

# State of the City

Update on the 10 year plan

Good evening everyone, City Council Members, Racine Department Heads, Special Guests, Citizens of Racine:

Roughly 3 years ago, when we started together, I made the following statement; "In our efforts we must create sustainability and success through a series of wins, big or little we must get back on a winning track."

Tonight I want to give you a progress report on where we are as a city. This is a snapshot in time; and accomplishments we have achieved together as a city.

Highlighted on the screen are the portions of the 10 year plan that are completed or in progress. While this illustrates what we have done so far, we also must recognize that there is much yet to accomplish.

As you recall there were 6 areas that we focused on in the 10 year plan; development, housing, administrative, business, crime and the environment.

## **DEVELOPMENT**

David Burnham said when looking at the design of Chicago and the tri state region in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, "Make no little plan, they have no power to stir men's blood."

With that same determination - I am proud to announce that in partnership with our local businesses and the RCEDC we are preparing the first ever Citywide Comprehensive Plan.

I have always believed there was a need for a comprehensive plan for the City of Racine. A plan by which the city, private developers, residents and investors can follow. If we are to attract business to Racine in this highly competitive market, we have to clearly show them our vision for the future of this City.

A comprehensive plan will also allow us to plan more efficiently, layer grants and funding more successfully and save our residents time and money.

When I took office we had some failing development sites (TIF's) that were struggling financially. As promised we have refinanced and restructured our TIF's to pay them off faster - saving the taxpayers money.

We have also worked with developers to make sure that their projects meet the proper market conditions, so that we prevent this problem from happening in the future.

One of our latest announcements includes a historic building in downtown Racine. We recently announced the Porters redevelopment project. This development, totaling \$5 million, will be a catalyst for additional 6th street development. I want to thank Micah Waters and the family for their commitment to Downtown Racine.

On the other side of town, we worked with the Regency West Project to build a \$9 million development. Even though we didn't always agree – we stood strong on our commitment to a quality development and came away with a project that not only is the showcase of the area, but is already full.

The city has benefitted because we made sure a quality project was completed and the developer is making money with a waiting list of clients. This is a win-win situation that we are all proud of.

We have made significant efforts to expand opportunities in the area of water based companies. One of our greatest assets is access to this beautiful lake. And while some think we should just give it away, I do not. Over the last couple of years, one thing has been made clear in talking with mayors around the country or around the world, water is one of, if not the greatest resources on the planet and we must protect it.

While we are working to bring new job opportunities focused around water we cannot forget those who need employment now. That's why we partnered with companies like Butter Buds and Summit Packaging to expand their companies - creating new jobs.

In order to continue to partner with local businesses we had to have the financial capacity. I am proud to announce that our recent efforts have resulted in a grant from the federal government to expand our revolving loan fund.

The city made an investment in jobs recently, approving \$500,000 for the revolving loan fund, and the Federal government matched our efforts with an additional \$1,066,000. This gives us the opportunity to continue the partnerships like we did with Butter Buds, Summit Packaging and others to grow Racine jobs.

My last point in the area of Development; state leaders continue to cut back on local transit funding. This makes it especially tough for us to compete for jobs in this global environment. Locally, the people affected most are our elderly and mobility challenged citizens.

These cuts make it nearly impossible for them to enjoy productive lives and participate in daily activities. I am proud to stand with other Mayors of this state who have collaborated on a study and proposal to create the most efficient and effective transportation system in Wisconsin. What state leaders have failed to do for our citizens, the Mayors will demand for the long term best interest of our residents.

## **HOUSING**

The next topic I want to touch on tonight is housing. Our efforts in rehabbing properties in Racine through the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) have been the envy of neighboring communities. As we continue to put foreclosed properties back in the hands of homeowners, we keep our local contractors working.

Even though the leaders in Madison took away the very money the federal government sent cities to stem the tide of foreclosures, we will strive ahead, and we will with shining examples like the First Choice Pre-apprentice program headed by Ola Baiyewu. His program takes our resident off the street trains them in the trades to help them find gainful employment. Ola and his team are a perfect example of a successful partnership.

We are proud to announce that the City has just been awarded more than \$2.4 million as part of a joint effort to eradicate lead paint in the cities of Kenosha and Racine. Working in collaboration with Kenosha, we will expand our efforts to eliminate the lead from old houses that poison our children.

Our newest initiative, The Pastoral Alliance, focuses on fixing up homes around our churches in the river view area. These are just a couple examples of how we are taking back our neighborhoods.

I am also proud of the work our partner David Coles has done in building Racine's first nearly energy neutral home on DeKoven Ave. David's model home utilizes revolutionary residential engineering with extra thick insulating walls, grey water reuse and geo-thermal heat to name a few.

