

State of the City Address | October 28, 2015

Presented by Mayor Libby Schaaf in Oakland, CA

This is an amazing time for Oakland. After years of stagnation, we are finally seeing growth.

People recognize Oakland is the hottest new center of urban innovation in America: one of the most awesome places to live, work and play.

Today, more than 16,000 new residents call Oakland home, businesses from Uber to Sunset Magazine are moving their headquarters here, and more than 300 new restaurants, bars and cafes are helping us eat, drink and stay merrily caffeinated.

And the world got to see Oakland shine this year as our diverse and harmonious Dub Nation lined our elegant downtown streets and surrounded our glorious Lake Merritt on a picture-perfect day to celebrate that fairytale team of champions – our own Golden State Warriors!

There's a buzz about Oakland. It's not just a feeling - the evidence is in numbers – look at these economic indicators!

But, while we celebrate this moment of progress and prosperity, we must have the DISCIPLINE and HONESTY to look into and behind these numbers to make sure that the prosperity is shared and progress benefits everyone equitably.

I call it “looking behind the green dot.” The idea came from a recent convening I attended on resiliency. The presenters put a map up of the world with green, yellow and red dots on cities rating one of the resiliency indicators. Mayor Mitch Landreau was surprised to see a green dot on his city of New Orleans. And he pointed out that his city might get a good overall rating, but behind that green dot were lots of neighborhoods that were yellow and even red dots, and that those neighborhoods were what he was still worried about.

Our recent green dots do not tell the whole story of Oakland.

Take the current employment numbers. Oakland's overall unemployment rate might be an encouraging 5.3%. Yet a whopping 7.9% of Oaklanders who live in East Oakland neighborhoods like Soverano Park are unemployed – that's more than double the unemployment rate for Oaklanders who live in the Grand Lake Neighborhood.

If we look at other indicators – like health -- we see the same disparity. That same East Oakland resident who is twice as likely to be unemployed also has a life expectancy that is 12 to 17 years shorter than that Grand Lake resident.

We can't celebrate the overall health of Oakland knowing that two people can live just 1 mile apart from each other and be nearly twice as likely to be unemployed and expected to live 15 years less. Behind the green dot we see a lot more work to do.

As Oakland enters this time of growth, we must remember a lesson from the mighty oak tree for which we were named – healthy growth requires strong roots. To be the thriving, equitable Oakland of our dreams, we must stay rooted in our legacy and our values.

To promote Oakland's healthy growth, my administration is focusing on four things: holistic community safety, equitable jobs and housing, vibrant sustainable infrastructure and responsive trustworthy government.

This evening I'll provide a brief overview of our progress and plans in each of these areas.

First, Holistic Community Safety. It remains my highest priority.

The numbers show that Oakland is getting safer.

For the third consecutive year, we have double digit reductions in non-fatal shootings -- down 14% compared to this time last year. So far this year, nearly 200 fewer people were shot in Oakland than in 2012.

Residential burglaries and home-invasion robberies are significantly down, 15 and 54%, respectively. We've had a similar number of robberies as last year, which continues to be 27% below the previous 3 years average.

But I'm not going to sugar-coat the state of safety in Oakland. Behind the green dot of fewer shootings overall is the tragedy that more of them were fatal.

We've lost 71 of our loved ones to murder so far this year -- 15% more than this time last year. I can't celebrate improvements while overall levels of fear and harm in this city remain so unacceptably high. And behind every number and trend line lies a heartbreaking story of loss.

This photo is a poignant reminder of everything that is so right and so wrong in the City of Oakland – a memorial for community artist Antonio Ramos in front of the mural he was painting when he died.

If you heard the inauguration speech I delivered not even a year ago on stage at the Paramount Theater, you might remember I urged citizens to support one of my favorite community efforts -- the Super Heroes Mural Project, where the incredible folks at Attitudinal Healing Connection work with Oakland kids to come up with their superhero powers and then incorporate these images into stunning murals to enliven freeway underpasses in West Oakland.

I couldn't have imagined I'd stand on THIS stage TONIGHT, grieving for one of their artists, killed so senselessly while in the very act of painting a mural about nonviolence and youth empowerment. This is beyond unacceptable.

As we dedicated the mural last week in memory of Antonio, we stood in front of the mural's image of a girl whose superpower was that when she twirled, her dress would sprout flowers that would take all the violence away. I believe in her superpower and I know we need to do things differently to change pictures like this.

So what will we be doing differently?

First we will grow our police department. On Oct. 30th we'll have 735 sworn officers with another 50 in training – on-track to meet my promise of 800 officers by 2017. A long ways from having only 607 officers in 2013.

We'll use recently awarded federal grants to hire walking officers for our commercial corridors, expand our 21st century policing reforms, and combat the horrific sexual exploitation of minors in Oakland.

Recognizing that holistic Community Safety means a lot more than just cops, we'll more than double our number of case managers who help those at the highest risk for violence make more positive life choices. And expand our street outreach work to interrupt retaliatory violence and support victims' families. We'll strengthen implementation of the proven Ceasefire strategy to reduce group and gang-related violence and expand it to address robberies, as well as shootings.

