



MAYOR DWIGHT JONES DELIVERS 2011 STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

FORGING AHEAD

Thank you, and good evening.

Welcome, to all of you.

First let me thank Ron Stallings and the board of directors of the Hippodrome Theatre for opening this beautiful venue for our use this evening.

I'm especially pleased to be holding this State of the City Address at this important landmark in historic Jackson Ward... and I'm pleased to be here during Black History Month to mark this occasion.

As we celebrate black history and achievement this month, I find it very fitting that we are here in this venue which has sat empty for most of the last 40 years. The City of Richmond is proud to have had a hand in finally bringing this landmark back to life and to have helped anchor this landmark in Jackson Ward for many historical undertakings to come. We look forward to all of the great performances that we'll be able to see right here at the Hippodrome.

To the members of the Mayor's Youth Academy who graced us with their presence earlier; I thank you and congratulate you. It was this time last year that I first spoke of my vision for the Mayor's Youth Academy and the way in which we want to reach young people in this city. We had a great summer with our youth and you've just seen some of the evidence of what our young people can accomplish when simply given the opportunity.

Please thank those young people again.

I want to acknowledge those who are on stage with me. These are many of the co-chairs of MPACC – the Mayor's Participation and Communication Corps. MPACC is our new “app” for city services. MPACC is changing how service requests are made and responded to. Service requests can be made through a number of mediums, including smart phones.

I requested that the MPACC co-chairs join me on stage tonight because I am ever mindful of the community's hand in many of the accomplishments that I want to speak with you about tonight.

It was Theodore Roosevelt, the 26th President of the United States, who said about public service, “It's not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the person who is actually in the arena...”

These are the people who are on the court and not on the sidelines; the people who are in the arena, making things happen!

Thank you MPACC co-chairs for being in the arena with me. I want them all to stand so that you can acknowledge them.

[City Council, Schools, and Senior Team introductions]

It was in that same talk in 1910 that Roosevelt spoke of those who “strive to do the deed...”.

And I want to share with you tonight our continued efforts toward Building a Better Richmond where all of our people thrive.

Last year when we reviewed the state of our city, I spoke of the challenges we faced- the lagging economy and the extraordinary financial challenges, the need to de-concentrate poverty, and position ourselves for growth.

These have been very challenging times given the economic, political and social conditions, but we forged ahead and set our goals for a well-managed government, an aggressive economic development and community revitalization strategy, an improved infrastructure as well as an innovative and creative environment that will support healthy families and individuals of all abilities.

We've made great strides in these areas, even as the effects of the recession continue to linger.

I am pleased to report to you today that the State of the City is resilient! We are resilient and resolute, and we are positioned for future growth.

WELL MANAGED GOVERNMENT

Running a top-notch, well managed organization grounded in accountability and strong financial management means that the government:

- prudently manages its resources,
- develops its employees, and
- runs the business of government efficiently.

During our first year in office we had to close a \$26 million budget gap, and last year we faced eliminating another \$30 million in costs in order to be structurally balanced.

We got it done. And we got it done:

- without furloughs
- without tax increases
- without interrupting core services
- without balancing the budget on the backs of those most in need, and
- without balancing the budget on the backs of City employees.

Instead we took strategic steps and looked for ways to consolidate efforts, like combining health insurance with Richmond Public Schools saving \$3 million.

We said we would do it, and we've done it.

We restructured the Broad Street Community Development Authority (CDA) saving approximately \$2.5 million immediately and another \$300,000 every year thereafter.

We said we would do it, and we've done it.

We implemented twice-a-year real estate billing, saving \$1.7 million per year, every year. Savings from that move alone over the course of a fifteen year period could pay for another elementary school in our City.

We said we would do it, and we've done it.

We have made many changes to the way we do business in the City of Richmond. And these changes have produced real results for our City and made our government stronger. I want to acknowledge that we've gotten results by working closely with the City Council. Working together we managed our budget carefully and reduced spending responsibly.

