

Office of the Mayor

Matthew T. Ryan

Mayor Matt Ryan's 2008 State of the City Address

Wednesday, February 13, 2008

To all the people of the City of Binghamton and citizens of the Greater Binghamton area who realize the importance of the City to the health of our entire region, thank you for joining us tonight.

To my partners in City government, to all of the members of City Council, to all the hard working members of my staff, and to all the veteran Civil servants of the City of Binghamton – thank you for joining us tonight; and thank you for all that you do throughout the year to take care of our City and its residents. I also want to say that our thoughts are with our friends serving in Afghanistan, Captain Joe Merrill, Chris Marion and Jameel Robinson. We look forward to their safe return.

To Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo, Senator Tom Libous, and County Executive Barbara Fiala thank you for your diligent cooperation in all that we are collectively trying to do to make this great City even greater.

Especially to our partners in Albany, Governor Spitzer, who has recognized that to have ONE state and ONE future, Upstate New York needs special attention to realize its potential. Thank you, Governor.

To all of our partners in local government, whether you be private businesses, non-profit organizations, or individual citizens who have come together for the collective good. Thank you for accepting the invitation to participate and make a difference.

To all our Binghamton University and B.C.C. partners – the partnerships and collaborations that are being formed today will help in the transformation of our urban core and our whole economy. Embracing higher education and the students who study in our community has already expanded our capacity at City Hall and beyond. Thank you to STOC, CIC2020, and all the local businesses and industries that recognize the talent and resources that our institutions of higher education bring to our future. And as we all join together to convince those at the state level that the Binghamton University Law School should become a reality in our downtown, we can all see how important town/gown relationships are to our future.



Office of the Mayor

Matthew T. Ryan

This is my third State of the City address and I am deeply honored for the opportunity to talk with you tonight about where we have been, where we are now, and what we can achieve together if we continue to reform government and make our city and region a vibrant part of the 21st century economy.

Talking about where we have been is important because we have a glorious past. Certainly, our area deserves the reputation as the Valley of Innovation. But there is some danger in nostalgia, as pointed out in the recent Guest Viewpoint by Carol and Philip Cali who have moved back to Binghamton because of the quality of life our community currently affords and the potential they see for what the future holds. "Nostalgia is a two edge sword," they cautioned. "It evokes warm and pleasant memories while having the capability of impeding the vision, time and effort needed to assure a prosperous and satisfying future. It's time to move on and create another golden age, one with the future, not the past, as its focal point." Thank you for those words of wisdom and I share your sentiments.

2008 and beyond must be a time when we celebrate our current accomplishments and embrace our future possibilities. After all, those who take up the difficult task of progress are all working to make our community a better place to live.

And I can proudly tell you tonight that every decision we make has been to build capacity and partnerships: the capacity to move this city forward on the nuts and bolts issues that face all upstate cities in New York; and the partnerships with those who care deeply about our community. Partnerships that acknowledge and understand that our citizens expect us to work together to rebuild our urban core and to have a strategy that promotes healthy neighborhoods and overall neighborhood safety.

I thank all the residents who have approached me to say that they do not want just a caretaker government, but a government that seeks progress. Thank you for recognizing the many progressive agendas we are now pursuing as a city.

Two years ago, I made it clear that we would bring a different approach to City Hall and city governance. Since then, we have formally adopted a mission statement for this administration. The mission reads, *"To excel at progressive governance based on participatory democracy, transparency, sustainable development, and innovative management. Our ideas and our actions will embody and affirm justice, equity, diversity, inclusion and fairness."*



Office of the Mayor

Matthew T. Ryan

Instead of basing decisions on input from only a few key powerbrokers, a progressive government embraces true democracy – we ask citizens to participate, a process of decision making that emphasizes the involvement of the entire community. Participatory democracy not only upholds the founding ideals of this country, it also ensures the responsiveness of municipal government to our citizens' concerns.

