



2010

State of the City Address

Hon. Ann M. Thane

Mayor, City of Amsterdam

Presented to Amsterdam Common Council

January 15, 2010

Racing with Destiny

Members of the Common Council, Controller Reynicke, my Department Executives, honored guests and my fellow residents of the City of Amsterdam, it is with a distinct sense of privilege that I deliver to you a report on the state of the city. As we enter a new year my administration is eager to partner with a new council and together embark on a journey of success that has been unmatched in recent history. Together we will champion the needs of our citizenry, confront those issues that most affect us all, and explode into this new decade with brazen resolve and deliver all that is deserved to our fellow neighbors and friends.

As our nation begins its recovery from near financial disaster, and as our state has thrust its worrisome economic condition upon municipalities all across New York, Amsterdam will directly confront our given set of circumstances and counter with smart economic and community development policy and press forth towards financial stability and economic comfort as together we will succeed, we must succeed as this is a time for serious people confronting serious issues and this administration will answer our call to duty utilizing every avenue along the road to prosperity, both legislatively and administratively.

As the City of Amsterdam prepares to engage in the budgetary process, my administration anticipates a fruitful dialogue with the city's Controller whereas together we will formulate a budget that not only serves as a listing of appropriations and expenditures, but acts as a guiding policy tool for the next fiscal year and roadmaps a destination with measurable goals over the next decade so that this city, our home, is prepared for the challenges we may face and so that we may reinvest in the necessities and amenities our constituents must be afforded to maintain a healthy community. This government has learned much through the partnership with the Office of the State Comptroller in review of our practices and we will implement appropriate procedures going forward.

We often speak of economic responsibility and fiscal conservatism, especially in times of uncertainty, but I do not see this period in our history as a time to shrink in on ourselves, rather I see this as a time to view economics and finances not as a liberal versus conservative issue, but to view these series of complexities through a prism of fiscal intelligence. We must enact smart money policies that not only guard our assets, but provide opportunity for growth and development thereby increasing our vital tax base and expanding our sphere of influence in the Capital Region.

As a humorous aside, let me summarize to my Republican controlled Common Council my philosophy; it is now "Grow, Baby Grow." We will grow the seeds of opportunity, we will nurture the expansion and prosperity of our city and in this process we will strengthen our community.

In this next year we will examine and act upon the Capital Projects list, some of which has lain dormant for several years. We can no longer afford to risk the safety and

security of our citizens and our employees, thus I call upon this council to work with my administration and the Controller to develop sound, practical methods by which we will invest in our future. We will focus our efforts on prioritizing those projects that require immediate attention and develop comprehensive purchase plan agreements that act in a fiscally intelligent and responsible manner. We will seek alternative funding through grants and other available resources to further aid our efforts as we must act now as material and equipment prices are low and the cost of borrowing is greatly reduced. We have a responsibility to provide our constituents with the best of services and we will meet that obligation in this process.

As we begin to identify the path we will follow in the coming years, it is important to also reflect upon our successes in the last twelve months and build upon those achievements. I am pleased to announce to the City of Amsterdam the following accomplishments that have been attained in the past year:

Through a partnership with Montgomery County, Amsterdam has seen the demolition of sixteen blighted properties throughout the city with more dilapidated properties already taken down in the new year and additional properties identified for demolition in the coming months.

The City of Amsterdam has been the recipient of a 10.2 million dollar stimulus improvement deal that will see to the upgrading of the water filtration plant and distribution system improving the city's water quality and enhancing the facilities operational and structural efficiency. Also, the Wastewater Treatment Plant has begun rebuilding the Southside Pump Station to accommodate the Beechnut facility project, which with new water agreements will generate additional revenue for the city. Furthermore, we

have seen the completion of the Northampton Box Culver project, the conclusion of the Storm-Sewer Separation initiative and the installation of the emergency generator system at the West-end Pump Station.

We have also seen vast improvements in our city transit department. We have also been allocated stimulus money from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act in the amount of \$593,950.00 which will expand our fleet with the purchase of buses, signage and much needed garage rehabilitation at no cost to the city tax payers. New York State Department of Transportation has even conveyed that they are pleased with the progress at the City of Amsterdam's Transit Facility and preparations have been made for the city's traffic re-patterning. Moreover, the collaboration of two unions (ATU & AFSCME) has resulted in sharing DPW mechanics with the Transit Department furthering the stretch of our available resources and diminishing costs.

The city's Parks and Recreation Department has spearheaded several successes as well. The Riverlink Park restaurant underwent substantial remodeling and has resulted in increased foot and boat traffic to the park facility. Also, the construction of a new baseball field within Veterans Park which was a joint venture between the City, St. Mary's Hospital, the Amsterdam Youth Baseball Club and the Amsterdam Cal Ripken Baseball League. In the upcoming year, we will continue to expand parking at Shuttleworth Park and continuing to push for a 1.5 mile walking path along the water.

Through engaging dialogue with the county Board of Supervisors, the City of Amsterdam was able secure an increased sales tax revenue agreement thereby prompting a more equitable distribution of the sales tax generated.