We've also gotten these results by listening to employees. Our Common Cents program launched an automated employee budget feedback process that resulted in \$2.6 million in savings. The Common Cents program even won the Digital Government Achievement Award for 2010.

These are examples of our efforts toward communication, cooperation and collaboration. It pays off.

We have moved to an outcomes based budget.

And we've improved our collection efforts and made many internal operational improvements that have resulted in savings.

Through improved fiscal management we ended the fiscal year with a General Fund surplus of \$6.7 million and we were able to re-allocate monies to assist some of our most vulnerable residents. Of that amount we allocated \$2 million to a revenue stabilization fund that can help the City manage unforeseen economic events.

Establishing this reserve was an important and critical step that will help move us toward becoming a Tier One, Triple A bond rated city. A Triple A rating is the gold standard from the rating agencies; fewer than 40 cities nationwide have achieved the Triple A rating and we are moving Richmond in that direction.

To continue to Build a Better Richmond, we need to capitalize on our past successes, and look to the future with vision and a renewed sense of optimism.

We will do so by continuing to develop more creative, innovative and progressive ideas that get meaningful results. We will not rest on our laurels. We will not stop pushing ourselves and our City to become better - become the best Richmond we can be. We will lead this City not for self-interest but out of common interest.

We will not hide from making the tough decisions. We will be vigilant in our pursuit of excellence. Some may disagree with our deliberate approach. Some may question our actions and our timing, but I will lead this City on the path of success. We will not waiver from our mission - our vision of Building a Better Richmond and becoming a Tier One City.

GROWTH AND PROSPERITY

We must remain focused on creating a sustainable local economy and focus on the long-term growth and development of Richmond's job base and labor force.

That means embracing economic development as a core foundational function; realizing that economic development is more than how many buildings are renovated or constructed in our City. Economic development should be the engine that drives our City to greatness.

We've focused on maximizing the city's competitive advantages and positioning ourselves for growth—an approach that focuses not just on the next project, but on the next generation.

Our City needs answers that last!

While we will take advantage of good opportunities which present themselves, we are going to grow this City by design and not by default.

Short-term thinking won't address our many challenges or create long term job growth.

We are forging ahead with our aggressive economic and community development strategy – a strategy that expands our tax base, mitigates poverty and develops our future workforce.

For me, this is an issue of economic parity; an issue that is central to the overall economic health and future of our entire City.

Last year we reorganized the Department of Economic and Community Development. The new agency has diligently moved my philosophy forward which is a belief in:

- increased competitiveness,
- a tangible return on any investments we make,
- comprehensive neighborhood revitalization,
- industry-relevant workforce development, and
- an inclusive environment.

We needed a robust economic and community development agency, and that is exactly what we've built.

At the end of the year, we completed our CEDS – the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for the City of Richmond. And in doing so, we've corrected a major problem.

Not only did we get the CEDS completed after it had gone undone for many years, we have restored the City's credibility with a major federal partner—Economic Development Administration of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Our City and the private sector can now, for the first time since 1997, have the chance to access millions of dollars in support that had been previously closed off to us.

This is no small matter, and again, it isn't a complete solution, but it is a step in the right direction.

As we continue to position ourselves for future growth, we also need to develop new partnerships and grow existing relationships.

We've seen companies like Pfizer, Williams Mullen, MeadWestvaco, BB&T, and Health Diagnostics Labs decide to stay, relocate to, or expand in Richmond and we've worked to provide the incentives, when necessary, to help make those decisions happen. All of these employers are within our targeted cluster groups around life sciences, financial services, manufacturing and professional services.

These projects alone represent over \$140 million of investment and over 1300 jobs. Overall we currently have \$981 million... almost a BILLION dollars in recently completed, active, or planned development projects right here in the City of Richmond.

