

# STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

CITY OF RIVERBANK  
JANUARY 28, 2008

Good Evening,

It is once again my privilege to present to you the Riverbank State of the City address for 2008.

Tonight I would like to touch on four major areas. First I want to discuss the impact of the current home mortgage crisis and what it will mean to the City's cash flow. Second, I would like to discuss the accomplishments made by your elected City Council and your City Staff in 2007. After that I'll follow up with some of the projects we'll be pursuing in 2008 and I'll finish up by sharing some of my personal thoughts as we move into the new year.

Before I get started with all of that I would like to again thank all of my fellow Councilmembers who have diligently and sacrificially worked to make Riverbank a better community for all of its residents. I would also like to thank our families who continually sacrifice to allow us to serve in this capacity.

I would also like to pause and thank the great staff that we are fortunate to have here in Riverbank. I would like to thank Rich Holmer our City Manager and all of the department heads and staff who continue to work tirelessly to make Riverbank a better community.

So what's going on in Riverbank?

First we need to talk about the housing market crisis and its impact on the city. Our friends, families and neighbors have all lost homes as a result of this time of economic uncertainty. This has had a devastating impact on many of our residents. The city is currently looking at options for bringing more education and programs to our city to inform our residents of their options during this difficult time.

This period of economic uncertainty carries over to the city as well. Property tax revenue is one of the main sources of income for a local jurisdiction like Riverbank. And unfortunately, due to some political wrangling that occurred when Prop 13 was enacted, Stanislaus County receives one of the very lowest percentages of return on Property Tax revenue from the state. What that means is that our small pool of funds is getting even smaller. As home prices drop, the amount of property tax that we receive is also dropping.

Another result of the housing crisis is the increase in abandoned homes throughout the city. This is a concern to the city for a couple of reasons. First, abandoned houses fall into disrepair as there really is no incentive for the banks to keep up on the maintenance of the home. To help with this problem the city has instituted a program to at least keep down the high grass and weeds in the front yards of these

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homes. Lawns will be mowed and a lien will be placed on the property so that the city will recoup these costs when a new buyer buys that property.

Another issue with the abandoned homes is the increased likelihood that squatters will take up residence in the home. If no one is living in the house and none of the neighbors are keeping an eye on the property it is the perfect opportunity for a person or a group of people to break in and begin living there, or make it the focus for illegal activities. So I would ask that if you have an abandoned or foreclosed home in your neighborhood, please keep an eye on it. If you see new activity at the property, that obviously doesn't appear to be real estate related, let the Sheriff's department know so they can send a deputy out to check on it. It's just being a good neighbor. Their number can be found on the Riverbank website at [www.riverbank.org](http://www.riverbank.org).

As I said before the housing market is tightening the city's revenue from property taxes. Well, it's tightening the belt up in Sacramento as well. Fortunately the cities of California banded together and with the help of the voters passed Prop 1A a few years ago. This keeps more of the budget money that is due the cities with the cities. Unfortunately, with the State budget crisis the way it is, it means that the State is just going to have to get more creative in their attempt to balance the State's budget. As we all know, with the current group that we have in Sacramento that spending is very rarely cut so they will be looking to the cities to help make up the budget shortfall. The city of Riverbank is aware of this and we are waiting to see what the impact will be when it finally comes down from Sacramento.

Fortunately, as property tax inflow drops our sales tax revenue is still continuing strong and should continue to increase with the increased commercial development activity in Riverbank. We are looking forward to continued expansion in the Crossroads Commercial Center with the opening of a new Chevron location just this month, the opening of Save Mart in March and the opening of Best Buy in early summer. It's nice to see our Commercial Center grow into fruition as the major, regional Commercial Center that it was planned to be. We thank the residents of Riverbank, Oakdale, Modesto and the rest of the surrounding area that come to do their shopping in Riverbank. Even with the continued success in Crossroads, it's nice to see that it isn't the only area that is a focus for commercial development. In the coming year, Walgreens and La Perla Tapatia market are set to take the anchor position in a new shopping area on Hwy 108 (Patterson) across from Galaxy Theatres. Also, the restaurant next to Galaxy Theatre is slated to open in the coming months. Cool Hand Luke's steakhouse will finally be open for business in March of 2008. This has been a project that has been a long time coming and your city staff has worked long and hard to turn that piece of property around from the glaring yellow building that it was to another great dining establishment for our community.

