

*Mayor Rachel Hernandez, MPA*

# Riverbank State of the City

April 3, 2025

## Welcome to Riverbank, the City of Action



**Welcome to Riverbank, it's not just a greeting but who we are.**

Good evening, Riverbank!

It is my absolute honor to stand before you tonight as your newly elected Mayor. To our residents—both those whose

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families have called Riverbank home for generations and those who have recently started to call Riverbank home—welcome.

Es un honor absoluto estar ante ustedes esta noche como su alcalde recién elegida. A nuestros residentes, tanto aquellos quien sus familias han considerado a Riverbank su hogar durante generaciones como aquellos que recientemente comenzaron a considerar a Riverbank su hogar, bienvenidos. La traducción en vivo está disponible; consulte a alguien en la mesa de registro para acceder.

To our dedicated city staff, thank you for your hard work and commitment day in and day out, it does not go unseen and I admire so much your passion and solution-oriented attitudes. Thank you to our public safety teams for your bravery and care of our city, and the schools districts that teach, care for, and uplift our kids and teens.

To our city council, what an exciting time to be here! Thank you Vice Mayor and District 2 Councilmember Cindy Fosi for your introduction, your forthright attitude is something I find truly special. Thank you, Councilmember District 1 Luis Uribe, your ideas are constant and energy is contagious! Thank you, Councilmember District 3, John

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Pimentel, for stepping up for this role and being willing to listen and uplift everyone around you. Thank you, Councilmember District 4 Stacy Call, we have a shared curiosity and willingness to embrace change for the betterment of our city and I think that is amazing.

To friends from across the county and beyond, THANK YOU for taking an interest in Riverbank and supporting our city. Fellow dignitaries, thank you for your guidance and willingness to exchange ideas and perspectives. To my friends, family, and all those who have supported this journey, I am deeply grateful for your patience and love as the passion I have to serve has been a personal sacrifice.

I have always led with heart and being your Mayor is no different: I am here to listen, to learn, to share my perspective and to bring you along to grow a Riverbank that is reflective of every corner of our small city y cada persona quien vive aqui, every person who lives here.

Growing up, it is hard to realize what you lack until you look back. I often reflect on long walks to the grocery store, my heart light as I skipped along, oblivious to the fact that we couldn't afford a car—only enough money to buy what we could carry. Endless family sleepovers were not for fun,

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but for necessity because our family of five could barely afford a one-bedroom apartment. The excitement I had being the oldest sibling to wake up every morning to prepare breakfast for my sisters was partly because my parents both worked long days and nights to provide for us. I bring into this space the experience of not-having, being first-generation, a woman, and now the youngest and first of AAPI heritage to be Mayor of this amazing city.

EVERY DAY building my experience with the willingness to listen, lead from experience and empathy, and uplift others. There is a quote that I think about often: I come in peace, but I mean business. So let's get to it!

Tonight, we gather not just as neighbors, but as a community—a community that takes pride in its history, its people, and honoring our past 100 years of being a city and its promise for the future. Riverbank has long been a place where small-town charm meets opportunity, where families grow, businesses thrive - small and large, and where we look out for one another. That is the heart of who we are.

A couple weeks ago, I was invited to California Avenue Elementary School's career day and for about 45 minutes I

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was asked a million questions by curious 4th and 5th graders: What does a Mayor do? What is the hardest part? What is the best part? Do you work with other Mayors? Do you have a boss?

I loved that last question because it highlighted a common misconception: “Do I have a boss?” YES, it’s YOU! I pointed to them, but I’m also speaking to all of you. It is our shared responsibility to serve you and balance all of our duties while communicating transparently with the community, but it is also an ask of you that I make often: stay connected with us.

The theme of this year’s address is *Welcome to Riverbank*, a reflection of both our city’s growth, our commitment to each person who lives here, and our unwavering commitment to keeping Riverbank a place that feels like home. As we welcome new residents, new ideas, and new opportunities, we do so while holding on to the values that define us: inclusivity, engagement, and a deep respect for the community we love.

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Leading this city is not just about guiding growth or policy—it's about listening, collaborating, and ensuring that every voice in our community is heard. I am committed to fostering open communication, strengthening civic engagement, and working alongside each of you to ensure Riverbank's future is one we build together.

As we move forward tonight, we will take a closer look at each department that keeps our city running—from public safety to infrastructure, parks, and beyond. These teams, often working behind the scenes, are the backbone of our community, and their dedication ensures Riverbank continues to flourish.