Two years ago, when I came into office, the City lacked a consistent forum by which residents could share ideas, take collective action and address common needs and concerns.

My administration seized the opportunity to give our citizens a voice in all that happens in city government. Through a lot of hard work, the Binghamton Neighborhood Assemblies Project became the cornerstone of our administration's commitment to participation. With partners across the public and non-profit sectors, we secured a federal grant and made VISTA a household name. The project has empowered the residents of our seven neighborhoods to convene and lead regular forums. The purpose is to forge relationships with each other, interface with municipal leaders, and carry out common projects, including campaigns for neighborhood beautification, community safety, and environmental conservation. Today, I am proud to say that the Neighborhood Assemblies are up and running throughout the City.

Each Assembly has developed and operates according to its own decision-making process, the results of which are as varied as the needs of our different neighborhoods. Some examples: Last year, the members of the Southside East Assembly identified community safety as a common neighborhood concern, and for the first time participated in National Night Out, an annual, national awareness campaign that promotes community safety through neighborhood block parties all across the City.

The Northside Assembly, as we all know, has focused on the long-standing absence of a neighborhood grocery store. This last summer, Assembly members generated awareness around this issue, by organizing a monthly farmer's market. Through collaborations with Cornell Cooperative Extension and the Northside Binghamton Business Association, the Northside Assembly featured more than 10 local produce vendors in the parking areas of Big Lots and Anthony's Restaurant on four occasions between August and October 2007. As impressed as I am with their efforts, I have not strayed from the true goal: a permanent grocery store. Working with City Council and County legislators, I promise to continue advocating the interests of North Side residents to prominent developers and investors. Access to healthy food is a matter of equity and justice, and whatever development plans unfold around the North Side and the Brandywine Corridor, I promise to keep the grocery store at the center of our development plans and negotiations.



Office of the Mayor

Matthew T. Ryan

For all their achievements in enabling participatory democracy throughout Binghamton, the Neighborhood Assemblies find direction and consistency through a common organizational body: their respective guiding committees. Each Assembly's guiding committee is comprised of three-to-five residents who have shown exceptional dedication to this initiative. With support from the VISTAs, the guiding committee members organize the monthly Assembly meetings, as well as particular Assembly service projects. This enables our citizens to take part in decision-making at the neighborhood and municipal levels. Truly, they are Restoring the Pride in our City.

To further support participatory democracy, last year I promised the City would set aside \$70,000 of our annual Community Development Block grant for the Neighborhood Development Project Fund. We delivered on this promise. This new Fund will support neighborhood projects conceived and endorsed by citizen groups and human service organizations. This month Assemblies are reviewing final proposals before passing them along to the Council members and City Hall for mutual approval. I look forward to seeing the fruits of such a closer collaboration between City hall, City Council, and those we serve.

And the Assemblies' are not the only means we use to encourage and cultivate participatory democracy. From River Trail development, to downtown development, to greening the city—we've consistently encouraged and empowered residents to take a more active role in community affairs. The results have been impressive. For example, consider the Shade Tree Commission, which we reinstated last year. The diligent volunteers produced and distributed educational materials, raised \$6000 in donations, and helped us plant 13% more trees than in 2006—surpassing the 10% goal I announced at last year's Address.

This is but one example of how we approach local governance. Our goal is always to include more citizens in the process.

Instead of conducting business as usual, we have embraced innovative management, introducing new organizational tools and practices to optimize the efficiency with which we deliver core services.

When I stood before you in these Chambers two years ago, I promised quick government reform in the first 365 days that would consolidate services and increase productivity. Some doubted we could achieve our goals in such a short time, calling them too ambitious. I heard of veteran staffers whispering that we promised too much, and that we couldn't overcome the status-quo.



Office of the Mayor

Matthew T. Ryan

But we did. Every promise made for innovative management, we fulfilled. The website was overhauled in six months, increasing City Hall's accessibility. Tax collection and enforcement services were consolidated to the County in eight months, saving hundreds of thousands annually. And our phone system and workstations were upgraded in twelve months, improving productivity and boosting workforce morale.