For as long as I can remember, we have all talked about regional cooperation. Unfortunately, in many cases, all we've done is talk. But just last fall, together with Chesterfield County, we secured Federal planning grants for the Hull Street corridor... another example of getting results by working collaboratively with our neighbors.

We recognized that for too long, the City of Richmond approached economic development projects almost exclusively by "granting" money to the private sector. We have begun to change that paradigm with new economic development financing tools ensuring short- and long-term return on investment. These include programs such as the Citywide and Section 108 loan pools, as well as a contractor's program that will further assist small and minority businesses with their working capital needs.

We've also exceeded previous levels of minority business spending by \$2.4 million and have set unprecedented goals for future participation levels.

Our venue tonight is a product of the city's creative financing. It is also an important symbol of what can be achieved by members of our local minority business community.

Not only does the Hippodrome anchor Jackson Ward with much-needed commercial, cultural and entertainment activity; but this project is important because it is the first project where we applied my philosophy for economic development. It validates our new economic model.

We were able to secure the following:

38% of housing units are affordable units - which means our teachers, police officers and our fire fighters can live here.

At least 30% of the construction jobs went to city residents.

30% of the project was completed by minority businesses.

This is a great illustration of how the City can promote neighborhood revitalization that is fiscally responsible and also leverage maximum private capital.

We said we'd do it, and we've done it.

With our focus on neighborhoods, we've worked to secure funds for Neighborhood Stabilization Programs. These funds have allowed us to move forward on renovations for vacant and foreclosed properties in Southern Barton Heights, Church Hill, North Highland Park, Southside and Eastview.

We are also working with LISC (Local Initiatives Support Corporation) to establish a vacant properties reinvestment fund to put these properties back on the tax rolls.

We're developing an urban revitalization plan for the East End's Nine Mile Road corridor.

We are very excited that the redevelopment of Dove Court is moving forward. We want vibrant mixed-income housing for Dove Court and now a developer has been chosen for implementation. This is an anchor project for north Richmond and I am proud to have helped move this project forward with our partner, the Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority.

We said we would do it, and we're doing it.

We are reclaiming our neighborhoods with a vision for their success and we're doing it neighborhood by neighborhood.

The Shockoe Bottom revitalization strategy will be completed next month.

This long-term economic revitalization strategy is yielding practical, do-able concepts for unlocking the commercial potential of Main Street Station. What we know thus far is that the train shed behind Main Street Station lends itself to becoming a catalytic anchor project for the area. The train shed has been empty for many years. So, the critical steps for us will be to invest in the train shed in a way that stabilizes that facility and positions it for future growth.

We are taking deliberate steps.

We continue to move forward in our quest to get higher speed rail from Richmond to D.C., the northeast and the southeast. Although, I would be less than honest if I did not add that this is not nearly fast enough for me, because I wanted it done yesterday.

Nonetheless, the Federal government granted Virginia \$44.3 million to continue the Tier II environmental studies that are the basis for the improvements needed for developing rapid rail, allowing us to commute to Washington and live in Richmond.

We are moving deliberately, and we will continue to push forward wherever and whenever we can.

Richmond is arguably one of the most historic cities in the United States. The range of history spans the Native American tribes that settled Shockoe Creek, to the Colonial history in the revolution and early tobacco trade, through the slave trade and early African presence, the Civil War, and the home of the first electric streetcar, and the robust black entrepreneurial presence that is represented by the neighborhood where we sit tonight. To ensure a *Richmond-centric* approach to marketing our unique assets, we will establish a Coordinator of Tourism position. Among other responsibilities, this individual will work with a diverse group

of civic, public and private sector stakeholders to lead implementation of recommendations that emerge from a tourism commission that I will appoint.

We said last year that the City needed a coliseum befitting a Tier One city in order to attract major sporting events and other entertainment.

Our strategic approach since then has resulted in a clear review of the feasibility of redeveloping or constructing a new arena.

