EVENT: **2014 State of the City Address**
TITLE: **People-Powered Neighborhoods**
PRESENTER: **Mayor Cynthia Sternquist**
DATE: **March 4, 2014**

Good evening fellow residents, friends and honored guests. I'm Cynthia Sternquist, the Mayor of Temple City. On behalf of the City Council, tonight I have the honor of delivering the State of the City address.

First, I'd like to acknowledge my colleagues on the Council, and I ask them to please stand: Mayor Pro Tem Carl Blum; Councilmember Fernando Vizcarra; Councilmember Tom Chavez; and Councilmember Vincent Yu. We are a hard working team with a shared vision of Temple City and an unwavering dedication to residents. I am so proud to be part of it.

I also want to thank our exceptional City team. As you all know, we've had a recent change in leadership, which has brought some exciting opportunities. Everything we need to make Temple City excel is already in place, including employees with a strong work ethic and a culture of caring.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

In America today, there's an ongoing debate about the appropriate size and role of government, and how effective it is in improving quality of life. While this is a worthwhile debate, I instead want to talk about what we know is working in Temple City which is based on a concept we call the "complete neighborhood."

First and foremost, the complete neighborhood is a collaboration of citizens, government officials and other stakeholders. It always begins with citizen engagement

and public participation that influences effective public policies and often transforms the built environment around us. This process works, and it works best when every policy or project returns, full-circle, to the community for further evaluation and citizen engagement. That way, policies and programs are constantly reassessed in complete transparency.

In the past several years, we've been working hard to build complete neighborhoods by engaging the community's residents to address issues related to their quality of life. Ultimately, we will build a more complete Temple City that addresses the dreams and aspirations of local residents—and in Temple City we tend to dream big!

ENGAGEMENT

It always begins with people.

More than any other city I'm familiar with—in California or anywhere else—Temple Citians have a passion for participating in their local government. Virtually everything in Temple City begins with citizen engagement, and we ask a great deal of them. In the past few years, they've participated in a Parks & Open Space Master Plan, the Rosemead Boulevard Enhancement Project, and the Bicycle Master Plan, just to name a few. One colleague even suggested that Temple City residents are kept so busy they might be suffering from "citizen engagement fatigue." But that does not appear to be the case, as interest only seems to build year after year. And when people see the tangible results of their input, it actually creates a greater desire to play a role.

Our residents are so dedicated to improving their community that they continue to turn out in record numbers for public meetings on new projects, as well as participating in programs like Neighborhood Watch, Citizen's Academy and CERT.

Recently, Temple City residents provided input on the preparation of a Strategic Plan, which will prioritize various programs and policies for the next five years, and will eventually help guide a new General Plan that looks 35 years into the future. A General Plan is driven by the community's long-term vision, and your participation will shape the way the city looks and feels for generations to come. The public needs to know that the General Plan won't be a consultant's plan, nor would it be staff's plan or the City Council's plan. Like all of our efforts in Temple City, it will be your plan. I invite you to join in the discussions for our future, which will start within the next few months.

BUDGET

Even the budgeting process—which is sometimes dismissed as an outdated system where citizens have no impact—is part of the public discourse in Temple City. In fact, we are the first city in Southern California to adopt the Priority Based Budgeting system, which helps us prioritize projects and policies while receiving valuable feedback from the public.

This system is designed to be user-friendly, making technical information easier to digest by both elected officials and residents. The Strategic Plan, which will set the public's priorities, can be used to drive the budgeting process so that resources are effectively and fairly allocated. Even if you're not a numbers person—that's me, by the way—you'll find that Priority Based Budgeting takes the mystery out of the City Budget.

Fortunately, the City continues to enjoy a solid financial outlook at a time when many cities are still facing severe economic challenges. Some municipalities are overburdened with debt, or even facing insolvency. But Temple City has been prudent in its finances and has resources to invest in its future.

BIKE LANES

There are many examples of programs or projects in Temple City that have been largely community-driven, thanks to our culture of public engagement. I'd like to touch on a few of our accomplishments that began in the neighborhoods, and started with people's dreams of what they would like to see in Temple City.

