John F. Kennedy declared many years ago *"the Constitution makes us not rivals for power but partners for progress...It is my task, to report the State of the City - to improve it is the task of us all."*

Thank you for electing me to serve as your Mayor for another four years.

In 2017 The City of Plainfield opened more businesses and added more jobs to the local economy. We attracted more serious investors than at any other time in the past several decades, and we launched several initiatives designed to improve health outcomes for our residents

At this moment -- with a growing local economy, lower unemployment, rising housing values, and falling crime -- we have thrown off the fetters of an ugly reputation, rebranded ourselves from inside out and are now rewriting our narrative for the world to see. It's now up to us to choose the type of City that we want to be.  
Will we be a city separated by east and west, wards and cultural divides? Or will we embrace our community as one that celebrates diversity, united in our mission to create One Plainfield and One Future?

We’ve had many successes in 2017, and we are justifiably proud. However, we’re not here to pat ourselves on the back and rest on our laurels. Plainfield has just begun to recognize its potential, and I know the best is yet to come. There is still much to accomplish, and we must stay focused even as we pursue our goals and visions.

My heart is full as I stand here tonight because I have NEVER been more hopeful for the future of this City that I love, and I have never seen the level of engagement on the part of our community as I’ve witnessed over the past few years. Plainfield has finally recognized its real power, the power that comes from standing united for a common cause. We've taken action, and we've seized the opportunity to make lasting change. I see our City’s destiny unfolding and I cannot, and will not stop until it is fully realized.

It gives me great pleasure tonight to bring you the 2018 State of the City Address

I am pleased to see elected officials Present here this evening.  I’d like to acknowledge members of the clergy, members of my administration, community stakeholders and most importantly, the residents of this great city.

We have newly elected Council members. Congratulations to Steve Hockaday who was elected to serve as Councilman for the 4th Ward and Joylette Mills-Ransome Elected as Councilwoman at large for the 2nd and 3rd wards. Congratulations to Charles McRae who is our newly elected Council President with Joylette Mills –Ransome serving as the Council Vice President. I extend my warm regards to the other Council members, Cory Storch who is our 2nd Ward Councilor, Rebecca Williams our Councilwoman at large, Barry Goode Councilman at large for the 1st and 4th Wards and Diane Toliver who is the 1st Ward Councilwoman.

I cannot function in a bubble, and I could not work effectively as your Mayor without the partnership and support of this Council. I appreciate the hard work they do, and the interaction they have with the members of our community on a daily basis. This is what makes local government work.

I must always acknowledge the person who keeps me grounded, my rock, my partner, my beautiful wife of 38 years, Amelia. Who, along with our daughters Ayisha and Shermona understand more than anyone else what public service means to me, and I thank them every day for their love, their understanding, support, and strength. And I thank them for loving Plainfield as much as I do.

I am re-invigorated at the thought of working alongside you to continue building the Plainfield we only dared dreamed of four years ago. As our Queen City sheds the dogma of the ugly reputation it has carried for far too long we're not only physically re-shaping our world, but we're uniting as a community. We’re spending more time with our neighbors, we’re getting involved with the running of our City, we're helping each other more, we're finding the kinder side of Plainfield, and we're building a sustainable Plainfield brand.

We are at a significant moment in Plainfield history, but I'd still like to take a peek back to four years ago when I began my first term as Mayor.

…  
As a Finance professional, I know that if you want to gauge the health of any organization you need to look at the numbers. The city’s finances were dismal when I walked into City Hall in January 2014; there was no confidence in the city by investors or financial institutions. The task was monumental, but we were determined to change our circumstances from inside out and make the city financially viable.

I am proud to say that in four years we have completely changed our financial status from abysmal to excellent. Audit findings have reduced from 16 all the way down to 1. Our permanent financing rating improved to A1 BAN financing from a negative outlook to a positive outlook. Surplus has increased to $9.1 million up from $5.6 million, and we’ve achieved a tax collection rate of over 97%

We needed money for infrastructure improvement, and last year with our improved rating was able to finance $5.3 million for much-needed road improvements. And, we continue to find ways to bring services to our residents through partners such as the Robert Wood Johnson and Grotta Foundations who awarded us grants for the “Healthy Plainfield” and “Lifelong Plainfield,” initiatives respectively.

