

2008
State of the City Address
By Mayor Gerald D. Jennings
Presented to the Albany Common Council

On my first day as Mayor, I promised to make City Hall a catalyst for change – change that would make Albany a better City – a City that was safer, cleaner, more economically vibrant and more financially stable. Over the past 14 years we’ve remained committed to that promise, and we’ve been successful in bringing about that change - change that I believe has been transformational and that has improved the overall quality of life of our great City.

In virtually every part of our City, new projects have been built, new jobs have been created, and new opportunities for further growth and development have become reality. And because of all that we have accomplished, I am confident in stating that the State of our City is strong and that our future looks brighter than ever before.

More, of course, remains to be done and this address will focus not only on what we have achieved, but on the challenges we continue to face; on the

opportunities that lie before us; and on the progress we must continue to build upon.

First, I will address the financial condition of our City. Over the past several years, we have enjoyed a strong fiscal position, largely because of my successful efforts in lobbying the State for payments in lieu of taxes on the Empire State Plaza. Those payments have enabled us to maintain the high level of services our citizens deserve, services critical to the quality of life we enjoy in Albany, and, at the same time, these payments have enabled us to avoid any major tax increase to our property owners. Our City's bond rating, an indicator of our financial well-being, has remained at an "A" rating level. While we are justifiably proud of these accomplishments, we must be concerned going forward.

That is because expenses - largely beyond our control - continue to rise, for costs such as employee related health insurance, utility expenses, gasoline expenses and the like. We will face significant financial pressures in the near future unless new sources of revenue are identified and existing revenue streams such as from our landfill remain constant. I will, in this regard, continue my efforts to lobby the State to pay us an equitable share of State

financial assistance, something we do not presently receive. If we received per capita aid on a level comparable to other major cities in the State, we would be in a very sound financial position.

Furthermore, I will continue to press for a payment in lieu of taxes on the Harriman Campus. Albany continues to feel the pressure of so much of its real property being exempt from taxation largely because of State ownership. With so much tax-exempt ownership, the tax burden is disproportionately shifted to the remaining property owners in the City. I have made our case to Governor Spitzer and to our State legislative leaders, and I remain confident that they will be responsive and help our Capital City deal with these financial challenges.

I will also continue my efforts to get the State to change the way road infrastructure projects are funded. Most major roadways in suburban communities are not only repaired at State expense, they are maintained and plowed by the State as well. Conversely, in cities, we are left with the expense of repairing, maintaining and plowing all of our City streets. When I took office 14 years ago, many streets and critical infrastructure projects had been neglected for decades. Over the past 14 years, we've spent out of the City's

general fund or using bonded funds, tens of millions of dollars to repair City streets, with so many more needing repair still. During 2008, we will move forward with major road improvement projects for Central Avenue and Delaware Avenue. These two projects alone will cost over \$23.6 million. We obviously need more State assistance for road and infrastructure repairs, and I will continue to make this a priority in my discussions with State leaders.

That said, I reiterate my belief that the State of our City is strong, that our future is bright, and that together we can accomplish our goal of making our City the very best place to live, work and raise a family.

The safety of our City will of course always be our first priority. Last year I reported on the initial success of the major restructuring of the City's Police Department. You will recall that the Chief implemented a new organizational structure to provide more effective supervision, communication and accountability throughout the Department.

Furthermore, a Strategic Deployment Unit was created to provide a more proactive approach to community policing. During the past year, even more significant changes in the Department have occurred, most notably in

the area of technology. Crime mapping with coordinated daily, weekly and monthly analysis now provide the Department with invaluable information for crime fighting initiatives.

The Department has also worked hard to establish new partnerships and relationships with a vast array of community and neighborhood groups, recognizing that effective community policing requires establishing an environment where every citizen knows they are an important partner in our effort to improving the safety and overall quality of life in our City.

As a result of these new initiatives, I am pleased to report for the second consecutive year that in almost every category of crime, the amount of crime in the City has dropped and, again, in many categories, dropped significantly.

