



February 24, 2022

Good evening, Riverside, and thank you for joining me for the annual State of the City Address.

A special thank you to the Greater Riverside Chambers of Commerce for being a dedicated partner in this event each year. Businesses in the City of Riverside are fortunate to have the very best chamber in California advocating on their behalf.

Thank you to the City Council for their care and commitment in building Riverside's future.

Thank you also to you, the residents, business owners, and families of Riverside for trusting me with the great honor and privilege of leading our city—my hometown, the city I grew up in.

The Riverside I was born and raised in was very similar to Riverside today. Like my four siblings and me, you can still muddy your shoes, running in the damp soil of an orange grove, trees laden with fruit, the snowcapped peak of San Gorgonio glowing brightly against an impossibly blue sky. You can still shiver in the cold water of the deep end at Shamel Park Pool and warm yourself, covered in goosebumps, on the hot concrete deck. You can still walk among the stacks in the Main Library, breathing deeply the scent of thousands of pages of history, ideas, and stories.

That was the Riverside my parents came to from New Jersey in the post-war boom of the 1950s—poor, with nothing, no jobs, home, family, connections or money—but lured by those orange groves and the sweet smell of the blossoms and the rustle of eucalyptus in a warm winter breeze. Like many, my parents came to Riverside seeking the California Dream.

And they found it, but not easily.

My parents believed in the promise of the Golden State—and the promise of Riverside. Despite coming from nothing, their daughter went on to become the mayor of her hometown. Now, I get to continue my parents' journey by working to provide residents and families—those here now and those who continue to join us—the same opportunities that my family had.

As we are all Building Tomorrow Today.

RiversideCA.gov/SOTC

Recently, I reached to some of you who shared with me your hopes and aspirations for tomorrow:

- Cyndi Sandoval Yancu, a 40-year resident of Riverside shared her vision of preserving our historic Greenbelt to connect the Riverside of the past with the Riverside of the future.
- Christian Gurrola, a young professional leading two family businesses shared his vision of a future Riverside that is a haven for people to live and own a business in the city.
- Jamal Jennings, a newcomer to Riverside, shared that we cannot sell ourselves short, that Riverside—with more people than 99 percent of all cities in the country—we are a major city, with the resources to compete in a global economy.

Like Cyndi, Christian, and Jamal I believe that the best way to predict your future is to create it.

And in Riverside, we are creating our future by focusing on three signature themes:

- Reinventing our economy through Arts, Industry, and Innovation
- Reimagining the River
- Revitalizing our Downtown

And ensuring a Livable Riverside where people choose to live where they work and flourish.

The State of the City Address is my opportunity to share with you our progress as a city over the past year as well as share a vision for the future.

This evening, I will share my thoughts on our challenges and opportunities in five key areas related to these themes: homelessness, quality of life, jobs, the economy, and division within our country and community.

The pandemic remains a real challenge, but we have reason to be optimistic: vaccination rates are increasing, schools remain open, and our local businesses are recovering, boosted by our commitment to supporting them. We must stand strong as a community and work to close this pandemic chapter of our history.

ACHIEVEMENTS & SIGNATURE AREAS

First, let me take a few moments to let you know the work my team and I have done over the past year and the impact we've made.

My highest priority is to hear from you, so we've set up many different ways to do just that.

I am touring the city, visiting every neighborhood through what I call my "Big Tent Tour" where we listen, learn, and share—connecting neighbors to City Hall and each other. So far, we've held eight of these gatherings with six more to go. Throughout this tour, I met with more than 400 residents. We've connected in many other ways, too: I've spoken at 183 community events, and my team has answered 8,593 emails and 2,990 phone calls—and counting—providing residents with assistance and connecting them to services.

As the Mayor, I am privileged to be the official spokesperson for the City of Riverside. And today that means creating a robust social media presence. This year, we've connected with nearly 7 million people through Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. Make sure you follow us to stay up to date on our initiatives, events, and community partnerships.

One example is the Riverside Military Wall of Honor. In November, I launched a fundraising campaign to modernize and enhance this monument on our Main Street Mall which honors our fallen from across the city and county. For me this is personal. I think about my own father, who served our country in Korea, and all of the men and women in our lives who also answered the call of service. I hope they would be proud of this effort to commemorate Riverside residents who died for our freedom while on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces. And tonight, I am excited to announce that we've surpassed our fundraising goal by 50% which will allow us to establish an endowment for long term care—something we've never had before. Construction will begin in a matter of days with an unveiling in late May. I hope you will join us then.

