



CITY OF PLAINFIELD

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
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PLAINFIELD, NEW JERSEY 07060



STATE OF THE CITY 2016

Members of the City Council, Cabinet Members, Honored Guests, fellow Plainfielders, and friends of Plainfield,

I am pleased to share with you the 2016 State of the City Address.

As always I would like to begin by acknowledging and congratulating the newly elected Council members who began their four-year term on January first. Congratulations to Council member Barry Goode who was elected to serve as Councilman at large in the first and fourth wards. Congratulations also to Councilman Cory Storch who serves in the second ward and was elected to serve as the Council President.

I extend my regards to other Council members, Councilwoman Bridget Rivers who serves in the fourth Ward, Councilwoman Gloria Taylor who serves in the third ward, Councilwoman Rebecca Williams who is Councilwoman at Large in the second and third wards, Councilwoman Diane Toliver serving in the first ward and Councilwoman at Large Tracy Brown.

I look forward to working with the council this year, as there is much work to be done in Plainfield, and I believe that if we work together we can make a significant difference.

My administration would be nothing without the talented team of cabinet members who work with great dedication to ensure that the business of running the city takes place smoothly, and with professionalism... and at this time, I'd like to recognize them. Rick Smiley, John Stewart Jr., Ron West, Carl Riley, Carlos Sanchez, Eric Watson, and David Minchello

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Thank you.

Last, but never least I'd like to recognize the unwavering support that I receive daily from my beautiful wife Amelia and daughters Ayisha and Shermona. Truly they inspire and sustain me, and I am grateful every day that they recognize the importance of public service.

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If I had to describe the past year in only two words, those words would be change and progress. 2015 was a pivotal year and as I look ahead to 2016 I see that we are poised to achieve even more. But, before we discuss future plans, let's take a closer look at the progress made in 2015 and some of the changes that took place.

Change can be scary, depressing, and sometimes it pulls us in the opposite direction of where we think we should be going... but all change is not like that and that's not the kind of change I want to talk about today.

Today I want to talk about the kind of change that enhances lives... The kind of change that elevates... and fixes... and helps those that are touched by it... The kind of change that indicates progress... that's the change I want to talk about today.

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I stood before you at the beginning of 2014 and again in 2015 and I promised that there would be change. I promised you that the safety of Plainfield residents was a top priority for my administration, and me, and we would work tirelessly to ensure that Plainfield was safe for everyone.

I have kept this change as a priority in my mind and I am happy to be able to tell you that violent crime has fallen by 17 percent over the past two years... non-violent crime by nine percent... and thanks to the implementation of new safety measures, we are confident that it will continue to follow this downward path during 2016.

Our Police force has never been as interactive with our community as they are today, due to the strengthening of our Division Wide Community Policing philosophy, which requires Officers to exit their patrol vehicles regularly, and positively engage with the community.

We have installed 30 Real Time City Wide Cameras in strategic locations and will be able to view their feed, live from police headquarters. This system went live on February 1st, 2016, and will enable our police force to be far more proactive in responding to negative activity.

We recently added seven new officers to our Police force, who were fully mobilized at the end of January. Also, as a result of recent retirements, the Police Division sent nine new recruits to the Union County Police Academy on January 15, 2016.

Our Police Officers have started utilizing body-worn cameras; ultimately, even as we patrol the streets to make them safer we want to build trust, and enhance relations between our law enforcement officers and the community. We see this as a positive step in the right direction.

This is change that is good for all of us...

2015 saw collaboration between the American Red Cross and the Plainfield firefighters as they teamed up to help educate families on steps to prevent fires in their homes. To date, the Fire Division has installed 164 smoke detectors in 53 Plainfield homes at no cost to the homeowner.

The Fire Division added 12 new firefighters, and a new Pumper and Combined Rescue Truck has been fully operational since fall of 2015.

An updated software system to support better record keeping and an upgraded narrow band radio system ensures that our Firefighters are better equipped and more involved than ever in the business of keeping Plainfield safe in 2016.