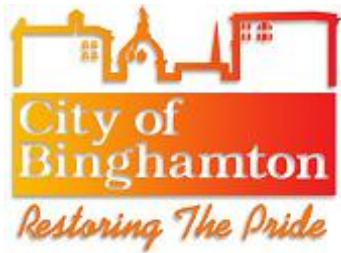
It became clear to our colleagues that this administration was different. We outlawed the phrase, "can't do it" and we said "yes we can." We raised the level of expectations. We emphasized teamwork and collaboration. We stressed that together we need to push forward with tough, smart reforms that would improve how we serve the community. Many here at City Hall came to believe in this approach, and many today continue to embrace this commitment to change. In fact, earlier today, the Blight Prevention Task Force met for the first time, the culmination of a blight prevention initiative that I announced at last year's Address. The initiative included new legislation for vacant property registration, the commitment of resources for enforcement through a dedicated vacant property officer, and the restructuring of municipal management. And we folded the Code Enforcement office under the Building Bureau. All three components were successfully implemented last year, and the task force will carry this effort forward in the years to come.

So as we move into our third year, I am glad to report that the spirit of innovative reform is fully alive, and its momentum is strong. And tonight, I want to make it clear what additional reform measures residents can expect in the coming months.

By the end of the Fall, I promise that residents will have the convenience of paying water bills and parking tickets online.

By the end of the year, I promise that City Hall will no longer be storing boxes of paper, but archiving digital files.

I promise tonight to move toward 100% transparency of all city projects and initiatives, a goal which I am committed to reach by the end of this year. Reports, summaries, meeting minutes, grant applications—all of the records, your records, will be available for review online.



Office of the Mayor

Matthew T. Ryan

And if you recall, two years ago I stood before you pointing to the large hole that existed in the Broome County's GIS maps, and we promised to fill that gap. We have come a long way on this project, and next month I will introduce legislation to the Council to approve an inter-municipal agreement between the County and City that consolidates services in a County-wide GIS Division. This consolidation effort will save the city money. We will not have to hire our own GIS specialist since that expertise and capacity already exists at the County. By the end of the year, and with the help of this new tool, we promise greater operational efficiencies in the delivery of key city services. For example, we will have installed a GIS-supported pavement-management program that takes the politics out of road reconstruction, and greatly increases the productivity and efficiency of our summer road crews.

When you engage the residents and tap their knowledge and experience, and when you approach public management with innovation and determination, every policy and initiative becomes an opportunity to embrace, for the benefit of the whole community.

Let me highlight what I mean by referencing our success with the State's Restore NY grant program.

The Restore NY grant program, as many now know, was announced by the state in August 2006. This three-year program is a rare opportunity for municipalities to remove blight, promote homeownership, and facilitate commercial development. Whereas most governments saw this as a chance to take down buildings, we took this as an opportunity to build a healthy neighborhood strategy.

When Restore One was announced, we seized this opportunity to address the frustrations shared by residents in the initial meetings of the Neighborhood Assemblies. We creatively used the Restore money to regain control over a dozen of the notorious MBBA properties, like 7 Mason on the East Side. As we implemented the grant award, our project team thought creatively about the demolition process. Before demolition, we worked with preservation advocates to salvage materials, and then we coordinated with the fire department to allow special on-site trainings.

After demolition—and staying true to our principles—we devised a transparent process to resell the properties for one dollar. We formed an inclusive committee of community leaders, residents, Council reps, and City Hall staff and empowered this group to review and select the most appropriate redevelopment proposals. Thanks to the Restore grant and our approach, a few victims of the 2006 floods will start over again this summer, as new homeowners in the City of Binghamton.