Now that the Military Wall of Honor improvements are underway, we are working with the Riverside African American Historical Society for a privately funded upgrade to the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial which sits on our Civil Rights Walk on our Main Street Pedestrian Mall, home to 6 sculptures that celebrate Riverside's history. This year we plan to better connect these sculptures with a linked pathway and unifying signage, to better tell our story and draw visitors to other experiences in our downtown, such as The Cheech, the Mission Inn, the Main Library and the Civil Rights Institute—just to name a few.

Also in progress, is my work in the Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative. In August, I was honored to be selected for this program, joining an elite group of 38 mayors from around the world. Because of my involvement in this program, Riverside will receive funding and support to transform our local economy with robust clean and green tech economic development and applied research. Working with a team of innovators at Harvard, Bloomberg, and the City, we aim to:

- Expand opportunities for Inland Southern California innovators and entrepreneurs.
- Create a pipeline of startups launched by a pool of Riverside entrepreneurs, that is diverse with respect to race and gender
- Drive investment capital to local startups, emphasizing those with high social impact; and
- Leverage our assets of government, industry, and university-research to attract employers.

Another effort I've launched to transform our local economy is my Mayor's Venture Catalyst Challenge, which aims to stop the brain drain by providing cash prizes and assistance to students to launch their creative business ideas locally.

And Campus Riverside is helping college students connect to our city's culture and neighborhoods, find student discounts, and land their dream job or internship so we can keep our talent local.

We are Building Tomorrow Today by creating opportunities for Riverside's youth through our CalVolunteers \$4.4 million youth workforce development state grant program which focuses on prevention, providing career pathways for youth in our community who have been affected by the pandemic with the goal of preventing youth homelessness and bolstering youth job training.

These are just a few of our initiatives we are working on to Build Tomorrow Today.

HOMELESSNESS

The tomorrow of Riverside is one I see where every person is housed and healthy.

I've heard from many of you who are feeling discouraged about the challenge of homelessness and I share your frustration. It's the number one challenge facing our city, and our state, today.

Affecting people like Alice—or at least that is what I've taken to calling her. Alice lives behind the dumpster in the business park around the corner from my house. I see her every day, unkempt hair, face dirty—sometimes she talks on an imaginary cell phone, or has conversations with people I don't see. When it rains, she wraps a black trash bag around herself. She started limping a couple of weeks ago and she is really struggling to walk now. Alice has refused every offer of assistance we have provided.

You all know Alice. The person who hangs out on the street corner, while you cross to the other side of the street, thinking: "Wow, I wish the City would do something."

And we are.

Just this past year, I secured \$8 million in funding through my work in the Big City Mayors Coalition—a group of mayors from the 13 largest cities in California advising the state on local issues. This \$8 million is funding we can use as we see fit—such as adding more shelter capacity and bridge housing. In 2021, we served over 161 homeless individuals resulting in 60 housing placements. We also added 50 new recuperative care beds for those who need additional medical care after leaving a hospital while also stabilizing individuals with mental health conditions so we can keep them out of our emergency rooms.

But while building housing is important to the overall effort to address homelessness, we can't just build shelter. We need to supplement that work with new approaches, driven by data, that help two of the most vulnerable populations: those suffering from mental illness like Alice and those suffering from addiction like Paul.

I met Paul at The Salvation Army. He struggled with substance abuse; he had lost his job, his house, and his family. Paul entered The Salvation Army's First Impressions program, where he was able to find a job and work for the stability he needed to end his 30 year cycle of homelessness and substance abuse. He went from homeless to housed, and now works with The Salvation Army to assist those in similar circumstances.

We know through the success of Paul and those like him that this program works. And I believe we should start with what's already working and build on that rather than start from

scratch. So, this year, I am hoping to expand The Salvation Army's efforts with a \$1 million grant from the state's Clean California grant program. We've partnered with the Governor's Office, CalTrans and The Salvation Army to increase the number of participants while also beautifying our city through litter removal and tree planting.

And finally, let me be clear: our state has a mental health and substance abuse crisis. But too often, people who need treatment decline assistance or do not have the capacity to accept it. That needs to change. Change in the form of new legislation and partnerships with the county and state. This could include expanding conservatorships, providing more facilities to address mental and behavioral health issues, and expanding regional efforts to address the need across our county.

This year, I will work with my fellow Big City Mayors and mayors from our surrounding local cities to push for meaningful state legislation that will make a difference. We must make it easier to help those who cannot help themselves, and ensure proper mental healthcare and rehabilitation is being provided for Alice and those who need it most.