The review shows that a new arena is needed and viable... that we could generate a positive cash flow for the City rather than continuing to operate at a deficit in the current structure. Not only can we generate revenue, but we can reclaim some of the entertainment events that have bypassed Richmond on their way to Charlottesville or elsewhere.

Our downtown should be anchored by a new Coliseum. Downtown is the right location and I'm encouraged by the feasibility study.

I also want to make clear my preference for a new Baseball Diamond on the Boulevard.

Last year we were excited to bring baseball back to Richmond. We realized that the Richmond Flying Squirrels were not only a great baseball team but an even greater community partner. In their first season, they established attendance records and the General Manager, Chuck Domino was named Executive of the Year. The Squirrels are a first class organization and deserve a first class stadium. The tradition of baseball on the Boulevard is an important one and we should continue that tradition when a new stadium is built. I believe the new stadium on the Boulevard can be the catalyst for significant development along this major corridor.

The corridor lends itself to high-density mixed-used development.

The site is the largest undeveloped site in the City. There are 60+ acres with high visibility and accessibility from I-95 and I-64. There are major links to districts and neighborhoods- South of the James, Byrd Park, The Fan, the Museum District, Monument Avenue, Northside.

But we can't emphasize enough the importance of a regional approach for some of our broader issues like transit, tourism and sporting events connected to the Coliseum and the Diamond, as well as High Speed Rail.

We are in constant discussions with our regional partners who all recognize that the city is the core of the region. We have to maintain a strong core if we are to have a strong region. Regardless of what addresses or zip codes change in our region, the 62 square miles that is the City of Richmond is the core. Richmond is the heart and soul of RVA.

The coliseum and Diamond are important parts of entertainment in Richmond.

Our Broad Street Redevelopment Strategy is equally important.

The Broad Street area, roughly between the Convention Center and Belvidere as well as portions of Grace Street and Jackson Ward - including our venue this evening- this area is developing into what we want to be our "cultural district." Our strategy consists of strategic property rehabilitation, small business development and façade improvement packaged under the heading of an arts initiative, "ArtBusiness Richmond."

The City's arts and cultural organizations are among our greatest assets. Arts and culture at every level are critical to the future of our city.

As part of ArtBusiness Richmond, we will tap our new financing mechanisms to facilitate redevelopment of selected buildings. But we will also provide micro-financing for small businesses operating in the target area.

You may have already noticed some nuisance properties looking better and you will continue to see progress being made property by property to enhance this corridor.

I will propose an ordinance to City Council creating our first cultural district so that we can capitalize upon its potential to become a bona fide arts and entertainment district.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

We have begun reinventing our workforce development program. This provides a more effective framework to align the local and regional Workforce Development Services.

Ours is becoming a demand driven workforce development strategy which begins by defining the needs of the customer.

We've looked at the knowledge, skills, abilities and working approach employers are seeking in their workforce to position the City to provide "Employees of Choice."

Recently we launched a pilot program for entry level construction jobs. The initial participants in the Richmond Workforce Pipeline completed three weeks at the Richmond Technical Center to become OSHA 30 certified in Construction Safety and Health. We were able to successfully place participants as apprentices with International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and with DAL Construction, a local construction firm working on McGuire Hospital.

Additionally, Aspen Products has agreed to use the Richmond Workforce Pipeline as its source of applicants. We thank Aspen for that commitment.

We'll be growing the number of participants in this program moving forward.

INVESTMENT IN CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

Even as we improve gateways and corridors; even as we push our economic development agenda forward and spur job growth, our efforts will be in vain if we do not protect the health and stability of our children, youth and families.

We must begin early with our children.

Our investment in the years to come in their development must be substantial if our children are to be first class champions who can compete academically and athletically in a global community.

I will be establishing a Breastfeeding Commission in March that will work with our hospitals, healthcare professionals, and community supporters to ensure that expectant mothers recognize the gift of health that they can provide their children if they nurse them.

