

STATE OF THE CITY SPEECH 2011

BY MAYOR RICHARD J KAPLAN

Thank you for joining me again in presenting this year's State of the City. Again, we have all gone through many challenges, but we believe that we are seeing improvement. Today I will go over and highlight many of the accomplishments and goals of our departments and programs. But, first of all, I want you to know that through our work in maintaining the city, we remain fiscally sound, and that we will continue to keep the city moving forward. With your help and involvement, we will continue to succeed as an All America City.

One of the more difficult issues is related to the reduction in city revenues due to decline in property value. Over the past several years, Lauderhill, like many other cities, has lost a significant part of our property values, which is 45% in our case. In order to compensate, we have had to raise our tax rate. But even with an increase in our tax rate, the average property owner is only paying about \$8 more this year than last year in city property tax.

We have had to also increase our fire rescue fee, and I know that creates a hardship for quite a lot of people. What I need to explain is that this fee represents the actual cost of the service that the residents and businesses in the city have been using. To cut the rate would mean that we would not be funding a service that is a public safety necessity. For the rate to stop increasing would require a serious reduction in the calls for this service.

We have also had to deal with cuts in funding to our Community Shuttle Bus Program. The City and Commission have worked hard to maintain the system, and in order to save money, we initially planned to cut back hours of operation. However, we were striving to keep the system running when most people need it.

Fortunately, we have recently been advised that we are receiving a grant which may not only allow us to reinstate the hours of operation, but expand the system into the Southeast Area of the city. At this time we are putting together what we need to do to secure and implement the terms of the grant. This is really good news so that we can not only continue to help people get to work, shop, and to get to doctor appointments, as we have done, but also to provide it to more people without having to raise taxes.

On another positive note, in 2011, our city, working through our Grants Administrator, secured over \$2.16 million in grants. The grant funds are awarded primarily for street improvements, bus shelters, police support, water treatment and park improvements. Already for 2012, we will be receiving over \$4.5 million. The largest part in excess of \$4 million is a watershed grant in order to repair 3 canals going through Lauderhill.

In the last year we have had a few changes in our Police Department. For the last 3 consecutive years, crime has decreased a total of 18%. However, there recently has been a rash of new crimes that have occurred, particularly in a specific area of the city. This has caused our crime rate to go up for the first 6

months of this year. The department is undertaking steps to address this situation. Being a fully accredited police department, of which only 1/3'rd of the police departments in Florida are accredited, demonstrates that we have the ability to combat this problem.

At the same time we have lost two of our top police officers. Our Chief, Ken Pachnek retired, and our Assistant Police Chief, Mike Cochran has left to go back where he started as a police officer to serve as that towns new Police Chief. We wish them both well.

We have hired a new Police Chief, Andrew Smalling, who previously served as the BSO District Commander for Lauderdale Lakes. Already we are seeing him with a very hands on approach to matters and we expect to continue to see a high level of service from our Police Department.

As to capital improvements, we are completing both the Lauderhill Cultural Museum and Lauderhill Aquatic Center. We are trying to begin construction of the Lauderhill Performing Arts Center and Library, pending resolution of a problem stemming from the contractor. These projects are the last from our \$35 million GO Bond that you the voters overwhelmingly approved in 2004. I believe that you can see how the bond you passed has made a significant and positive difference in our city.

In the last 13 years, the time that I have served as Mayor, the city has made significant investments into the infrastructure of our city. Not just through the GO Bond, but through other sources of funding as well.

To review, we have completed repaving most streets throughout the city, put up new walls, rebuilt our fire stations, built a new library, a new main police station, a new main fire station with an emergency operations center in it, created new parks and expanded existing parks, built new or refurbished existing community centers, rebuilt and expanded our water plant, rebuilt roads with new drainage, built a new city hall, among other projects, and virtually changed every aspect of our city's operations to serve you better.

Another way we have tried to help is by finding ways of spending less. Lauderhill has undergone many changes in the way we operate to reduce our costs of operations. As an example, our City Hall, which was built to LEED Silver standards, costs us approximately 19% less per year than a typical building would have cost to operate. We are purchasing new vehicles that use less gasoline, and installing new equipment that uses less electricity. This is a part of the Lauderhill Sustainable Green Initiatives Program.

We have also worked with the public to help them also find ways to reduce their expenses. Recently we held the first Broward Green Expo, which was very helpful in providing information to the attendees. This created a forum for residents and businesses to learn how to apply different ways to save them money. And just so you know, Lauderhill does not have a special events fund, so this event was paid for by sponsors and monies left over from savings in other sponsor supported programs. We are very hopeful that we may be able to repeat this program again next year, because we believe in the importance of recognizing the need for energy conservation and sustainability.

