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Good afternoon, Jackson.

Jackson is defined by its roots, history, and people. A solid foundation is continually reinforced, which is why the theme this year is "Building the Future on a Solid Foundation." This means honoring our past while fearlessly embracing the future to ensure Jackson continues to thrive.

This past year brought a familiar challenge: a constrained budget. However, a tight budget didn't limit our vision but fueled innovation. We successfully modernized and improved every department, technologically and procedurally, raising our service standards and providing a better, more efficient citizen experience without significant new spending.

The future of service delivery in Jackson is smart, modern, and effective.

Technology & Financial Modernization

Our IT department has driven much of our modernization efforts. Investing here saves time and money everywhere and increases our ability for data driven decision making. Last year our IT department moved dozens of old softwares and subscriptions to Google Enterprise, saving money and allowing us to use AI to increase productivity and support a more mobile workforce. More on that in a bit.

Additionally, they replaced three legacy systems for work orders that will save 8-10 hours of worktime per day in our 311 Call Center and allows the City for the first time to calculate maintenance costs of City facilities and better plan for future costs. Lastly, we launched a new app that allows citizens to report potholes or other issues, find our nearest parks, view public notices, and more without leaving the app.

This year, IT will be replacing old and installing state of the art security systems at City facilities like the Civic Center, Fairgrounds, and work to digitize all paper records into an indexed and fully searchable database saving countless hours of staff time.

Finance and Purchasing

Our Finance and Purchasing Departments implemented new, data-driven software for expense tracking and purchase orders, safeguarding tax dollars and preventing overspending. We also streamlined purchasing agreements, reducing bureaucratic red tape for routine buys. These reforms earned Purchasing Director Zach Polk the 2025 Manager of the Year from the Tennessee Association of Public Purchasing.

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But we're not satisfied with tracking spending internally, but allowing you to do so as well, by launching the Open Finance portal, everyone can track our spending, down to every penny and vendor.

Transparency also extends beyond finances too. Our new NextRequest Public Records portal simplifies and makes it easier to submit open records requests, and MuniCode provides easy access to up-to-date City ordinances and regulations.

Public Safety: Protecting Our Community

The dedication of our Fire and Police Departments forms the bedrock of our Jackson's safety and stability. We are ensuring they have the best tools available for their essential work.

Police Department

In 2025, your Police Department adopted new tools and strategies to strategically deploy resources. This modern approach to public safety is already showing results.

Our primary strategy for keeping Jackson safe is community engagement and crime prevention. Last year, JPD held numerous outreach events to build trust, including National Night Out, the Citizen Police Academy, yard sale visits, and school activities. And we can't forget arguably JPD's most elite unit, led by Sgt. Cozart, also fired up over 5,000 hamburgers and hot dogs in 2025, creating positive community relationships with citizens of all ages.

We've enhanced street and event safety with new tactics, including a bike unit for downtown and large events. Our Traffic Unit issued nearly 20 percent more citations and achieved a remarkable 50 percent decrease in fatal crashes in 2025.

But rest assured, when bad guys do commit crimes, we'll find them and arrest them. In September, a sex trafficking and prostitution sting led to 15 arrests and connected seven young women to Restore Corps, an organization that assists those involved in trafficking or prostitution. Our Major Crimes Unit closed all but 2 homicide investigations this year, including the search and apprehension of quadruple homicide suspect, Austin Drummond, a prime example of the Jackson Police Department's skill and professionalism.

It was also another banner year for some of your hardest working, but certainly furriest employees, our nine police canines, who in 2025 seized 9 weapons, 4 of which were stolen, 13 lbs of marijuana, and 5 grams of cocaine.

The Jackson Police Department's comprehensive approach—using advanced data, community engagement, and resolute enforcement—is producing clear results despite social media chatter.

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Crime is significantly down: assaults by 20%, burglary by over 10%, vehicle thefts by 25%, and murder/manslaughter by nearly 30%. The professionalism of our officers, supported by the best tools and a focus on prevention and protection, is making a profound, measurable difference in our city's safety.

Fire Department

Every time I have the chance, I mention how we have the best fire department in the state. Chief Friddle's leadership ensured the Jackson Fire Department retained a prestigious rating this year, placing it in the top 2% nationwide. This achievement saves every taxpayer money by significantly lowering property insurance premiums across Jackson.

This recognition shouldn't be a surprise. With 95% of calls responded to in under 7 minutes and two-thirds under 4 minutes, your Fire Department's high level of preparedness and efficiency is evident. Beyond saving lives, they're saving money. New initiatives—an in-house vehicle maintenance program and a medical training academy—have saved about \$250,000 this year and provided over 40 firefighters with basic and advanced EMT certifications, compounding our efforts to ensure we provide the highest level of service and protection to our community.

Yet we're always looking for ways to raise our standards. Remember our new AI capabilities I mentioned earlier? The department recently used our new AI capabilities to analyze house fire data, revealing that safe rescue time has dropped from 17 minutes to as little as 4 minutes, depending on construction type. This new insight is being used to update their procedures and they will be launching Project ESCape this year highlighting how every second counts when it comes to saving lives.