When mothers breastfeed, research shows that we can begin to address a variety of issues: obesity, infant mortality, poor brain development.

A high-quality, well-aligned system for young children—a system that bridges the divide between early childhood programs and K-12 education—is key to the overall economic and social vibrancy of the City.

Richmond was one of four localities chosen nationwide by the National League of Cities to host a community conversation on educational alignment. The focus of this work is to ensure that our children are ready to learn when they enter school.

We are investing in our youth by working closely with some of our most fragile emerging young adults. Last year, we transferred our non-sworn truancy officers from the Richmond Police Department to our Justice Services department to take a different approach in addressing the needs of youth who are habitually truant from school. Our children cannot learn if they are not in school; I believe that one of our roles is to work to ensure that they are present and accounted for on a daily basis.

This past year, I launched the Mayor's Youth Academy which provided approximately 500 youth with summer jobs with businesses across the city and with state government.

Tonight, I call upon our business partners, religious organizations, non-profit and academic communities to assist us again in hiring our youth for this summer. We need you, and our youth need you.

NEW SCHOOLS

This past year we broke ground on two new elementary schools.

We said we would do, and we've done it!

We've started with a new Oak Grove Elementary and a new Broad Rock Elementary. Later this year, we will break ground on a new Martin Luther King Middle and a new Huguenot High School - the first new high school in 40 years.

These schools represent more than just new buildings; they represent a new chapter in our story.

We are raising expectations and these schools will be models of innovation and creativity. These schools will be comprehensive, community schools- housing not only creative learning environments, but also social services, health and recreational services. And they will be open during non-traditional hours.

Our City now enjoys the status of every school being accredited. I want us to give Superintendent Yvonne Brandon and the School Board a hand.

This is no small matter and let the record show that not every jurisdiction in our immediate area enjoys that standing.

While we applaud our schools and students for becoming fully accredited, our work is far from finished.

Our truancy rate, while declining, is still too high.

We still have 28% of our students that do not graduate on time.

And solving these difficult challenges will require more than new buildings. We must push and prod our school administration, teachers, students and parents - our City to make sure our children not only meet testing standards but are prepared to enter a world that is not defined by their neighborhood or zip code. We can leave no stone unturned and take no idea off the table in our pursuit of excellence in education.

We must have a school system that embraces creativity and new paradigms. We must ensure that our children have the tools they need to compete in the global economy. That means that our City's schools must strive to not only excel in testing but also excel in building character and good citizenship.

Let's challenge ourselves and bring together our educational professionals, business leaders, colleges and universities and anyone else who shares this common agenda. My

administration is working with the Secretary of Education to bring a university-centered laboratory school to our city. You will hear more about this in months to come.

I want this to be a new era for Richmond - a time when we do what is best for all of our residents.

And the education of our children must be a priority.

We owe it to our children to equip them for the world that they face.

Let us unleash the best in our kids!

HEALTH POLICY

Last year, I established a Blue Ribbon Commission on Health Policy.

The Commission recommends that we:

- provide flexible financing for doctors to work and practice in neighborhoods;
- provide incentives for corner stores to sell healthy food and place grocery stores in food deserts;
- require green spaces, trails,
- bike and walking paths in all new community plans;
- develop prevention and intervention services for at-risk youth and families;
- and implement a comprehensive consumer education program for school personnel.

It is critical that we take actions that help maintain a presence of physicians in the community. We also need to look squarely at whether the responsibility for establishing health priorities and policies should reside with the City of Richmond. The current responsibility for the city's health policies resides with the Commonwealth of Virginia. The Commission further recommended that we have a strong role in setting our own health priorities consistent with the unique needs of our citizens.

I want to thank the Blue Ribbon Commission for its work and its commitment to continue working to ensure that we create a 'healthy Richmond'. I will be looking to work with City Council and the Commission on many of the recommendations contained in the report.