For those that may have missed the expo, some of the information that was presented has been placed on Lauderhill's green web site, www.lauderhillgreen.com. Also on this web site is information on our Interest Free Energy Loans, a continuing program to help you save money on your electric bill, and about grants to residents to replace older toilets that use less water to flush. Please take some time and visit the site to find out more.

Also with sponsor support, we have been able to continue several other worthwhile programs. The Jazz Picnic in the Park concert series is in its 4th year, with free concerts on the 2nd Sunday of each month from December to March. This information can be found on our lauderhilljazz.com web site.

Our children have a variety of programs that the city offers them. There is Teen City, an empowerment initiative for community success, developed in partnership with the YMCA. It is a holistic youth development program for ages 5-17, and is focused on providing engaging and inspiring programs for children and families.

We also have a Teen Leadership Camp. This program is a partnership between the PALS and Police Department. It seeks to cultivate the next generation of leaders through the development of leadership skills, talking about real issues, how they can help to solve them, and encouraging active involvement within their community.

Our First Tee and Fore-Life Programs have the goal of providing young people of all backgrounds affordable access to the game of golf, and an opportunity to develop life enhancing values, such as responsibility, confidence, respect, integrity, and sportsmanship. This can positively impact them on the golf course and in their everyday lives. Currently the program serves 325 children, ages 7 through 15.

The city also offers a Summer Literacy Camp. Lauderhill has partnered with the Oscar Thomas Foundation, an organization dedicated to promoting leadership and inspiring young people through the power of art, education and community service. The organizations motto is "Creating Masterpieces One Child at a Time." The program is located at St. George Park and serves 60 children ages 5 to 12.

We also have a program to teach children how to swim. This program is run by trained contracted swim instructors and has served 767 children ages 2 to 14.

High School students can apply to our Unitown program. Unitown is a cultural diversity camp, where students leave for a private camp retreat for a weekend. Their motto is "Prejudice is a disease, don't make me sick. Ending Hate, beginning in Schools." This is a free program, and I can tell you personally, that students not only have a great time, but it also looks really good on a college application.

Information about these programs can be found on the city's web site, at one of the Community Centers in Lauderhill, or on the Lauderhill Central Teen web site, www.lhillteencentral.com.

We also have scholarships available for Lauderhill High School Seniors going to college or vocational school can apply for. Students can find this information also on our Lauderhill Teen Central web site, or go to their school's Brace Advisor.

There is also a variety of other programs for not only children, but adults and seniors. Many are listed in the city's Spotlight magazine which is mailed out several times a year. If you did not get a copy, please visit one of our community centers to pick up one, or you go to the city's main web site and find posted an electronic copy of it.

Our Commissioners continue to be very busy. Commissioner Margaret Bates is again organizing our MLK Day activities on January 14. This year's headliner for the dinner will be Ed Gordon, the host of the BET program "Weekly with Ed Gordon." Tickets are available from the city, and as in the past, are expected to go fast. Those wishing to help sponsor the event are also encouraged to contact the city. This event is paid for solely by ticket sales and sponsorship.

Commissioner Ken Thurston, our newest Commissioner has developed a very positive program on Lease Lauderhill. Its goal is to help those interested in leasing commercial properties within Lauderhill. You can find out more on our city's CRA web site, lauderhillcra.com.

Another new initiative being worked on is reviewing our city's marketing program and utilizing new techniques. Technology, social media, and new marketing techniques are impacting how business is being done. Lauderhill needs to see how it applies, and work to take advantage of it for the benefit of our city. Currently, we have used social media to encourage Canadians to consider Lauderhill as a place to purchase property. We have seen success already with this initiative, and we believe that these same principals also have business applications. It is expected that this applications will change how we create economic development in the city.

Next year will also see the coming of another city election in November. Several Commission seats will be on the ballot. At least 3 seats with 4 year terms will be up for election, and with one Commissioner running for a new position outside the city, there should be an open seat available with no incumbent running for re-election.

Considering all that we have done, and all that I have outlined tonight, which is only a portion of what is going on in Lauderhill, it is remarkable that we have been able to do it with less revenue than the prior year. I am very pleased with the progress of the city, and I hope you are as well. As we go into the future, I know we are looking forward to a better Lauderhill, where we remain proud to call it our home.

With that I want to thank you for listening to this year's State of the City, and on behalf of myself, my family and the City of Lauderhill staff and elected officials, I want to wish you a happy and healthy holiday season.