

State of the City 2011

Ladies and gentlemen, honored guests, and elected officials, it is once again my pleasure to present the state of our city for the year 2010.

First, let me congratulate Stew Leonard and his entire family for receiving the Cecil J. Previdi award.

Folk's I have a confession to make...

I'm a Stew Leonard's junkie.

Ask my wife. Since I do the shopping in our family, I am at Stew's at least once a week.

And it's not just because of the free samples.

What Stew Leonard Sr.,-our honoree's father, started many years ago was quite remarkable.

Stew Leonard's is a true American success story.

Stew Jr. and family have built on the vision that was laid out many years ago and now we have an organization that employs thousands of people in Connecticut and New York and is a tremendous corporate partner for the City of Danbury.

Stew Leonard's has become a national model for excellence.

Both in its delivery of services, and the way that it treats its employees.

Thank you Stew Leonard's for choosing Danbury as place to do business.

Special thanks to the Greater Danbury Chamber of Commerce for being a statewide leader in encouraging and enhancing the pro-business environment that exists in our region. It's no accident that Greater Danbury has the lowest unemployment rate in the state.

Special thanks to my wife Phyllis for her continuing support and advocacy.

I also would like to recognize of our state and local elected officials for their hard work and their commitment to Danbury.....Please stand to be recognized.

Ladies and gentlemen, rather than give you a list of accomplishments of the past year, I thought it would be appropriate to talk about some key initiatives for the coming year, update you on several other ongoing initiatives and share some general observations about the state of our community.

Over the last year, as many of you are aware, I ran for state wide office.

It was an invigorating experience to spend time in communities and analyze the answers they had devised in response to many of the problems that face our own community.

It was refreshing to spend time discussing with elected officials, residents, and stake holders their perceptions of the future of Connecticut.

I will never forget the opportunity to visit two highly successful charter schools of excellence. One located in Hartford the other in New Haven,-- both are operated by an organization called -"Achievement First".

What an experience. I saw education and learning that was inspirational and was successful.

In New Haven I was able to participate in the morning exercises with elementary students who are coming from some of the most challenged neighborhoods of the city.

I saw students who were excited to learn, and who were ready to learn.

I saw a school that is less expensive and more efficient to operate and than a traditional public school.

I saw a motivated and caring staff.

I was moved and I was inspired.

I thought to myself, why can't we have a school like this in Danbury?

Why can't we offer the same learning experience to Danbury's children?

I value the work being done in our schools, I am proud of our public schools, but I propose we offer our parents a choice of another learning experience.

With a projected public school budget request of an additional 5 million dollars for the 2011-12 fiscal year, it's time that we thought differently about how we educate our children.

And let me say this, a 5 million dollar increase to the school budget would mean a significant increase in property taxes when residents can least afford it.

School funding in Danbury and across the State of Connecticut, has become unsustainable.

We can't afford to continue on the same path.

Charter Schools provide academic excellence, competition, and are cost effective.

This past year, I also had an opportunity to visit many cities and towns in Connecticut that all had one thing in common-- a Main Street.

Some Main Streets were successful, some... well they needed work.

Danbury's Main Street has been a source of pride, and a source of frustration for our residents for many years..

Let's take a step back and think about it.

For example:

First we had diagonal parking on Main Street, then we removed the diagonal parking on Main Street.

Then we added the diagonal parking back.

Then a decade later, we removed the diagonal parking again and added the medians that you see today.

Every once in a while I get a telephone call that goes something like this:

"Good morning, Mayor Boughton, I have the most creative idea to help revitalize Main Street..."Let's get rid of the medians, and add diagonal parking."

The point here is that we don't have a plan, and quite frankly, we never had a plan that all stake- holders, elected officials, and residents could point to as a guide in our decision making process and help us sustain our downtown.

Today, I am releasing the final report of the Main Street Renaissance Task Force that will guide this administration-- and I hope future administrations in our decisions regarding Main Street.

Special thanks to John Kline of Union Savings Bank for chairing this Task Force.

While I won't read the entire plan to you, I would like to highlight some key points.

As part of our strategic plan, I am announcing the creation of a new entity charged with implementing the recommendations contained with the Task Force report.

The Danbury Main Street Partnership will be created by city ordinance and will consist of members of the City Center Board, Chamber of Commerce, and the Architectural

Review Board, as well as residents, professionals, and stake holders who are all dedicated to improving our Main Street and implementing our plan.

In its report, the Task Force calls for a full-time economic development director that would have responsibility over Main Street. I believe that we must create this position-- someone who will become the "go to" person of our revitalization plan.

But before we hire that person we must set the table for success.

We must have tools that a person charged with the economic development of Main Street can use.

First and foremost, we must create the Downtown Revitalization Zone through our zoning regulations..

The Downtown Revitalization Zone or DRZ will be our new designation for the urban core of our city.

I am also proposing a series of economic incentives for our newly created Revitalization Zone.

They include, but are not limited to:

1. For new projects, expand the deferral of assessment Increases to include office uses, retail uses, information technology, and other uses allowed by zoning regulations.
2. Reduce the sewer and water connection fee and permit fees for projects located in City Center.
3. Expedite permit applications in the DRZ.

In addition, I believe that we should make sidewalk repair and installation the responsibility of the City in the DRZ.

In exchange for the City accepting the responsibility of the sidewalks , I am asking for some level of responsibility by the property owners and the business owners along Main Street.

Too often, I have seen litter and debris located in front of store fronts along Main Street.

Litter and debris that is ignored by the business directly affected.

If we are going to ask the residents of Danbury to support our plan, then we must ask the business owners and tenants along Main Street to respect themselves and their business.