Of course as we look forward to the new businesses that are coming to Riverbank we need to pause and give our appreciation to all of those businesses that have been a part of Riverbank for a number of years and have catered to the needs of

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the residents of Riverbank. To you I want to say thank you for making Riverbank your home.

This brings me, as always, back downtown. If you have ventured downtown recently you have seen a few new businesses spring up in the last year, the largest being the Queen Bean Coffee House. You've probably also noticed a lot of dust and construction activity. For those of you watching this at home, and were not aware, Riverbank does indeed have a downtown shopping district. It is bounded by Patterson road on the south and highway 108 on the north and runs from 1st Street on the West to approximately 6<sup>th</sup> street on the East. If you are driving on Highway 108 the Del Rio theater building marks the northern entrance to our downtown. And if you haven't been downtown, you should come down and check it out. If you are like me you will be taken with the wide streets, calm atmosphere and the great businesses that are truly trying to bring something unique to the City of Riverbank.

At this point I would like to run down a list of some of the specific things that we accomplished in 2007.

In the City Clerk's Department we-

- Revamped our City's Government Channel and created Riverbank Action 2. I really appreciate the work that has gone into this as it improves our ability to get information out to our residents while giving the city of Riverbank a more polished image. When our residents are flipping channels at home it's nice to be able to put forward a positive, professional image of our city. All of us on the Council and on staff are extremely proud of Riverbank and we want it to show. If we weren't extremely proud we wouldn't be here doing what we are doing to try and make it even better.
- We also, through the Clerk's office joined with the Salvation Army Christmas program and served 351 children and 61 Riverbank Care home residents. We also helped raise \$400 in scholarship funds for 8 Riverbank families' children to attend Riverbank Summer camp. I am extremely proud of these contributions. In the coming year we are hoping to take a look at all of the charitable activity that takes place around the city around Christmas time in an effort to coordinate all of them so that the city of Riverbank can be even more charitable in our efforts to help everyone in the City have a merry holiday season.
- With the leadership of Vice Mayor Madueño, the city presented the First annual Beyond Earth Day celebration in conjunction with Galaxy Theatre. We had presentations on Global Warming, recycling, green power and an e-waste recycling center to name a few of the activities. Response to this event was outstanding and we look forward to it expanding even more in 2008.
- I was honored to be able to take part in the City's Veteran's Day remembrance in 2007. It was a particularly special day as the City was able to rededicate our Veterans' Wall in front of the Community Center on Santa Fe Avenue. In doing so we also dedicated 6 plaques recognizing the sacrifice of Riverbank's own in the ongoing struggle to maintain the freedoms that we are able to enjoy in America. Staff is continuing to follow up on any

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information of Riverbank residents killed in action so that they may be added to our wall. We also were able to raise the POW/MIA flag to continuously remember all of the veterans that have not yet returned home. To all of our Veterans the City extends a warm Thank You.

- The City Clerk's office also assisted in, with the direction of Vice Mayor Madueño, the establishment of a Sister City relationship with Tamazula Mexico. The city was able to send a delegation to Mexico to tour the city and sign the official documents that would help launch what we hope will be a long and close relationship with our Sister City to the South. A documentary was filmed while in Tamazula and will be shown at Galaxy Theater with the proceeds going to a very important project in Tamazula, the construction of a shelter for abused and battered women. We are hoping that the residents of Riverbank will participate in this fundraiser and help us help our neighbors in what is obviously a global issue. I believe this brings our total number of Sister Cities to three. Two of these are formal relationships with Tamazula Mexico and Fuyang China. And we have an informal but very active relationship, thanks to Frank Monschein, with Fuerstenfeld Austria. The city hosted a visit from Fuerstenfeld in 2005 and we look forward to hosting a delegation from Tamazula in October of this year.