Office of the Mayor

Matthew T. Ryan

Because of the work of the Restore NY Project Team, which coordinated efforts across six departments—legal, finance, engineering, fire, planning, and parks—blight is being removed, new homeowners are being recruited, development opportunities are being offered, neighborhood safety is being improved—and yes, pride is being restored. Thank you to the Restore team.

But that's not all. Last summer, it became clear that our actions in Round One caught the attention of State agencies. And in the Fall, the State made a dramatic decision. Based on our success here in Binghamton, the state announced it would return control of all MBBA properties back to municipalities, including Buffalo, Syracuse, Plattsburgh, and Binghamton. This decision finally gives these communities the chance to remove blighted vacant properties that for more than four years languished in legal limbo, negatively affecting the health, value, and safety of our neighborhoods. I'm proud our approach here in Binghamton has mobilized positive change all across this state, and created new opportunities for our healthy Neighborhood Initiative.

However, the prospect of regaining control of more than 40 blighted, MBBA properties in Round 2 was a wake-up call. We knew we would not have the capacity to handle this volume, so last Fall, as we anticipated the most recent grant award, we began reaching out to partners across the private, non-profit and public sectors. The reception was impressive. Earlier this month, we announced the Healthy Neighborhood Collaboration, an unprecedented alliance of regional and local developers, realtors, financial institutions, trade unions, and housing advocates. This group also includes workforce agencies who understand the potential in youth trades training and the Southern Tier Homebuilders and Remodelers Association, who want to help work on the dream of homeownership for more of our citizens. This collaboration immediately boosts our housing capacity by 300%, and going forward, we pledge to make homeownership an option for residents of all incomes.

As we proceed with this wide network of partners, and as we look to prepare our Restore NY application for round three, we will not forget the goals of green design and construction, livable wages, and more youth involvement in this program.

As the Restore NY project illustrates, when we stay true to our values and this particular management approach, it results in benefits for the entire community. I'm proud of the work we accomplished together with this specific initiative, and I thank our partners in the State for giving us this opportunity.



Office of the Mayor

Matthew T. Ryan

More than two years ago I promised to bring together the arts, academia, businesses, and City Hall to provide new complementary and collaborative opportunities to enjoy Downtown Binghamton. We enlisted the support of partners across the private, public and non-profit sectors.

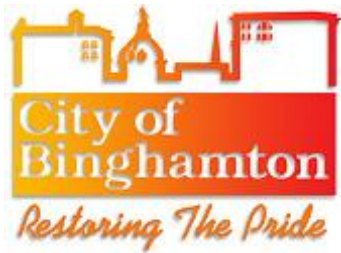
Beginning with the arts community, I've stated many times that they deserve our praise. But they deserve our financial support as well, which is why in our 2008 budget, I included \$25,000 to begin a more formal expression of our community's appreciation and acknowledgement of our arts sector. Not only does art and culture heighten the spirit and enrich our lives in so many ways, but it remains a powerful economic engine and one of our region's strengths. So tonight, I pledge to continue this support, expand it in the years to come, and I thank City Council for embracing this shared goal.

The success of a downtown hinges largely on the success of its small businesses. By pushing forward with a National Historic Trust Main Street Program, we've empowered approximately 50 downtown stakeholders to assume a more active role in strengthening the integrity and diversity of our downtown small business sector. Eighteen months ago we explored this concept together, and the group named Binghamton Downtown is now incorporated and ready to make a difference. I applaud the commitment shown by this group of partners, and we pledge tonight to continue supporting their efforts. These efforts will ensure that the beauty that is Binghamton architecture will be respected and celebrated.

A city's commitment to its downtown can also be measured by its commitment to maintaining and upgrading its infrastructure. In this regard, our commitment is unparalleled.

In March, the Downtown Wifi zone will finally go live. In planning for this service, we made sure that it would reflect our principles, specifically our commitment to equity and justice. So I'm proud to announce tonight that users will have free, unlimited access to the internet through the Binghamton WiFi Project. And thanks to the generosity of our partner, Plexicomm, the coverage will extend a bit farther than originally planned, into the neighborhood around Columbus Park and Columbus Learning School.