In 2017, we completed data center virtualization projects for the City and Police. We opened Plainfield's first ever FREE technology training center, NAN Plainfield TECHWORLD at the Covenant Church on East Seventh Street. To date, a dozen residents have successfully completed the training course, and we have another batch enrolled as we speak. We have also been approved as a Cisco Academy, and soon students will be trained and certified for FREE right here. This is a part of our efforts to improve job outcomes for our residents. We are teaching 21st-century job skills and equipping our residents to be competitive in a technological world.

If we took a financial physical today, the prognosis would be very healthy, and that’s no accident.

Looking ahead, we're going to tighten up even more. We recognize that given the current climate in Washington and mandates being handed down by the Federal Government, we need to be even more practical, creative and self-sufficient than we were before.  This is why we are working hard to sustain our current tax collection rate of at least 97%, and determined to generate suplus of at least 6 million dollars with no more than one audit finding.

Bill Gates said *“The first rule of any technology used in a business is that automation applied to an efficient operation will magnify the efficiency. The second is that automation applied to an inefficient operation will magnify the inefficiency.*”

In the City of Plainfield, we believe that adequately utilizing technology will help us perform, manage, inform and communicate more efficiently. We have been steadily working toward automating as many of our processes as possible.  In 2018, we hope to finalize and implement a Virtual Desktop Strategy, and we're making changes to our website to ensure a positive experience for our users with disabilities.  
Our goal is to make our City, 21st Century technology leaders and to train our young people to use technology as a tool to success.

As we move forward in 2018, we're seeking to finance at least $3.5 million in capital projects, and we're aggressively trying to grow the tax base of our industrial and commercial properties.  
Many of the state and federal grants we receive are predicated on population size, and it's essential that we have an accurate count in the 2020 Census, so we're taking proactive steps to mobilize the community and prepare them to be counted.

…

Plainfield’s renaissance encompasses not just redevelopment but includes fiscal reform, technology, infrastructure, education and improved health outcomes. The resurgence of our city is reshaping the future of our communities, one redevelopment project at a time, and it is taking place in every single ward of our city.  
Four years ago, this was a vastly different picture. Plainfield had been stagnant for decades, no development, no interested investors, no growth and no prospects. It was a disheartening picture. But those of us who love our city, saw the potential, we knew the Queen City could be revived, and we were determined to make meaningful change.

So, we identified our principal objectives and here they are:

* Improve the quality of life for all residents
* Seek serious partners
* Attract high caliber development projects
* Increase ratables
* Create jobs
* Improve retail traffic flow to our small business community
* And, attract major retailers

In four short years, our Economic Development team in co-operation with our other Departments has managed to change the picture dramatically. Plainfield now has over $280 million in investment reflecting various projects in different stages of development. Upon completion of all proposed projects, there will be over 1,800 new residential state of the art apartments with over 450,000 square feet of new retail commercial space. This represents over $25 million in tax revenues for Plainfield from previously blighted and undeveloped properties.

Over the past year we’ve shared a lot of information about Plainfield’s various redevelopment projects, but tonight I'd like to highlight one that I know many of you have questions about.  The redevelopment of the former Muhlenberg site.  We promised that whatever development took place on that site would have a medical component and we only entertained development offers that included this as part of the proposal.

Today we have a fully approved redevelopment plan.  This plan includes a Medical Complex of 186,000 rentable square footage dedicated to the provision of healthcare services including but not limited to multi-specialty services, private practicing physicians, behavioral health services and other healthcare related services.

It will also feature a residential component comprised of 120 luxury market-rate units.

This project represents a significant increase in municipal revenue in excess of more than $10.3 million over 30 years and during the construction period, taxes will be paid on the property estimated at $151,000. Prior to this the property generated $0 in tax revenue to the City.  This project will create approximately 200 construction jobs and 600 permanent jobs. It’s estimated that forty percent (40%) of jobs and construction contracts will go to Plainfield residents and businesses.

This is good business for Plainfield. We prevent this property from becoming blighted, and we bring tax dollars into the city. This is Economic Development at work and functioning efficiently.