Since the second week of December, the city has seen the replacement of nearly half of the previously identified thirty fire hydrants that were either malfunctioning or in poor

working condition and this process has been a teachable moment for the city in terms of the infrastructure that we can no longer wait to repair. We must adopt a proactive approach in identifying equipment for repair or replacement at the first signs of wear, rather than erupting into elements of alarm when we are thrown an unexpected surprise. We must all do better; we will do better as this city cannot sustain our collective failures. In this moment of teaching we will accept our responsibilities and we will raise the bar of expectations and hand-in-hand we will lift our community above any instance of challenge.

The city has also worked diligently together in elevating our sense of community spirit and prompting a call for every member of this city to do their part in steadying the stewardship of this community. The creation of the Amsterdam Neighborhood Watch program, Police Academy and the Amsterdam Neighborhood Association has led to this community once again garnering a notion of ownership and responsibility in striving to make our city a better place to call home. I applaud the many members of the Amsterdam Police Department, Neighborhood Watch Captains, Neighborhood Association community organizers and countless volunteers who have made our short run a successful operation with graffiti clean-up events, Meet Your Neighbor gatherings, National Make a Difference Day participation and the continued neighborhood safety training in community activism. We will expand the outreach efforts of our community groups in the next year with increased recruitment and continued partnership between my office, the police department and the many community leaders who have selflessly dedicated their time and attention to our all-important cause.

Furthermore our collective notion of civic duty has continually been enhanced by the social support provided by the Amsterdam Beautification Corps and their service in

planting flowers, hanging banners and fostering an ornate picture of our beautiful community. Efforts such as these have also been exhibited through the formation of a local Habitat for Humanity chapter, and the inclusion of the Youth Construction Initiative Program throughout the city in many of the community projects.

In this past year we have also begun to critically view the social support structure that we provide to our community. In collaboration with local education leaders and business professionals we have seen the development of programs such as the Suicide Prevention Task Force. In addition we have seen the implementation of the Business and Education Alliance in our area which seeks to promote healthy business teachings to our students and provides them a framework in which to prepare their professional skills upon entering the working world. It is because of programs such as these, that we as a society are able to reach greater expectations and, again, continually raise the bar for which we as a people must strive to meet.

In addition to support we must provide opportunity. The leadership of the city's Industrial Development Agency and education efforts of my administration have resulted in the City of Amsterdam's competitive placement in the selection process for the New York State Office for Technology's consolidated data center. The redevelopment of the Mohasco Technology Complex will spotlight Amsterdam's position within the Capital Region and Tech-Valley Corridor. It is my sincere hope that I may stand before you one year from now and proudly proclaim that our city is home to a state data center that will bring with it millions of dollars of investment, job creation, economic sustainability and growth in our population.

The city has also received immense assistance from our grant-writing staff and Urban Renewal Agency. In the past year the City of Amsterdam obtained key grants for several important projects. A \$400,000.00 Community Development Block Grant was secured and together with funding from a \$500,000.00 Federal Transportation grant, \$150,000.00 from AIDA and \$125,000.00 from the Department of State will push forward the Bridge Street reconstruction program and help fund roads, sidewalks, lighting and the burying of utility lines. In addition, we are proud to announce that twenty-five homes were rehabilitated under the HOME and CDBG grants. One such area was a stretch of Division Street on which three decaying houses were demolished with plans for rehabilitative construction on another home through Rivercrest Development. The city has begun to target previously underserved areas and will continue to breathe life into our neighborhoods in efforts to brush off the dusting of our past and continue the systematic building of our future.

While we have made significant strides over the course of the past year, in addition to our list of accomplishments we must also set a series of goals for which we must aim in the coming years. This government and my administration must foresee an overall concept of that which we will strive to reach. The Common Council must be prepared to embrace that vision and work supportively through the legislative process as I will continue to advance the needed change in our community administratively.

My administration will be committed to community and economic development in the coming year. Through administrative partnerships with city and state agencies such as Urban Renewal, AIDA, Empire Zone and the newly formed Excelsior program, we will embark on a relentless march towards progress by identifying specific businesses and

business types that will best serve our community's needs and play to the historic and cultural advantages we inherently have to offer. We will strive to improve the face of and breathe new life into our downtown business and empire zone districts by courting the appropriate class and function of business prospects. With the availability of such enticing offers as our \$500,000.00 Main Street grant program and Empire Zone tax credits, we will work in concert with entrepreneurs and our local agencies to provide every economic, financial and social incentive possible to once again drive the pulse of prosperity through our city.

My administration is also committed to the enforcement of building and codes standards. With the recent addition of a Code Enforcement Supervisor, I trust that with the recently enacted changes within the department in terms of operations and efficiency, the city will once more continue to hold property owners to the highest standards and we will embrace serious commitment so that issues will be quickly addressed and resolved expeditiously. In this past year we have generated additional revenue for the city by billing for property maintenance services on non city-owned properties to ensure that they remain within the established guidelines of city codes.

