

2019 SOTC – New Brunswick, NJ; 01/01/2019

It is a great honor to once again take the oath of office as Mayor of the **City** of New Brunswick and I am truly grateful to the residents of our **City** for the opportunity to continue to serve.

Together, we should be proud of all we have accomplished, but recognize there is always more to do.

Throughout my years as Mayor, I have had the pleasure and benefit of working with agencies like DEVCO, our art organizations, Johnson & Johnson, Rutgers University, Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital, Saint Peter's University Hospital, and so many more, all who believed in the importance of corporate responsibility and community stewardship and helped transform New Brunswick into a destination known for its compassion, industry, hospitality, healthcare, education, arts and culture.

To meet the social service needs of our community, agencies like New Brunswick Tomorrow, PRAB, the Civic League of Greater New Brunswick, Elijah's Promise, Catholic Charities and Holy Family Parish and countless others help bring needed support to the people who live, work and raise their families here.

I have been fortunate to work with so many talented and dedicated people, from the late John Heldrich in my earlier years as Mayor to Chris Paladino for the past 25 years, and many more in between, visionaries that understand what it is that makes a community great and how to realize victories as a team.

Whatever success New Brunswick has enjoyed, it is the result of the friendships and partnerships we formed.

Each year, more and more people call New Brunswick home. From 41,000 people in 1991 to a projected 60,000 for 2020, we are the fastest growing urban center in the **State**. One of the reasons for this: New Brunswick delivers great services while holding the line on taxes. We have cut our taxes from the highest in the County to the second lowest, while continually adding services for our residents.

Together with our Council, we deliver the best services at the best cost, including:

A safer **city** with crime cut in half.

A senior resource center second to none.

New schools and award-winning youth programming.

Investments in our parks, water and sewer infrastructure.

And our ambitious Sustainable New Jersey initiatives.

Our job is to make every dollar count.

We are able to provide the level of services that we do because of the efforts of our Department Heads, **City** employees, and the members of the boards, authorities and commissions that serve our **City**.

It is the efforts of all these people, working together, that help to make New Brunswick the extraordinarily special place that it is.

But as a new year begins, we are in the bittersweet position of sending off some longtime friends and leaders in the management of our **City**.

City Administrator Tom Loughlin and Director of Planning Glenn Patterson are both beginning 2019 by entering into well-deserved retirements.

The success of New Brunswick is due in large part to the roles you have both have played in its management and development.

We also wish a fond farewell to our Construction Official Bill Schrum and his team that has played a crucial part in the growth and development of our **City**.

I could spend the duration of this speech talking about the effort these men have put into keeping the **City** running and growing, but it still wouldn't be enough.

So I will instead say this – It was an honor and pleasure to serve alongside the best in the business.

I am proud and fortunate to have you as friends and wish you all the best as you enter in the next phase of what's to come.

But it's not all goodbyes.

I am pleased to announce that I have appointed Dan Torrisi as **City**Administrator. Dan has served New Brunswick since 1991 and knows our **City** well. He has performed admirably as our **City** Clerk and I look forward to working with him as the new leader of our Administration Department.

We are also fortunate to have the continued leadership of Finance Director Doug Petix, Fire Director Robert Rawls, Police Director Tony Caputo, Director of Social Services Melanie Ford, Water Utility Director Alexi Walus, Tom Valenti as Head of Engineering and DPW, and our **City**Attorney, T.K. Shamy.

As our economy continues to grow, we will continue to create safe and healthy housing for residents of all income levels, including those without any income at all.

With our largest population ever, we will continue to encourage housing development close to jobs and transit, and under our complete streets policy, make our **City** more pedestrian and bicycle friendly and less dependent on cars.

There are over 1,100 new housing units currently under construction and/or approved in New Brunswick.

But housing isn't about just building new – we have to maintain and improve what we already have. Vibrant neighborhoods are key to a successful **city**. Dilapidated and vacant houses can lead to problems in a neighborhood and take viable housing off the market. We have enacted two laws to help address this. As a result, many previously vacant units have been improved and reoccupied, housing new residents and their families.