But that's not all we did; we know that our small businesses are the backbone of our business district and we wanted to provide resources for them to be successful. So, we partnered with online giant Google and introduced the "Get Your Business Online" program because we know that every growing business needs to have an online presence. When people search – we wanted them to find our businesses, we wanted them to see Plainfield. The GYBO program was a hit right out the gate with over 35 businesses benefitting so far.

During 2017 the City welcomed over 20 new businesses.  A total of 15 grand opening ceremonies were coordinated to introduce the new businesses to the community. The office of Economic Development provides technical assistance and one on one guidance to potential businesses coming to the City. Last year the Economic Development team conducted over 25 free seminars on a variety of topics to help local entrepreneurs.

Small businesses represent the fulfillment of lifelong dreams, and we want to support those dreams and provide every possible resource for them to succeed. The Urban Enterprise Zone program is vitally important in doing that. For years, some who oppose the UEZ program have been actively trying to cut funding to the municipalities that benefit from this initiative, and last year with support from ex-Governor Christie, they succeeded.

 I am here to tell you definitively that the UEZ program does work and it has been doing what it was designed to do in the City of Plainfield, which is to kick-start the economy in designated Urban Municipalities. Many of our local businesses have benefited from this program and to date over 25 businesses have utilized the funding available to beautify their storefronts through the Sign and Façade program.

We have been actively involved in supporting legislation to reactivate this funding, and the goal is to extend the UEZ program here in Plainfield as well as in the four other municipalities which were cut. We will vigorously pursue this extension to meet our goal of processing at least 15 new applications in 2018. We are committed to giving our small businesses every opportunity to succeed. When they thrive, our downtown prospers and our economy flourishes.

Tonight Plainfield, thanks to your commitment to change, your ardor and your determination, I can confidently say that the state of the City is stronger than it has been in decades.

With foresight and strategic planning, we are in a position to choose our development projects and partners, focusing on those that support the vision we have for our city. We used some of our most tangible assets; our train stations and aggressively pursued a Transit Oriented Development designation which enabled us to bargain aggressively with potential partners. Today we see the results of that effort as high-quality mixed-use development projects are either in process or slated to begin very soon.

To support these developments, we joined with other municipalities to petition for a one-seat ride into New York's Penn Station. We now have a one-seat ride during off-peak hours but are redoubling our efforts to have that expanded into peak hours.

My Administration affirms its commitment to keeping Plainfield residents informed and providing resources. In 2017 Our office of Community Development completed and distributed our first ever Service Providers Directory. 20,000 copies were printed and distributed, and it is available for download on the City’s website.

In 2018, we intend to increase participation in the CHAP program and create an online portal which will allow concerned citizens to notify our office of potentially impacted properties. We believe in keeping our city esthetically pleasing and abandoned properties give the appearance of blight. In that same vein, we launched an Outside Art Initiative which I’m sure many of you have noticed. We’ve been beautifying our city with murals, decorating our underpasses, signal boxes, walls, and businesses. The aim is to inspire as we create beauty and provide artistic outlets for our local talent.

We create pathways to home ownership by bringing potential homeowners, lenders and their partners together. We’ve cultivated relationships with more than ten financial institutions.  Our partnership with the 504 Company is strong, and we continue to promote this loan program within our business community.  The program provides loans from $25,000 to $250,000 for start-ups and expansion of businesses in the City of Plainfield.

The City of Plainfield is open for business and the New Technical Review Committee (TRC) – is assisting in expediting and making the process more business-friendly for all developers and investors. Since the creation of the TRC the committee has been active providing technical assistance, guidance and meeting with potential developers  
…

One division which historically has flown under the radar stepped up in 2017. Our Health Division which provides numerous invaluable services to the community spearheaded some initiatives which is putting Plainfield on the fast track to healthier living.

"Physical fitness is not only one of the most important keys to a healthy body; it is the basis of dynamic and creative intellectual activity."

My administration understands the importance of investing more in preventive care so we can avoid illness and disease down the line. That begins with each person taking more responsibility for their health and the health of their children… It entails some lifestyle changes such as cutting down on the junk food that's fueling an epidemic of obesity which puts far too many Americans, young and old, at greater risk of costly, chronic conditions. And, it means getting people out and away from the TV and computer and spending more time outside.