We also have coordinated closely with federal, state and county agencies around the \$10 million intermodal project, and we've pledged to make complementary improvements and upgrades to ensure the success of this central transportation hub.



Office of the Mayor

Matthew T. Ryan

In our first two budgets, we have committed a total of \$4 million for needed rehabilitation to our downtown parking garages, and construction will begin this summer. Also scheduled to begin this Fall is the \$4.2 million Court Street Gateway Project, which will dramatically enhance our downtown corridor while accommodating different levels of mobility and all forms of transportation.

We continue an aggressive path towards revitalizing our waterfronts. We've engaged citizens through the River Trails Commission, which advises the city on waterfront investments and river trail expansion. Last month, we submitted applications totaling more than \$1million for waterfront development, including the final phase of the Chenango river trail from Cheri Lindsay Park to Ostiningo. Later this year, we will begin design on the Susquehanna River trail that will connect Confluence Park to the Rockbottom Dam Park. We've partnered with the County and our federal representatives to more fully understand the potential of converting this dangerous dam to a whitewater park. Removing this obstacle would open up more than 20 miles of waterways for recreational use and fulfill a Department of Environmental Conservation goal of providing a ladder for our migrating fish populations. This project, which builds on our region's strengths, would be a powerful engine for growth in our recreational tourism industry. Just a few weeks ago, County and City officials toured the waterfront with Congressman Hinchey and he understood its potential. He has pledged to advocate for the necessary funds for the next phase of this sustainable development project.

Some have doubted the investments along our waterways. However, evidence from many cities confirms that smart, public investments along the waterfront will eventually lure private investment. We now have our own evidence to point to—the Regency Hotel.

The Regency Hotel is just one of the many difficult challenges this administration inherited. But as with all challenges, and staying true to our principles, we rolled-up our sleeves, acted with determination and foresight, and successfully turned this downtown liability into an asset. The proposed "Radisson River Trail Hotel and Convention Center" is proof of the inclination of investors to embrace the promise of waterfront development. I'm proud that the City Council worked so closely and cooperatively with my administration on this project. Together, we made difficult decisions, held faith, and ultimately resolved a challenge that had troubled downtown for more than two decades. Tonight, I want to thank them for their true partnership on this issue.

Friday we will open bids to demolish the remaining Ross Building. We tried to save this historic structure, but unfortunately determined that it is too deteriorated to make rehabilitation a possibility. But tonight I can



Office of the Mayor

Matthew T. Ryan

state with confidence we will have significant redevelopment plans proposed for this corner. There is already serious interest in this property, and I am very optimistic tonight that within three months, after the request for proposal process, we will be announcing a new and impressive construction project, which will be symbolic of the commitments being made by private investors to our downtown revitalization efforts.

So all the efforts of many partners are paying off. And if we stay committed to change and loyal to a principled vision, we will continue to attract jobs, private investment, retain young professionals, and new homeowners.

In fact, during 2007, more than 12 small businesses have located and opened in our downtown. Granite Holdings, whose relocation of its corporate headquarters brought more than 80 jobs to the MetroCenter, is in its next stage of expansion. Soon a new high-end French restaurant will open at the Kilmer Building, a project made possible by the critical-gap financing provided by the Binghamton Local Development Corporation.

Like this new venture, many other smaller businesses have had some assistance from our revamped BLDC. This board is incredible in its fiscal responsibility and its creativeness, and I am so proud of the commitment they have made to promote economic development in our city. They have reviewed and revised all loan program guidelines, adopted a marketing plan, and each dollar borrowed from the BLDC is scrutinized by bankers, business leaders, and City Council representatives. The BLDC is but one component of our economic development capabilities that deserve tremendous credit for their very broad efforts that are reaping great outcomes for our city.