Violent crime decreased 8.5 percent in 2007 following a trend in 2006 in which the City saw a 3.8 percent drop in violent crime. Overall, violent crime has decreased over that two-year period by 11.9 percent. Over two years, rapes are down by over 32 percent; murders down by over 60 percent; robberies down by over 14 percent and aggravated assaults down by over 8 percent. Additionally, property crimes saw similar significant decreases over

the same two-year period – burglaries down by 27 percent; larcenies down by 6 percent and motor vehicle larcenies down by over 22 percent.

Total Index Crimes also followed similar positive trends as the number of overall crimes fell by 11.3 percent in 2007 following a decrease of 1.6 percent in 2006. Total Index Crimes decreased overall by 12.8 percent over that two-year period. These numbers far exceed the national average as reported by the Federal Bureau of Investigation for the first six months in 2007.

This significant accomplishment in crime suppression has put Albany in a very select category among Operation Impact communities. Albany is one of only four cities among seventeen in the Impact jurisdiction that have been successful in decreasing overall crime by double digit percentages.

I congratulate Chief Tuffey and the brave men and women officers of his Department who have successfully implemented these new initiatives, strategies and changes. As a result of their efforts, Albany is a far safer City, and I look forward to further accomplishments, particularly as the Chief coordinates the City's new Block-by-Block initiative – a cross departmental

program focused on four strategic neighborhoods. Block-by-Block uses the existing departmental resources of Police, Fire, DGS, Planning, Community Development and Law among other agencies including the State Attorney General, and the Albany County District Attorney to combat blight and to increase the quality of life and safety of these neighborhoods.

Key to the success of the Block-by-Block initiative will be the role of the City's Fire Department. Rated again by "Firehouse Magazine" as one of the 150 busiest departments in the Nation, the Department completed nearly 18,000 inspections, the majority of which were related to residential occupancy permits. The Department, working closely with the City's Law Department and with our City Court, has established special court sessions where owners of vacant buildings, beginning in the Block-by-Block neighborhoods, who have failed to comply with City ordinances, will be vigorously prosecuted. Building owners who wish to come into voluntary compliance will be offered assistance by various City agencies, including the City's Economic Development Agency, who will participate regularly in these special court proceedings.

There is no doubt that the City's inventory of vacant and abandoned buildings is a major challenge - one that will require us to seek State and Federal funds for acquisition, stabilization, rehabilitation, and in some cases, demolition. We will use every effort to make certain that the owners of these structures know that if they fail to comply with existing ordinances, we will have zero tolerance. In the coming year you will see a dramatic change in the way such cases are handled, and with that change I believe, in time, the City's inventory of vacant and abandoned buildings will begin to diminish as other City programs and initiatives, such as those now being coordinated by the City's Office of Development and Planning and our Community Development Agency, get underway.

In addition to Code Enforcement, the Fire Department also provides the critical services of fire safety and prevention and emergency services. The Department continues to be recognized as one of the leading departments in the Nation in terms of the quality of the delivery of these services including EMT and paramedic services that have literally saved hundreds of lives. For all of their effort, I thank Chief Forezzi and the brave men and women of his Department for their efforts to improve the safety and quality of life for all of our City's residents and visitors.

During 2007, the City's Department of Development and Planning, the Albany Community Development Agency and the City's Albany Local Development Corporation continued developing and implementing programs and initiatives throughout the City, including the Park South Plan, the Midtown Homeownership Plan, the Arbor Hill Neighborhood Plan and the Capital South Plan.

The Park South Urban Renewal Plan was designed to stimulate neighborhood revitalization and improve the quality of life in the nine-block Park South area. Already underway is the first phase of the Plan, the \$12 million historic rehabilitation project on Knox Street. The Knox Street project, undertaken by Winn Development, will result in the rehabilitation of 18 stunning row houses in this historic district. The buildings, which once housed 62 sub-standard units, will be transformed into 47 spacious and affordable apartments with modern amenities.