Together, we will embrace the future with what makes Riverbank special. Together, we will celebrate our diversity, uplift our neighbors, and continue to shape a city that welcomes all who call it home. All of you being here today is a testament to the importance of accessibility and the renewed vision for our city.

Tonight, I speak not just as your Mayor, but as your neighbor—someone who sees the heart and hustle of this city every day. Riverbank is growing, evolving, and rising to

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meet both new opportunities and familiar challenges with resolve and unity.

*Welcome to Riverbank. Bienvenidos a Riverbank.*

## **Who we are**

As we look ahead, let's also reflect on the ways we can continue strengthening our bonds. All things are intersectional.. What do I mean by this? Here in Riverbank, we have generations of families who have been here to see Riverbank change while welcoming new residents. We have seen economic growth, while continuing to prioritize our small businesses and thriving downtown. This is all possible because of deep rooted community bonds that I and our council are committed to strengthening.

This is the Riverbank we are working towards.

A place where every child enjoys safe and accessible play areas, where every senior can age with dignity, where every resident regardless of language and socioeconomic status, feels empowered to voice their thoughts and contribute to our growth, where every small business is supported, and where each resident can find resources to thrive, not just survive. We can accomplish these things together.

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The City of Action has taken many definitions. From the railroad tracks, to the activities around those tracks. In recent years, we have elevated this definition by so many levels. Whether it's improving infrastructure, expanding community services, or advocating for vulnerable residents, our progress has been a collective effort.

As of the 2020 Census, our population is at 24,865... the median age of our city is 34 years old, about 60% of our population is Latino (31% white, 5% asian, NHPI .2%, Native American 1.9%, 1.8% Black), 50% are women, almost 80% have earned their high school diploma and of those almost 20% have a bachelors or higher, almost 800 veterans call Riverbank home, yet the median income in our city is only about \$33,500. What does this mean? A majority of our community is young, hard-working, diverse, growing... AND we have work to do to bring high-paying jobs, a variety of housing, and an inclusive government to our city.

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## **Public Works and Infrastructure**

From fleet and sidewalks to waste and water systems, our Public Works Department had a busy year.

Projects like the Claribel Road Overlay, the Seventh Street Outfall, and the Crossroads Elementary raised crosswalk were completed to improve safety and mobility. We moved into our new Public Works facility, finalized the Sierra House IT network, and continued the graffiti abatement program, beautifying over 100 areas in the city.

In 2024 alone, over 1 billion gallons of clean water were delivered. Groundwater is essential to the city and so important to ensure sustainability. Behind these numbers are city workers ensuring our residents have safe, and have reliable services every day.

A VERY thankless job, we appreciate you Cody and your Public Works team!

On that same vein, Kathleen and the development team were hard at work completing Patterson Rd sidewalks between Hwy 108 and Roselle, fencing around Riverbank Police Services addressing safety, Claribel Rd overlay between Squire Wells and Roselle, and Crossroads

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Elementary Schools Raised sidewalks to name a few. This year, we will be seeing projects all over the city like the Pioneer Park Playground, the MUCH needed installation of a signal at Patterson & Roselle, and Roselle Avenue Sidewalks over MID Canal between Westgate and S. Rosebrook. These updates and improvements are essential to the connectivity of the city as a whole!

## **Parks and Recreation**

Our Parks and Recreation Department brought people together like never before as Michael and the team bring community connection to a whole new level.

From fitness classes and monthly community events to affordable camps and innovative recreational offerings, these activities strengthened community bonds and encouraged active lifestyles.

Significant progress was made in improving and expanding park spaces, guided by valuable input from the community and the newly established Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee made up of our residents. New parks, additional park features, and upgrades to existing facilities

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underscored our commitment to creating inclusive and inviting public spaces. Environmental stewardship remained a cornerstone of our work, with initiatives such as tree planting and water conservation projects helping to preserve Riverbank's natural beauty.

Food Truck Fridays (starting for the month of May!), to the Dia de Muertos Festival, to the Christmas Parade, our calendar was packed with events that celebrated who we are as a city. Shoutout to the Riverbank Tuesday Market, Love Riverbank and the upcoming partnerships we have this year! We held monthly community events, expanded our Tot Time and teen programs, and unveiled Centennial Park on the southwest side of town.

We began the Jacob Myers Park Master Plan update, installed ADA drinking fountains, renovated our skate park bathrooms, and improved landscaping at the Community Pool.

In 2025, we look forward to renovating Castleberg and Pioneer Park playgrounds, completing the Jacob Myers Trail, and enhancing downtown lighting. And with the support of advocates and the Oakdale Animal Shelter, we will keep addressing the cats! Our public spaces are more

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than places to gather—they are places where memories are made and community is strengthened.

