



**STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS
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EASTON PA
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GROWING PRIDE IN EASTON

I always liked Robert Kennedy's vision for a good city. He said, "The city is not just housing and stores. It is not just education and employment, parks and theaters, banks and shops. It is a place where people should be able to live in dignity and security and harmony, where people can see and know each other, where children can play and adults work together and join in the pleasures and responsibilities of the place where they live." Thank you for taking the time to participate in our city.

Governance is not a solitary act. Success depends on collaboration with many others. Many thanks are in order before I begin the State of the City, especially to all of you. As I look around the room every single person can take credit for being a player in this State of the City.

I would like to acknowledge the continuing support of Easton residents. I am honored by your confidence, trust, and thus the opportunity to serve again as your Mayor.

For the sustaining support of my wife Pam who is central to whatever success I have attained.

Thank you to my unbelievable staff, city employees and elected officials who share the vision and desire to make Easton a better place for all people.

Thank you to the thousands of residents who give of their time and talents to city authorities, boards and commissions, and volunteer in our city.

We have accomplished so much in the past few years that it is difficult to keep this short.

Through hard work, unprecedented partnership and a shared vision... we've set our City on a course for a better tomorrow for everyone who lives here, works here, or chooses to raise a family in Easton. Yet, as we reflect on our progress, I am reminded of the words of Will Rogers who said: "Even if you're on the right track, you'll still get run over if you just sit there." But there is much more to do. I am also proud that we have maintained a policy that I put into place four years ago -- every decision is the "best decision for the long term, not a political term."

This is the reality before us. While we celebrate four years of achievement, we cannot rest on what we've already done or we risk getting run over by this big locomotive we call the national recession.

Our Administration will never stop dreaming big dreams for Easton. We need to know that nothing real is easy, there will be bumps ahead, but sacrifice is a requirement for progress but as elected leaders we have a responsibility to balance hope and optimism with realism.

This is an exciting time in Easton. Over the past four years, we have made real progress on the key issues that matter most to Easton's families. The Urban Land Institute makes this powerful observation: "In a global world, cities have become more -- not less -- important. They really matter...They are increasingly the "wealth of nations." "Whether a city performs well or poorly is not its location or history, but rather the choices its leaders make...quality of decision making is important and quality of life is critical."

Above all else, keeping residents and visitors safe will always be priority number one. Violent crime continues to march downward -- down 37% in just five years. In 2006 UCR Part I incidents were 1,713 and last year there were 1,075. Last year's overall decrease in crime was 11.4% with a decrease in incidents from 4,553 to 4,035.

It's these crimes that gave us a bad reputation as a dangerous place and, for too long, instilled the deep-seated fear that drove families away and kept families from locating here.

It's not time to celebrate—absolutely not. But it is also not a time for cynicism. It's time to acknowledge that Easton is becoming safer for families—it's time to believe in a safer city and to work even harder because we know the progress is real.

Four years ago we had 52 sworn officers and today there are 63. While we have come far, now is not the time to take our foot off the gas. We are also committed to increasing direct, positive interaction between patrol officers and the community—getting officers out of cars – walking on your street and on bikes and motorcycles.

Today, I want to especially thank our police officers. It hasn't been easy—it's been rough to constantly overcome the reputation of the past.

I will continue the fight against illegal guns and the violent criminals who use them. The vast majority of the guns used in crimes in our country, are not purchased by the actors, they are either stolen or purchased by a straw buyer for the actor. With Mayors across the country we will urge the state legislature to pass our Lost and Stolen Guns bill and urge the Federal government to increase the standards for background checks. We are not talking about Second Amendment rights, we are talking about guns that are no longer in the hands of their legal owner or the person that purchased them – we are talking about common sense gun reform. Mayors work with police departments everyday to curb crime, unfortunately our legislators don't -- but when there is an incident, like last year's brutal killing of Officer Laslo in Freemansburg, they all show up at the funeral service. Yet they are politically afraid to give our police officers the tools they need to curb illegal guns – we need common sense gun reform legislation.