Under the guidance of the Health Department, we created The Mayors Wellness Campaign which sponsored walk-off challenges for City employees, Seniors, and the Community. As a result of these challenges, Plainfield took over 18,000 steps to a healthier life or walked 9008 miles. These walk-off challenges are now an annual event, and we hope walking for health will be embraced as a lifestyle choice by more of our residents.  To further promote a Culture of Health we partnered with the United Way of Union County and other community-based organizations to conduct a Health Survey and develop a Road Map for a Healthy Plainfield. This Road Map will be implemented in 2018.

Healthy children grow into healthy adults and thanks to a partnership with EZ Rides we launched the Healthy Corner Store initiative to show our young people how delicious healthy snacks can be, and to help them develop healthy eating habits for life.

A grant from the New Jersey Department of Health totaling $499,000 enabled us to launch a childhood lead exposure program which will be renewed annually. This goes hand in hand with our free vaccination program which received $120,000 worth of vaccines and will help to address the problem of students being barred from schools because they lack the proper vaccinations.

BY the numbers here are community members serviced under the Mayor’s wellness campaign

* 1,096 people were screened for diabetes
* 89 free health screening events were held
* 20 citywide Free Flu vaccination clinics conducted
* Over 495 free flu shots administered
* 925 residents educated about public health issues by public health nursing and health educator
* 152 sessions about public health issues were conducted

In 2017 every single food establishment in Plainfield was inspected.

A healthy Plainfield is a happy Plainfield… and a healthy lifestyle begins with you.

…

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is a comprehensive youth employment program that serves eligible youth, ages 14-24, who face barriers to education, training, and employment.

**A.W.** is a WIOA participant, who joined the program in September of 2017 and is already on the fast track to becoming a healthcare worker. **A.W.** who comes from a big family is a low-income adolescent with a strong desire to get ahead in life.

“My classes are challenging but I enjoy the hands-on experience, and I'm grateful for the opportunity that was offered to me by Plainfield Action Services.”- said **A.W.**

In October 2017 Plainfield Action Services enrolled **A.W.** under the WIOA program. She is pursuing a Patient Care Technician Certification at Union County College in Elizabeth. Students can earn up to four nationally recognized certifications. So far, **A.W.** has passed three with flying colors and is waiting to complete her Patient Care technician certification exam. The program also requires participants to do 50 hours of community service under a healthcare professional outside of the school. **A.W.**currently interns with the City of Plainfield nurse every Friday.

Upon graduation, **A.W.** will begin an internship at Trinitas Regional Medical Center in Elizabeth.

We cannot change our city unless we provide paths for residents to have improved outcomes. We are determined to provide support and opportunities for people like **A.W.** who have the will and desire to get ahead and succeed. Plainfield action Services has been on the ground changing lives in a very personal way. There are times when things get rough and immediate intervention is needed such as in the case of

**C.H.**

**C.H.** is a single adult mother with a young child.  After spending almost two years in a shelter, Plainfield Action Services was able to assist her with obtaining permanent housing, job development, employment skills, furniture, clothes, food, and toys

“I was homeless… without Plainfield Action Services,” said **C.H.** “I don’t know where my daughter and I would be. Now with the help of Plainfield Action Services and other agencies, I’m working on finishing school and getting a good job to support my baby!”

**C.H.** completely changed her trajectory with the help of Plainfield Action Services and the ***Bootstrap***program. The program works with each client to develop an individualized plan of action specifying short and long-term goals and barriers to be overcome. The client receives training, counseling and supportive services. The ultimate goal is to nurture each client to achieve self-sufficiency.

So, we're not just looking at the big picture as we grow, we're paying attention to every single individual, we're listening to the needs of the community, and we're providing resources for those that need it most. Charity begins at home, and we're committed to being a community that takes care of each other.  
**…**

Public safety is one of the most critical facets impacting quality of life. Four years ago, the crime statistics in Plainfield were disturbing. We committed to tackling the problem with all the resources at our disposal, and it was a commitment we took very seriously.

We drove crime down by 25%. We didn't do this by merely wishing that crime would go away. This was the result of thoughtful and measured actions. We started by putting strong leadership in place in our Police Division. Then we implemented programs like our community policing, mentoring programs for our youth, Coffee with a Cop, Carefree Fridays and summer block parties facilitating bonding between our officers and the community. We believed that fostering stronger ties and providing venues for informal interaction would go a far way to building a strong partnership and we were right.