But an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. In 2025, your Fire Department completed over 500 fire inspections, taught over 200 citizens CPR, installed 200 smoke alarms and educated 13,000 students on fire safety.

Building a Better Jackson: Planning, Engineering, and Codes

Our Planning, Building & Codes, and Engineering departments are the front lines of our physical development. Their work is the definition of "Building the Future."

Planning

The Planning Department reviewed 22 commercial and industrial site plans in 2025, welcoming new businesses like QuickTrip, Raising Cane's, and Scooter's Coffee to Jackson. Yet no project has revitalized our downtown more than the Jackson Walk. This year our Planning Department

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continued the coordination for the Jackson Walk redevelopment project bringing over 130 new apartment units downtown in 2025.

Additionally, Planning updated our zoning ordinance to help meet our housing needs for decades to come and completed a feasibility study for the redevelopment of the former Jackson Plaza site, which I believe is the next economic catalyst for our City in the coming years.

Building & Codes

After designs are approved, the City works to ensure growth is built safely. In 2025 your Building Department completed over 10,000 inspections and this year will work to cross train new inspectors so we can provide a faster service to builders in our city. Meanwhile, last year our Code Enforcement inspectors demolished a major dilapidated structure and are currently undergoing training and investigating software platforms to remove eyesores and blighted properties quicker and more efficiently because how our City looks matters.

Engineering

Our Engineering Department designs the infrastructure that makes this growth possible. In 2025, our Engineering department implemented new stormwater inspection standards and coordinated roadway projects like the Vann Drive and Country Club traffic light improvements. And what I know you all really care about, our Engineering Department oversaw the repaving of 48 miles of roads in 2025.

Public Works: Maintaining the City's Core

Public Works impacts every resident daily, from roads to trash collection. This year, they focused on maximizing efficiency, for example implementing GPS tracking on all vehicles. This technology provides real-time tracking, preventive maintenance alerts, and idling data, immediately improving operations. Reducing idling is projected to save over \$55,000 in fuel costs per year demonstrating fiscal responsibility.

In 2026, Public Works will launch the Public Works AI Project—using machine learning, fleet cameras, and environmental data to quickly detect road defects, drainage failures, litter, and illegal dumping. This technology will enhance our workforce, making crews more effective, data more accurate, and city infrastructure smarter and safer for residents.

311 Call Center

I already mentioned the replacement of three legacy work systems our 311 Call Center was working in previously. That streamlining will help them handle the over 44,000 calls they handled

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in 2025 and I know they look forward to continuing to provide you with a high level of service in 2026.

Health & Sanitation

Many of those calls go to our fantastic Health & Sanitation Department under the leadership of Leilani Mills which handled over 32,000 bulk waste pickups in 2025. This efficiency stemmed from the 2024 pilot of smart-route technology, which minimizes fuel consumption and ensures peak efficiency. Consequently, residents now receive collections within 2-4 days of scheduling. Additionally, H&S champions environmental protection with Jackson's Recycling Center, diverting 262,000 pounds of material from our landfills last year and serving over 970 visitors monthly. We also partnered with the Madison County Sheriff's Department to have the first female litter in the City of Jackson. In 2025, these ladies picked up over 110 tons of litter inside the city limits.

Streets, Traffic Signals, and Road Signs

In 2025, our Streets department acquired new asphalt equipment, allowing for more in-house maintenance and less reliance on contractors. They will also roll out a new four-district structure this year to promote faster response to potholes and ensure consistent attention, leading to more road repaving than ever before.

Beyond pavement, our Traffic Signals team installed 15 new cameras and three battery backups in 2025 for safer, more reliable intersections. In 2026, they are planning for more of these installations and a timing study on key corridors to reduce commute times. And our Traffic Sign division repaired/replaced nearly 300 road signs in 2025. All of these efforts mean smoother and safer streets.

Stormwater

However, there's more to our infrastructure than roads alone. Stormwater is our often unseen infrastructure. In 2026, we will finalize our Stormwater Assessment Project. This milestone will equip the city with the data necessary for capital improvements, storm-response planning, and regulatory compliance. Our goal is to move from assessment into infrastructure upgrades that will reduce flooding risk and support future development.

Garage

All of this equipment and the vehicles needed to maintain this infrastructure don't maintain themselves. Our in-house garage crew maintains our fleet of over 400 City vehicles. Our

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in-house crew saves the City over 50 percent in labor and parts. In 2026, their goal is to reduce fuel consumption by 20 percent, which will save the City nearly \$100,000.

Parks & Recreation: Enhancing Quality of Life

Our Parks and Recreation team, which includes everything from North Park to the Civic Center, Sportsplex, and Farmers Market, continues to enrich our community's soul. This year we've raised the standard of our investments in our parks and how we provide a high quality of life to every Jacksonian.