New investors and entrepreneurs, excited by the vision and governance of this administration, can also be inspired by the impressive work of the Court Street Redevelopment Group. The group is comprised of five private sector entities. Over the last ten years, the Court Street Redevelopment Group has purchased and renovated several commercial properties on the block of Court Street between Exchange and Carroll Streets, a key gateway into the city's downtown. Most recently, they have taken a lead role in renovating the old Bern furniture building into the County's Business Incubator project. Their focused efforts downtown demonstrate how engaged individuals and companies can make a significant difference in the health of our entire community, and we appreciate their contributions toward a vital downtown.



Office of the Mayor

Matthew T. Ryan

This coordinated, engaged approach informed by progressive principles is not limited to downtown, nor are we neglecting the commercial centers in other neighborhoods. Major projects in other key neighborhoods include: (1) The Charles Street Business Park in the First Ward; (2) The Southside Commons, (3) and The Brandywine Corridor.

The Charles Street Business Park will complement the large construction projects planned along Clinton Street this year, including the Boys and Girls Club, the Mental Health Clinic, and the rehabilitation of the Old Marble Grill. These development projects all point to a more vital and vibrant First Ward Business District.

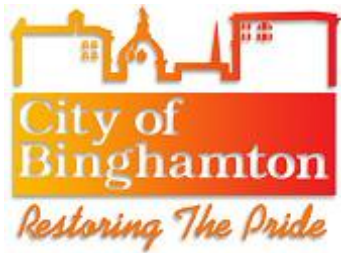
The Southside Commons, a project possible through the Support of Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo, will provide a neighborhood gathering space and municipal parking lot that when completed, will greatly enhance the Southside Business district. Progress has been unfortunately slow, but tonight we are proud to announce that acquisition of an important piece of property crucial to this project is in its final stages.

Finally, developing the Brandywine Corridor has the interest of many private and public stakeholders looking to revitalize the STOWE Brownfield and adjacent areas. We commit to working closely with these partners and ensuring that the expressed needs and interests of North Side residents and business owners are fully met.

Another principle of our mission statement holds that sustainable development should characterize the future of the entire city. Last year we introduced the Healthy Neighborhoods Approach, a community development strategy that is both comprehensive and focused. This approach recognizes we must enhance each of the central components of a thriving neighborhood. These components are:

- a well-maintained and upgraded infrastructure
- the removal of blight
- the beautification of our public spaces
- opportunities for safe and affordable housing
- workforce development
- and youth development

We have made great strides in implementing this approach, and I look forward to additional progress in 2008. For a moment, I want to focus on one of these components in particular: Youth development.



Office of the Mayor

Matthew T. Ryan

In 2006, I pledged to create a municipal youth bureau, and we did. In 2007, I pledged to launch a downtown youth media project, and we fulfilled that promise as well. Youth In Motion is a youth media skills program that emerged as an innovative collaboration between the Bureau, community agencies, the Neighborhood Assemblies Project, and On Point Productions – a private state-of-the-art recording studio in Downtown. Since last February, participating youth have produced videos for Planned Parenthood, for Carlisle residents concerned about the safety of children walking to school, for Cornell Cooperative Extension’s CITY project, and also produced an intern recruitment video for the Neighborhood Network Computer Learning Center at Saratoga Apartments. Tonight I want to thank the three young women who were the visionary forces behind these productions—Janeece, Sabrasia, and Nyesha.

Tonight I want to make it clear that we will continue to engage, empower, and invest in our youth. In fact, our Youth Bureau is currently coordinating two new projects out of the Liberty Street Police Substation on the North Side. With participation from the Police Department, the VISTA program, BOCES, and the community, the youth are turning an empty, underused substation into a workshop and meeting space. The basement, which is already full of more than fifty donated bicycles, will host “Fresh Cycles,” a program in which youth participants will learn basic bike maintenance skills and earn a free bike upon graduation. Also at the station, more than 30 youth are meeting monthly to research how Binghamton can better provide safe and accessible options for skateboarding and BMX biking. The “Bike and Board Youth Commission” will present their short and long-term recommendations to city officials this coming summer, and we will work to make these recommendations a reality. Already illustrating leadership, a sense of responsibility and awareness of the community and its history, these young adults have recently made a great suggestion to rededicate the substation. Tonight we stand with them, and next week we will introduce legislation asking City Council to officially rename the space as the Lee Barta Community Center.