In our Public Works Department we-

- Welcomed a new Public Works Director. David Melilli joined us in November 2007. David was most recently with the city of Dixon and prior to that was Director of the Rio Vista Public Works Department.
- We also finished up the first phase of the Riverbank Sports Complex and Restroom project. The city has been working to develop a regional sports park for a number of years and I am happy to say that phase one which includes the soccer fields and the restrooms has been completed. The official opening and dedication will take place in March as the recently sodded fields need time to firm up before they will be able to endure the heavy use that we expect them to receive.

Our Police Services Department was busy this year. In 2007 they

- Created a Community Resource Deputy position. This deputy's main purpose will be to work in the field with community groups, businesses and schools to help identify and target criminals and criminal activity, organize neighborhood watch groups and conduct directed patrols targeting gang and narcotic activity. I don't believe it is possible to overstate the importance of this role. Instead of simply sending our deputies out on routine patrols we will be able to take information gained from the CRD's communication with the public and direct patrols into areas to establish a "police presence" in those areas that need the most attention.
- Also, in conjunction with Vice Mayor Madueno and the Consolidated Fire Protection District, they organized Riverbank's first National Night Out program.
- The department also applied for and received a \$70,000 grant from the State which will provide for additional traffic safety information and

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additional staff overtime to implement DUI and seatbelt enforcement programs, to keep Riverbank citizens safer as they travel our roads.

Our Finance Department was once again busy this year with-

- Bringing to council a balanced budget that brought the city's reserve amount to 11%. It has been a long time goal to have the city's reserve (which is basically the percentage of the city's total budget that is not earmarked for use-kind of similar to your home's savings account) above 10%, so this was welcomed news.
- The city also received an unqualified opinion on our audit this year which means that the firm that reviews the city's books had nothing to comment about or correct regarding the way that the city is recording its transactions.

In our Economic Development Department we also made a few personnel changes in the past year-

- We welcomed Debbie Olson to the post of Economic Development Manger, Debbie was most recently working for the League of California Cities, an organization that unites local cities as we try to work with (and sometimes fight with) the State of California. So not only is it nice to have someone with high qualifications working for the city but its also nice to have available those contacts up in Sacramento, particularly during this time of state budget unrest.
- We also welcomed back, Tim Ogden. Tim rejoined us as the city Economic Development and Housing Director. Tim was formerly with us as Manager overseeing the Ammo Plant transfer process, a project that will again receive a large amount of attention this year.
- The Economic Development folks had their hands full this year with-
- The expansion of the city's Enterprise Zone. If you are a very small, small, medium or large business owner located in Riverbank please call our Economic Development department, their number and all of the numbers to the city departments is located on the city's website located at [www.riverbank.org](http://www.riverbank.org). The state of California has provided a huge incentive and tax savings for businesses located in an Enterprise Zone. So I would encourage you to call the city and get more information. Do not leave money which the state has set aside for our city's economic expansion sitting on the table.
- The Riverbank Redevelopment Agency, which is overseen by the Economic Development and Housing department ran full gangbusters in 2007. The agency acquired \$12 million dollars in bond revenue to revitalize and renovate within our stated project area. It also enabled the city to set aside funds for use on affordable housing projects.
- In 2007 the city began the Downtown Streetscape and Plaza Del Rio projects. We are looking forward to their completion in 2008. This will enable us to continue to work on bringing forward a comprehensive economic plan for the city of Riverbank and the downtown area.
- The city, through the RDA, purchased the Del Rio theater. Our plan, at this point is for the theater to be renovated and turned into one of the focal buildings for the downtown theater and arts district that will be created.

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Many opportunities for the public to comment on this project are expected in the coming year.

- As stated before, the Ammo Plant transfer is moving along slowly but more emphasis will be directed to that transaction as the pace of the transfer picks up.