BIKE COMMISSION

I also established the Mayor's Pedestrian, Bicycling and Trails Planning Commission and hundreds of enthusiastic participants gave their input at a public forum. In addition an on-line survey received over 1200 responses.

The Commission made several recommendations including:

- creating a Coordinator Position for the City of Richmond;
- implementing a “Complete Streets” policy making room for cars, buses, bikes and pedestrians;
- developing a dedicated funding stream for infrastructure;
- establishing education/safety programs for motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians;
- and prioritizing official vehicle, bicycle, and pedestrian routes for the City of Richmond.

These progressive recommendations are being advanced to City Council for formal adoption. And if approved, this is work we can begin within the next paving season. This is work that will go a long way toward making our city healthier, cleaner and safe for everyone.

GREEN CITY

As we build and rebuild our City, we've kept an eye on sustainability. We appointed the City's first Sustainability Manager and first Energy Manager.

We've been recognized for completing our Baseline Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory, and we received a Silver Award from the Virginia Municipal League for our part in the Green Government Challenge. We also received the Green Giant Award from the Sierra Club Falls of the James Group.

We have implemented sustainable initiatives that in total will save taxpayers more than \$300,000 annually.

Our four new school facilities and our new Fire Station - the first Fire Station built in 17 years - will all be LEED Silver certified.

Our City was selected as one of nineteen markets to be the first to see Ford's all-electric vehicle.

We have transitioned our fleet of refuse trucks from diesel to natural gas. These trucks will not only operate more efficiently, use less fuel and save money, but they will produce less carbon dioxide and other emissions.

We christened our first "green alley" this past year. This is a way to reduce stormwater pollution by using porous surfacing which allows water to soak through rather than run off.

We've already provided additional funds for basic improvements to roadways – which includes paving, sidewalks, trees and bridges, doubled the amount of money in the budget for these types of projects and this has resulted in a visible difference, and we've included improvement to major thoroughfares such as Broad Street, Midlothian Turnpike, Hull Street, Belvidere and Jefferson Davis Highway.

And we will continue investing in our infrastructure as well as improving core services.

SAFE COMMUNITIES

As we provide clean and green communities, we've got to provide safe communities.

While our overall crime statistics are down, we must remain vigilant where public safety is concerned.

Our public safety officials, including the dedicated police officers and fire fighters, do exceptional work on behalf of our City. This past year the Richmond Police Department received national accreditation for the first time in its history. That makes RPD one of the top 10% of law enforcement agencies nation-wide.

But the fact remains that we don't want any violent deaths in our City - no one does. Every such death is tearing apart someone's family, someone's mother, someone's father or someone's child.

Every year our hearts break as we remember the victims of crime in our city. We hold a solemn ceremony in the lobby of City Hall with the Coalition Against Violence. This past year was the 20th such year that we've held this recognition and we adorned the statue "The River of Tears" with red ribbons. We must continue to work diligently against senseless violence and we must support those in law enforcement when they need our help to abate crime.

It is only through service and working together that we can realize a transformation for all of our communities.

I have consistently said that we will not build a bigger jail and continue to warehouse people. That will not lead to the transformation of "our communities" that we are seeking.

That is why we are moving forward on developing strategies to reduce the jail population. We are partnering with the sheriff, commonwealth's attorney, judges and other stakeholders to create a system that recognizes our need for 21st century secure facilities but also a network of community based services.

We have to work together to address our challenges.

MPACC REVISITED

I want to revisit the service driven initiative MPACC just briefly. I set up MPACC because I believe that free flowing information from both citizens to government and from the government to citizens is essential to a well-managed government.

Moreover, citizens expect and deserve a responsive government.

So through MPACC, we've been hosting meetings to work with residents on priority items that need to be addressed throughout the City.

Since we began last July the turnaround request for core services is averaging eleven days as opposed to the months it used to take for some services.