## **Housing and Homelessness**

Every 1-2 years, cities and counties across the nation conduct a Point in Time Count. The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires communities to conduct a Point-In-Time (PIT) count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons on a single night during the last 10 days of January. The sheltered count must occur on an annual basis, and include clients in Emergency Shelter, Transitional Housing and Safe Haven projects. Other than the COVID years that are outliers, homelessness continues to increase and most of those folks have experienced homelessness for the first time in the city they reside in. How do we take action? This past year, we took meaningful steps toward addressing housing access and homelessness—issues at the heart of all communities, including ours.

In April 2024, we completed the renovation of Sierra House, a transitional housing facility that now offers support and shelter for up to 16 people on their path toward stability. It was an honor to dedicate the home in October with

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Senator Susan Eggman, who advocated at the State level to help make this project possible. In 2024 the RESTART Program had space for a total of 8 participants. This is one step in addressing the complexity of homelessness.

We are starting 2025 with 4 committed residents, and we remain hopeful for continued progress in the program. In 2024, the Day Use Facility, located on the same property as Sierra House, provided a total of 1,516 showers to community members in need:

- 945 showers, clean clothes, and snacks for men
- 571 showers, clean clothes, and snacks for women

In June 2024, we authorized funding for the Bridge Covenant Church Tiny Homes Project, which will provide housing to extremely low-income families focusing on single mothers. This development is being managed by Stanislaus Equity Partners which includes the construction of eight (8) tiny homes in their first phase of development, services being provided by Center for Human Services with property management being done by Stanislaus County Affordable Housing Corporation. The project is currently under development and slated to open in mid- to late-2025. As you can tell, building homes is difficult and takes

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true collaboration from trusted partners and the city to ensure we are proactive and conscious of the unique needs of our neighborhoods. This is real progress and additional tools in our toolbox to ensure Riverbank is a place where everyone—regardless of income—can call home.

### **Economic Development & RIC**

What is the property behind Riverbank on Claus Road? The Riverbank Industrial Complex is a complex project involving the city, US Army and California regulatory departments. We remain committed to the complete transfer of this property to the city to be able to be fully effective and create economic mobility for so many in our city. Can you believe that right in our backyard we have welcomed businesses like 3R Technologies? This new factory is designed to process 45 million pounds of plastics and e-waste per year with state-of-the-art machines. 3R technology's positive impact on the environment is noticeable, and processing lines are environmentally clean and sustainable. All machines from forklifts to the biggest ones are electric, and the plant includes two water treatment systems which clean and reintroduce the

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previously used water in the system, reducing the amount of water used in the process.

Not only that, they are providing almost 100 high skill and high paying jobs with an intentional focus on hiring Riverbank residents where possible. Economic development ranges from Melissa's advocacy there and work at the Riverbank Industrial Complex to Joshua Mann's Community Development Department where the inception of building and planning homes and commercial are realized and the city's beautification standards are maintained. It is with so much pride that I say, we are thriving!

2024 saw the opening of several major retailers, including Costco in June 2024 and Costless Groceries. In December 2024 Planning Commission meeting, Tractor Supply received their architectural and site plan approvals. They are slated to begin construction in 2025 and will spur development on infill property that has long been vacant along the Highway 108 corridor.

Crossroads West is intended to be a complementary project to Crossroads Retail and is a project of patience and quality, with the Developers working hard to ensure

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the highest quality mix of National, Regional and Local tenants. The project will continue to be phased over a number of years, but has started off with much excitement.

- Costco opened June 2024
- Chase Bank just opened last month
- Wendys is opening this month
- Raising Canes, under construction is scheduled to open early Fall 2025
- There is much speculation, but officially, “an exciting soft and hard goods retailer is currently under construction” scheduled to open late Fall this year
- There is a 10,000 sq. ft. building for Sutter Health for a medical clinic-use scheduled to start construction in June 2025
- Approx. 20,000 sq. ft. of retail and restaurant multi-tenant buildings at the intersection of Freddie and Oakdale Road with high quality local and regional businesses, scheduled to start construction in summer 2025

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- And Another 6,200 sq. ft. retail building located within main parking lot scheduled to start construction in late summer 2025
  - The developers are working hard to bring a 250-unit apartment rental project to the development
  - As a sneak peak: the developers shared that 2026 is shaping up to be a great year for the City and Crossroads West, the development team has made great progress with several other great retail tenants to complete the major tenant line up, all leases are still pending but could comprise of a high-quality arts and craft store, specialty grocery and soft goods retailers with an estimated opening in 2026.