This is progress that is good for all of us...

Sometimes progress is not about huge things but more about achieving goals and performing everyday tasks in an outstanding way, like our Public Works Department did every day of 2015.

From responding to service and weather related calls to street sweeping, to painting signs, paving roadways, abating unused properties, and ensuring that repairs were done to all public pools in readiness for the summer season of 2015, they went about the business of maintaining the city professionally, and responding in a timely manner when service was requested.

The Recreation Division was steadfast in providing wholesome activities for the entire family to enjoy. Our young people participated in diverse activities such as basketball, wrestling, tennis, swimming, fishing, dance, and theater, while older members of the family got involved in line dancing and fishing. The seniors were not to be left out, as they got active in Zumba classes, and enjoyed, at least, 15 culture-based field trips.

Our Public Works and Recreation departments met and surpassed their goals for 2015; this is how we progress by achieving one goal at a time. Each Division has been a vital part of the change process and it hasn't happened overnight but the progress is steady and sure.

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I want to switch gears for a minute and talk about Goals... to be more specific, let's talk about Achieving Sustainable Goals...

Some of you may remember in 2014 when I stood before you as your newly elected Mayor, and I presented a three-point plan for Economic Development here in Plainfield... it involved a technical review team to expedite projects, a marketing and branding strategy to attract developers, and a transportation plan to continue to push for a One-seat ride to New York City.

Our goal though seemingly simple was not an easy one... we wanted to attract new businesses and new residents to Plainfield, and that does not happen by sending out an embossed invitation. We had to prove that Plainfield was economically viable; we had to prove that Plainfield was safe; we had to prove that Plainfield was a great place to live, to work and to invest, and we put our talent and resources into proving that.

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I'd like to share the story of Abraham and Maria Ramos... Maria used to sell Empanadas and Arepas out of a little corner shop in Colombia, South America. When she settled in the US, Maria decided to use the skills she had and open a restaurant; Abraham worked in a

plastic factory, and after they married he left his job to work with Maria in the restaurant; Specializing in Hispanic foods they anticipated that patrons of the business would primarily be Plainfield's Latino population, but after just one short year in business, their clientele included people of all cultures.

Their expansion was only by word of mouth, but soon they began serving customers from North Jersey to as far north as New York City and in 1997 they were able to expand their menu... Then on March 15, 2015, they suffered structural damage to their restaurant, which had now been in business for 29 years.

Unsure of what to do, they were offered assistance through the "Plainfield Open for Business" loan program and with collaboration from the Regional Business Assistance Corporation they were able to begin the process of re-opening in another location, and keeping their business and employees here in Plainfield.

The RBAC in partnership with Greater Newark Enterprises Corporation, and facilitated by the City's office of Economic Development, were able to assist Mi Buenaventura with relocation, expansion, and a complete upgrade.

On November 12th, 2015 they re-opened their doors for business here in Plainfield once again.

We take enormous pride in this Plainfield success story and in showing skeptics that The "Plainfield Open for Business" loan program works...investing in revitalization and development works... Investing in public safety works... Investing in Plainfield works... and we look forward to assisting other deserving businesses through this program.

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Over the past two years, we have participated in the opening of over 15 new businesses here in Plainfield.

We have provided assistance to existing developers and facilitated the flow of information to potential developers. As a direct result of this, there are over 56 development projects at various stages totaling over \$135 million dollars in investments.

I would like to highlight just two of those projects:

- On South Avenue preliminary and final planning board approval has been obtained to build 212 residential units, with 302 parking spaces and related amenities, along with site improvements of 11 lots in the South Avenue Gateway Redevelopment Area.

This is transit-oriented development and it will boast a number of environmentally friendly features

- Redevelopment and Purchase agreement has been approved for the acquisition and redevelopment of approximately five acres of a brownfield site on South Second Street;

This will include proposed development of a 44 thousand square foot commercial facility, and proposed development of approximately 90 units of one, two and three bedroom units in two five-story buildings

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Friends, the time for talking about proposed redevelopment is at an end. I stand here with certainty tonight and tell you that Plainfield is rebounding. We are achieving the goals we set two years ago. We have laid the foundation for sustainable achievement in 2016.