By the end of the year we'll release Oakland's first Comprehensive Community Safety Plan crafted by a diverse array of experts. It will create better collaboration and collective accountability for a holistic set of goals -- ranging from increasing high school graduation rates to improving reentry support to making Oakland a restorative justice city.

This year, the Black Lives Matter movement put Oakland into an important national conversation about policing, recognizing that we are both healing from a shameful history and forging a new future.

Oakland contributed to the dialogue as our recent advances in modern, progressive, community-based policing earned attention and praise from the likes of CNN, The Washington Post and our Attorney General. Even President Obama's Director of 21st Century Policing recognized OPD as a "national model" for our body worn camera program, racial profiling data initiative and procedural justice training. THANK YOU Rev. Damita Davis-Howard and Pastor Ben McBride for being the two of the first community-members in California who get to train police.

Our Chief Sean Whent has consistently recognized publically that there is still so much more work to be done to rebuild trust and heal the harms that our department has caused, particularly within communities of color.

He's recognized that overly aggressive tactics and over-incarceration do NOT make Oakland safer. Thanks to his policies, OPD will reduce arrests by 26% and use-of-force by 15%, while continuing to bring down crime. Not surprisingly, citizen complaints against the police also continue to go down and hit a 5-year low this year.

Chief Whent continually demonstrates his belief that policing is about being guardians of the community not warriors within it. And to that end he forged new partnerships with the Oakland public schools and Merritt College to proactively recruit and prepare OUR youth who have grown up in Oakland to be the compassionate guardians of their own communities as future Oakland police officers.

The Black Lives Matter conversation continues to be critical – it's all about getting behind the green dot. It is my continued hope that as a community we TURN TOWARD each other, not ON each other, as we figure out Oakland's path to safety and justice.

Finally, we MUST address the root causes of crime. Safety will increase when we invest in equity, education and economic opportunity for all.

So it just makes sense that our next priority is Equitable Jobs & Housing.

Oakland has an affordability crisis. With the second fastest rising rents and 6th most expensive rental market in the country, many long-time Oaklanders are getting priced out of their hometown. Oakland's own rent board has seen petitions triple!

My highest priority is preventing displacement of our long term residents, residents who have called Oakland home for generations. These are not fungible housing units – they are homes where families have recorded the heights of their children over the years on the inside of their kitchen door frames.

My newly convened Housing Cabinet is working furiously on implementing our Housing Equity Roadmap, and will bring forward an implementation and funding plan in early 2016. We will take multiple actions to protect existing families and affordable housing stock, as well as create new affordable and market rate housing. I believe in bringing affordability protections to families where they are already living. We can do this by leveraging existing tax breaks to incentivize landlords to restrict their buildings to keep them affordable for our working class families.

We've launched a proactive safe housing inspection program to ensure our most vulnerable tenants do not have to choose between affordable rents and safe, healthy living conditions.

Next week, I'll be asking the council to increase our tenant protection fees that could triple resources for tenant outreach and assistance. I'm also asking them to make it easier to add secondary units to existing housing near good transit, as well as create impact fees so we can use this economic boom to fund more affordable housing construction.

The good news is that 1,300 new units of housing are getting built this year – including 30% affordable -- and more than 15,000 units are in the development pipeline – including nearly 1,000 units that will be affordable to low and very low income tenants.

Our recent work approving area specific plans is really paying off in cutting red tape and streamlining development. And our latest Downtown Plan will be finished in 2017.

We must learn the cautionary lessons from San Francisco and not discourage market rate construction. Every new unit relieves a little pressure on our tight housing market. We can't build a wall around our city and stop people from moving here – nor would we want to (in fact that sounds a little like a certain Presidential candidate). We need to have new housing at every income level so new residents don't push out the old as they move into Oakland.

And making housing more affordable is not our only challenge. Just as important, Oaklanders need to earn a living wage, prosper and thrive.

As the first Oakland official to endorse Measure FF last year, I'm proud Oakland has raised our minimum wage to \$12.25. Now I will be co-chairing a statewide initiative to raise the minimum wage for all Californians. I know this big wage adjustment was hard on many of our small businesses, but Oaklanders have shown their support for fair wage businesses by continuing to support them. Oakland's economy is thriving under a fair wage – it was one of the best things we did as Oaklanders this year.

We're also expanding our commitment to youth employment by changing the OLD Mayor's Summer Jobs Program to a year-round initiative called Classrooms to Careers. It's part of our expanding partnership with OUSD in support of their linked learning initiative.

And we're supporting our Oakland-grown small businesses – the biggest job creators of all -- with an innovative partnership with Kiva Zip. Oakland is a city of small businesses, with 90% of our businesses having 20 or fewer employees.

But our entrepreneurs struggle to expand because they're shut out from accessing capital.

In 2016, Kiva Oakland will bring 0-interest crowd-sourced loans to 600 traditionally under-served Oakland entrepreneurs. The thing I love about Kiva is it makes its loans on character not credit scores. Human centered capital is what is going to fuel an equitable economic agenda for Oakland.