ECONOMY, JOBS, CITY BUDGET

Of course, to be able to provide for our residents, we must have a strong economy. And I'm pleased to report that Riverside's economy is thriving, creating opportunities like no other time in our history—particularly through private investment.

This past year I created an Economic Advisory Council comprising industry leaders and business owners from a diverse array of sectors and backgrounds to advise me on the types of initiatives and incentives that will create fertile conditions for business and job creation. Their advice and insights have challenged me to rethink our approaches to attracting and retaining businesses while rewarding and growing the businesses that have already chosen Riverside as their home.

Our city is ready for the international stage—to be a global center for clean and green technology jobs and research; an ecosystem of businesses and entrepreneurs focused on emissions research, air quality, engine manufacturing and renewable energy. We have all the elements in place, geographically concentrated near each other: the California Air Resources Board Southern California Headquarters, the University of California Riverside, and the city's Arts & Innovation District and we have the factors common to other successful cluster initiatives: industry-driven, university fueled, and government funded. All positioning us for explosive growth in this sector.

The City Council recently approved a Master Plan for our Arts & Innovation District. This district spans 220 acres and is bounded by the 60/215/91 interchange providing more spaces for our clean and green technology cluster to grow.

Like UC Riverside's OASIS project. This past year, my office supported a successful community effort that awarded OASIS \$1.5 million of federal funds to be used for site planning and workforce development training for the OASIS Clean Technology Park.

I'll continue to encourage investment in Riverside as I did recently with the UC Riverside Office of Technology Partnerships. I met with international entrepreneurs to showcase Riverside's

entrepreneurial ecosystem, driving home the point that we have everything they need to help them launch into the U.S. market right here and right now in Riverside.

Entrepreneurs like Tre'dish, who launched a food delivery platform allowing at-home chefs, many of whom lost their jobs over the course of the pandemic, to enter the home-to-home food sharing economy. Tre'dish, initially from Canada, chose to move to Riverside because we were among the first to approve the operation of Microenterprise Home Kitchens.

To support a thriving economy, we must have a dynamic downtown with eclectic and diverse food and entertainment options and a flourishing arts scene. Art is more than just beautification, it is a true economic driver. For every dollar spent on arts-related entertainment, \$3.35 comes back to our local economy.

The city is expanding its investment with multiple new large-scale murals—such as the three-story mural painted by Darren Villegas just beyond this window and several others slated to take place this spring—not just in downtown, but across our city. This summer will see the opening of the Cheech Marin Center for Chicano Art and Culture, an international sensation that will breathe new life into downtown's art scene.

Completion of this new Main library with its iconic architecture leverages such transformational efforts that are happening right now—just look around downtown.

New restaurants and shops have opened, historic buildings that have been blighted for years are currently in various stages of restoration to open soon, and scores of new apartments are bringing new residents to the downtown core, such as the long-anticipated housing development project The Mark—named in honor of my dear friend, champion of Riverside, survivor of the Holocaust, and nationally renowned housing developer, the late Mark Rubin.

Riverside is meeting the future but honoring our past with these and other developments from a strong financial position.

We have made good on our promise of responsible fiscal stewardship at the City—a promise I made to Riverside while campaigning to be your mayor. But we also have you, our community members, to thank for helping our city maintain its fiscal strength.

A thank you is in order to our residents for your commitment to “buy local”—which has generated a surplus in our city budget. COVID-19 threatened to wreak havoc on local governments across the nation, but in Riverside, we have seen the opposite. Our sales tax revenues increased 15 percent year over year. As a result, Riverside expects a budget surplus of \$7-10 million when this fiscal year ends June 30.

QUALITY OF LIFE

A robust economy also ensures that we have the financial resources to preserve and maintain our quality of life.

I want every resident of our city to feel safe walking our streets and trails and neighborhoods. Decreasing and deterring crime must be a key priority.

Here in Riverside, we are grateful to and supportive of our first responders. To our police officers, we thank you for ensuring our safety daily. To our firefighters, we thank you for responding to our emergencies quickly and effectively. Rest assured, we will continue to provide the Riverside Police and Fire Departments with the tools they need to be successful in keeping our city safe. Like we have this past year, using Measure Z funds for what they were intended: \$10 million for new police helicopters and \$2 million for two new fire engines.

Ensuring a Livable Riverside means ensuring a place that shines and thrives and draws new residents like it did my parents. A city that instills pride of place without reservation and gives hope.

To that end, we're focusing on issues like road improvements, sustainability, and barriers to housing.

