new commitment to transparency and citizen engagement. Suddenly, residents that had been left out of the process for years were now being invited to participate, even guide the process.

It proved to us that Temple Citizens are people with a passion for participating in their community. The Rosemead Boulevard streetscape project was very much driven by citizen comments, and folks also came out in large numbers to comment on—and ultimately shape—the Parks and Open Space Master Plan, Traffic Calming Study, Downtown Parking Study, the Bicycle Master Plan, and most recently, the Strategic Plan.

On the City Council, one of our greatest fears is commissioning studies that end up collecting dust on a shelf, never implemented. But most of these studies I've mentioned are now an integral part of our Strategic Plan. And equally important, they have created a culture of citizen participation that hasn't existed in Temple City for decades.

PARKS & RECREATION

Let me focus on a couple of studies, for example.

According to national standards, we have a severe shortage of parks and green space acreage in Temple City. We commissioned the Parks and Open Space Master Plan to look for answers on how we could squeeze more acreage and more activity out of what we had. Despite our deficiencies of acreage, I challenge anybody to name a municipality that uses what they have more effectively and creatively than Temple City.

When people are spending more than \$700,000 for a home in Temple City, they expect great public services, which includes parks. I believe—thanks in large part to the long-time leadership of Parks and Recreation Director Cathy Burroughs—that residents are getting plenty of bang for the buck. Events like Concerts in the Park, Camp-A-Palooza, the Camellia Festival, and the Lunar New Year celebration draw huge crowds and are examples of events that engage citizens of all kinds. Bringing our diverse population together for fun, education and camaraderie—regardless of what calendar they follow—makes a huge difference. I'm proud that the Council I serve on has remained committed to parks and recreation.

Because we're a built-out city, vast new acreage of parks is not a realistic goal, but transforming drainage washes into useable green space with trails and bike paths is something we're now exploring. Likewise, we are looking at creating pocket parks along Las Tunas Drive to bring more greenery into the center of town. And we're constantly adding more innovative programming that gives neighbors excuses to meet one another and live healthy lives.

In our mission to provide greater resources for Temple City youth, we've built a stronger working relationship with Temple City Unified School District, with whom we share use of facilities. We have also established relationships with local pastors, ministers and our rabbi, not only bringing invocations back to City Council meetings—God knows we needed all the help we could get!—but coordinating charity work and arrangements for working together during emergencies.

BIKE LANES

Another study that has borne fruit is the City's Bicycle Master Plan, which lays out a 27-mile system of new bikeways and facilities. So far we have already secured \$922,000 in grant funding for implementation, which has resulted in construction of the new protected bike lanes on Rosemead Boulevard, and in the next few years, 12.6 miles of additional bikeways citywide.

My friend and colleague, Councilmember Yu, is one of those bike riders and was instrumental in teaching us how important providing safe bike lanes is. We're proud that Rosemead Boulevard in Temple City provides "cycle tracks" or fully protected lanes that are separated from the flow of motor vehicle traffic.

Our dedication to innovative infrastructure has made Temple City a bright spot within the cycling community. Local bicycle advocacy nonprofit Bike SVG recently named us its first-ever Bike-Friendly City in the San Gabriel Valley; and at the national level, People for Bikes—a coalition of bicycling suppliers and retailers—recently named our Rosemead Boulevard lanes among the top 10 new bikeways in the U.S. But what matters most is seeing more cyclists taking to the streets and using the new facilities.

PROGRAMS & ACHIEVEMENTS

We also launched a Farmers Market, thanks to the efforts of Councilmember Vizcarra. The weekly gathering on Sunday mornings has since become a popular community amenity and something that has fostered a more interesting produce scene.

Beginning in 2010, we started addressing a number of other issues in a proactive, focused manner. We facilitated downtown façade improvements through a financial assistance program that provided a series of small grants and low-interest loans. Overall, this has helped create a more attractive commercial area that boasts more modern and architecturally interesting storefronts.

Thanks to Mayor Pro Tem Chavez, we established a Youth Committee that instills the ethic of public service among our young people. It not only makes our youth a priority but prepares these young people for future leadership positions. I fully expect a former Youth Committee Member to be standing here giving the State of the City address sometime in the not-too-distant future.

ENGAGEMENT

As a culturally diverse community, Temple City faces unique barriers that can sometimes complicate public outreach. Nonetheless, we have proven ourselves to be a model for public participation, not only when it comes to the public meetings I've already described, but also in terms of neighbor helping neighbor.