We're also talking a lot about Techquity.

Yes, techquity. We created the concept of Techquity this year to communicate our expectation that Oakland's growing tech business community will have a visible commitment to inclusive diversity – to strive for a workforce as diverse as Oakland and to support our local businesses. Most importantly, we need them to help us create an opportunity pipeline that prepares Oakland's youth for jobs in the tech sector.

And speaking about preparing Oakland's youth for jobs in the 21st Century, let's talk about my personal passion – education. If we truly want long-term safety and equity we must improve educational outcomes for all of Oakland's children.

This January, Superintendent Wilson and I will launch the Oakland Promise – a cradle to career strategy with five new supports designed to triple the number of Oakland public school students who earn a college degree. Yes – I said triple. A college degree is the number one ticket out of generational poverty. Right now, only 10% of our public school 9th graders are earning one. We can do better.

And now for a shameless plug. In a matter of days, the 50th Mayor of Oakland is turning 50. It's a big birthday for me and there's only one thing I want for my birthday. I want to send 50 Oakland kids who'll be the first in their families through college. With a college degree, these kids will earn a million dollars more over their lifetime than if they only had a high school diploma.

And by finishing college, every young person in their family – every nephew and niece, little sister and brother – become 3 times more likely to go to college too. Oakland's kids are talented, resilient, brilliant and strong -- they deserve our help in earning this life-prize. If you'd like to help my birthday wish come true, visit libbyschaaf.org to learn more. Educating our kids is the most transformative thing we can do for Oakland.

My third priority as Mayor is Vibrant Sustainable Infrastructure.

People joke that infrastructure not sexy, but it IS one of government's most basic responsibilities. And honestly, good infrastructure should be sexy – great public spaces, public art and complete streets encourage healthy living, build community, spark the imagination and improve our quality of life. Done sustainably we reduce pollution, conserve resources and spend fewer tax dollars on maintenance.

We're creating Oakland's first Department of Transportation to better leverage our transportation assets and attract more competitive transportation dollars.

I love bringing other people's money to Oakland -- And we are. We've secured \$16Million for safer routes to school, better bike and pedestrian safety, as well as affordable housing near transit. We've started to fix those raggedy roads, completing 18 paving projects this year.

Yet behind that green dot, we still have a \$450 million backlog in needed road repairs. MTC's last pavement condition index rated Oakland's roads at risk of falling into poor condition.

In the coming months, we'll be doing a deep dive on our long-term capital plan to explore how we might speed up long-overdue repairs and improvements to our roads, public spaces, and community facilities.

My fourth and final priority is Responsive Trustworthy Government.

When I attended the mural dedication for our slain artist Antonio Ramos last week, his brother spoke passionately about his disappointment and distrust in his government. Even his Mayor. It was painful to hear, and it reminded me how urgent it is that Oakland rebuild trust between the people and THEIR government.

I want people to fall back in love with democracy; to realize that government is our collective best selves and that Oakland's officials come to public service to cure inequity not cause it or even tolerate it.

I could tell you about our transparency and gov 2.0 projects – like our digital front door website redesign, our employee civic lab or plans for a 311 call center, but it really starts with the people.

So much of what I've done during my first months as Mayor is build a great team of city leaders (the first stable leadership city hall has seen for nearly two years). It includes my Chief of Staff Tomiquia Moss (former Director for Hope SF to San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee), my City Administrator Sabrina Landreth (former city manager of Emeryville), Assistant City Administrator Claudia Cappio (former Director of Housing and Community Development for the State of California) and Christine Daniel (former City Manager of Berkeley).

But don't let those former job titles fool you, they are ALL long-term Oaklanders with integrity, talent, crazy reserves of energy and a burning passion for their hometown.

This leadership team is committed to respond to community concerns and serve every corner of this great city – particularly the ones that government has not served well in the past.

These are my four focus areas for Oakland right now: holistic community safety, equitable jobs and housing, vibrant sustainable infrastructure and responsive trustworthy government. These are the ways WE WILL grow like the beautiful oak tree for which we were named -- from our roots, healthy and strong.

I am proud to be born and raised in Oakland and to have worked my whole life to improve its communities. I'm determined to use time of progress and growth to solve long-standing problems that have plagued Oakland all my life.

The fears right now are real – that today's dramatic changes could white-wash our rich cultural heritage; that new residents will suppress the free expressions of the old.

And, I will say this again, we must TURN TOWARD each other, not ON each other as we navigate these changing times. Remember Oakland is an ecosystem. We are ALL interconnected.

Our challenge today is to welcome growth in Oakland with actions that ensure it promotes equity; that it lift up and not push out our long-time residents;
lift up and not push out our vulnerable residents;

and lift up and not push out uniquely-Oaklandish ethos and soul. We must ALL prosper for Oakland to truly prosper.

I am confident we can do this, because we KNOW how strong our roots are. Even as new leaves and branches sprout to join Oakland's mighty canopy, our strong roots connect us to our identity and past; our strengths and our values. We WILL grow from our roots. WE are Oakland.

Thank you.

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