Providing safe lanes for bikes is no longer just a fad, but an essential part of the infrastructure for any city that wants to remain competitive. Bike lanes not only attract young Millennials, but they also serve families and even seniors while reducing traffic and pollution.

Councilmember Vizcarra, Commissioner Fish and I go on morning bike rides twice each month and stop at a different local restaurant for lunch. Councilmember Yu is also an avid bike rider, and many of us would follow suit if we had more safe bike lanes in town.

It's been well documented that bike lanes are good for business. People on bicycles are closer to storefronts and travel slower than cars, so they're more conscious of the businesses on their route. It's easier for them to drop into a shop or café on the way to work or home. Bike riders also tend to be loyal customers.

Temple City's Bike Master Plan is an ambitious one, especially for a city of our size. It's not ambitious because staff and consultants wanted it to be ambitious, but because Temple Citians expressed a desire for a very comprehensive plan.

I'm proud to say that this plan is not just sitting on a shelf someplace, but is being implemented as I speak. The first evidence of it is under construction, with two miles of dedicated bike lanes separated from motorists driving on Rosemead Boulevard. Also on the way are eight miles of bike lanes, strategically planned to serve as regional connectors from Rosemead Boulevard to El Monte Avenue. As a result of these accomplishments, Bike SGV, a nonprofit advocacy group for bicyclists, recently named Temple City the San Gabriel Valley's first-ever Bike Friendly City.

PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

Our residents spoke again about their dreams for green space when we commissioned a Parks & Open Space Master Plan. My 19 years of service on the Parks and Recreation Commission, combined with Councilmember Chavez's eight years of service, makes this a top priority for both me and my Council colleagues.

A park doesn't necessarily have to be green grass and playgrounds. With a little creativity, we can transform drainage washes into inviting recreational strips with trails and bike paths. In fact, walking trails were the most requested amenity by residents who participated in the Master Plan process. And now, we're in discussions with the County to realize the first trailhead and trail segment of the regional Eaton Wash Corridor Plan.

Property values are rising in Temple City thanks to safe neighborhoods, good schools and a reputation for good government. But parks are also essential to a high

quality of life, and we need to address our residents' concerns that we don't have enough parks or recreational services.

To help compensate, the City has brought more events into the streets, which expands our recreational offerings beyond traditional park borders. Our recent Lunar New Year celebration and Camellia Festival did just that, engaging neighbors while honoring our diversity. But as we look ahead, we need to think hard about making a greater investment in our parks and open space infrastructure, whether that means acquiring new land or creating recreational spaces from non-traditional environments.

Whenever discussions on the General Plan begin, I'm sure citizens will have additional ideas about infusing some greenery into our downtown area. Our Traffic Calming Study and Parking Study—both of which were driven by citizen comments—identified opportunities for small parks, which may create a sense of open space along Las Tunas Drive.

SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOLS

When we heard from parents that they were afraid for their children to walk to school because there were too many hazards along the way—like un-signaled crossings and a lack of sidewalks—we listened. We knew the built environment had to change and we accomplished that in a cost-effective manner. Our in-house grant-writing team secured over $900,000 of Safe Routes to School awards from Caltrans for improvements that will make our children safer on their way to and from school.

Construction will begin this spring on pedestrian crosswalks and other improvements near nine school facilities, ensuring that our children can make it to

school safely. This is another example of your government working smartly and responsibly—without taking a dime from our General Fund—to ensure the safety of our youth.

PEDESTRIAN RAMPS

We're constantly upgrading neighborhoods to assist other residents who have health and safety concerns, including our elderly neighbors and people confined to wheelchairs. We've added 120 pedestrian ramps over the past year and plan on adding an additional 80 this year, funded primarily through our Community Development Block Grant funds.

These improvements, combined with our ongoing Dial-A-Ride program, encourage independent lifestyles for seniors and the disabled.