We've received 7,490 requests for services and we've closed 7,196 of those requests!

That's a 96 percent completion rate.

I want to thank the city employees who have worked hard to produce this level of performance. We are continuing to improve our service delivery and we are taking care of our city better than ever.

One of the things I've learned in working with the MPACC co-chairs, and after meetings with those in the community, is that we need to shift our program name to a more user-friendly name.

The program name will shift slightly and will now be called MPACT.

M - P - A - C - T

Mayor's Participation, Action and Communication Team.

And through MPACT, I'm making a pact with you to continue providing faster service for concerns such as potholes and overgrown lots. Through MPACT we are also following citizen requests from start to finish, and we contact you when the work is done.

So I encourage all neighborhood civic associations, business associations, non-profit planning, service and funding agencies concerned with neighborhood issues to join with city departments in building stronger neighborhood partnerships and ensuring a coordinated effort and prompt delivery of city services.

CITY OF SERVICE

Along those lines, we announced last year the creation of the City's first Chief Volunteer Officer to develop and implement a plan to increase volunteerism. Our Neighbor-to-Neighbor program was launched and projects under this initiative have included:

- mentoring to children in schools
- visiting and providing home repairs for the elderly
- beautifying projects throughout the City,

- and shopping with youth for back-to-school

We competed with several other cities across the country to receive funding to hire a Chief Volunteer Officer. We were one of only twenty cities nationwide that received this grant.

These programs help us make the most of our greatest asset: public-spirited citizens like you and organizations from across the city.

I want to thank all of you for helping us to Build a Better Richmond.

SUMMARY

So remember we are saying it and we are doing it.

We will continue to focus on several key areas.

First, as a well-managed government we restored fiscal credibility, we have combined health care services for savings, restructured tax collections for savings, provided tax relief for seniors and disabled—reducing financial burdens during this economic downturn. Going forward we will fully implement outcome based budgeting, connecting our desired outcomes with spending; which will increase transparency and accountability.

In the area of economic development, we will continue to operate by our guiding principles. Those principles will help us address the poverty crisis, transform our neighborhoods into healthy thriving places, create jobs and become a Tier One City.

Going forward we have to look at those things that benefit our quality of life and the overall region. For example, there are land assembly questions, biotech questions, corridor development. We will work to find answers to the hard questions.

Where health and sustainability are concerned, we'll continue to work hard for a healthy city, with new bike trails, safer streets, and the elimination of food deserts. We will work to preserve our land, water and air quality. We want more control over our health policies and priorities.

We will continue to invest in our infrastructure; breaking ground on two more new schools this year, more library renovations, paving our streets and planting 2000 trees per year. We will break ground on a new fire station and a new justice center and ensure that the appropriate population is housed in our jail.

CLOSING

By being a well-managed government, fostering comprehensive economic development and growth, creating healthy and sustainable neighborhoods and communities, and strengthening and investing in our infrastructure, our city is poised for greatness.

We can build on the historical significance that we hold in the nation, as well as the creative and innovative path that we've laid out for the future. Our success is ensured.

Most of us who live here already get it! Our City is incredibly vibrant, diverse, historic, and timeless.

This is the city of Edgar Allan Poe, Maggie Walker, of John Marshall and Bill (Bojangles) Robinson. The city of Arthur Ashe, Lewis Powell and Oliver Hill.

This is the city of Samuel Tucker, Dr. Dorothy Height, L. Douglas Wilder and Henry Marsh.

Every day we are creating new possibilities and bringing them to life.

Every day we are forging ahead.

And even as we stand here this evening during Black History Month, in this transformed theater - a theatre which was old but is now made new - we know that our City is a City with a shared history. And to Build a Better Richmond we need to embrace the possibility of who we can become together, not who we are as separate and distinct individuals or groups. It is only together that we will move fully into our greatness and it is only together that we will realize our own renewal and transformation as a City.

Thank you.