### Parks and Recreation

- Thanks to Sue and her staff for another successful year of community events which included:
  - The Halloween Haunted Hayride
  - The Turkey Trot
  - New Year's Eve Pajama-rama and
  - The annual Easter Egg Hunt
- Parks and Recreation also oversaw, in conjunction with the Friends of Jacob Myers Park, the completion and installation of
  - The Bicentennial Grove plaques and informational signs at Jacob Myers Park
  - The completion of the paved Loop Trail (a one mile walking/jogging trail in the back area of the park) and
  - The completion of the second park host site and open grass area at Jacob Myers Park
- I have said it before and I will say it again, if you are a resident of Riverbank and have not yet made it out to see what the city offers at Jacob Myers Park you have no idea what you are missing. For me and my family it's like going on an adventure without leaving town.

### Community Development Department

- Riverbank's Community Development Department was busy this year with over 500 property and abandoned vehicle reports. Each of these reports were followed up on to ensure that all of Riverbank's residents are conforming to the City Codes and Ordinances to maintain our sense of pride in our community.
- We also made tremendous strides toward the completion of the City's General Update which is slated to be completed in Spring 2008.

And now a quick run through of some of the things that we'll be working on in 2008:

- We'll continue to update and improve the city's Government Channel 2 and the city's website in an effort to improve communication between the city and its residents.
- The city will conduct elections in 2008 for two council seats and the post of Mayor.
- We'll construct a new Compressed Natural Gas facility at the city's corporation yard.
- We will supervise the construction of traffic signals at Jackson Ave and Highway 108, near the Galaxy theatre.

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- We will construct the Waterfall Entry Sign project at the location of the current Welcome to Riverbank "City of Action" sign at Calendar and Patterson.
- We will work toward designating the Riverbank Police Services Headquarters as the North area command post for the Sheriff's department
- Work toward establishing a comprehensive gang awareness and educational program for the city of Riverbank to include town hall meetings, newspaper and Channel 2 media campaigns and high-visibility patrols directed toward identifying gang members and their associates in order to suppress their illegal activities.
- We will be working, in the coming year, on bringing the required departments together to plan for a comprehensive update of the system development fees and the city's Capital Improvement Plan.
- We will work with two of Riverbank's large manufacturers to find space within our sphere of influence to relocate their growing businesses.
- We will fund at least 8 housing rehab projects and 7 first-time home buyers.
- We will continue to promote the Riverbank Downtown Business District and find new and innovative ways to draw business, residents, customers and interest back to downtown Riverbank.
- We will hold public meetings to determine the highest and best use for the newly acquired Del Rio Theater.
- We will celebrate the grand opening of the Riverbank Sports Complex and break ground on the Riverbank Teen Center.
- We will finally adopt our newly updated General Plan. This has been a long time coming and it will be a great achievement to have this update (which has been much more like a major overhaul) behind us.
- We will work on developing a comprehensive Development Code to implement our General Plan.
- We will also begin work on a comprehensive strategy to increase the city of Riverbank's efficiency and respect for the environment when it comes to green initiatives. Riverbank is committed to be a leader when it comes to implementing strategies that are considered environmentally sound and "green".
- And finally, as one of the jurisdictions involved with the North County Expressway JPA, the other jurisdictions being the County and the cities of Modesto and Oakdale, we will work toward the formation of a strategy to plan and develop the proposed North County Corridor Expressway.

Whew, that's a lot of work on our plate, we better get busy.

However, before I wrap up, I would like to take a couple of minutes and share some of my own thoughts regarding a couple of issues that will be coming up in 2008.

First, I would like to add my personal comments on behalf of the county-wide half-cent sales tax measure to improve our roads.

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This item was on the ballot last year and received an approval rating of nearly 60%, unfortunately it needed 67% to pass. We are hoping to bring this item back to the ballot in November 2008 and I would encourage everyone listening to this to consider supporting this Measure. Stanislaus County is perpetually at the bottom of the list of counties when it comes to receiving funds from State to complete our road maintenance and projects. This is a major reason why our roads have continued to degrade and disintegrate over the years. There simply is no funding available for us to do anything beyond the most minimal repairs and improvements.