In 2017, we hired 20 new First Responders a combination of Police Officers and Firefighters; all were Plainfield residents. We implemented measures to address speeding concerns and increase pedestrian safety. As our city evolves, the safety of our residents must keep pace with our development. To this end, we Increased our Traffic Enforcement measures, placed new Four Way Stop Signs and Enhanced Street Markings and made other safety improvements to promote driving safety around our city.

In keeping with our commitment to making technology work for us, we installed several Stationary Automated License Plate Readers throughout various areas of the City to aid with traffic enforcement and investigations.

Additionally, we purchased a State of the art, firearms and incident simulator system. The Purpose of this system is to train and enhance our officer’s abilities and decision-making skills during a variety of tense scenarios which they might deal with on a daily basis. The goal is to use this system to optimize our officer’s response to situations that can be far from ordinary, and safe. This will, in turn, increase the professionalism of the department.

What lies ahead for our Public Safety Department? We're going to continue to drive crime down aggressively. We're paying particular attention to the speeding in and around Plainfield and will be strictly enforcing that day and night.  We’ll continue to train our officers to manage and be accountable by participating in the Supervisory & Officer Accountability & Training for Police Division. Our community policing concept is an essential part of our daily routine, and we'll continue to foster and build upon the relationships being formed.

We’re proud of the relationship our officers have forged with our residents… they’re family, and it doesn’t get any closer than being present for the birth of family members, or assisting with their delivery as Officer Andrew Crawford and Detective Michael Auricchio did one day.

They responded to a call for a woman in labor at home.  They radioed for the EMS as they set off. When they arrived, they realized that the baby was probably not going to wait for the EMS squad to come so they did what they had to and delivered the baby themselves. The officers delivered a healthy baby girl.

I think it’s safe to say there’s no job that Plainfield’s finest cannot or will not do. For Detective Auricchio it was his second delivery, he’s a pro! Thank you, officers

This year the Department of Public Safety and Department of Public Works and Urban Development will be initiating a Joint Divisions Quality of Life Inspections Task Force.  The Task Force will supplement the daily investigations of the inspections department and look into issues that go beyond the norm involving property maintenance issues.  Such as illegally subdivided and occupied residences, illegal dumping, and other nuisance-related concerns.

Quality of life is multi-faceted, but when it comes to pursuing it, we are single-minded. We are enhancing services in every single Department in the city.  
…

Over in the Department of Public Works and Urban Development, we were busy in 2017. With an eye to improving our recreational offerings, we completed a $1.7 million-dollar multi-sport, turf field, almost twice the size of an NFL regulation field. And, we built one of the largest and best Skate Parks in New Jersey. Our residents, young and old are just loving these two new additions and utilize them daily.

Rushmore field was retro-fitted with a concession stand and had a complete renovation of the bathroom facilities, and we completed a walking trail at Milt Campbell field

2017 was a good year for roads in Plainfield, we spent $4.7 million and resurfaced 43 streets for a total of over 63 in four years. We'll continue with the road paving program in 2018; our plan is not to stop until every single road in Plainfield has been re-paved.  We'll keep looking for shared services opportunities with connecting municipalities to co-ordinate road improvement schedules.

This year through our Recreation Division, residents enjoyed a Full pool season at our three community pools; Hannah Atkins, Seidler and Rushmore Fields.  There are 71 new young swimmers in Plainfield thanks to the free swim lessons offered by our recreation instructors.  And, this year for the first time we added free swim lessons for adults and had a successful graduating class of 10 students.

We’re encouraging more people to take advantage of all the great programs available to our residents, and we've made it easier than ever with the COMMUNITY PASS. Once you register with Community Pass, it's easy to keep track of upcoming programs and get updates on current ones. It’s your Passport to recreation which offers over 80 programs each year.

We’re evolving into a healthier, more active Plainfield. We’re visualizing our outcomes and taking steps to change them, and the Recreation Division is committed to helping you achieve physical goals as well as providing venues for good, wholesome fun for the entire family.

In 2017, we committed to ensuring that our youth got at least two solid meals each day while participating in recreational programs. So, we ran the Summer Food Program, and teamed up with the Hunger Hero’s Campaign which helped us to exceed our goal and serve over 50, 000 meals to our youth.  In true Plainfield fashion, over 150 volunteers signed up to help get the word out to our young people.