The next phase of the Park South Plan, projected to cost \$25 million, will be a mixed-use development that will expand amenities and retail services in this vital neighborhood bounded by Washington Park, Albany Medical

Center and University Heights. I want to thank Governor Spitzer for announcing a \$3.3 million Restore New York Award that will greatly jumpstart this revitalization effort. With this major award, we will now move forward with the demolition of several blighted structures to make way for the construction of two new buildings that will result in up to 120,000 square feet of new mixed-use space. This will be the first significant commercial development in this urban renewal plan area, that, when complete, will transform this neighborhood into one of the most desirable places in the Capital Region.

Key to every neighborhood stabilization effort is homeownership. In the fall of 2007, the Midtown Homeownership Program entered its second phase, expanding its boundaries to include an additional 2,700 parcels in addition to the original 2,500 eligible parcels in Phase I. The program provides a \$5,000 incentive for new homeownership within the program's boundaries. All six of the institutions involved in the initial funding have renewed their commitment and will work with the City during 2008 to achieve even greater awareness and participation in this important homeownership initiative in this historic and vital neighborhood.

Another key neighborhood initiative, the Arbor Hill Neighborhood Plan, has resulted in significant investment – over \$30 million since the Plan was completed in 2003. In the coming months, ground will be broken on a new library branch on Henry Johnson Boulevard and North Swan Street will be the focus of a mixed-use housing and commercial redevelopment project. In 2007, that project was awarded a \$200,000 Main Street grant to support first floor commercial development. West of Swan, the Albany Housing Authority will complete \$6.2 million in additional infill housing, having already completed over \$10 million in infill housing in this neighborhood. Additionally, the Housing Authority is investing \$2 million in the Stephen and Harriet Myers Homeownership Program.

In our historic South End, the Capital South Plan was completed in July 2007 and presents a three-phased revitalization strategy to realize the South End community's vision of once again being a community of choice.

The Plan calls for stabilizing the neighborhood to provide the foundation for market renewal; energizing the neighborhood to capitalize on current projects and attract new investment and growing the neighborhood to

link the Capital South area to the greater City. Phase I, currently underway, encompasses 53 new units along Morton Avenue, an \$11.9 million project.

A recent award by the Division of Housing and Community Renewal bolstered implementation of the Plan by supporting the development of 44 additional units of housing, including rehabilitation and new construction. Phase II will bring the total for this project to \$22.4 million.

Long-term development plans for the South End neighborhood call for the continued de-densification for Lincoln Square and re-use of the land surrounding it that will tie together the community and enhance its vibrancy. This level of community participation and public-private partnerships is resulting in an unprecedented amount of investment, new construction projects, including major improvements to the Howe Library, and new investment interest in the South End. I am committed to continuing this targeted approach to planning and development in this neighborhood revitalization effort as well in other neighborhoods across the City.

As we move forward in 2008, I will continue to press for more State and Federal funding to create new opportunities for neighborhood redevelopment.

We want to make certain that every neighborhood in our City is a vibrant, sustainable community of choice. As part of my Block-by-Block initiative, I have authorized the creation of the Division of Neighborhood Revitalization, charged with coordinating and administering resources and programs aimed at revitalizing the Block-by-Block neighborhoods. The Division will re-focus the City's Home Store and other programs to assist with homeownership and in the rehabilitation and redevelopment of vacant or abandoned properties.

I have also directed that this Division begin implementing the recommendations of the 2007 Recapitalize Albany Report regarding neighborhood revitalization, including working with Albany County to develop a more effective program to deal with the number of tax delinquent properties eligible to be foreclosed upon. These properties tend to be in the City's most historic and disinvested neighborhoods, and unless we are able to get them into the hands of responsible owners, sooner rather than later, they will continue to deteriorate as a result of neglect. I believe working cooperatively with the State and the County we can create programs that will get these properties into the hands of responsible owners, developers and non-profit development corporations so that together we can protect our most at-risk housing stock.

In addition to neighborhood revitalization efforts, the Department of Development and Planning, together with the Albany Local Development Corporation and the City's Industrial Development Agency, are focused on strategic development initiatives that will continue the unprecedented economic development that has taken place in this City in the past decade.