This... is what I call real change and real progress.

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2015 saw the implementation of IQM2 system for the City Council, which has streamlined the resolution and ordinance process and allows for faster and easier tracking, without leaving a large paper trail. The Courthouse was equipped with fixed cameras and most notably we saw a substantial reduction in abandoned and foreclosed properties. Progress takes the form of little things... which when put together make a big thing.

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Communication is a big thing and the way people communicate evolves constantly. Over the past 10 years we have witnessed a revolution where communication is concerned, and keeping up with that change is a critical component in the success of any administration. It is something that I personally feel strongly about.

I promised that we would revamp, update and innovate the way that residents and stakeholders were able to communicate with us, provide more avenues for open dialog, and make information more readily available. During 2015, we made breakthrough strides. Our Social Media presence solidified with an update, which linked both the City's Facebook and Twitter accounts with cohesive designs. Both provide a medium for ongoing interaction with residents and stakeholders and both are closely monitored and updated daily.

The City Website was transformed as we did away with the old, clunky, hard to use interface, and replaced it with a design that was clean, innovative, easy to navigate, and filled with useful information.

One user who recently relocated here from New York wrote to us and said: "The website has improved a ton in the past year. I can now more easily find what I am looking for. The Home Owners Guide is a definite bonus as well. Please keep adding more of the features like the Home Owners Guide and community events. I really am glad I moved here from Brooklyn. Keep up the great work.

Yet another user shared this response: "I just got finished browsing around the website. It is top notch and really reflects Plainfield for the potential and treasures that lie within. Great Job! Now I know when and where the council meetings are."

The new website is a large part of the progress we have made in upgrading the way we communicate.

One of the most popular phrases today is "There's an app for that" and The City of Plainfield can now join the ranks of cities who can say this with confidence. Recognizing that many people use their phones exclusively to fill their communication needs - We

developed an App for the City of Plainfield which captured the most useful and helpful information from our website and placed it in the hands of the app users. The Mapp App represents our ongoing commitment to staying current and connected at all times to our community.

We call this progressive change...

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Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said - Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through continuous struggle.

Plainfield... it is neither unreasonable nor unattainable to seek prosperity for everyone who lives here. It is not idealistic to pursue equality for every resident of Plainfield regardless of status, creed or address.

The goals of my administration this year embody the tenets of equality, prosperity and unity and as I lay out our plans for 2016 I hope you will join me in dreaming, working and building for the attainment of these goals.

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The lifeblood of every successful community are the hardworking people who support and sustain it through commerce, hard work, and investment.

We are committed in 2016 to expanding and promoting opportunities for all Plainfield residents in the fields of nutrition, housing, health, income stabilization, criminal justice and improved community life.

Recognizing that economic independence builds self-supporting residents, which translates to a stronger community; our Plainfield Actions Services will serve as the municipal office to strategically empower low-income and moderate-income residents and help them achieve self-sufficiency.

Through partnerships with Rutgers University School of Social Work, we have been able to engage master's level students of social work to serve as case managers. As a result of this, we plan to increase case management service to residents by ten percent and reduce client wait time. This will also enable us to have increased community outreach.

Our "Bootstraps" program, which is supported by Rutgers University School of Social Work, is set to assist more individuals to reach self-sufficiency through intense case management.

In 2015, we sought alternatives to help economically strapped tenants find alternatives to eviction. We will continue to do so in 2016 as we work with tenant/landlord advocacy services to prevent evictions and homelessness. We will facilitate and arrange funding assistance to prevent eviction proceedings. Additionally, we will provide direct nutritional services to those unable to procure food without assistance.

Prudent money management can mean the difference between success and failure, and we will continue to facilitate Financial Empowerment workshops to prevent asset poverty, and build economic stability. The focus will be on basic banking and money management, including budgeting, savings, debt reduction and investment.