GRANT WRITING

I want to talk some more about our commitment to grant writing. Our staff is incredibly aggressive when it comes to pursuing state and federal grants for projects, and it has earned us over $14 million over the past three years for things like traffic studies, landscaping, bike paths, and pedestrian amenities. That is some serious cash. These grants have allowed us the opportunity to leverage additional funds, making major capital projects like Rosemead Boulevard possible. I challenge anybody to find another city our size in California as successful as Temple City in securing State and federal money to benefit its residents.

DOWNTOWN

Let's talk about downtown for a moment, the heart and soul of every city, including ours. The concept of a central gathering place is more popular than it's been in 50 years, and downtown districts are experiencing remarkable renaissances throughout America. Has anybody been to downtown Los Angeles lately? Previously abandoned streets are now alive with new restaurants, art galleries and boutiques. We saw this happen in Pasadena, thanks to a healthy partnership between the City and business community, although it took a couple decades to fully implement. Next door, in Arcadia, they're trying to do the same thing with a new Business Improvement District. Someday, perhaps soon, it will be our turn.

Residents have consistently voiced their support for a more vibrant Las Tunas Drive, one that accommodates pedestrians, motorists, bike riders and mass transit. As we move into the next phase of design, there will be more opportunities for public input.

Recently, the City acquired two strategic properties, the first municipal purchases in nearly a decade. The first property is the former mortuary site on Temple City Boulevard, just south of Las Tunas; and the other is on Primrose, one block north of Las Tunas. Both properties hold wonderful opportunities to breathe new life into our downtown.

GATEWAY PROJECT

That hole in the ground at the corner of Rosemead and Las Tunas happens to be an exciting development called The Gateway. I can't tell you how often my Council colleagues and I have been asked about this project over the years. First, people used

to ask, “When will it finally get started?” Then they’d ask, “When are they ever going to move above ground?” Now that there’s obviously a lot of activity over there, people are asking us, “When’s it going to be completed?” The answer to that last question is spring 2015.

The City is not a financial partner in the project, but we were successful in creating the opportunity and environment for it to happen, and we kept those hopes alive during a recession that killed most commercial construction. And when the economy began to recover, Temple City presented the kind of stable economic environment that financial institutions have confidence in, making The Gateway a reality.

Although we have no control over the leasing, we expect a diverse mix of shops and restaurants with outdoor dining, as well as a public gathering place with a water feature. The Gateway has a lot of history, a lot of baggage, but it’s now underway and demonstrates that persistence absolutely pays off.

This project occupies a very strategic site in the city and represents an enormous opportunity to change the city’s image. With the reimaging of Rosemead Boulevard and the possible revitalization of Las Tunas Drive in the future, this corner becomes more important than ever.

INFRASTRUCTURE

We’ve talked about private sector investment in Temple City but we also need to talk about our own investment. Corporate America looks for locations where government is investing in the community and providing partnership opportunities for

businesses. If we don't continue to invest in our own infrastructure, we will no longer be able to sustain property values or attract high quality private sector interest.

In recent years, we've invested approximately $1 million annually on street maintenance, primarily using Gas Tax funds. But even with that, our community's overall pavement condition only rates as average—which in school would equate to a "C" grade. In Temple City, that is not acceptable.

Sophisticated companies—the kinds of retailers and restaurants our residents would like to see in Temple City—are attracted to cities that demonstrate sound financial policies. They appreciate communities that invest in themselves. That's why we need to consider investing more in our roads and other infrastructure to ensure a sustainable future.

Corporate executives also tell us time and again that they drive through residential neighborhoods around a prospective site, and if they see unkempt properties or littered rights-of-way, it's a red flag. They seek out municipalities that have demonstrated good planning and resource development—places where roads and other infrastructure are well maintained.

For our streets, the goal is to upgrade their condition to a respectable "B" grade, because buyers of Temple City's $700,000 homes and national chain retailers don't tolerate a "C" grade. But enhancing maintenance could entail some tough decisions by residents on whether to increase neighborhood investment, through such strategies like property assessments or bonds. Wherever discussions may lead, I can assure you that any decision will include ample opportunity and public meetings for input.