Since we began our Capitalize Albany initiative, more than \$5 billion dollars has been invested in projects throughout the City. Our historic downtown has undergone a major renaissance. It is now the hub of our economic vitality, and serves as a destination for visitors, students, investors and residents. Since the start of my administration, we have seen tremendous transformation in downtown due to our investments in infrastructure and public-private partnerships resulting in new construction projects. We will continue to create an environment that attracts innovation, investment and vibrancy. A number of significant projects are in the pipeline now, which will augment the renaissance of downtown. More than \$125 million in new projects are planned for downtown, including Wellington Row, Quackenbush Square, The Capital Grand and others. I am pleased to report on the progress toward a new Albany Convention Center, a facility that will further

dramatically transform downtown. The Albany Convention Center Authority has made significant progress in moving this important project along and I applaud them and their staff for their work and dedication. The Authority is managing predevelopment work for the preferred site on lower Broadway and in 2007 hired HNTB as the Architectural Services team and Gilbane/BBL as their Construction Management team. The Authority began negotiations with Starwood Hotels to operate the hotel and SMG as the Convention Center operator. In 2007, the Authority began the process of assembling the project site, and completing the preliminary survey, archaeological and environmental reviews in preparation for the design phase. Our rich history, our unique architecture, our Capital City status and our geographical position make us a true destination City. The Convention Center will be one of the region's most significant economic development projects, and will help us attract thousands of new visitors to our City and millions of dollars in economic development benefits.

I would like to thank Governor Spitzer and the State Legislature for their steadfast belief in the importance of this project and look forward to their continued support to ensure its development. We have done much work to prepare New York's Capital City as a premier destination for activities,

events and conventions. Albany has experienced a tremendous revitalization and we are committed to attracting further investment and activity. Development of a new convention center in downtown is a vital part of this plan as is further development of our waterfront. Over the next two years, we will move forward with Phase II of the Corning Preserve, to create even more festival space, and enhanced amenities to further take advantage of our magnificent Hudson River waterfront.

Perhaps the most important strategic development initiative has been the growth and investment at Albany NanoTech. The University at Albany's College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering, the world's first college devoted solely to nanotechnology, has attracted \$4.2 billion in public and private investments and over 250 global corporate partners. The complex continues to grow at a rapid pace, and its growth will continue to transform our City. Our economic development team will continue to assist this growth and to insure that all areas of our City, from our downtown to our historic neighborhoods, benefit. Already, new residential units are being successfully developed downtown to attract young professionals and empty nesters expected to move to this area as a result of the growth of Tech Valley.

The Harriman Campus with its close proximity to Albany NanoTech and the University at Albany is well positioned to attract significant new businesses to the City, which will result in new job opportunities and, in time, increased tax revenue for our City. I am encouraged by Governor Spitzer's commitment to the redevelopment of the Campus and by his recognition that its redevelopment is critical to the future economic growth of this City. The Spanos Company, a nationally renowned residential developer, has announced it will this year begin building 300 apartments in the Patroon Creek Development adjacent to the Harriman Campus, bringing investment on this former State-owned land to more than \$85 million.

During 2007, "Forbes Magazine" ranked Albany 30th among best cities in the nation for jobs and in 2006 it ranked us among the best large metro cities for doing business. "Expansion Magazine" in 2007 gave the City a five star ranking for its overall quality of life and in 2006 gave us a five star ranking for top business opportunities. There is no doubt we are on the right track for economic development, and no doubt that Albany remains the place to invest in and grow a business. In 2007, the City was awarded a prestigious grant from the American Institute of Architects, which brought together their Sustainable Design Assessment Team in our City for an intense three-day

public charette and consensus process. This group of national experts along with over 250 of our residents came together over a three-day period in August 2007 to discuss Albany's future as a sustainable city. The results were remarkable and we gained invaluable insight from these national experts. The final report from this team is due to be issued this quarter. We know that this work, as well as this process, will make the Comprehensive Planning process we are about to undertake a greater success because of it. I congratulate Commissioner Mike Yevoli and Deputy Commissioner Megan Daly and all of their staff in the Department of Development and Planning, the Albany Community Development Agency and the Albany Local Development Corporation for their success in helping us develop and transform our City.