Because safety is one of those essential elements of a desirable community, our staff has been working closely with our local Sheriff's team to have a strong Neighborhood Watch program. We bring monthly meetings to different areas throughout the city, and it has been tremendously successful in encouraging more folks to attend. Our residents share a trusting relationship with the officers that patrol their streets, which is not something you can say about every town in America. Thanks to Neighborhood Watch and an overall community policing strategy that engages the community, Temple City has been ranked the 5th safest city in California and the 40th safest in America!

Because this City Council recognized that we were not taking full advantage of the tremendous talent present in our community, we initiated a Citizen's Academy in 2012. The program is taught by staff and engages participants in every aspect of City government. It is our way to "strengthen our bench" or create a "farm system," to use a couple sports analogies. Alumni of the Academy have already gone on to serve on city commissions. Some have become active in their churches, nonprofit agencies and service clubs, and no doubt a few will eventually run for City Council.

Other Temple City residents have participated in the Community Emergency Response Team—or CERT—program, which trains ordinary folks to respond effectively

during any emergency, natural or manmade. The first class of CERT graduated in 2011, just before the massive windstorm, and their cool, collected approach was of tremendous assistance to emergency personnel. Their contribution made a big difference in helping Temple City rebound quickly from that devastating event. That storm taught us just how important CERT is, and many more residents have since received training. It also prompted us to upgrade our Emergency Operations Center, which now serves as a command center in the event of any disaster, natural or manmade.

Last year, Temple City residents provided input on the preparation of a Strategic Plan at two well-attended community meetings in an effort to prioritize various programs and policies. This Strategic Plan effort, which works in concert with the City's Priority-Based Budgeting, addresses six core objectives: civic engagement, good governance, sustainable infrastructure, public safety, economic development, and quality of life. These elements sound familiar because they comprise the foundation of virtually everything this current City Council is attempting to achieve.

Building on those key elements of the Strategic Plan is a new General Plan that will guide the City's land use—especially in commercial corridors—for many years into the future. The last time our General Plan was updated was in 1987, so this will be a major achievement. This General Plan will be something the entire community can embrace, and it will reflect the hope and ambitions of the City's residents and businesses. It's an exciting effort, and I urge all of you to participate. A 12-member Citizen Advisory Committee is already working to help guide this effort.

In 2011 we launched a tool that has been invaluable in communicating to the public and garnering public participation in local affairs. Our quarterly newsletter was dramatically upgraded and rebranded as Temple City Connect. This publication, which has won multiple state and national awards, really sets the gold standard for municipal magazines. I challenge anybody to find a better one, even from cities 10 times our size.

BUDGET

Probably the only really good news that greeted this current City Council when we got started about five years ago was that we had a great small town with lots of great people, and we were in relatively good financial shape. There was about \$23 million in the reserve fund (which could have funded city operations for two years). And it was growing at nearly \$1 million per year since interest rates were outpacing inflation at the time. While it's nice to have money in the bank, that big reserve demonstrated the status quo attitude of leadership at the time. \$23 million was way too much to keep in a Reserve Fund, and there was no strategic approach for how and when to invest that money. As a Council that has always taken its stewardship of taxpayer dollars as a serious responsibility, we established a Reserve Policy. The policy defined spending priorities, set aside adequate reserves for specific purposes—like emergencies and economic downturns—and established restrictions to regulate usage. In 2011, we created an Economic Development Fund with monies not included in the newly identified Reserve Fund. The purpose was to assist with important development projects, and also allow us to consider land acquisitions, appropriate incentives, and marketing strategies that would position Temple City for the future.

Establishing that Economic Development Fund proved to be one of the very best decisions this City Council has made. It came at a time when the State of California had begun raiding cities and local redevelopment agencies to balance its own budget. In 2011, the Legislature and Governor agreed to dissolve all redevelopment agencies—a lethal blow to cities across the State. We suffered about a \$1 million hit when our agency was dissolved, but unlike most cities we had set aside \$8 million to continue

pursuing our economic development goals. Many cities have simply put their dreams on hold, but Temple City has been actively moving ahead, thanks to smart financial planning.

From the public's perspective, the entire budgeting process five years ago was complicated with very little transparency. The average citizen had little hope of understanding the City's budget, a document that should—when you think about it—be the most user-friendly.

The City brought in a new administrative services director who introduced something called Priority-Based Budgeting. We were the first city in Southern California to adopt it, and it turned out to be a game-changer. Most importantly, it encourages public input and discussion, allowing residents to weigh in on their own priorities.