Our young people have proved that if given the opportunity they can and will demonstrate the leadership and creativity that will strengthen our community for years to come.

Our sustainable approach to creating Healthy Neighborhoods also requires that we green our public spaces. The City is dedicated to not only preserving such green spaces, but also expanding them. Look at Center City’s Columbus Park, only a few blocks from here. Last winter, the lot just east of the park was vacant and blighted, littered with broken glass, old tires, and shoulder-high weeds. Where others saw abandonment, Paul Harger saw possibility. Paul’s efforts to clear the lot for a new education garden first drew puzzled stares and skeptics. But he quickly earned applause and converts. With the help of students at Columbus



Office of the Mayor

Matthew T. Ryan

Learning School, volunteers and neighbors, Paul's efforts were nothing short of magical. The new handicapped-accessible garden educated youth, instilled community pride, and inspired copycats. A second Center City garden project at 15 Pine Street included the participation of over 30 residents as well many organizations from across the City. Who would have thought that so much bounty could be harvested from such a desolate, neglected lot.

As much as we've accomplished, there are sobering and difficult financial challenges we face at the city, level. The future of our city hinges on the decisions we make over the next few years, and it is critically important that we seize the opportunity now to ensure a more healthy financial future.

Decisions in Washington have placed a nearly impossible burden on cities and towns all across America. Here in Binghamton over the last five years, we've witnessed drastic cuts in programs that fund community development, housing, law enforcement and transportation. That is simply inexcusable, and the mismanagement of our tax dollars by an incompetent Bush administration is a dramatic illustration of how Washington has failed completely in responding to the needs of the American public.

Just two days ago Mayor Bloomberg, Governor Rendell and Governor Schwarzenegger formed a bipartisan coalition to put pressure on Presidential candidates to make infrastructure a national priority. Today, I pledge to stand with my fellow Mayors and other elected officials who have joined from across the aisle and around the country to demand that our money go to where it is needed most – back into our communities and our crumbling infrastructure.

Decisions at Albany also impact our local finances. Though the poor judgment and political gridlock that characterized Albany for so many years has only recently been turning around, the fallout from those failed years continues to burden New Yorkers both upstate and down. As alarms sound in Washington over an economic recession, and warnings are issued from Albany over declining revenues, we must show the courage now to put the city on a responsible path toward financial health and security.

Not even mentioning Washington and Albany, the pressures faced by our local taxpayers is, to a large extent, beyond the control of the Mayor or City Council. Over 70% of the local tax burden is tied to the County and School District taxes. We have practiced smart, fiscal management to minimize City costs over the last two years by pushing forward with operational reforms and consolidation of services. To offset local



Office of the Mayor

Matthew T. Ryan

costs, we have successfully tapped millions in grants to assist with housing, waterfront development, infrastructure, and youth programs. The Commissioner of Public Works secured more than \$2 million in FEMA reimbursements from the flood repairs of 2006 and 2007. We've begun to restore stability to our fund balance – which declined from \$9 million in 2000 to \$2.8 million in 2005—a crucial step in preserving the integrity of our bond rating. And we stopped the questionable raiding of the CDBG budget to fund essential city services, which not only restored integrity and fairness to our financial planning, but also returned community dollars to where they belong—our neighborhoods.