Our Community Relations Department will work to strengthen partnerships with other agencies to provide services and address community needs and host a non-profit community conference that will include grant writing, visioning and branding. During 2016, they will add to the structure of the department by developing a board of trustees.

The consumer education provided will encompass a variety of topics designed to help the community understand, cope and plan; the topics are diverse and include – funeral planning, credit management, fraud prevention, and identifying and avoiding scams

We will actively pursue avenues to increase the grants, which assist with these programs

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Public safety is, and will remain one of the most important issues to any community and it has always been a top priority of my administration. 2016 will see no less an effort than we have made in previous years. One crime in Plainfield is one too many and we intend to continue the fight to make this City the safest in New Jersey.

Our 911 Phone System upgrade has been completed and while callers may see no noticeable difference, it enables the call to be handled more efficiently by the operator. To complete this technology upgrade our emergency radio system will be upgraded by the end of March. Additionally, automated license plate readers will soon be installed throughout the City and we will begin utilizing a public safety computer virtualization enhancement by midyear.

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There are a number of new initiatives, which I believe will prove to be instrumental in the successful revitalization of Plainfield.

Firstly, we need to provide an avenue to re-entry for those who have been incarcerated. Each year, more than 700,000 people are released from state and Federal prison, while another 9 million cycle through local jails. Statistics indicate that more than two-thirds of state prisoners are rearrested within three years of their release and half are re-incarcerated. High rates of recidivism mean more crime and more victims. We need to find a way to intervene and circumvent the cycle of arrest, incarceration, release, and re-arrest.

Our criminal justice system cries out for reform. The United States has only 5% of the world's population, yet it has 25% of the world's prison population. Something is wrong! We as a nation cannot jail our way out of the social, emotional and other societal ills that lead the poor and too many of our young people down the wrong path. We must shift resources from incarceration to re-entry, early intervention and prevention. Meaningful criminal justice reform is an absolute must.

My administration is working on a reentry program to assist incarcerated individuals with a successful transition to community life after they are released. Breaking the cycle of drug use and crime will greatly enhance public health and the safety of our community. We intend to aid post-incarceration re-entry efforts by assisting in job placement, facilitating access to drug-free housing, and providing other supportive services

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The second initiative will be a first for the City of Plainfield. We will introduce the first ever Municipal ID system. We want every resident of Plainfield to have access to a photo ID. This has been a problem for some groups such as seniors, those on re-entry programs or undocumented individuals. The City Administration will issue the ID's and we believe it will provide a viable solution for many who are unable to procure an ID through other means.

This is not an ID card for Latinos and should not be thought of as such; this is not an ID card for undocumented immigrants and should not be viewed as such; this is a photo ID card for anyone who lives in Plainfield – let me repeat, for anyone who lives in Plainfield.

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This year we will be paying very close attention to abandoned and foreclosed properties and looking at ways to prevent and minimize this from happening. We have already been able to offer help, advice, and resources through a number of workshops and we will build on that success with ongoing support in 2016.

Let me also say this. We are committed to our veterans; last year we provided them with space at 400 East Front Street where they now have unfettered access. Although they can come and go as they please that is not enough. Too many of our veterans are homeless, many don't have jobs and they go hungry every day. No one who has served this country should go without a meal, job or a roof over his/her head. We will explore, in partnership with a non-profit, the possibility of turning the former Dudley House into housing for some of our veterans.

All retail food establishments are undergoing inspection and we will complete that process during the course of this year.

My administration is one that prefers to lead by example and we believe in fiscal prudence. This year we will actively seek and apply for grant opportunities that will help meet our capital improvement needs. We will seek ways to reduce overtime in various departments and seek further reduction in our audit findings.

Our long-term fiscal goals include property tax stabilization. Working to build a city surplus of at least 8 million dollars. Seeking funding for capital initiatives and increase shared services with other agencies.