The Vacant Housing Registration Ordinance encourages owners to keep their premises occupied and in good repair. In the event that a house becomes vacant, the owner is required to pay an annual registration fee that increases in subsequent years if the house is not fixed up and reoccupied.

Under the Abandoned Property Rehabilitation Ordinance, dilapidated, abandoned houses are identified and placed on the **City's** Abandoned Property List. The owners of these properties are notified that unless they take immediate action to renovate these structures, the **City** will acquire the properties and cause them to be rehabilitated

In 2018, fifty-nine properties on the Vacant Housing Registration Ordinance were sold and are either occupied or undergoing renovations, while 75 remain on the list.

The **City** received \$131,000 in registration fees in 2018.

In addition, the **City** is currently pursuing the acquisition and redevelopment of the nine properties that are on our initial Abandoned Property List.

And the **City** has also partnered with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Rutgers University and NBT to create the “Healthy Housing Task Force” to investigate and address potential health problems within our existing housing stock.

As with all our housing initiatives, we will continue to be guided by our goal that housing needs to be affordable, safe and healthy for all our residents.

Our New Brunswick Police and Fire Departments continue on paths of growth and positive change, dedicated to service to the people of New Brunswick.

Both police and fire added new faces to their ranks in 2018 with 11 new police officers and five new firefighters.

Both departments, already at their largest manpower levels, will add to their ranks in 2019.

Our newest firefighters were the second class to be trained in our own in-house fire academy. We are proud of our academy because it showcases the expertise of our highly trained fire professionals and prepares incoming firefighters for the unique challenges they will experience here in New Brunswick.

Our fire department also bolstered its fleet with the purchase of a brand-new 100-foot ladder tower firetruck, keeping our emergency response equipment up to date with the latest technology and our department best prepared to respond to emergencies in our **City**. Last year, we saw the successful implementation of a shared services agreement with Rutgers University, combining our dispatch operations and allowing us to maintain the highest level of service while also achieving a savings of more than \$3 million over the next five years.

In 2019, the Police Department will complete its third round of accreditation by the New Jersey **State** Association of Chiefs of Police, demonstrating that our department

continuously meets the highest ethical and professional standards in law enforcement at all levels.

The hard work and professionalism of our police department has paid off with crime cut in half since 1991.

It is because of these efforts, and much more, that our Police and Fire Departments have earned reputations as being the finest and bravest under the command of Directors Caputo and Rawls.

Over the past year, our Water Utility produced close to 4 billion gallons of water.

To keep up with growing demand, we have invested more than \$30 million in capital improvements to the infrastructure of our Water Utility over the past decade.

Key among these improvements has been a \$22 million investment in our Treatment and Distribution Plant that included comprehensive top to bottom upgrades to nearly all facets of the process, keeping us in line with the ever-changing requirements of modern water production.

Going forward, an additional \$15 million worth of improvements to our Treatment Plant are in the works which will allow for even greater efficiencies throughout the entire treatment process.

These improvements will allow us to continue the production of high-quality water for our consumers for decades to come.

Parks are an important part to the enjoyment, growth and livelihood of a modern and thriving **city**.

In an effort to provide residents with beautiful, accessible and enjoyable public spaces to gather, play, and engage with their families, friends and neighbors, we completely renovated Recreation Park to jump-start an extensive and long-term plan to renew, renovate and rejuvenate our entire parks system.

Last year, in partnership with researchers at Rutgers University and The Trust for Public Land, we developed the Parks Action Plan, a comprehensive review of all 272 acres of our

parks system. The Plan serves as a blueprint to address topics from big to small, intended to improve the universal accessibility and enjoyment of our parks system.

Working with our New Brunswick Parks and Gardens Commission, we got started right away, and completed a number of park projects throughout the **City**, including:

Two brand new, **state**-of-the-art National Fitness Campaign Courts in Alice Jennings Archibald and Buccleuch Parks.

New playing fields and courts at Memorial Stadium and Buccleuch, Joyce Kilmer, Baker, and Kossuth Parks.