We continue to send our tax money to the State and we, rightly, assume that it will come back to us for use on our road and transportation needs, however it usually doesn't. The state of California continues to find ways to send it to "self help" counties, but more on that in a minute. This may be all too simplistically stated, but basically that's what is happening. We are taxed and the money goes to another county for their projects. And it only gets worse. After passing proposition 1B and allowing California to borrow all of that money for road improvement, we are now sending tax AND bond money (which is also our tax money) to the state so, now there's just a bigger pot of money to not come to Riverbank. We have actually been told by authorities in Sacramento that because we are not a self-help county we have a very small chance of seeing any of those funds.

In the world of Cal Trans, there are two types of counties, self-help and everyone else. Self-help counties tax themselves to provide a pool of money to match and support the money that they receive from Cal Trans. Cal Trans prefers to send its money to self-help counties because it allows their money go further.

No one likes taxes, I certainly don't. But if it means digging a little deeper to get my hands on potentially millions of dollars of matching funds for road improvement from the state, I don't see how we can't do it. I would ask for your support on this Measure. Our roads in Stanislaus County are a joke. And it's not just the increasing population that is to blame. Combine that increasing population with the historically small pool available for road maintenance and improvement and we end up with the current mess that we have now.

Riverbank, Oakdale, Waterford and the entire Northeast side of the county are in dire need of an expressway that will allow us to move residents and goods from our side of the county to highway 99. And that will not happen without the new Measure K. And if that doesn't happen, traffic will continue to snarl, industry will continue to stay away from our part of the county and our residents who would prefer not to commute out of the area will continue to have to in order to support their families with well paying jobs. If you choose to support Measure K that can all change.

I like to use the analogy of getting a \$10,000 car for \$5,000. Yes, \$5,000 will come out of my pocket, but if I already need the car and someone else is giving me (not loaning) the matching funds necessary to get it, I'm going to jump at the chance.

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If we are successful in getting the measure to the ballot and you have any questions about why I back it, send me an email. My email is up on the city's website.

Finally, I would like to wrap up with something that that I am very excited about. Ever since I was elected Mayor of Riverbank in 2004 I have kept focusing on the Downtown area; to serve it, enhance it and reinvigorate it to help make our local business owners successful. I am proud of what we have accomplished, what the local businesses have managed to do and what we are going to be able to accomplish in the future.

This year, as the dust settles from all of the major construction in the downtown, I, and your City Council have directed your city staff to take a hard look at what we can do to make the downtown a vibrant and exciting place once again. One of the items that we are looking at and hope to implement in the coming year is the creation of a small business incubator site in the downtown area. This would be a place where our area's many home-based and web-based workers would be able to come and set up an office for as long or short of a time as they require. There would be communal internet access, business machines and furniture. They could be rented out for a week, a month, or two months. We are just at the beginning stage of this concept and are still working to nail down the exact details. But I am extremely excited about this.

What this project will do besides showing that Riverbank cares and wants to support the home and web-based businesses in and around Riverbank, but it will also draw people downtown during the day and in the evening. Word of mouth is the best way to create a buzz about our downtown. With more and more people connected to the downtown that translates into more and more customer and clients that will be available to the businesses that are downtown. It will then also be easier to get people more involved in the events that the city has planned for the evenings and weekends. We are looking forward to making our Plaza Del Rio and our downtown the center and heart of Riverbank.

Thank you for your patience. I know that this has been long, but it is very difficult to cut out any of what we have accomplished over the past year. For the full text of this message you can view it on the city's website at [www.riverbank.org](http://www.riverbank.org) or my personal website [chriscrifasi.wordpress.com](http://chriscrifasi.wordpress.com).

I have to say that it has been a pleasure serving as your mayor and I am looking forward to what we all are going to accomplish in the year to come.

Thank you