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Our development goals for 2016 revolve around three main themes; we're going to continue promoting and marketing the new loan program throughout the business community. As we heard with Abraham and Maria Ramos, this program works and can help sustain local businesses that need a helping hand. Secondly we are going to work closely with developers, facilitating the smooth implementation of proposed projects, and thirdly we are going to actively seek potential new businesses and investors.

Our Economic Development team will have as a focus, streamlining and simplifying the approval process for potential new developments and small businesses.

They will assist potential investors in obtaining the appropriate approvals and will offer adequate incentives to allow investments and projects to move forward. We will offer

support to current investors and establish new initiatives and educational seminars for the business community and residents of the City.

My administration and I have worked hard to advance the potential redevelopment of the Muhlenberg site and I am pleased to share with you that it is now ready to accept viable proposals from investors or developers.

Throughout the past year we re-established a working relationship with JFK Health in order to move the re-development process for the now closed 10 acres of the hospital site, and conducted required studies. This allowed us to obtain the necessary recommendation and approvals from both the Planning Board and the City Council in order to declare the site an “area in need of re-development”

The site has been marketed to potential investors and developers as a site for a “health care” facility with supporting services and benefits to the Plainfield community and surrounding areas

Working closely with a re-development consultant we are now in the process of creating, generating and marketing a viable RFP to attract potential proposals for the redevelopment of the site.

We have also worked closely with JFK to properly assist them with the relocation and implementation of a newly renovated Satellite Emergency Room at the Kenyon House facility with expanded services to the community.

This administration is committed to the continued re-development process and will explore all potential avenues to bring activity back to the Muhlenberg site.

A very real obstacle to economic growth in Plainfield continues to be a lack of support from local organizations to promote programs, new initiatives and provide resolution to many issues. We must work together in 2016 to overcome this stumbling block. When our local economy prospers, we all prosper and ultimately we are building something that our children can inherit enjoy, and build upon.

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This brings me to what will be an important project for 2016. This year we will begin the process of marketing and re-branding our City. We must do away with the misconception that Plainfield is not a safe place to live. We have a great lifestyle to offer and we want our residents and visitors to spread the word. Our Historic Districts are amongst the finest in New Jersey, we are one of the few towns that have two train stations and now offer a one-seat ride directly to New York.

Our branding initiative will support the redevelopment efforts. As more people understand the opportunity that Plainfield presents, our ability to attract more investors will expand exponentially. Plainfield is indeed a great place to live and work and that is the platform that we want to use to engage potential residents, investors and yes, even our own community. We have to see ourselves the way we want others to perceive us.

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2016 is poised to be a breakout year. This year we will see much of the groundwork laid in

the past two years come to fruition.

This is the year that we begin to change the image of Plainfield...

This is the year that we begin to infuse Plainfield pride back into the blood stream of our community...

This is the year that public safety becomes more than just a phrase; it will be a way of life...

This is the year that new life will begin sprouting in previously undeveloped spaces...

This is the year that we begin to breathe new life into our business community...

If we work hard and achieve our goals, this will be a year of prosperity, a year of greater equality, a year of development and progress.

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I would like to acknowledge the support of the City Council who has helped to move Plainfield forward and into the position it is today. Poised on the brink of major re-development and infusing new life into our current business district.

Because of their support and the work of so many who are assembled here today, we can point to past success. We can see change, and we can show progress, and yet, we also understand that our work is nowhere near done. We can take pride in what we've accomplished, but we cannot be complacent. We MUST feel a sense of urgency about what lies ahead and we must work together to make our City a place we are always proud to call home.

Today I say to you that the State of the City is strong, we have advanced immeasurably since 2014 when you entrusted me with the role of your Mayor. 2016 promises to be even more rewarding as we continue to work together. We are stronger when we work together, we achieve more when we work together, we can change the world when we work together. This evening I leave you with more wise words from Dr. King - We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools.

Thank you! May God bless you, the City of Plainfield and the United State of America
Good night.