I especially want to thank Chief Larry Palmer for his strong focus, leadership, and the ongoing stability he's brought to the department. Chief Palmer will be retiring this year, maybe even in just a few weeks or months, so I would like to publicly thank him for his leadership in taking the Easton Police Department not only the status of a fully-accredited and re-accredited department but also to a department that is respected by their peers in law enforcement and our residents. I have known Chief Palmer since he was an eighth grade student in my class. I was Mayor when he came on the force. He is professional in all he does; he is a man of character and integrity.

Our professionally paid full-time fire department answered more than 2,000 emergency calls and more than 650 non-emergency calls. Not only have our firefighters risked life and limb to save others, they've done a remarkable job educating the community about fire safety. Last year alone they held public education events that were attended by more than 3,700 adults and 3,000 children. They also participated in 283 training classes accounting for over 5,600 hours of training. They are also credited with saving more than \$8.5 million in property.

At this time I would like to single out one of our firefighters. Joe Piro retired last week after serving more than 37 years in the Fire Department. Joe also served as the President of the Fire Union last year and helped to restore a feeling of cooperation between the union and management. I wish him well in his retirement, he will be missed.

As a cleaner and safer city we are turning our attention to growing our city. Economic development – the retention of jobs, the creation of jobs and expansion of the tax base must be the highest priority of the City. We must be a best place to do business. We must do economic development better and smarter than other cities. I am happy to report that Easton is recognized throughout the state as a city that knows how to do economic development.

Four years ago we separated the Planning and Economic Development Department giving

Economic Development and Community Development a full time director and full time attention. We also placed the Easton Redevelopment Authority and the Greater Easton Development Partnership under this position so that all economic and community development fell under the responsibility of one person who answered to the Administration. Today I am happy to report that this structure has worked better than I could ever have imagined.

In the last four years so much has happened in economic development in our city that I can not take the time to fully report it here today. Suffice it to say that projects like Silk: A Creative Community; Pomeroy's; Lipkin's; A&D Tile and W.E.S.T. buildings; the Intermodal; Mt. Vernon; Neston-Heights and dozens of small businesses have opened. Just as importantly we are creating more than 100 new living spaces in downtown. I do not know of a good city that does not have a good downtown. A vibrant, 24/7 downtown requires full time residents. These projects also generate hundreds of short-term construction jobs, several hundred full-time jobs when completed and more than \$300 million in public and private investment in our city – this number representing the last four years and projects currently on the books. This investment came to us for a lot of reasons: a better reputation which is now where people want to be a part of the revitalization; a hard working staff that has now attracted more than \$40 million in economic development grants and more than \$70 million in grants overall.

Let's also remember that not all economic development takes place in the downtown. There are three that I would like to point out – R&R Provision Company, located in the West Ward. When so many other companies chose to relocate to the fertile farmlands in our region Rocky Rogers made a decision to stay in the City's West Ward with his nationally known Scrapple.

On the Southside the long vacant Shapiro factory was demolished and made way for our first major project under our smart code. Today CVS, Subway and Dunkin' Donuts have provided a beautiful urban shopping area. Also on the Southside the long vacant Hilltop Café found a new owner in Frank Tolotta who completely renovated the building inside and out and his final inspection is scheduled for March 1st with an opening of the Sole Mio Italian Grille shortly thereafter.

More importantly, on the Community Development side we are driving reinvestment in neighborhoods by strengthening code enforcement and providing targeted incentives for homebuyers who invest in vacant homes. Amy Boccadora is one of our proud new homeowners who participated in our highly acclaimed Green Rehab Program which takes blighted vacant homes in our neighborhoods, puts people to work fixing them and selling them to qualified and bankable first time homebuyers. Our HOME and NSP Programs are extremely successful in the renovation of homes and neighborhoods.