As I mentioned, the Strategic Plan, which establishes city priorities, will now be used to drive the budgeting process so that resources are effectively and fairly allocated. Priority-Based Budgeting makes the City Budget a useful tool for citizens; furthermore, it makes the Strategic Plan manageable and achievable.

We currently have a Reserve Fund of roughly \$16 million. The money allocated into the Economic Development Fund has been put to good use; for instance, the City acquired two strategic downtown properties and is now exploring reuse options.

We can also report that our City's investment portfolio has performed consistently well over the past five years, even when falling interest rates as low as $\frac{1}{4}$ of 1% have limited its potential. We've been able to increase its yield to about 1 percent, without

taking unnecessary risks on taxpayer money. And while the yield is not necessarily significant in overall dollars, it demonstrates a high performing attitude.

Overall, I'm proud to say the City continues to enjoy a solid financial forecast at a time when many cities, despite an improved statewide economy, are still facing severe challenges. Temple City has been prudent in its finances and now has resources to invest in its future.

GRANTS

Temple City has also become one of the most prolific grant-writing and grant-awarded cities in California. We did it because we had to, and now make a practice of doing it well. For example with Rosemead Boulevard, we received nearly \$4 million in grants. We also were awarded nearly \$1 million for our ambitious bike plan; and secured \$912,000 in Safe Routes to School grants to fund improvements that make it safer for our kids to get to school.

These grants allow us to leverage additional funds, making possible major capital projects like Rosemead Boulevard. The administration this Council encountered five years ago was certainly not proactive or resourceful enough to secure this kind of funding. But this is yet another example of how Temple City has turned the corner and is now a model of resourcefulness.

DOWNTOWN

How many people here grew up in a city with a great downtown: places like Monrovia or Pasadena—or even towns back East or in other countries—where central gathering places are a part of daily life? If you did, then you know the excitement that can come with the experience of shopping or dining there, rather than at a mall. Thankfully, downtown districts are riding a wave of popularity in American cities big and small. Look at Pasadena, where a public-private partnership brought a neglected historic district back to life. Even downtown L.A.—a place that used to be dead after 5 p.m.—is now boasting new stores, restaurants and art galleries. There is no reason why Temple City cannot transform Las Tunas Drive into an exciting retail and dining district. Residents have consistently voiced their support for a more vibrant downtown.

With its Economic Development Fund, the City has acquired two strategically located properties that will help jumpstart our efforts to create a vibrant downtown: the former mortuary site on Temple City Boulevard, just south of Las Tunas; and a parcel on Primrose, north of Las Tunas. As an interim use, the mortuary site will accommodate badly needed parking, and the City is exploring future opportunities for both sites. These newly acquired sites present opportunities to inject new life into downtown.

We are in active discussion with owners of the large piece of private property—the old Alpha Beta grocery store site—which has been sitting vacant for almost 20 years to build a project that would create more energy in our downtown area.

Camellia Square at the corner of Rosemead and Las Tunas—the focus of so much controversy five years ago—has turned the corner, just like the City itself.

Although it's not progressing as quickly as we would like to see, significant progress has been made. The City is not a financial partner in this private venture, but has approved the necessary land use entitlements to encourage success. We are cautiously optimistic this project will result in a diverse mix of shops and restaurants, as well as an inviting gathering place for residents.

With all private developments, the City's primary role is to create an attractive economic climate with a minimum of red tape so that success can be achieved. With its increasing property values and responsible governance, Temple City presents the kind of stable environment—both economically and politically— required by mainstream developers and financial institutions.

DOOR-TO-DOOR PROGRESS

In Temple City, citizens come first, and we have made a commitment to investing in those residents and their homes. These are not big glamorous projects, but small, personalized investments that are significant in their own way.

One of the reasons our neighborhoods are attractive and safe is our commitment to aggressive but compassionate code compliance policies based on positive reinforcement. Back when my colleagues and I arrived on the City Council, Code Enforcement—as it was called back then—was all about uniformed officers writing citations. Now, our award-winning Community Preservation Program involves community preservation officers who aren't viewed as adversaries but as advisors. They visit with homeowners, speak to them—often in their native language—educate them, and help them resolve problems. The response has been remarkable and has fostered pride of ownership in every part of town. This program also helps to keep property values going up and crime going down.