Each year, hundreds of thousands attend concerts, sporting events, festivals, parades, cultural activities, art galleries and museums throughout the City. Albany has been nationally recognized for its outstanding "creative" atmosphere, a place where the arts and artists flourish. As our economic development transformation continues, we must remember that those cities that have been the most successful nationally in attracting new businesses and new residents, are those that offer a vibrant and creative lifestyle and Albany

does just that. City sponsored events such as our Alive at Five concerts at the Corning Preserve, our Riverfront Jazz Fest, our recent Winterfest, our Summer in the City Arts Fair and of course our Tulipfest, which this past September was named among the top 100 events in North America by one of the Nation's leading travel associations, attract tens of thousands of attendees – last year over 250,000, and these events nicely complement those offered by exciting venues such as the Times Union Center, the Palace Performing Arts Center, Capital Repertory and Park Playhouse.

Despite the City's financial challenges, we must continue to support all of these cultural and artistic programs - they are important to our overall quality of life, and important to our continued efforts to attract more families, residents and businesses to our City.

During 2007, Sperling's Best Places ranked Albany as 43rd in the nation as one of the country's best "green" cities. And in 2007 the U.S. Conference of Mayors selected Albany as a finalist for the City Livability Award, an award, you will recall, we won in 1998. The City's program "Albany Blooms" has been included in the Conference's National Clearinghouse as a model for other mayors and urban researchers to follow.

“Albany Blooms”, our civic beautification program, is an important means to increase City livability, encourage urban living, and improve the natural environment. The program is a partnership between various divisions of the Department of General Services and a multitude of neighborhood civic organizations, including the City gardeners and forestry personnel working with neighborhood and community groups dedicated to the beautification and greening of the City.

In Albany, America’s second oldest city, with numerous historical parks, large open space areas, and tree-lined streets, civic beautification is an important part of our City’s culture, both historically and into the future.

The City owns and operates a 180-acre farm, a series of neighborhood gardens, a municipal golf course, a 30-acre lake with recreational fishing, and part of a 3,000-acre nature preserve that is home to a globally rare ecosystem and a butterfly listed on the U.S. endangered species list. Our parks system includes a total of approximately 60 parks ranging in size and variety from urban pocket parks to the Normanskill Farm, a working farm that is also

home to the City's tree nursery and the largest community garden in Upstate New York.

A key component of the "Albany Blooms" program is encouraging volunteerism and broad-based civic involvement by creating partnerships with both formal and informal neighborhood groups, residents and property owners to develop voluntary community beautification projects and plantings. Such projects promote civic pride and improve neighborhood livability standards.

A decade ago, the City started a traffic island "makeover" program to transform previously barren asphalt traffic islands into islands of spectacular floral displays. Additionally, now more than 800 hanging baskets grace the ornamental street light poles along numerous main travel corridors and City gateways.

Our forestry crew is responsible for the care, maintenance and replacement of approximately 40,000 trees along City streets and in public parks and spaces. Albany has again been named Tree City USA by the

National Arbor Day Foundation to honor our commitment to community forestry; 2007 was the fifth year Albany has received this national recognition.

The City's investment in "Albany Blooms" has resulted in significant dividends including increased beautification, increased tourism, and increased pride and community involvement by City residents. Perhaps most importantly, we have shown our residents and visitors that building a Green City provides us with local and global benefits and that must start at the local level. "Think globally, act locally" has never been a more pertinent slogan.

In my past two State of the City messages, I've discussed the importance of obtaining permission to expand the City's Rapp Road landfill which will reach capacity by late 2009. The landfill not only provides predictable and reasonably priced disposal capacity for much of the Capital Region, but also it is critical to the financial stability of the City, as one of our major budgetary revenue streams.

In August of 2007, we submitted our initial application to the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and we are working with

DEC to get it to a completeness determination that will start the public review process.