These are the homes of the future and we look to do more work with David because not only is he building homes to reduce our reliance on energy, he is training our young men and women for future employment.

Finally in housing, I was proud of all the work our people are doing with the NSP funds. This was highlighted when Housing and Urban Development Secretary Shaun Donovan, while visiting Milwaukee commented on Racine's efforts as a model for communities to emulate.

### **ADMINISTRATIVE**

In the area of administration our practices of long range planning and evaluation have worked. As we continue to find ways to provide better services to YOU the customers, we look at ways large or small to provide you better service at less cost.

I want to point out one small example of our staff's efforts. Just last week our staff in the Dept. of Public Works found a way to make our salt go farther and have less of an impact on our environment, thus saving over \$100,000. To some that may not see like a lot, but at a time where the state is cutting millions from our budgets every year....every little bit helps.

There is one trend that I have seen over the last year that is troubling. That is the state's efforts to strip the powers of the cities away. In this last year, leaders in Madison proposed making taxpayers pay for delinquent water bills, stripped the cities of the foreclosure prevention

funds, stripped out bus funds, limited the city's ability to zone city properties, and numerous other local control issues that Madison believes are better at deciding than your local officials.

The leaders in Madison need to understand that it is time to stop working for your own political parties and start working for the people of this state. We must get away from this notion that you can cut your way to a great society. Instead we must work together to provide a strong infrastructure and strong city that are attractive to businesses.

The amount of funding reductions we received this last year by the State and Federal leaders were painful but not new. Moving forward we must find the balance between quality of life for our citizens with services and taxes. I don't know about you, but after reviewing how the state has been running over the last couple of years. I think it would be a good idea to leave the running of cities to the Mayors and City Councils who are better at it.

I will be the first to admit there are a couple of areas that need more attention, specifically the Hispanic and senior centers. I am pledging my support to finalize both of these critical projects. Projects which I believe are vital to a successful city.

## **BUSINESS**

I have had the pleasure of touring over 40 companies throughout our city. It has given me a real appreciation for our business owners, large and small. Their commitment to Racine, and our hard working residents, continues to impress me each and every day.

I am glad to say that our efforts and partnerships have helped lower the unemployment rate in Racine. But to me, it is not enough. There are still people struggling to find employment, and as long as I am Mayor I will work every day to try to meet that need.

To assist in expanding our companies efforts to sell more products I have been working with the US Dept. of Commerce to establish trade missions to bring countries and our businesses together to form long lasting partnerships for sustained growth.

We have also established an initiative called the E3 program to incentivize any business looking to move into or expand in Racine to receive funds to implement energy efficiency projects to reduce their long term cost of energy while reducing our reliance on it.

Furthermore, after recognizing the lack of growth in new minority businesses, we developed Launch Box, a new program designed to provide new businesses with the pieces they need to move to the next level of growth. Sometimes your best solutions for jobs are right in your own backyard. It just takes a little care and some fertilizer to get them growing.

One of the individuals that has started with a little help and is growing leaps and bounds is Caleb Robinson. Here is a young man who grew his idea of a hot dog cart into his own restaurant and now is an active partner with the city as he opens his newest project downtown at the boat ramp.

While we work local, we look global. That's why I take the time and effort to bring our story to the rest of the world. Recently, I spoke in Paris, France about the need for a regional cooperative development agreement focused on creating jobs around water resources. The proposal was then brought to Chicago at the G-40 Mayors summit on sustainability. Mayors from all over the world heard about our efforts to grow new job opportunities around water. They agreed, this is the type of effort needed for future growth and opportunities. I was able

to not only present the proposal itself, but speak about our efforts in Racine.

I want you to know that of all the items discussed that day - Racine; yes Racine's efforts were highlighted as a best practice for the world communities to follow. Mayors around the world wanted to know how we cleaned up our beaches and provided not only the best tasting water in the country, but how we were able to provide handicapped accessibility to our great beach for our residents.

Ladies and gentlemen, I hear too often of the detractors who tell us how bad our city is, well I am here to tell you that the world is looking to Racine, and we are looking right back at them with our heads held high. Congrats go out to Julie Kinzleman, our health department and the folks at the Water and Wastewater Departments.

## **CRIME**

While there are some areas where we WANT to be ranked in the top ten, crime is the area that we want to be OUT of the top 10. Our efforts have led to a 40 year low in crime rates. However, it is still not good enough.

The work we have done to expand our COP houses have had a dramatic impact on the Uptown and Jacato Drive areas. The efforts have led to a decrease in crime and have allowed us to gain control over 2 uncontrolled areas.

I look forward to working with our new Chief Art Howell to prepare a Crime Package that will be introduced later this year. We have made some great gains lately, and I want to personally thank retiring Chief Kurt Whalen for his efforts to get us to where we are.