DOOR-BY-DOOR INVESTMENT

Beyond major projects like The Gateway or Rosemead Boulevard, we need to continue to invest in our people and their homes.

Our neighborhoods look good because we have an aggressive policy of Code Compliance based on positive reinforcement, not penalties. It's an award-winning system in which Neighborhood Preservation Officers aren't confrontational but collaborative. Their mission is to solve problems, not write citations.

In fact, these same Preservation Officers hosted our first Neighborhood Clean-Up Day in February for residents of the Sereno-Sultana focus area. Dumpster bins were provided, new neighborhood watch signs were installed, trees were pruned, and curbs, fire hydrants and crosswalks were repainted. Numerous residents called City Hall to express their appreciation for assisting them in making their properties and neighborhood safer and more attractive.

You see, we aren't "all talk and no action"—we are working side-by-side with you to make these long-term and impactful investments in our neighborhoods. I invite you to join us in May as we continue these efforts in the Persimmon-Santa Anita focus area.

We also led a successful residential rehabilitation program, which eliminated isolated pockets of blight, and also rekindled the pride of home ownership among hard-working families and seniors on fixed incomes.

We're also are very proud of our Brush With Kindness program, in which neighbors help neighbors rehabilitate homes. Last year, in conjunction with the San Gabriel Valley chapter of Habitat for Humanity, we fixed three homes of needy but responsible families.

A long-time resident and program recipient recently spoke to the success of the program in saying, “for the first time in 16 years I am dry in my house thanks to the work of Habitat for Humanity.” About the volunteers she says, “They are all amazing people…that have big hearts and do better than I could ever do.”

I don’t think I could express my appreciation for the many program volunteers any better than that. Programs like Brush With Kindness provide security to hardworking families in need, and encourage them to become involved in their communities, perhaps as future volunteers.

Likewise, our Yard of the Quarter Awards promotes attractive gardens, sparking friendly competition among neighbors and encouraging all kinds of property improvements. Some people might dismiss this kind of program as insignificant, but there’s no city in America that wouldn’t benefit from another beautiful garden!

HOUSING

We’re not just looking at housing on a door-to-door basis, but are also looking far into the future to ensure that we meet the needs of current and future residents. As you may know, we are mandated by the State of California to create opportunities for a certain number of new housing units, which is codified in something called the Housing Element—and is actually part of the General Plan. But to do this while maintaining the integrity of our neighborhoods can be tricky. Fortunately, we were able to come up with a good plan, which was well received by the public, and recently certified by the State. Kudos to our Planning staff, because State certification is no easy feat!

Large homebuilders recognize the potential in Temple City, despite our shortage of land. The Olson Company is currently developing 74 Spanish style family homes on the former Lower Azusa Road lumber yard site between Eaton Wash and the Union Pacific Railroad right-of way. It's an innovative project that includes public art and four new pocket parks—which the City insisted on having—to boost surrounding property values and encourage neighborly interactions. Construction is slated to begin this summer with model homes for show by August.

ECONOMIC CLIMATE

Partially as a result of our investments and proactive governmental policies, property valuations in Temple City are hitting all-time highs. The current median resale price of homes has risen to $710,000—higher than before the recession. In fact, Temple City is one of only five Los Angeles County municipalities—and I remind you, there are 88 cities in the County—in which home values have rebounded to pre-recession levels. Meanwhile, values in the County as a whole remain 25 percent below their pre-recession heights.

This is not something we should be too smug about, because we all know the real estate market can be very volatile. Rather, it should be an incentive to plan for the future. Home prices don't rise in a vacuum. They're directly attributable to the quality of life amenities we've been discussing tonight: safe streets, good parks, high-ranking schools. And as soon as those amenities are ignored, there's only one direction for property values to go. The current market creates an opportunity to be certain our

financial house is in order and that we are committed to reinforcing Temple City's quality of life.

Our Priority Based Budgeting, which I talked about earlier, enables us to reassess priorities in order to make sound long-term financial decisions, while providing opportunities for public participation. Thanks in part to the hard work of Administrative Services Director Tracey Hause our finances are in good shape. We must now implement long-term fiscal strategies that enable us to withstand the next recession or natural disaster.