I recognize that any expansion of the Rapp Road landfill facility is a sensitive matter, because of its location directly adjacent to the Albany Pine Bush Preserve. We have spent over a year working with stakeholder groups such as the Pine Bush Commission, the Nature Conservancy, and others, discussing alternatives and attempting to come up with an acceptable expansion alternative that can create a win-win situation. We have changed the location, footprint and design of the expansion, at considerable expense to the City, in an attempt to minimize Pine Bush Preserve impacts. Furthermore, we hired a nationally recognized ecological restoration firm to develop a Pine Bush Habitat Restoration Plan that is now an integral part of the landfill expansion project. This Restoration Plan constitutes a major investment in the Pine Bush Preserve and can only become a reality if the expansion is in place to provide the necessary financing. I also want to use part of this revenue stream to improve on reuse and recycling programs, to reduce the waste stream that ultimately ends up in the landfill.

As important as the landfill is to the economy and finances of the City, we are also concerned about the environment. Accordingly, my staff at DGS has started a major initiative working with the new administration at DEC to update our regional Solid Waste Management Plan. Albany offers our residents perhaps the most comprehensive recycling program in the Capital Region. The program entails curbside blue bin collection of mixed recyclables; yard waste collection; white goods and used tire collection, and household hazardous waste collection. Although comprehensive, there is still room for improvement to expand on our current programs and increase public participation. We also need all of the other communities and private waste haulers, who depend on our landfill, to get on board with more aggressive waste reduction and mandatory recycling. I want to see Albany's program for solid waste management become a model for New York State.

Recycling is only one of the areas we will need to look at in the coming years to do our part at the local government level to assist in global efforts to curb climate change. Last year, I signed the U.S. Conference of Mayors Climate Change Agreement and set up a Planning Committee to begin the process of evaluating the things we will need to change. We are just beginning what will be a long term process, working in cooperation with the Council,

department heads, and with the State of New York to find ways to reduce global warming and develop an action plan for our City. I thank Commissioner Bill Bruce and Deputy Commissioner Nick D'Antonio and all of the hard working men and women of the Department of General Services, including the departments of Engineering and Special Events for their contributions to improving our City's quality of life.

One of the most precious commodities that contributes to our high quality of life is our wonderful drinking water supply. Albany residents have recognized this since 1932, when sparkling clean Alcove Reservoir water first started flowing into our City. Now, all of New York State knows as well. We were honored and enormously proud to win the award for the Best Tasting Drinking Water in New York State during competition this past summer at the State Fair in Syracuse.

As many of you know, I have long said that water is a commodity that should be marketed aggressively. It only makes sense to share our 12 billion gallon water supply with other communities in need of water, which not only helps them supply water to their residents, but also provides increased revenues for our City. In this regard, I am continuing to talk with additional

Capital District municipalities who have an interest in buying our water. We already sell water to the Towns of Bethlehem and Guilderland, and we stand ready to negotiate with other towns and cities that might like to enjoy the Best Tasting Drinking Water in New York State.

The Albany Water Department continues to win praise for its sophisticated leak detection program, applauded as a national model by the National League of Cities. Trained staff from the Department are out on the streets every week checking the integrity of the 376 miles of underground water mains. Our water mains – like our sewer pipes – are aging – some 55 miles were installed in the 19th century. And, as in many old Northeast cities, aging water mains develop hidden underground leaks, which not only waste precious water, but also can lead to road and sidewalk collapses when sub-surface voids develop. Under the aggressive program instituted by the Water Department, under the leadership of Commissioner Bob Cross, more than 130 hidden underground leaks have been found and repaired, saving countless millions of gallons of water, as well as averting many potential disasters throughout our neighborhoods. I thank Commissioner Cross and all of the hard working men and women of his Department for providing such outstanding services to all of our residents and businesses.

Speaking of water, business at our Port of Albany continues to flourish. We continue to see increased wharfage, dockage, and tonnage at the Hudson River facility, generating substantial increases in revenue for the Port. In addition, longshore labor hours continue to climb, as more and more workers along our docks are able to earn a living wage to support their families. And that, after all, is the true measure of the success of any port.