New spray water features at Alice Jennings Archibald and Joyce Kilmer Parks, which like the one installed at Recreation Park, proved to be wildly popular with our children during the hot summer months.

We commenced construction of a new park on Welton Street near Roosevelt School scheduled to be completed in the spring of 2019.

We continued incorporation of public art into **City** spaces with the inclusion of a student-created mural at Memorial Stadium.

We completed much of our community guided redesign of Feaster and Pittman Parks, working closely with Unity Square, Rutgers University and the Trust for Public Land and look forward the completed plans in early 2019.

We expanded our community gardening resources in our **City** with the opening of plots at Recreation Park, bringing our total number of community gardens **citywide** to 13.

And we began a large renovation project this past summer at the Senior Resource Center which will be completed this Spring and include new bocce courts, a gardening area, a walking path, new exercise facilities, new landscaping, and exterior renovations to the Center.

And we aren't done yet. 2019 will bring more improvements, more opportunities for public discussion, and more outdoor resources for our residents to enjoy throughout all of our neighborhoods.

With \$3.5 billion invested in new residential, retail, office, educational and healthcare facilities throughout the **City** as part of New Brunswick's revitalization, it's easy to understand why our economic and community development efforts get a lot of attention. Our redevelopment efforts have produced:

7,000 new jobs for New Brunswick residents;

5,600 new homes for all income levels;

\$22 million in revenue a year to support government services and our public schools;

An unemployment rate of 3.3%; and

The 2nd lowest taxes in the County for our residents.

Our momentum continues full speed ahead.

New Brunswick has been recognized as a leader in the arts in New Jersey. We have learned as a community that, not only are the arts fundamentally good for the spirit and the soul, they are good for the pocketbook as well.

New Brunswick's rich cultural and performing arts attractions have made the **City** a true destination. Nearly 600,000 visitors experience professional theater, ballet and modern dance, popular music, lectures, community-theater, and visual and performing arts annually. Scheduled to open this summer, the **City's** new performing arts center will further cement New Brunswick's well-earned reputation as a destination for arts and culture.

This new \$172 million arts center and office and residential tower will be the new home of George Street Playhouse, American Repertory Ballet, Crossroads Theatre Company, and Rutgers Mason Gross School of the Arts Opera and Musical Theater Programs. It is located next door to the **State** Theatre and a short walk to the Zimmerli Art Museum.

Together, they will continue to energize and grow the arts community in New Jersey, adding even more excitement to our already vibrant community.

Next in the pipeline is the New Jersey Innovation and Technology Hub. The Hub site is located directly across from the train station, right in the **City's** core.

The **City** and its partners have identified opportunities and developed plans for over 4 million square feet of new job-creating development, including unique space for technology

and innovation ventures together with corporate office space, academic and corporate research facilities, ground floor retail, and exciting residential options that will establish New Brunswick and the **State** of New Jersey as a major center of innovation in the areas of healthcare, life sciences and technology.

Recent proposals that look to move forward in 2019 include a mixed use development consisting of 12,000 sq. ft. of retail and commercial space and 112 residential units located at the corner of Georges Road and Lawrence Street; and the construction of a five story 112,000 square foot medical office building and a four story residential building consisting of 192 residential units in the Jersey Handy Redevelopment Area as it extends to Delavan Street.

Taking advantage of our reputation as the Healthcare **City**, the RWJBarnabas Health and Rutgers University partnership plan to operate a world-class academic health system includes the construction of two new facilities in New Brunswick, a new ambulatory care center and a new clinical and research building for the Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey, adding hundreds of thousands of square feet to our already burgeoning healthcare industry.

We look forward to one of the most exciting economic and community development tools to come into play in 2019. At the end of 2017, Congress adopted the Tax Cut and Jobs Act. While most of the focus on that bill was on tax-rate cuts and the fate of **state** and local tax deductions, little attention was paid to a provision called the Investing in Opportunity Act.

The heart of this new law is the creation of Opportunity Zones, lower-income areas designated by each **state**. Individuals and corporations will be able to invest recently realized capital gains into projects or companies based in Opportunity Zones and slowly erase the tax obligations on a portion of those gains and have those proceeds grow tax-free.