Since I was elected mayor in 2020, we've allocated more dollars for infrastructure projects than in the last 15 years. In 2021 alone nearly 25 miles of roads were repaved, 100,000 square feet of new sidewalks installed, 300,000 square feet of potholes repaired, over 12,000 street trees trimmed, with more to come this year as Riverside will directly benefit from the recently passed federal infrastructure law.

You may have heard that Riverside is charged by the state with zoning for 18,000 new housing units in the next 8 years. While that does not mean that many units will be built, this remains a challenge and we plan to meet it by managing future development, traffic, and density responsibly, as well as ensuring affordability.

Beyond just meeting our responsibilities, we also have big opportunities.

Like Reimagining the River that runs along our great city. It's an asset we've left untapped—or underutilized—for too long: 11 miles of nature, parks, trails, and open space.

With the support of my colleagues and co-chairs, Councilmember Edwards and Councilmember Hemenway, I launched the Santa Ana River Working Group, which was tasked with answering the following question:

“What would it look like for the City of Riverside to transform its reach of the Santa Ana River into a driver for economic growth and a destination to be enjoyed by families for generations?”

Our work ultimately led to detailed recommendations including surveying residents, exploring the creation of a community-led group to continue our work, and identifying potential development opportunities and constraints along the river, and more.

The Working Group's effort builds on the Riverside Gateway Project, a \$1.7 million planning effort that I brought to the city prior to being elected mayor. This project identifies nine areas along the river for park improvements, such as trail heads, restrooms, and connecting trails.

Community input will ultimately determine exact amenities, but stop for a moment right now: imagine if you can, sipping a cold drink on a shaded patio, warm breeze on your skin, bird songs surrounding you, enjoying the scenery of the wild and beautiful Santa Ana River. Festivals? Bike paths connected to downtown? Breweries? Bike rentals? Let your imagination run wild, like the river.

UNITY VS. DIVISION

Finally, I want to turn to what I am probably most passionate about and what I hope all leaders are deeply concerned about: bridging the division in our society. For we cannot dream of, much less build, tomorrow if we cannot come together.

Our country, our democracy, our city is threatened by divisions, a crisis we cannot ignore.

This past year, I launched the Mayor's Bipartisan Forum, enlisting 14 community members with diverse, even opposing, political ideologies to help drive solutions to our city's mental health and homelessness crisis. I want to thank them for their goodwill and commitment to our city.

Since October, this group has reviewed state laws and legislative proposals to see how we can build consensus around solutions and take steps to make a difference.

Riverside is leading the discussion. The Mayor's Bipartisan Forum is now working with our state and county leaders to push for legislative changes—using data from other cities as a guide for best practices that can be implemented statewide. The governor and several other mayors in California have expressed interest in our forum's work, and I have joined my colleagues in San Diego and Oakland to lead on this issue through our Big City Mayors Coalition.

The Mayor's Bipartisan Forum demonstrates the power of transcending the partisanship that has so gripped our nation. Their work should give us hope.

In my campaign for mayor, I ran on a nonpartisan platform for a nonpartisan office. I have governed, and will keep governing, as a mayor for all Riversiders. While we can't control what happens nationally, and wouldn't presume to try, we can exert influence on our own attitudes here at home.

We should set aside ideology in favor of pragmatism. I have relied on this method for over two decades in public office and it has never let me down. We, in Riverside, as the largest city in Inland Southern California, can strive to set an example and be a model for others.

I won't tolerate Riversiders feeling excluded, rebuffed, marginalized or unrepresented. We can make everyone feel welcome, valued and heard. And we can cooperate to aspire, to create, to Build Tomorrow Today.

I remain committed to listening to every resident; know that my door is open.

My challenge to you this evening: reach across the aisle, talk to someone whose views are different than yours and listen, hear their story; congratulate public officials of different parties who cross the aisle and compromise to solve problems, for without this we will never help Alice or those like her, nor make good on the hopes of Cyndi, Christian, and Jamal. The only way we can Build Tomorrow Today is by cooperating. That doesn't mean agreeing on everything, that means working together towards a shared vision of success.

My parents came here with nothing. But my mother, a nurse, found a job at Parkview Community Hospital and my father, a Veteran, worked construction and eventually ended up at the County of Riverside building roads.

They came here with nothing, but they built something. They built a life, a home, a family. Our family's story is the story of thousands of Riversiders who, for the same reasons, continue to call this place home and build their tomorrows here.

A tomorrow full of opportunity, promise, and unwavering prosperity. Thank you for listening and God bless the City of Riverside.