The aim is for both projects to be the gateway to Riverbank complementing the downtown with specialized shopping appeal and living appeal. Once Crossroads West is fully complete, the developers are envisioning a network of pedestrian sidewalk connections from the existing Crossroads retail development to the new project. They will have sidewalks internally connecting the retail businesses with the residential project and the existing retail development across the street. The developers are

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working to develop gathering spaces strategically placed adjacent to restaurants and along the network of pedestrian connections to promote community connectivity.

As we move towards downtown: In 2024, the City awarded over \$180,000 in American Rescue Plan Act funds for the City's Downtown Façade Improvement Program. The program provided matching grant funds to businesses and/or property owners to enhance the curb appeal of their buildings and increase economic vitality within the Downtown Specific Plan Area.

Once the economic hub of cities, I believe that downtown's are the social heart of our community and preserving this will take intentionality. I am proud that last year, we chose to keep city hall in downtown Riverbank and are working towards keeping investment here. There is more to come!

Our small businesses work hard and truly uplift our city. It is our commitment to remain accessible and ease what is often a complex process to navigate for many who are sacrificing so much to build up their passion and livelihood. To help them, we are proud to partner with regional nonprofits and organizations like: the Riverbank

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Chamber of Commerce, Stanislaus Latino Chamber, Opportunity Stanislaus, and STEP to name a few.

### **City Staff and Leadership Transition**

In 2024, we saw transitions in leadership and we appreciate our elected leaders and staff who have served the city before.

We are investing in the people who serve Riverbank.

Our HR Department expanded training opportunities, we've prioritized safety, equity, and support for our staff, continuously working to improve from the inside-out —because a stronger organization means better service for our residents.

In 2025, we'll launch a Class & Compensation Study to remain competitive in the job market, onboard new positions like our part-time Neighborhood Improvement Officer, and continue improving employee wellness and performance systems.

I may be biased but, we are hiring and our city is a great place to work.

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## **Public Safety and Community Engagement**

We are deeply grateful for the relationships we have with Stanislaus Consolidated Fire and the Sheriff's Department. I have been able to ride-along helicopter, with fire and police to see first-hand the care, expertise, and knowledge that each of our local public safety teams have. For example, overall average response time to Calls for Service by Riverbank Police Service in 2024 was 3.91 minutes - a decrease from last year by almost a minute! A drastic improvement when we know seconds matter in situations of life and death.

Their dedication to our community is apparent and they continue to find ways to creatively enhance our safety. Public Works staff collaborated with Detective Xiong to monitor and track graffiti in over 100 areas throughout the City. Riverbank Police Services hosts Christmas shopping and bike giveaways for kids. In partnership with Riverbank Unified School District, the city has supported just over a year of a new School Resource Officer.

You will hear me say this often, but public safety is up to all of us. Oftentimes, so much pressure is put on police and fire and there are ways we can step up! Building intentional

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communication, trust with your neighbors throughout the city, ensuring people are housed and that there are high paying jobs available all support safe communities.

Community engagement can also support safety. In October 2024, we partnered with Jane Media Services to enhance our social media presence and communications. This contract aims to intentionally expand our content reach, strengthen community engagement, and help establish a cohesive brand for our outreach efforts in 2025.

In the digital space, we launched a refreshed City website, added live Spanish translations to meetings with Wordly, and expanded the NextRequest portal for public records. We're working hard to ensure everyone can access their local government, in every language, on every device.

As many of you know, I am very active on social media but I will be the first to tell you that it is not the means to the end. It is a tool that will help us build connection and understanding. I am so proud that we as a council are accessible, willing to listen, and to offer perspective as well online, in-person, and present at city events. Join us!

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## **Closing**

Like I mentioned (what feels like a few hours ago! - Look at watch)

All things are intersectional.. Riverbank is not just a small city—it's a community of action, heart, and pride.

From new parks to major developments, from clean water to community events, from small business support to digital transformation, we are improving and it will take *intentional* leadership and involvement from you all to ensure we continue to be proud of our city and proactive in all aspects. Great things take work!

Together, we will build a city where every resident is seen, heard, and served. A city that is safe, welcoming, and full of opportunity. A city where progress is made not just through the council, but through partnership.

Thank you for your trust, your involvement, and your belief in Riverbank. And remember my challenge to you: get involved, ask questions, and take pride in our intersections.

The state of our city is strong, and because we are in it together, its future is brighter than ever. Thank you.