With the number of ships docking up 59 percent since 2000, the Port of Albany has become a real player on the international stage of world commerce. Many new and different cargoes are arriving daily, including wind turbine blades, steel, cocoa beans, sugar and grain.

We continue to explore new opportunities to expand our business at the Port, and as we move ahead in 2008, we expect to see a greater number of ships arriving and departing Albany's docks.

The business growth at the Port of Albany, the growth of Albany NanoTech, the renaissance of Downtown, the improvements to our Hudson River Waterfront, the redevelopment of the Harriman Campus, the various

neighborhood redevelopment initiatives are all transforming Albany, and positioning our City for unprecedented future growth and development. We need to make certain that our youngest residents receive all of the training and skills they will need to fully benefit from what the future growth of this City can offer them.

Albany is incredibly fortunate to have so many fine educational institutions from pre-school to post graduate institutions of higher education. Academic achievement and even greater student success at all levels, especially in our publicly financed elementary and secondary schools is vital to the City's future sustainability. Additionally, there is no doubt that one of the most important factors in attracting young people, especially young families back into the City, is the quality and safety of our public schools. We need to make certain that our schools, particularly our publicly funded schools, have all of the advantages possible to help our children succeed.

In that regard, I agree with the report of the Recapitalize Albany Education Subcommittee that the two greatest challenges facing the City's publicly funded schools are "closing the great divide in achievement along lines of income, race and ethnicity, language and disability" and "keeping up

with growing demands for still more knowledge and skill in the face of increasing competition in a changing global economy.”

The report recommends a greater collaboration between the business community and the City’s public schools to narrow the educational achievement gap. The report further recommends the creation of a permanent standing committee that would act as a bridge between the City, the City’s publicly funded schools and the greater business community, to develop innovative and effective public-private partnerships to advance the cause of improving and maximizing student achievement and success at every level including eliminating the obstacles of the digital divide. I accept this recommendation, and in the next few weeks will work with all relevant stakeholders to establish such a standing committee and charge it with this mission.

During 2007, our Department of Youth and Workforce Services continued to successfully carry out its mission to change and improve the quality of life for our community’s most disadvantaged children and families, as well as those in the midst of career and job changes. The Department served 3,000 youth and more than 15,000 customers at its Career Central

offices. The Department's Truancy Abatement Program received statewide and national recognition and most recently was nominated by the National League of Cities as a best practices model for City resources. It serves as a model for effective partnerships benefiting area youths utilizing the resources of the Department of Youth and Workforce Services, the City's Police Department and the City School District.

The Department's Gang Prevention Program served over 500 youth last year by providing recreational, educational and social alternatives to those at risk of joining a gang.

Likewise, the Mayor's Summer Youth Program is designed to create an alternative to a summer of idleness for our City's youth and to provide them with the benefits and experience of meaningful employment. This past summer's program successfully employed more than 1,400 youths and created partnerships with over 200 different sites in the community to create job opportunities for our young residents.

Over 150 young people took part in and graduated from the Department's Youth Build Program, a community service program in which

young people spend a portion of their time rehabilitating housing for homeless and low income people and the remainder of their time pursuing academic goals in preparation for further education. I thank Commissioner Faye Andrews and Deputy Commissioner Sal Villa for their success with all of these programs.

All of these programs as well as the programs offered by our Department of Recreation are critical to providing our youth with meaningful alternatives to help them achieve success in their lives. The Department of Recreation operates teen venues and youth programs at numerous locations throughout the City that offer our youth outstanding programs for growth and development. In fact, the Department operates 36 playgrounds; the Swinburne recreational facility that provides an all-weather protected skating rink for City residents; several swimming and spray pools including the historic Lincoln Park Pool; various teen centers; and the Bleecker Stadium – a multi-purpose sports complex of ten acres that include a quarter-mile running track, a professional size baseball diamond, a football-soccer-rugby field, a softball field, and stadium seating for 7,000 people.

