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OFFICE OF  
COMMUNICATIONS

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## **Text of Mayor John J. Tecklenburg's State of the City Address**

**Charleston, S.C.--** *The following State of the City Address was prepared for delivery by Mayor John J. Tecklenburg on January 24, 2023, at 6 p.m.*

Mayor Pro Tem Sakran, members of City Council, honored guests, my fellow citizens:

What a difference a year makes.

Just 12 months ago, when I last reported to you on the state of our city, our high hopes for 2022 were surrounded by question marks. Yes, the pandemic seemed to be getting better, but were we really returning to normal? Yes, we'd flattened the curve on violent crime here in Charleston, but would we actually be able to bring the numbers down? And yes, our plans for flooding relief and affordable housing and West Ashley revitalization and all the rest were ambitious, but would national economic problems like inflation force us to cut back?

Tonight, the answers to those questions are in, and they're all positive. Covid is present, but contained, and we can see each other's smiles again. Violent crime is down, and our police are working hard every day to bring it down even further. More than thirty flood relief projects are moving forward all across the city. Affordable housing starts are at an all-time high. New fire stations, parks and local businesses are coming to every area, with West Ashley leading the way. And thanks to the common sense and uncommon decency of our citizens, Charleston remains a city of civility in an era of deep national division.

Put simply: In 2022, the people of Charleston proved the naysayers wrong once again. You showed that together, we can solve problems and make our great city even better. So, tonight, with real and measurable reductions in crime and violence, and with real and measurable increases in flood protection and affordable housing and parks and fire stations and more, I'm pleased to report that the state of our city heading into 2023 is confident and grateful and optimistic.

Of course, here in Charleston, we know that progress isn't a stopping point, and much work remains to be done. That's why, in 2023, we plan to move forward even faster on our city's top

priorities, the issues that matter most to our citizens' quality of life: fixing flooding, keeping us all safe, building affordable housing, and improving neighborhood livability, with a special focus on traffic relief and new and improved city parks.

So let's begin this evening with the top challenge facing our city, in this age of rising seas, rain bombs and ever more frequent and powerful hurricanes – protecting our citizens from flooding.

It was just seven years ago this month, only days after I was sworn in as Charleston's new mayor, that I traveled to Washington and met with the Dutch flooding experts at their Ambassador's residence. At that meeting, I asked them to partner with us to make Charleston a national leader on flooding – and that's exactly what's happened in the years since, as we've adopted the pragmatic Dutch approach to living with water: natural solutions where possible, infrastructure where needed, and land use policies that stop irresponsible development before it happens.

That's why we're working now to acquire land in the Church Creek basin and on Johns Island for more nature-based water retention. It's why we're breaking ground this month on Phase 2 of our award-winning Forest Acres Drainage Project in West Ashley, and opening Phase 4 of the Spring Fishburne Project on the peninsula to finally bring relief to the area around the Septima P. Clark Parkway – and adding soon, the Medical District. We're designing the Central Park basin improvements on James Island, and continuing with the Low Battery reconstruction. And it's why, this year, we will continue to move forward with our Citywide Water Plan to account for every drop of water in the city, elevation-based zoning to ensure new homes and businesses are built on higher ground, and a full ban on slab-on-grade in low-lying areas.

Next, I'd like to turn to public safety, where I'm proud to say that, in 2023, we're once again making major investments in the training, equipment and, yes, the salaries of our first responders, with significant increases in our police and fire budgets – annual budgets that have grown by more than ten million dollars each in the last seven years alone, as we funded, not defunded, our police and firefighters. And thanks to that strong and ongoing support from our residents, the remarkable men and women of the Charleston Police and Fire Departments are making our city and citizens safer, with violent crime down more than ten percent last year, and many lives saved in major fires throughout the city.

Also this year, we will continue our strong support for public safety, as we move forward with plans for new and refurbished fire stations in every area of the city, and with major police initiatives like DNA testing at our new West Ashley Crime Lab, more crime-fighting cameras and technology on our streets, and further enhancements to the King Street Safety Plan.

But just as important, we'll continue to work with our state legislators to pass the bail and sentencing reform package created recently by Gov. Henry McMaster and Charleston Solicitor

Scarlett Wilson, with input from our own inspirational police chief, Luther Reynolds. Frankly, nothing is more demoralizing to our police officers or our citizens than the revolving door that keeps putting violent, repeat offenders back on the street almost as fast as we can take them into custody. That has to stop. And it has to stop this year, in this legislative session.

Next, affordable housing – where our efforts are literally coming out of the ground all across Charleston, with almost 800 new and saved affordable units since 2016, and 500 more currently in the pipeline.

But we're not stopping there. Thanks to the ongoing commitment of our City Council members and the strong support of our citizens, we've been able to cut red tape on affordable housing initiatives, strengthen affordable housing requirements on developers, and invest our own resources in both single family homes, and outstanding new projects such as the James Lewis Homes, the Archer School, the Low Line, Bermuda Point in West Ashley and more. Taken together, these efforts represent nothing more or less than the largest, most ambitious affordable and workforce housing initiative in our city's history. And as the Charleston area continues to grow, we plan to continue to insist that developers pay their share to keep expanding the stock of attainable housing for our citizens.

Finally this evening, I'd like to look at just a few of the neighborhood livability and quality of life projects we currently have underway, specifically with regard to traffic relief, new and improved parks and playgrounds, opportunities for citizens and local businesses, and the arts.

First, traffic relief, where in partnership with the county and SCDOT, we are moving forward with the widening of Glenn McConnell Parkway in West Ashley, the construction of the Northern Pitchfork on Johns Island, the replacement of the Beresford Creek Bridge on Daniel Island, the implementation of safety enhancements on the peninsula, and contracting for the construction of the Ashley River Crossing for bikes and pedestrians. In addition, tonight, City Council and I will vote once again to support the completion of I-526 to finally bring real traffic relief to our citizens on Johns Island and across West Ashley.

Next, parks and playgrounds, which add beauty to our city and joy to the lives of our residents. And where, this year, every area of Charleston will see major progress: the opening of Carr Richardson Park and improvements to Mulberry Park in West Ashley; plans moving forward for Fort Pemberton on James Island and the Griffith tract on Johns Island; the new Waterfront Park on Daniel Island; the new Shiloh Park and Hampstead Square improvements on the peninsula. And with plans for new parks on the WPAL, Dominion, and Union Pier sites continuing to move through the process, we expect to have even more good news to report on parks and playgrounds in the days ahead.

Now, to expand opportunity for our citizens and small businesses, we've started with our own city workforce, where our minimum salary has more than doubled, from \$8.25 to \$17 an hour, just since 2016. To help women and minority entrepreneurs get their start, we're moving

forward with a new business incubator on the Eastside. And to assist our small and local businesses, we're continuing to work with the CLIMB Fund to make resources available when and where they're needed.

And finally, the arts, where new leadership at the Gaillard Center and the Spoleto Festival, the opening of the International African American Museum, and increased funding for our own MOJA Arts Festival promise a flourishing of the arts and culture all across our city.

My fellow Charlestonians, we've indeed come a long way over the past year, but there's still much to do. Our goal, as always, is clear – to make this Holy City not just the best place in America to visit, but also the best place to live, work, worship and raise a family. And I know that as long as we stay focused on public safety and the critical quality-of-life issues that matter most to our residents, our best days are yet to come.

Good night, God bless you, and God bless the great city of Charleston.

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