I think it is also important to point out the cost-managing measures we accomplished through the last round of labor negotiations. This is an administration that values the workforce and believes in fair compensation. From the sanitation worker hauling trash to the officer patrolling our neighborhoods, from the clerk reviewing permits to the summer crews beautifying our parks—we honor and dignify the good work of all city employees. And in order to provide compensation that supports working families, we made it clear to our unions at the onset of negotiations that we needed their full cooperation in meeting the challenges ahead. Most responded very admirably. I want to thank tonight the leadership and membership in CSEA, Fire and the Teamsters Blue Collar for recognizing our common goals and for making difficult but important concessions to help us manage these serious financial pressures. Your commitment to the taxpayers does not go unnoticed.

But with storm clouds circling in Washington and Albany, we cannot be fooled into thinking that minor reforms here and better negotiations there will solve our problems. As I stated during my 2008 Budget Address last August, this will be the year for political leadership and candid community dialogue. Fortunately, with a new City Council comes great promise for progress, and it gives us a rare opportunity to tackle these serious challenges with respect, cooperation and thoughtfulness. The expectations by residents are high—as they should be. So tonight, I am proud to announce a new City Hall-City Council initiative, “The Partnership for Change.”

The Partnership for Change, in essence, reflects the same approach to governance this administration has committed to over the last two years. The same approach that scored the impressive list of accomplishments I touched on earlier in my speech.

The Commissions will include representation from City Hall, City Council and community leaders to ensure full participation in the democratic process by all relevant parties. The work of the Commissions will be fully



Office of the Mayor

Matthew T. Ryan

transparent—meetings will be held here in City Hall open to the public and meeting minutes will be available for review on the city website. The Commissions will meet monthly for the next six to twelve months.

The first Commission will look closely at all fixed personnel costs, but with a focus on Police and Fire. Police and fire costs account for approximately 60% of our general fund expenditures, so if we ever hope to produce real savings, we need to now turn our focus here. This is not an easy discussion, so we're making sure all parties are at the table, including police and fire management, union representatives, City Council members and residents. We must work together to find affordable, long-term solutions so we can continue to deliver the wide range of essential services needed to create a safe community of healthy neighborhoods.

The second Commission will study Sanitation. The fees from green bags account for less than 30% of the costs of trash removal, but this same fee system is a smart and effective incentive for residents to recycle. We have millions of dollars in sanitation equipment. We have a transfer station that needs to be relocated or rebuilt. We currently pay a private firm to accept our lawn debris, which then turns it into a profitable commodity. This Commission will explore building a composting facility, which would give us a product we could re-use in parks, our golf course, and community gardens. And once again, we will be looking at all operations with an eye toward efficiency and cost-savings.

We can reform operations and manage our fixed personnel costs better, but the surest path to financial health and stability must be broader. That is why the remaining two commissions deal with the other side of the coin of municipal finances: the private sector. The Commission on Sustainable Development and Smart Growth will consider how to attract private investment and grow small businesses. Additionally, the Commission on Housing and Homeownership will determine how to expand the tax-base and the value of the local housing market.

Together, all four commissions will help us move beyond our increasingly burdensome fiscal constraints, so that we can ensure the overall health of our community, while holding the line on taxes.

While we have taken great steps toward restoring the pride in our City, the journey has not always been easy. Our inherited burdens, as well as some unforeseen circumstances, have been daunting obstacles. And another significant challenge remains –the stubbornness of those who oppose change and are critical without constructive input.



Office of the Mayor

Matthew T. Ryan

I like the way Teddy Roosevelt responded to those critics:

It is not the critic who counts; not the person who points out how the strong person stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the person who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that their place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.

Moving as a community into 2008, we already know that additional challenges await us. But we also have much to be inspired by. If we build upon the same spirit we have embraced the last two years – working collaboratively with a commitment to participatory democracy, transparency, innovative management, and sustainable development – I trust we will continue to produce the change we want. We are a City making progress toward a safer, stronger, greener, more vibrant community. And tonight I say, Keep Moving Forward.

Thank you very much for joining us, and good night.