



City of Arts & Innovation

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Feb. 24, 2022

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Mayor Patricia Lock Dawson Says Riverside “Building Tomorrow Today”

City can predict its future by creating it with gains on economy, downtown and the Santa Ana River

RIVERSIDE, Calif. – Embracing the spirit of “Building Tomorrow Today,” Mayor Patricia Lock Dawson used her second State of the City address to encourage Riversiders to rally around three main themes: Reinventing our economy through Arts, Industry, and Innovation; Reimagining the River; and Revitalizing our Downtown.

Working within that framework, Riverside can create its future by focusing on five key areas -- homelessness, quality of life, jobs, the economy, and division within our country and community -- Lock Dawson said in the address that aired today (2/24) and can be viewed at WatchRiverside.com.

The annual State of the City event, produced by the Greater Riverside Chambers of Commerce in partnership with the City of Riverside, was conducted virtually because COVID-19 made it difficult to predict if an in-person event planned months in advance would be possible this year. Lock Dawson recorded her remarks at the new Main Library for broadcast today.

Lock Dawson used her own family as an example of why she believes so strongly in Riverside, and the opportunities that are ahead. She noted that her parents moved to Riverside in the 1950s with “no jobs, home, family, connections or money,” but were drawn to the promise of the Golden State.

“They came here with nothing, but they built something. They built a life, a home, a family,” Lock Dawson said. “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.”

Lock Dawson thanked Riversiders for getting involved with projects like the improvements to the Riverside Military Wall of Honor on the Main Street Mall. A campaign launched in November raised funds to modernize and enhance the monument which honors fallen military members from across the city and county. Construction will start shortly, and an unveiling is planned for late May.

“For me this is personal,” Lock Dawson said. “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.”

Lock Dawson said her office also is working with the Riverside African American Historical Society on a privately funded upgrade to the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial along the city’s Civil Rights Walk on the Main Street Mall. A linked pathway and unifying signage will better connect six sculptures that celebrate local history to better tell Riverside’s story.

Speaking specifically on the economy, Lock Dawson said her Economic Advisory Council, with industry leaders and business owners, has challenged her to rethink the City’s approaches to attracting and retaining businesses. And she said Riverside’s best economic days are still ahead of it, with promise of an ecosystem of businesses and entrepreneurs focused on emissions research, air quality, engine manufacturing and renewable energy.

“Our city is ready for the international stage, to be a global center for clean and green technology jobs and research,” Lock Dawson said. “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 -- all positioning us for explosive growth in this sector.”

A thriving economy needs a dynamic downtown, and Riverside is expanding its investment in public art with multiple new large-scale murals across the city. The Cheech Marin Center for Chicano Art and Culture is scheduled to open this summer and “breathe new life into downtown’s art scene.” The Main Library is drawing rave reviews, new apartments are bringing more residents downtown, and Riverside is thriving in part because residents’ commitment to “buy local” whenever possible.

“Riverside is meeting the future but honoring our past with these and other developments from a strong financial position,” Lock Dawson said. “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.”

One of Riverside’s greatest opportunities is reimagining the Santa Ana River, which Lock Dawson sees as an untapped asset of 11 miles of nature, parks, trails, and open space. Boosted by the work of the Santa Ana River Working Group, Riverside is finally taking a hard look at how the river can become “a driver for economic growth and a destination to be enjoyed by families for generations.”

“Community input will ultimately determine exact amenities but stop for a moment right now and 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,” Lock Dawson said.

Lock Dawson also addressed division in our society, both locally and nationally, calling it “a crisis we cannot ignore.” Speaking in favor of pragmatism over ideology, Lock Dawson said she is encouraged by the work of her Mayor’s Bipartisan Forum, launched last year to bring together 14 community members with different political ideologies to search for solutions on mental health and homelessness.

The group now is working with state and county leaders to push for legislative changes, she said. The governor and several other mayors in California have expressed interest in the group’s work, which “demonstrates the power of transcending the partisanship that has so gripped our nation,” she said.

“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,” she said. “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.”

Homelessness remains a challenge for all local governments in California. Lock Dawson noted that her work with the Big City Mayors Coalition secured \$8 million in funding that can be used for adding more shelter capacity and bridge housing. But Riverside must supplement its efforts to provide housing with “new approaches, driven by data” to help people suffering from addiction and mental illness.

“Let me be clear: our state has a mental health and substance abuse crisis,” Lock Dawson said. “But too often, people who need treatment decline assistance or do not have the capacity to accept it. That needs to change.”

That change should come through new legislation and partnerships with the county and state, the mayor said. Options 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,” Lock Dawson said. “We must make it easier to help those who cannot help themselves.”

Lock Dawson noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has remained a challenge, but she said there is reason for optimism.

“Vaccination rates are increasing, schools remain open, and our local businesses are recovering, boosted by our commitment to supporting them,” she said. “We must stand strong as a community and work to close this pandemic chapter of our history.”

Dr. Vien Doan was announced as the latest recipient of the Dr. Carlos E. Cortés Award for Championing Diversity and Inclusivity, named for the UCR professor emeritus of history who is recognized as the single most influential force in shaping the City of Riverside’s Inclusivity Statement.

As a young teenager, Vien and his family were Vietnamese refugees. He went on to complete his medical residency and founded a free community clinic to serve the health needs of new immigrants and later established the Good Samaritan Medical Dental Ministry. Dr. Doan led the Riverside-Can Tho, Vietnam Sister City Committee and is one of Riverside’s premier international humanitarians. In mid-2021 when COVID-19 was reignited across the country of India, Dr. Doan led efforts with our Hyderabad, India Sister City Committee to raise \$30,000 in donations for purchasing and transporting ventilators, oxygen concentrators, and other COVID aid from Riverside to Hyderabad.

“Dr. Doan has always had a heart for Riverside,” Lock Dawson said. “I am grateful for his commitment to our city.”