Our Home Improvement Program, funded with dollars from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), not only helps eliminate blight but fosters new pride of home ownership among hard-working families and seniors on fixed incomes—people who don't have the extra cash to fix a leaky roof or a dangerously out-of-date electrical panel. And it encourages private investment by their neighbors, too—having the same profound impact on property values and crime as the Community Preservation Program.

Another major success is our graffiti removal program, which eliminates any incidence of graffiti within 24 hours. That immediate response not only keeps our

neighborhoods and business districts looking good, but makes a statement that vandalism is not tolerated in Temple City and that maintaining a clean, safe community is a high priority.

HOUSING

The State of California requires all cities to create a Housing Element, a document that demonstrates provision of housing opportunities for future residents. The Housing Element, like all of our plans, was vetted by the public and certified by the State in 2014. In the Temple City of the future, we hope to provide attractive housing choices for Temple City residents in all income categories, seniors and families.

Despite our shortage of developable land, large homebuilders continue to see value in Temple City. The Olson Company is currently developing 74 single-family units on Lower Azusa Road. The long, narrow site—between the Eaton Wash and the Union Pacific Railroad right-of-way—created many design challenges. But with the encouragement of City staff, the developer was able to create an innovative project that includes three new mini-parks and public art, both elements the City insisted on. These homes, priced from upwards of \$700,000, demonstrate the desirability of living in Temple City.

Also making real differences in the appearance of our residential neighborhoods are the Brush with Kindness and Habitat for Humanity programs, championed by Councilmember Sternquist. While it's usually our parks and recreation programs that are most associated with volunteerism, these home improvement programs also bring together community volunteers to help one another. Residents and business owners spend time fixing up houses in the community for their less fortunate neighbors. This is something that embodies the small town values that have always been a part of the Temple City experience.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

If you've been following along in this presentation, our aspirations for the future sound very much like the description of the desirable city I illustrated earlier. But to get there, we still have many challenges to address.

First is our cultural diversity. While diversity is one of Temple City's greatest assets, it also creates challenges—particularly when seeking public engagement and grooming new leaders for the future. We need to communicate effectively with our residents and businesses, using whatever language or resources we need.

Second is a San Gabriel Valley perspective. Temple City is not an island. There are neighboring cities and other agencies in the region that we must work together with, and collectively address the larger issues of water, energy, storm water pollution, air pollution, economic development, and funding for transportation and recreation needs.

Third, is funding. While we currently have adequate reserves to address the basic business of running the city, there are other obligations we need to meet. One is maintaining our aging infrastructure. Our roadways are a major factor impacting quality of life and economic vitality, so it is urgent that we address it sooner rather than later—especially because delayed street repairs tend to get exponentially more expensive. Other important duties include cleaning up pollution, paying for employee retirement benefits, and providing the services and programs that citizens identified in the Strategic Plan. The amount of money needed to tackle all those issues far exceeds what we currently have, but it is important to be proactive and creative in managing available funds and seeking alternative resources. The good news is that our reserves put us in

a position to be able to leverage dollars for securing additional funds and continuing the momentum of building a strong community.

Last but certainly not least, the fourth element is good governance. We have now built into City Hall a strong commitment to civic engagement. In addition to keeping government transparent and accountable, our dedication to public information and community participation also helps in developing future leadership. Programs like the Youth Committee and Citizens Academy help cultivate knowledgeable, talented and dedicated leaders who will be ready to serve when our current generation of leaders exit the stage.

While these challenges are somewhat daunting, I think we have proven in the last four to five years that if we continue to be proactive and high performing, it is amazing what can get accomplished.

CLOSING

In closing, I think you'll agree that Temple City has truly turned the corner from those dark days five years ago. As Councilmembers, we certainly don't feel like hiding at statewide conferences anymore. Not only do we hold our heads up high, but sometimes are called up to the stage to make presentations or receive awards for innovation in local government!

I know I can speak for my colleagues on the City Council when I say that the future of Temple City has never been brighter. But it didn't happen overnight and we need to continue being proactive. What's important is that the Temple City we all love continues to improve and evolve.

I still recognize the small town values that attracted me to the community 30 years ago, when my wife Jeanette and our four children moved here from Alhambra. But I also take pride in the fact that Temple City is now a very diverse community.

In his State of the City Address in 2012, my colleague and friend Tom Chavez predicted that we would become a model municipality in the State and in the nation. Three years later, through a lot of hard work by a lot of people, that prediction has come true.

Thank you for this opportunity to share my thoughts with you. Please continue to help make Temple City a town we are proud to call home. May God continue to bless and guide our city, our state and our nation.

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