Thus, Opportunity Zones are designed to spur economic development in lower-income areas by providing tax benefits to investors.

Six of New Brunswick's Census Tracts have been designated as Opportunity Zones, proportionately more than any other municipality in the **State**.

We have established three tiers of land use for our designated tracts.

Tier 1 includes the Hub Innovation and Technology District.

Tier 2 includes the area between Route 27 and Jersey Avenue which has historically been the **City's** zone for manufacturing and distribution. This area provides development opportunities for supportive office, research and laboratory uses and start-ups that will be generated by the HUB Innovation and Technology District, as well as for expansion of existing manufacturing and distribution. It will allow companies to grow from incubation to acceleration to production in a lower cost area of the **city**.

Tier 3, designated for Urban Community Development, includes parts of the Unity Square, Esperanza, and Georges Road/Recreation Park neighborhoods that are the heart of New Brunswick. These are mixed-use, sustainable neighborhoods that provide housing, shopping and jobs across a wide range of income and skill levels.

With trillions of dollars of capital available to be invested, the potential for creating new jobs, new homes, and even more opportunities is unlimited.

In 2019, we will also celebrate the centennial of the graduation from Rutgers University of a noble American, a man ahead of his time, and someone near and dear to the New Brunswick community.

One hundred years ago, in 1919, Paul Robeson, valedictorian of his graduating class, star athlete and extraordinary student, set off into the world on the wings of his Rutgers education. His fame in music, acting, culture, politics and civil rights sprang from the education he received right here in our community of New Brunswick.

While the Robeson Centennial celebration is officially scheduled for 2019, New Brunswick started its celebration with the beginning of the school year this past September.

Following a two-year renovation and expansion project, 700 New Brunswick public school students walked through the doors of our new Paul Robeson Community School for the Arts.

Our students are now immersed in a theme academy that emphasizes the arts as part of their regular curriculum, housed in a center of learning that doubled in size with its recent

addition, and serves as a modern place for them to learn and grow in the name of a man who so valued education.

In addition, New Brunswick Public Sculpture is actively planning a new sculpture of Paul Robeson, to be erected in Feaster Park as part of its renovation, right next door to Robeson School.

And a group of our community partners – the Civic League of Greater New Brunswick, the New Brunswick Board of Education and Holy Family Parish – are initiating the process of the renaming of Commercial Avenue as Paul Robeson Boulevard to pay further tribute to this important community figure.

We are glad to be able to recognize one of Rutgers' most distinguished alumni and a man who went on to change the world.

So it is clear that while much has been accomplished, there is still much to do.

As we continue to move New Brunswick forward as a center of commerce, a center of culture and an urban center with an important role in the global economy of the 21st century, we will continue to focus not only on today, but on the generations to come.

We remain mindful that as our sisters' and brothers' keeper, we are called upon to feed the hungry; clothe the needy; provide family health and child care; counsel and guidance for our young people; comfort and care for our sick; and shelter for our homeless.

Our mission remains the same.

It's about building and improving our homes and our neighborhoods until every New Brunswick resident lives in clean, safe and affordable housing.

It's about becoming a hunger-free community and developing a sustainable local food system so that all residents have access to nutritious, healthy and affordable food at all times.

It's about creating jobs and putting more people to work than ever before so they can better care for themselves and their families.

It's about improving the quality of life and access to healthcare and a healthier lifestyle for all our residents.

It's about building the best in new schools and giving our children a nurturing environment and the opportunity to excel.

It's about providing the absolute best services at the absolute best cost.

It's about continuing our 300 plus year history as a welcoming community that provides the opportunity for a better life and a place we are all proud to call home.

I ask for your prayers for a more hopeful and better tomorrow for our **city**, our nation, and our world, and for our **city** employees, officials and me – that our actions and decisions are always guided by principals of fairness and justice, of peace and compassion, ever mindful of our calling to serve.

I am excited about the future as we continue our work together to build a better New Brunswick for today and for generations to come.

Thank you and best wishes for a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year.