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Aurora is 'strong and getting stronger,' mayor says in State of City speech.

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Aurora is "strong and getting stronger," the city's mayor said on Tuesday, citing successes in a new homeless navigation campus.



Mayor Mike Coffman said he leaves work every Friday and goes straight to the Regional Navigation Campus, where he then sleeps in the low-barrier homeless shelter and helps serve breakfast in the morning.

The navigation campus is improving and churning out success stories, Coffman told a crowd of hundreds of local and industry leaders during the State of the City speech hosted by the Rotary Club of Aurora.

It is on its way to being an example of how to address homelessness "not just for Colorado, but for this country," he added.

Coffman said he will continue to sleep at the facility every Friday "until this program is exactly the way I think it should be," he said.

The navigation campus — formerly a Crowne Plaza hotel — at 15500 E. 40th Ave., opened to the public in November to serve as a "one-stop shop" for homeless services.

The 600-person facility, which is operated by Advance Pathways, has three tiers of shelter space for homeless people, depending on their level of engagement in services, treatment and career development.

Tier One, where the mayor said he sleeps every Friday night, is meant to be a low-barrier shelter for people who have not yet engaged in homeless services and just need a place to stay each night.

It consists of large rooms on the first floor of the facility filled with 285 cots.

As people engage with services and seek out job opportunities, they move to Tiers Two and Three, which provide better and more private living conditions.

Coffman said he connected with a woman in the shelter who, over the course of several weeks, got a certificate to be a janitor and then got a job at the facility.

“She was so proud,” he said. “It was the first time I’d ever seen her smile.”

Another woman came to the navigation campus after experiencing severe meth addiction and being shot by her husband. After struggling to find a job, she got an office job at the campus and is now attending UC Health for occupational therapy, Coffman said.

Coffman’s narrative of success shared in the State of the City speech stands in contrast to recent conversations among city leaders about challenges the campus has faced.

When the campus opened in November, officials acknowledged it was still unfinished. With winter approaching and the facility offering far more capacity than the Aurora Day Resource Center, city leaders pushed to open it as quickly as possible.

In late March, Advance Pathways CEO Jim Goebelbecker said the facility opened “way too early,” telling city lawmakers that the rushed opening left residents living amid mold, plumbing failures, and other issues inside the former hotel.

A 70-year-old woman living at the Regional Navigation Campus has attended multiple City Council meetings to describe the problems she has encountered there.

“The place is terrible,” she said, adding that her belongings were stolen and nobody helped her.

One of the major challenges with the facility was that elderly and disabled people who were not workready were unable to move through the system to get better accommodations, Coffman said Tuesday.

Homelessness officials created a housing plan for people who could not work and there is now a different track for those people, Coffman said.

Also in Tuesday’s speech, Coffman celebrated the achievements of each individual Aurora City Council member Tuesday, lauding their ability to work together despite political differences.

He cited Amy Wiles, who is working on a transportation impact fee, Francoise Bergan, who is chairing a working group to improve Gun Club Road, Stephanie Hancock, who has pushed for vehicle registration enforcement, and Alli Jackson, who was appointed to the board overseeing the revitalization of Colfax Avenue.

“It’s been said that a vision is the ability to see the invisible, imagine the impossible, and achieve the incredible,” he said. “This afternoon I walked you through how our council can work together to rise above the broken politics of today to achieve a bold vision for our city.”