As part of the ordinance change to shift the burden of sidewalk repair in the DRZ to the City, I will ask our City Council to amend the ordinance to require tenants to clean their area in front their business on a daily basis.

There are a number of steps and policies that are outlined in our plan that are too detailed and specific for today's event. I would encourage you to go online and read the plan at the City of Danbury website for more information.

Finally, let me say this about our new approach towards the heart of our city. The proposals and suggestions in the Task Force Report may not be earth shattering. They may seem almost mundane. Boring if you will.

The reality is that there is no silver bullet for a revitalized Main Street.

But, the suggestions and proposals listed will set the policy foundation and the regulatory foundation for us to have success in our marketing and our revitalization of Main Street.

City Center has always had the foundation for success--with strong infrastructure, Western Connecticut State University, and a growing small business sector.

The Danbury Whalers are drawing large crowds to their home games.

Just this week, the City Council embraced a project on the old Police Station site that will spur a multimillion dollar development including a new bank, housing, and a Community Health Clinic.

In addition, the Brookview Commons apartment complex has sparked a redevelopment effort on Crosby Street, including Papa John's Pizza, Bruegers Bagels, and a dance studio.

By implementing the recommendations of the Main Street Renaissance Task Force, we can begin to build on the foundation that already exists.

I also believe that quality-of- life issues are a key element for success in our city. With the hard work of Chief Baker and his staff as well as our individual officers, over the past three years, we have maintained the designation of the "safest city in Connecticut".

As you came in here today, you were greeted by the officers who are part of a traffic enforcement initiative in the City of Danbury.

Our new traffic enforcement unit will help patrol Main Street and other parts of the City.

The traffic unit will utilize the motorcycles that you see displayed out front, and yes, in case you are wondering, they will be very, very cold in the winter months..

And in case you are wondering, the equipment was purchased through our asset forfeiture account, with money seized during various criminal investigations.

Last month, our new traffic enforcement unit issued more than 600 traffic tickets.

The Police Department is not the only public safety department that is doing a terrific job.

Our Fire Department continues to be the envy of the state.

Today, I am also releasing our strategic plan for the revamping and consolidation of our Fire Department.

Again, I won't read the entire plan to you, but some of the highlights include:

1. Combining three of our Volunteer Companies into one building--in order to reduce expense and increase efficiency..
2. When funding permits, add a maintenance facility to the Headquarters facility and then when funding is available, rebuild Headquarters.
3. Expand the Fire Training School.

I want to thank Chief Herald, the Danbury Council of Volunteer Firefighters, and the Firefighters themselves for their hard work on this report.

Over the years, Danbury has benefited from a strong economy and a strong retail sector. One could almost say that our identity as Danburians has been defined by the vibrant business attitude of our city.

With that in mind, my administration has begun to investigate a number of different events to help market our city and raise the profile of our pro-business environment.

We are in discussions about reviving the Danbury Fair and possibly hosting an Air Show at the Danbury Airport.

We would like to build on the success of the Taste of Danbury and the mini triathlon that we hosted in the fall.

These can be positive events that highlight the very best of what our great city has to offer.

Now, for some difficult news:

There is no question that the state budget crisis will have a negative impact on our ability to deliver services--and on our city budget.

With a state budget deficit of close to 4 billion dollars, there are no easy answers for the incoming administration.

There is little doubt that Connecticut's ranking as one of the worst states to do business, has exacerbated the current economic crisis.

We have a choice to make in this state. Are we pro-business, pro-jobs? Or are we destined to become an economic backwater in the United States?

A state where no company will locate here or expand here, or stay here because of the stifling business mandates that are placed on our employers.

That is the choice our new Governor and Legislature must make.

Locally, the economic crisis and poor business climate has crippled our revenues, and has virtually stopped grand list growth.

For the City of Danbury, that means that there is no money-

That also means that the next few city budgets will be painful for everybody.

While today I cannot make any budget predictions, I can assure you that the City Council and I understand the economic challenges that our families and businesses are facing.

There is some good news regarding the economy. We are beginning to see the tentative signs of recovery.

Danbury Hospital will embark on a 120 million dollar expansion, WestConn's enrollment is at an all-time high, The Danbury Fair Mall is filling it's last few remaining storefronts. New businesses are beginning to open around our city,-- the phones are ringing again in our Permit Center.

The Matrix Corporate Center continues to attract blue chip tenants like GM and Guideposts.

Toll Brothers has purchased much of The Reserve and will resume construction.

We have been able to retain Barden Corporation with an aggressive partnership with the State of Connecticut.

The Shops at Marcus Dairy will begin development in the coming year.

Most importantly, Sonic and Pepe's Pizza are coming to Danbury.

Now, if I can only get an IHOP...

All of these private investments are an indication of faith and trust in Greater Danbury's economy, as well as a reflection of our pro-business culture and mentality in the City of Danbury.

And.. let's make no mistake. A pro-business culture means jobs for our residents.

A chance at employment is the best gift give we can give our residents in the holiday season.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am proud to report to you that Danbury remains the envy of the state.

With a reinvigorated downtown revitalization effort led the Danbury Main Street Partnership, and with an eye towards enhancements to our schools and our public safety services, we will improve on our standing as one of the best places live in Connecticut.

Thank you for your support over the past year.

My friends, we live in a great city, in a great state, in the greatest country in the world. In this magical time of the year let's not forget that.

As we close out 2010, Phyllis and I wish each of you a happy and blessed holiday season, and a terrific New Year.

God Bless you, and may God Bless The City of Danbury.