With that in mind, the City Council has adopted an ordinance that sets minimum levels for our General Fund Reserve. Just like local families save for unexpected events, the City also needs a rainy day fund it can count on. Our Reserve Fund currently has a balance of more than $16.1 million to account for one-time required expenditures – or investments, as I would like to call them—like the purchase of downtown properties, necessary planning studies and the critical review of key City service contracts.

I'm also proud to report that despite falling interest rates on investments, the return on our City's $23 million investment portfolio remains competitive. All cities are required by State law to invest their monies conservatively, but by continuing to diversify our portfolio in a very prudent manner—without taking any chances with taxpayer dollars—we've been able to maintain a yield of 0.73%. In a tough investment market like today, this is significantly higher than other municipalities that are receiving ¼ of 1% return on their Local Agency Investment Funds.

PUBLIC ART

Public art was introduced as part of the Rosemead Boulevard Enhancement Project a few years ago—widely supported by residents at public meetings—and is now becoming a reality. A Public Arts Commission has been established and those Commissioners have been very busy. More than 30 pieces of public art have been commissioned for installation on Rosemead Boulevard in time for its May 10th grand opening.

Why invest in public art you ask? As Commission Chair Larsen has said, “public art enhances public spaces and provides the community with a sense of pride and ownership.” It is also a mechanism for celebrating Temple City’s origins and its evolution into a modern 21st century community.

There will be a constant debate about what kind of art is installed, where it’s installed and who should pay for it. And some people will no doubt complain about the choices made by the Commission. That’s just the nature of art—the world’s great museums are filled with art nobody can ever agree on.

Personally, I believe that a city in which art is installed along its streets and in its neighborhoods is a much more interesting place than one without it.

What’s important to remember is that this is an ongoing process in the spirit of the complete neighborhood: It began with public input. Then it was implemented by sound public policy in a transparent setting, ultimately affecting our physical environment. And now it will go back to the public for further debate, especially since public art will probably be a component in our General Plan. It’s not usually a topic for a General Plan discussion, but then again, Temple City isn’t exactly typical.

DIVERSITY

The issue of public art reminds us that our diversity is a key part of Temple City's strength. Yes, it's true that a community with multiple languages like ours faces challenges in engaging the public. Many recent immigrants have a deep suspicion of government, for understandable reasons. Unfortunately, so do some folks who were born right here in Temple City. So some people will be slow to participate, but we'll continue to make it as easy for them as possible.

Our communications staff works very effectively with the ethnic media, community organizations and churches to get the word out to all of the City's diverse populations, and our emphasis on public engagement depends on absolute inclusivity. Translators are often provided at meetings, City publications are language-sensitive, and our staff is almost as multi-lingual as the United Nations!

Ultimately, the recognition of our diversity and the pride we take in it only enhances the degree of public participation we see on all of our many programs and projects.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

It is very heartening to see many Temple City residents take that next step of citizenship—people that go beyond just stating their opinions at public hearings or Council meetings. More and more people are participating in programs that make Temple City a place where people are fully engaged and 100 percent committed to the success of their local government.

We just graduated our second class from Citizen's Academy, a program that gives people the knowledge and insight they need to be leaders—whether that means being a leader on their block, a leader in their church or at their child's school.

An overwhelming number of participants reported that Citizen's Academy made them more enthusiastic about participating in their local government. One graduate said, "I hope to become more involved in the future and really hope this program continues."

Because of programs like Citizen's Academy, I'm confident there will be many outstanding citizens prepared and ready to serve. And I know that when I retire from the City Council, somebody well informed and passionate about Temple City will take my place.

We have record numbers of people applying whenever a vacancy opens on a City Commission or Board, some of whom are Academy graduates. I'm delighted to see that many people are getting involved in their government for the very first time, and that Commission applicants are more culturally diverse than ever.