Working side by side and planning our future course is the Planning and Codes Department. In addition to preparing to release the process for updating our Comprehensive Plan this year the department was equally busy enforcing code compliance following up on more than 1,319 code complaints (up from 1,144 last year) which resulted in 639 violations and building permits and inspections.

Building was also brisk last year with 451 building permits issued; 48 new construction permits; 124 Zoning Permits for business uses; 92 Zoning Permits for new construction and a total of more than 1,061 permit applications

The Planning Department was also heavily involved in all of the major private projects and several public projects including the Karl Stirner Arts Trail and our first dog park.

Coming off an 18 month full court press on the Hubcap Store the Planning and Codes Department led the charge against Blighted Properties, identifying and now certifying the 20 worse vacant properties in our city. This year we are launching the Nuisance Property Task Force to put a full court press on slum landlords and occupied properties that have a negative impact on

a neighborhood. Just this week our Director testified before the State House Urban Affairs Committee to seek stronger legislation to help us combat slumlords and absentee landlords.

There is one department that the Director and I took a lot of calls this past year but it was well worth the complaining and whining that we received. The Public Works Department is responsible for a number of areas but the most important area is that of our public infrastructure. In the last four years it is safe to say that we have spent more money and time on infrastructure than in the last decade or more. It's not glitzy but it is definitely needed most of which was replaced was more than 80 years old. Yes we tried some people's patience but our city is safer and a whole lot smoother.

Major projects included:

- Complete construction of the Bushkill Street Bridge
- Complete construction of the Hugh Moore Bridge
- The waterfront improvements project
- Completed decorative lighting installations on College Avenue and Pine Street
- The Heil Pool construction project with new deck and shade shelters and the installation of a spray park.
- Completed Eddyside Pool upgrades including shade shelters and playground equipment
- Complete upgrades of the Milton Street and Mauch Chunk playgrounds
- Completed the capital improvement program at the WWTP
- Continued our urban re-forestation program Planting approximately 125 new trees throughout the city
- Worked with ESWA for the installation of 4 miles of new water main and associated road work and ADA upgrades and total replacement of UGI high-pressure natural gas lines and services for a safer city.
- Installed new pedestrian signal controls at 4th and Ferry
- Continued installation of new ornamental street signs & poles as well as continued streetscape improvements such as decorative trash receptacles, street trees, and benches in order to help provide the best environment for the City to achieve its economic development objectives.
- One program that I am truly proud of is the RecycleBank program that rewards residents for recycling which will help reduce domestic waste and increasing recycling and associated grant opportunities. As an example since November when the program started our household is credited with recycling 205 pounds of waste and we have earned 813 points that we can redeem for products and services.

Internally we successfully hired individuals to vacant positions and our Human Resources department we busy maintaining all of testing, hiring, training and personnel issues such as payroll, insurances and union negotiations. Last year we successfully negotiated the FOP contract without arbitration.

The two-member staff in our HR department so a fabulous job in overseeing all tasks including payroll, insurances, union negotiations, civil service, etc. Last year we successfully negotiated a new three-year FOP contract without going to arbitration. HR is a tough job.

Easton is quickly becoming a destination for the arts, tourism and entertainment. The challenge before us is to celebrate, coordinate, and support the arts. Urban economist Richard Florida has introduced the creative class. Composed of highly educated professionals, they regard lifestyle as particularly important in choosing a place to live. The members of this class demand social interaction, culture, nightlife, diversity, and authenticity.

Our vision for Easton as an Arts, Entertainment and Tourism economy is right on track and Silk: A Creative Community is testament to our vision and provides the framework for the vision of our future. This vision also led individuals like film editor Gershon Hinckson to our city.

Today he is the founder of the ever-popular Movies at the Mill.