Our commitment to public safety will continue to be a source of great results. We are fortunate to live each day under the blanket of protection provided by our police and fire department forces. Our community remains extraordinarily safe and we will further strengthen that with the efforts of our security camera system in our city's parks, the first response software system of our fire department and we will continue to devise methods that integrate the best of technology and resources to assist our brave service members in keeping us all secure.

The city will also be entering a year of heavy construction and redevelopment. With Bridge Street reconstruction slated to begin this spring and the NYS Dormitory Authority's recent release of contract documents and \$350,000.00 in funding matching the Department of State \$350,000.00 grant totaling \$700,000.00 in all, the City of Amsterdam will begin the construction of Riverlink Park Phase II and continue in its endeavor to bring beauty and rehabilitation to our community. These projects will serve to bring our neighbors together and provide a necessary facelift to our Waterfront Heritage Area, which is also the focus of a Brownfield's Opportunity Area Grant application currently in the review process. This will couple with Amsterdam's fortunate receipt of sixteen million dollars from the 2005 Transportation Bond Act for construction of a Pedestrian Bridge that will unite our North and South shores and provide a catalyst for tourism and economic expansion with the increase that businesses will receive as a direct result of its construction. I wish to publicly extend my appreciation to Congressman Paul Tonko and all those who have assisted in providing our city with needed improvements and funding for these necessary developments.

I am also pleased to report on the comprehensive development of the city's marketing campaign that will serve to elevate the public image of the City of Amsterdam to attract new business opportunity, promote relocation to Amsterdam, bolster population growth, expand the existing tax base and generate additional sources of revenue through business enterprise, retail sales activity and marketplace viability thereby providing the City of Amsterdam with the capability to reinvest in infrastructure, decrease its tax burden and provide amenities that generate a healthy community environment while presenting an accurate and positive city image.

In an effort to brand this city we will show that Amsterdam is a community that is warm, accessible, and affordable. Housing and cost-of-living priced well below the national and state average provide a comfortable and settling environment to live and raise a family, while the city's location along the NYS Thruway, Amtrak lines and canal provide for easy access to and from the surrounding capital region. Quality education, amenities and prime conditions for economic growth also provide a supportive framework for community and economic development.

The marketing campaign has been highlighted in a tactical plan and campaign evaluation that tracks measurable goals and these documents will be available on our city website, another of our yearly accomplishments. We will utilize our existing resources such as the internet and social networking in conjunction with print and media spots produced primarily through grant funding and free resources with very limited cost to local taxpayers. We will feature radio advertisement segments, promotional videos, advertisement in print productions and the City of Amsterdam will even be featured in an eight page insert in the Legislative Gazette next month.

In a joint effort to utilize combined resources and establish subsequent cost savings and revenue enhancements, my administration will actively engage in productive dialogue and negotiations with our Common Council Inter-governmental Committee co-chairs, the Montgomery County Board of Supervisors shared services committee and the Greater Amsterdam School District to establish an action plan for expanded shared services. Together we will evaluate our strengths and weaknesses and provide support for one another through services such as records management, shared equipment, and the selling of services to surrounding areas. In addition, the city's connection to NYCOM and my

position as NYCOM Finance Committee co-chair will assist in our efforts by providing unique insight on the complex solutions needed to address difficult issues. We will stand as one united community and that is why I am calling on the city, the county and the school board of education to band together in one solitary voice to champion the much needed resources and funding this community and surrounding area needs in order to effectively continue operations.

This year, city employees underwent workplace violence and safety training and we will begin implementing organized schedules of training for our employees to ensure that the City of Amsterdam is served by the most qualified and highly trained public servants. My administration will also focus concentrated attention to our own in-house operations in the coming year. We will look to evaluate the efficiency of departments, crews and responses and strive to provide our citizenry with a return appropriate to the taxes they already pay. That is why I will be announcing in the coming weeks the formation of an Inter-Department Task Force charged with identifying areas for improvement and establishing a supportive framework for all employees with the development and continued evaluation of departmental policies and procedures.

I have also had the opportunity recently to discuss the direction of the city and my vision with young members of our community. At a recent presentation at Amsterdam High School, I was excited to engage in intense and intelligent communication with young members of the community that will soon lead its direction themselves. As such, it is with great excitement that in the coming weeks I will be announcing the formation of the Mayor's Youth Advisory Council where high school seniors will serve in the capacity to provide insight and criticism on the direction of the city for the youth of our community.

Together we will open the lines of communication that are often lost between generations and establish a direction for the future of our city.

As we continue through the next year and approach the many challenges, circumstances and opportunities that will come our way, it is my intention to pursue the City of Amsterdam's positive destiny. Together we will set aside our ideological entrenchment and progress within the established principles of the city's comprehensive plan and make a commitment to community reinvestment. The resolve of my administration is strong, the call to service that I answered and that this council answered is equally strong, and in this new year my administration will bridge partisan divides as our will is firm, our hope enduring and our vision never faltering.

Thank you for the honor of allowing me to present my vision and goals for this city and I thank my fellow residents for their strident support and encouraging words.