Other Temple City residents choose to receive training in the Community Emergency Response Team or CERT, a critical program that prepares its graduates to assist families and neighbors in the event of a natural or manmade disaster. We just graduated 27 new trainees, bringing the entire team to 125 fully trained citizens.

Safety, of course, is something we address every day, not just during an emergency. Our Public Safety staff, working closely with the Sheriffs' Department, has dedicated themselves to making safety "Issue #1". Thanks to an ambitious, revamped

Neighborhood Watch program, Temple City has been ranked the 5th safest city in California and the 40th safest in America!

OUTREACH

Because everything we do begins with public engagement, we've enhanced our ability to reach people by going live with AM 1690, which broadcasts public safety and traffic alerts—not only in English but in Mandarin and Spanish as well.

But we don't stop with radio broadcasting, we've also gone digital. Bikers, pedestrians and drivers traveling north on Rosemead Boulevard can now look up and see current City news and announcements rotating on an electronic billboard. The City successfully facilitated this through an innovative partnership with Axis Digital Media, which allows us free advertising and translates the message that we are committed to improving our infrastructure. I'm not talking streets and buildings; but I'm talking about digital and technological infrastructure. This is what makes Temple City more attractive for new business.

We're also in the process of upgrading our City website to make it easier for residents to stay current on City issues and communicate effectively with City Hall. In fact, I'm pleased to announce that as of Friday, we are beginning a soft launch of the new website which is accessible from www.templecity.us. This beta, or test site, will be up for one month so residents can take it for a test drive and make comments or suggestions before the site's official launch in May. Staff has been very resourceful on this project, pushing the website developer to create something far more interactive

than their standard municipal product. We had to explain to them that Temple City is not one of those places where one size fits all!

BRANDING

I think from the examples I've provided, that the process of citizen engagement we preach so often in Temple City is definitely yielding benefits and is changing our community for the better. Almost everything we do is driven by community involvement. If a program doesn't have a public engagement component, it never makes it off the ground.

We've recently unveiled a new City logo, one that reflects a modern, sophisticated image that will appeal not only to corporate investors but a new generation of young leaders. You'll begin to see it soon on new street signs all over town.

The logo is not just a piece of graphic art. It's part of a broader mission to rebrand and market the City far beyond its borders. It helps reinforce a sense of place and fosters community pride. But don't worry—our familiar City Seal remains in use as the community's official insignia. As in everything we do, we strive to meet the challenges of the future, but are forever proud of our past.

I'm pleased to report that for the first time in 50 years, we've renovated the City Council Chambers, which includes not only cosmetic changes but technology upgrades that will make public presentations and communications easier. If we want more people to come out and participate in our governmental process, we need to make our place of business a more attractive, inviting environment in which to observe and participate in.

Adjacent to the Council Chambers, we've created a new Emergency Operations Center, which is used during natural disasters like the windstorm of 2011.

Citizen engagement is the absolute core of our governing philosophy, and just this past year has yielded multiple awards from prestigious urban planning, public information and municipal government associations at both the state and national level. Temple City Connect, the Las Tunas Project Outreach Campaign, and the Rosemead Boulevard streetscape project were among the programs and projects recognized.

I have to tell you, from my perspective as mayor of a small-town community, it is on the local level where you really see the connection between the dreams of the people and the policies that turn those dreams into reality. Much more so than at the County, State or Federal government levels, things get done in a very collaborative way—with citizens, stakeholders and government officials working side-by-side to sustain our "complete neighborhood" concept. Here in Temple City, citizens and government work together in a partnership based on trust.

And it is only through citizen engagement can we continue to foster this partnership and improve the quality of life for all Temple City residents. I think I can speak for the City Council in saying that our residents' dreams and visions for Temple City's future is what motivates and inspires us everyday. Don't worry, we won't ignore your dreams or deem them unattainable. Rather, we will continue to invest in our physical infrastructure, invest in our parks and neighborhoods, but most importantly—invest in you, who will one day be Temple City's future leaders, mayors and councilmembers.

It takes teamwork to make the dream work – and we already know that we dream big in Temple City! So please, always stay connected with us. Together we can turn your dreams into reality.

Thank you.

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