I am happy to announce that our efforts will include a partnership with the Racine Unified School District, the County and our neighbors to take our streets back and let criminals know firsthand that Racine is not the place to do their type business. This is one business we will fight hard to remove from our borders. Special Thanks goes out to Dr. Anne Lang and County Executive Ladwig for their efforts

One shining example of work done in our neighborhoods is the Neighborhood Watch Program. I want to thank Mary McIlvaine and Charlie French for their commitment to making Racine a great place to live, work and play. Recently Neighborhood Watch received a National Award for their work - again, right here in Racine.

As Racine keeps making positive headlines, we also continue to fight shortsighted decision making by some elected officials. Neighborhood Watch, our Community Re-entry program, First Choice Pre-apprentice and many others like it are funded in part through federal Community Development Block Grant Funds. These funds are often our last line of defense for our residents.

However, Congress continues to cut the very funds we use to make Racine a great place to live. Recently, our Congressional leaders turned down a Dept. of Justice Grant that was the collaboration of 5 separate law enforcement groups designed to fight Gangs and Drugs in our city. They called it pork or an earmark. When you have 5 separate law enforcement groups coming together in a collaborative effort to fight crime, it's not pork it's called a partnership, something deserving of support from all political officials.

If our federal representatives are not willing to bring your tax dollars back directly to help our communities, then how are local officials supposed to create the atmosphere for jobs that they talk about so often? Our Congressional leaders need to remember that they work for the people NOT political parties.

As Congress continues to cut the funds that we rely on to rebuild our neighborhoods, we look to form even more partnerships with the local Churches, non-profit groups and the private sector to continue our efforts in a more cost effective and efficient manner. We need to do more with less because we cannot simply pass the buck and forget about the very citizens we serve.

This fall we will be introducing a new collaborative designed to help those children not making the grade to enroll in our After Zones program, an after school program that provides kids a safe environment to catch up on their classes while having fun in the process. The After Zones program is another example of how we look to combine the resources of the City, RUSD, our local non-profits and our churches to provide an opportunity for our children. I want to thank Debby Embry and Kathy Dunkerson for their efforts in this exciting opportunity.

One of the most successful partnerships in 2011-2012 has been Racine Reads. If a child learns how to read at grade level by the time they are in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, the likelihood of them failing decreases significantly. A little effort on the front end can create a tremendous result in their future. I want to thank S.C. Johnson Wax and Racine Unified School District for stepping up and playing such an incredible role in our children's future. They are the real heroes.

I have had the pleasure of reading to more than 60 classes so far and my daughter Eleanor and our family have also done our share by reading over 150 books together so far. And that's how we do things in Racine – as a team.

## **ENVIRONMENT**

Finally in the area of the environment, I want to extend a special thanks to the Park Pride committee and their efforts over the last year. I have always believed in the power of our residents. The Park Pride Committee was one of those groups that came together to take a long range look at where we were going with our parks. Their foresight and ideas are already being put in place to make this a better city with fewer dollars. Whether it is the new Tennis Courts or the Adopt a park project, I am convinced we are moving in the right direction.

Thanks to people like Chris Flynn and the Urban Garden Network members, we are also expanding the number of Urban Gardens in our city from 2 to roughly 10 over the next year. Who would have ever imagined that this tiny seed of an idea would bloom into such a wonderful bounty in our City?

As you already know we won the award for the Best Tasting Water in the Country, an award I have been sharing with every Mayor and individual I meet. Racine was also the host to the first ever U.S. Conference of Mayors Water Summit at Wingspread this last December, where we were able to discuss solutions to our water problems while being able to show off our incredible City.

We were also honored with the Tree City Award again. Believe it or not trees not only beautify our city they actually help us all save energy and money.

Furthermore, we worked out an agreement with UW Parkside to keep the Root River Rec Center open serving our residents in the Riverview area; I want to thank State Representative Cory Mason, UW Parkside and the members of the Root River Council for their efforts to preserve a real treasure.

There is one last project that I believe identifies our commitment to our most precious resource – our children. We have partnered with the Johnson Foundation and Racine County to implement the Infant Mortality Grant in Racine. The grant allows us to look at ways to prevent infant mortality in our community, which unfortunately is one of the hardest hit in the nation. Thanks to Carol Johnson, Cory Mason, Racine County and our Health Department, we are moving ahead to care for Racine's most valuable resource.

You can see from my speech that there are many, many good things going on in the City of Racine. That's because we are blessed with good partners, residents who care deeply about this community and volunteers that are dedicated to making this a great city.

We do what we do, not because we are paid to, but because in essence we are all one big family. We are all in this together. And together we will make this the greatest City in the Country to live in. Let's get back to work.

God Bless you and good night.