We are also realizing the benefits of our festivals and special events and last year we formed the M.O.O.S.E. to oversee, coordinate and initiate our special events. The opening of our new waterfront and festival venue will greatly aid in the promotion of these events which brings people to our city, many for the first time. Last Saturday I can't tell you how many young people came up to me at the snowboard event to tell me that it was their first time in Easton.

In its first year the MOOSE brought free movies to the neighborhood parks, concerts in the amphitheatre and new stage in Scott Park, revived Community Spirit Day, and even held events like Biking With the Mayor. Expansion of these events this year will include more fitness days, celebration of the Annual Jazz Day in April, an International Arts and Music Festival in June, a Hispanic Cultural Festival in August and comedy nights at the amphitheatre.

Finally, despite a tough budget, we are committed to fully funding our Main Street program, the Ambassadors and our Weed and Seed program. These programs have added significantly to the economic welfare of our city and the quality of life in our neighborhoods.

But in 2012, I certainly agree with the Red Queen in Alice in Wonderland, "it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that." Our staff is up to the challenge.

Successful cities require effective governance, but government alone cannot create successful cities. Working together we can overcome the worse recession since the Great Depression. That's where the growing credibility of our financial management is effective.

All of the accomplishments highlighted and holding the line on taxes for four years has been made possible through a finance department whose mission is to provide the resources for a clean and safe city. Important milestones have been achieved as we work toward our goal of financial sustainability. These milestones include:

A General Fund budget that does not include one-shot revenues. These types of revenues are placed in the capital improvement fund we created in 2009 to fund equipment and capital needs of the city.

In 2010 Standard and Poor's raised our bond rating from a BBB to A- a remarkable accomplishment when most other municipalities were seeing decreases. Last year when we were floating our 2011 bond they reported "S&P further predicts a stable outlook for Easton andif the City continues its strong financial performance, we would consider an upgrade."

We live within our means. Our budgeting process is based on the amount of revenue we can expect. With strong financial oversight we have ended each year with a surplus. Our 2010 budget audit reported a \$534,600 surplus that was carried over to last year. We fully expect the 2011 surplus to exceed our forecast. That audit will be available in June. Last year we also successfully re-issued prior debt at a lower, more favorable rate without extending the term.

We also issued a \$1.05 million bond for much needed infrastructure projects. Continued aggressive collection of past due accounts. After re-evaluating pension investments the city switched pension fund financial advisor in 2010 and last year, despite uncertainty in the economy, both locally and nationally, the pension fund realized an annual rate of return of 8.38%. Unfortunately, the pension fund is still severely underfunded.

This year we will evaluate and begin implementation of a new enterprise software program to further assist us in managing our data better and we will be evaluating lockbox and online check cashing technologies as well as online credit card payments.

Abraham Lincoln once said, "The best thing about the future is that it comes only one day at a

time.” Each new day brings new challenges and new opportunities. Every day, we can come together, make the tough calls, and do the hard work worth doing to get Easton growing again. We have an opportunity to grow Easton on a new foundation based on efficient management.

Leading this dynamic team of professionals and helping to oversee the day to day management of our city is Glenn Steckman.

CONCLUSION

I started with a quote from Robert Kennedy and would like begin my conclusion with one that is my view of a mayor’s leadership, “The future does not belong to those who are content with today, apathetic toward common problems and their fellow man alike, timid and fearful in the face of new ideas and bold projects. Rather it will belong to those who can blend passion, reason, and courage in a personal commitment to the ideals and great enterprises of American society,” and I would add, the City of Easton.

Quickly framed, a Mayor has three major responsibilities. The first is to provide a vision for the City -- what policy and political directions? What best practices? The second is to bring people to the table, to be a facilitative leader, and to promote civility and inclusiveness. The third is to be the ambassador for the City, to be its representative locally, regionally, statewide, nationally, and globally. We will continue to work hard everyday to not only succeed, but to excel in these areas.

Ladies and gentlemen, looking at the last four years, let there be no doubt: The state of our city is now better, safer, stronger and better managed.

Thank you and God bless you.