During 2007, the Department opened a new state-of-the-art youth fitness center at the Lincoln Park Bathhouse. This facility offers wrestling, karate, boxing, weight training, cardiovascular training and a dance fitness program. We currently have 425 children signed up at the new fitness center.

The City's Karate Program is one of the best karate programs in the Country. I am very pleased to announce that the 2008 AAU National Karate Championships will be held in Albany from June 30 to July 5, 2008 at the University at Albany's SEFCU Arena. This prestigious event is the pinnacle of karate competition and is an opportunity for our youth to meet and compete against other competitors from all over the world. The City of Albany is very proud to be the host site for these exceptional athletes as they are joined by their families, friends and fans. The Championships will bring in approximately 5,000 athletes representing all 50 states.

The City of Albany's Boxing Program is the finest amateur youth boxing program in the country. In 2007, our program grew to 95 participants and was ranked Number One in New York State. I congratulate Commissioner John D'Antonio and his staff for their hard work and for the

success they have achieved with all of their award winning programs that are improving the lives of our young people.

In total, the City spent over \$8 million in youth and recreation related programming. All of these programs help our children to mature and to develop positive skills and self-confidence. These programs also help them fulfill their dreams. And helping our young people realize their potential and fulfill their dreams is the most important thing we as public officials can do for them and for our City. Their successes will, hopefully, ultimately be Albany's successes as well.

As I said last year in my State of the City message, and as I've said before, the livability of a great City is inextricably tied to how well its leaders listen and respond to the concerns and aspirations of its citizens. I believe that in Albany we are a better City, a transformed City, because we've listened and we've tried our very best to be responsive.

On this point, during 2007 we launched our new City website and we will continue to move forward with implementing e-commerce initiatives. My special thanks to City Treasurer Betty Barnette and her staff for leading the

way with e-government by making it now possible to pay City tax bills using our website. I am very pleased to announce that the City was just recently notified that it has won the 2007 Government Standard of Excellence Award for its website. This award, given by the Web Marketing Association, is judged by an international body of top-tier executives from organizations including Microsoft, Oracle, Sun Microsystems and Panasonic among others. Our website is now an excellent way for our administration to communicate more effectively and directly with our residents and others seeking information on the City, and it is a more effective way for them to communicate with us.

Every day I hear from the residents I meet or who call into my office on what they want for themselves and for our City. They want a City that is safe and clean and that offers them a place to enjoy a great quality of life. They want a City that offers them great schools, great jobs, and great neighborhoods. They want a City that offers them hope. I believe Albany is such a place and, we will remain vigilant to ensure that it not only remains so, but that it becomes an even better City for our children and for theirs.

I look forward to working with you toward achieving that goal, and thank you for your commitment to our City. I also want to thank all of my department heads and all of the City employees who work so hard, and who are so dedicated to this City. They, as much as anyone, are responsible for the great achievements and tremendous progress we have achieved.

I've specifically thanked several department heads throughout this report. I also thank my Deputy Mayor Phil Calderone, my Budget Director Chris Hearley, my Executive Assistant Bob VanAmburgh, our Corporation Counsel John Reilly, our City Assessor Keith McDonald, our Personnel Director Beth Lyons, our Community Development Director Tom Griner, our City Clerk John Marsolais, our City Registrar Denise Kelley, our City Engineer Dede Rudolph, our Special Events Director Sue Cleary, our Planning Director Doug Melnick, our Building Director Nick DiLello, and the newest member of our family, our Administrative Services Commissioner Troy Mackey. Your hard work and dedication to our City is greatly appreciated.

Finally, I want to thank the people of this great and historic City – they are, of course, our greatest asset, and the true reason why Albany is such a great place to live, work and raise a family.

For my part I will continue to make City Hall a catalyst for change – change for an even greater City, a City where hopes, dreams and aspirations are fulfilled. The possibilities that lie before us far exceed what we have achieved to date, and together we can and we will bring those possibilities to reality. God bless Albany and God bless each of you.