

CITY OF LOCKPORT

STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

JANUARY 19, 2010

Michael W. Tucker
Mayor

Good Afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is my pleasure and honor to report to you on the State of our City this afternoon. I would like to thank the Lockport Rotary Club for hosting this event and thank you for your continued support to our community.

I am pleased to report that the State of the City remains strong. However, I remain deeply concerned about the mounting state and national deficits and the impact of them on our fiscal forecast for the years coming ahead. I understand that City taxpayers are struggling in these tough economic times, and we must remain focused on keeping taxes down and our budget tightened.

During last year's election, the taxpayers spoke and brought new faces to City Hall. I carefully watched and listened to the concerns of our residents. I welcome new Aldermen Andy Chapman, Ken Genewick and Jack Smith, and look forward to working with them – along with re-elected Alderman-At-Large Joe Kibler and Alderwomen Flora McKenzie and Richelle Pasceri to tackle the challenges ahead. I am so proud that Alderwoman Pasceri accepted the historic appointment as the first woman in our City's history to lead the Common Council as its President. I know that Common Council President Pasceri has the right temperament and vision to lead the Council during this critical time. I am equally proud of Alderwoman Flora McKenzie, who was first elected in 2005 as Third Ward Alderwoman and the first African American to hold elective office in the City of Lockport.

Flora's Young Men and Young Women of Character Programs she oversees to help kids in our community is commendable. These two strong women have made history in our City and I'm proud that it happened during my administrations.

As we move into 2010, we will be facing many challenges – and these challenges are steep. Initial projections from Albany indicate that Governor Paterson will withhold ten percent of the state aid to our City and the costs to local municipalities for the employee pension fund will increase dramatically in 2011. Unless state leaders recognize that they should not shift the burden of unfunded mandates upon local governments, it will have a substantial effect on our local budgets in the coming years. Therefore, we must be prepared to trim our budget, promote attrition and begin changing the way services are provided within our City.

As Mayor, I began sounding the alarm two years ago. This administration recognized this impending situation and sat down and negotiated with the employee bargaining units. We reached contracts with four of the five unions, and secured substantial concessions from our employees for the betterment of our great City. Highlights include the future privatization of garbage service, the real ability to share services with other municipalities, and embracing central dispatching which will reduce overtime costs and improve public safety. I thank the employees for accepting these changes and look forward to working with them on new ways to make our operations more effective and efficient.

Times are changing and we must do our part to properly plan for the long-term future of our City. As the new decade begins, I call upon the Common Council, department heads, and citizen boards to join me in setting a clear vision of where we want to be at the end of this decade and five decades from now. Many of you know that I am a person of action, and I am not a fan of empty promises and cheap talk. And I truly recognize that you can't build a house without proper plans and specifications. That's why – the time has come – to revise and modernize our City Charter, Master Plan, Zoning and Planning Ordinances. Some of our current provisions are over one hundred years old and simply outdated and unrealistic to address the challenges of today. Therefore, I will be re-instituting the Citizens Advisory Board to begin the process of revising our Charter. I will be seeking a grant from our state and federal leaders to assist in hiring an expert to improve our Master Plan. I call upon Senior Building Inspector Jason Dool, Corporation Counsel John Ottaviano and the Planning Board to work together to offer necessary revisions to the Planning and Zoning Laws. I know these are not easy tasks – they are time consuming and difficult – but necessary to adequately prepare our City for the decades ahead.

Now, like many of you, there is nothing that upsets me more than when I go to the store or restaurant and do not receive appropriate customer service. There is an expectation that when you pay for a service, you are treated with respect and in a fair manner. The same thing should be true for a municipal service. Since taking office over six years ago, I have made constituent service the bedrock of my tenure as your Mayor. I want to continue improving on the methods in which services are provided.

First, I want to enhance our Web site to permit an immediate live hotline to report your non-emergency concerns – such as garbage, small pothole or tree-trimming issues. Second, I believe it is time to allow the payment of taxes and water bills online and taking credit card payments. Third, we need to continue promoting quality of life activities for our youth and seniors, while maintaining our parks. And finally, under the leadership of Common Council President Pasceri and fellow members of the City’s Recycling Committee, I remain confident that we will implement a cost effective citywide curbside recycling program in a reasonable period of time.

While driving here today, I drove slowly by the Ulrich City Centre. I remember that it was an empty block at the beginning of my term and now stands as a “hub” of economic and social activity for our City. It hosts a number of businesses, our Summer Concert Series, and New Year’s Eve celebration. Tomorrow evening, it is expected that the Common Council will authorize me to enter into a contract to continue the Molson Canal Concert Series for another three years. Western New Yorkers and others from outside our state are realizing that Lockport is the place to be on Friday nights. Acts like REO Speedwagon, Blood Sweat and Tears, Charlie Daniels, Eddie Money, Randy Bachman and others have brought tens of thousands of people into our City to stay at our hotels, shop in our stores and eat at our restaurants. It has put us on the map and has been better than I could ever have imagined. This year’s line up, of which of course I can’t say, is shaping up to be the best year yet. It’s been a great thing for our City and I look forward to it continuing.

Though I am so proud of this extraordinary transformation at the Ulrich City Centre, it reminds me of the potential at other critical sites within our great City. There is not a day that goes by, where I do not think about how our City needs to focus our full efforts on economic and job development. I want to ensure all residents that the GLDC and myself continue to work hard on developing the Canal Street Block, Harrison Place and the manufacturing sectors in the North and West ends.

These economic priorities work in conjunction with promoting our most precious jewels, the Erie Canal and the Locks. The City remains fully committed to restoring the Flight of Five and the entire Lockport Locks Heritage District. We continue to work with Congressman Lee, Senator Maziarz, and Assemblywoman Corwin, officials at the Canal Corporation and our local organizations to make this project a reality. Also, I continue to evaluate the different alternatives proposed for the closed Parking Ramp and continue to pursue funding to tackle this critical project for local businesses downtown.

In 2007, I started the process of forming the City of Lockport Historic Preservation Board. Under the leadership of Bob Hagen, I am pleased to tell you today that the City of Lockport has been designated as a Certified Local Government. Just last week we received confirmation of a \$15,000 grant to allow us to start the process of hiring a consultant to help us with a citywide survey to designate historic areas and places. I want to thank Bob and the Board of Volunteers for their diligence and hard work. This committee will help make our City better and protect some of our greatest assets.

As I am often reminded, “Rome was not built in a day”, Lockport won’t be restored in a day either. However, we need to remain aggressive and focused on our goal to make these critical projects a reality while understanding the economic realities we face so future generations will want to stay, work and raise their families here.

In conclusion, I want to be very straightforward. The next two years are going to be challenging from an economic and financial standpoint. These are very tough times and difficult decisions will continue to be made. We, the Common Council and I, will have to decide which projects to do, and which projects will have to wait until all this uncertainty passes. I, along with the Common Council, will keep promoting a balance between a strong quality of life for City residents, while keeping taxes low.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to serve as your Mayor, and for the honor to address you today.