In 2025 alone, we installed a new playground at Centennial, secured a new registration software that will make it easier to sign up for activities and programs, hosted the first ever State Games at our City parks, and one I've been looking forward to for years, opened our new Senior Center, the first in Jackson in over 30 years.

All of our facilities experienced record years in 2025. The Carnegie Center completed gallery renovations and restored its historic windows. These investments have resulted in a 290% membership increase, with October setting a museum attendance record. Our aim is to make it one of West Tennessee's largest attractions.

Our Civic Center is getting a substantial upgrade this year. Not only have we repainted the auditorium and installed new lighting, we're replacing our original risers. This allows us to not only continue to host West Tennessee's largest events, but more events as setup time will decrease dramatically from current two to three days to 8-10 hours.

The Ned continued to strengthen its role as an arts education, community engagement, and cultural enrichment hub. Accomplishments included over 1,100 spectators for the *Hunchback of Notre Dame*, multiple concerts from the Jazz Foundation, and various youth and teen seasonal camps.

Our T.R. White Sportsplex put in new playground equipment, a new PA system, and refinished its gym floor. And the West TN Healthcare Sportsplex hosted a record setting 1,859 teams in 2025. In 2026, we'll be installing our infield-turf, allowing us to host more teams and tournament days, growing its role as a local economic driver.

And I can't forget about Pee-Wee Williamson down at the South Jackson Community Center where over 10,000 people participated in the Center's exercise programs, board games and cards tournaments, and computer literacy programs for seniors.

Our facilities and venues weren't the only successes in 2025. Our unique Cyprus Grove Park celebrated its 40th anniversary, welcomed four new birds of prey, and hosted its first research

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forum, featuring original research from endangered sunflowers to wasps. National Geographic-worthy content is right here in Jackson.

But it seems like what y'all care the most about is pickleball. It seems like we can't build courts fast enough. In 2025, our athletics department added more courts at Conger Park, with plans to convert courts at North Park and Malesus Park. In addition to pickleball, our Athletics Dept. organized over 1000 participants for over 100 soccer teams and our Westwood Community Center upgraded our game room equipment and welcomed over 200 participants per day.

Finally, our Recreation Department worked to organize community events and programs from Youth Fishing at Muse Park, to an Easter Egg Hunt, and Movies in the Park. Or don't forget the Jackson International Food & Arts Festival, Jackson's largest annual event with over 10,000 participants this year. All of these successes demonstrate our commitment to enhancing the quality of life for all Jacksonians, ensuring our parks and recreational spaces remain vibrant and accessible cornerstones of our community.

Animal Care Center

We haven't just raised the standard of our services in quality of life for people, but for man's best friends too... and cats. In 2025, we opened a new Animal Care Center, doubling our capacity. Our third annual PetsRock Fest, featuring the international DockDog competition, drew over 800 attendees and raised almost \$10,000 for the community spay/neuter assistance program. For 2026, the Animal Care Center will begin microchipping all adopted pets, and we will convert a bus into a mobile veterinary clinic to offer routine services to residents in our community.

Maintenance

We achieve so many of these improvements and investments on a limited budget thanks largely to the excellent work of our Municipal Maintenance Department, led by Kirk Smith. This year, their in-house projects—including replacing a Sportsplex chiller, installing the animal care center cages, making and installing a bullet-resistant shield for JPD's front desk, rebuilding Rockabilly Stadium's commercial washer, and removing old Civic Center risers—saved over \$117,000 in taxpayer dollars.

Mayor's Office

I am proud of my team's initiatives to build community, reduce blight, beautify downtown, and improve the financial health of our city. In 2025, Neighborhood Services completed over 70 repairs on 18 homes for vulnerable seniors, and was featured in *Our Jackson Home*, with a goal of 12 more homes in 2026. Our Innovation Team combats blight by redeveloping vacant properties through the new Vacant Property Review Commission and held a national tiny home

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design contest, resulting in free, pre-approved plans for backyard cottages. Next year, we will use data tools to fight blight and seek grants for critical needs, lowering the burden on taxpayers. Our first-year Public Art initiative resulted in seven art installations, earning national recognition, with *USA Today* ranking Jackson as the third-best city in the country for street art.

The growth of the City requires the financial success of our citizens. Our Financial Empowerment Center (FEC) helps all Jacksonians, like 'Sarah,' who through free financial counseling raised her credit score 100 points, cleared debt, and achieved homeownership and a higher-paying job. She is an example of a thriving Jackson. Last year, the FEC generated over \$1.2 million in local economic impact by helping residents eliminate \$640,000 in debt and build savings, keeping money in Jackson that was previously spent on interest payments.

Closing Thoughts

"Building the Future on a Solid Foundation" is more than a slogan; it is our operational philosophy. We are proving that modernization doesn't require a blank check, but rather an innovative mindset and a commitment to efficiency.

Thank you, Jackson. The state of our city is strong, innovative, and positioned for a bright future. God bless you, and God bless the City of Jackson.

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