The New Skate Park and the Seidler field transformation are a great supplement to the offerings of the Recreation Division, and thanks to the great relationship we now enjoy with county and state agencies Cedarbrook Park is currently undergoing a transformation into a turf facility. we will see more significant changes in 2018.  
…

Last week I had an urge for Peruvian food, so I took a ride over to Watchung Avenue and ate at one of my favorite restaurants. We have our own little slice of Peruvian heaven right here in Plainfield.  The food is delicious, and the service is warm and friendly.

When was the last time you dined out in Plainfield? If you haven't, you're missing out. We are making a name for ourselves as a mecca of delicious ethnic eateries, and authentic, homegrown experiences. We cover the continents with the sheer variety of our eating establishments.

I am laying down a challenge to everyone here tonight, to eat out in Plainfield for the next two weeks. Just for two weeks, make a Plainfield business your destination for dining. If you're not sure where to go, stop by our Economic Development Department, or give them a call. They've made a list of every eating establishment in Plainfield and it will soon be available online. You will not regret it, and our local economy will thank you. We want everyone to think local and buy Plainfield. This is how we build self-sufficiency.

Our City of Plainfield is one of the most diverse in the State of New Jersey. It’s something we wear as a badge of honor. Every single human being has a God-given intrinsic value which cannot be stripped away by borders and papers. Every child deserves the chance to be educated and live without fear; this is why in 2017 we adopted a resolution establishing the City of Plainfield as a fair and welcoming City. And, we rolled out the Plainfield Municipal ID Card Program which to date has issued over 3000 Municipal ID’s.

We put a Spanish translator in place to be present at all City Council meetings for translation services if needed, and we’ve made the City Council meeting agendas available in both English and Spanish

We're inclusive, we're fair, we're progressive, and we're building for the future. We're optimistic that with a progressive Governor at the helm we’ll see more support for our migrant population and more programs put in place to accommodate legal immigration. Immigrants are our neighbors, our friends and very much a part of our community as we work toward a more united Plainfield.

…

I’d like to highlight an initiative that many of you have been intimately involved with… Vision 2025.

The full results of Vision 2025 will be made available on our website, but tonight I’ll share a brief overview and the next steps as recommended by the committee to attain the vision that emerged as a result of this community collaboration.

First, I’d like to thank the members of the Vision 2025 Executive Committee who worked very hard to create lively forums where people felt comfortable sharing and who spent countless hours compiling the results of these sessions. If you are here I’d like you to stand.

**Vision 2025 Executive Committee**

John Stewart Jr, Chairperson  
Nancy Jordan  
Sean McKenna  
Diane DesPlantes  
Natalie Chermak  
Jeff Spelman  
Siddeeq W. El-Amin  
Maritza D. Hall  
Susan Lattimore-Jackson  
Maritza Martinez

Plainfield Vision 2025 was an opportunity for the community to express its vision of what they want the City of Plainfield to look like by the year 2025. Residents, business owners, property owners, and stakeholders in Plainfield were encouraged to participate in the project to gather information, ideas, and dreams.  We were able to bring a diverse set of voices from the community together to participate in this initiative. And they came, regardless of background, ethnicity, socio-economic position, ward of residence, or the length of time residing in Plainfield.

The Committee conducted listening sessions on critical topics that are considered building blocks for Plainfield as they looked toward 2025.

Public Safety was seen as essential, and there were three listening sessions devoted to this topic.  Other sessions focused on Workforce Development & Adult Learning, Municipal Government & Essential Services, Economic Development & Vibrancy, Childhood & Youth Education, Health, and Human & Social Needs. And, there was a combined Connecting Community and Community Arts & Culture session.

There were three special listening sessions one with our Senior Citizens, one with Students and the other for our Latino community in Spanish. This short video gives us a sense of what happened during the process.

I would not do justice to the Vision 2025 team by trying to rush an explanation of their hours of hard work and the comprehensive report that accompanied it – over 130 pages to be exact, needless to say the team touched on all aspects of community life here in Plainfield.

The executive committee has laid out several recommendations for next steps including  
Creating a standing committee of citizens to work with the administration and stakeholders to bring ideas to fruition.

* Creation of a detailed roadmap to include obstacles to implementation, and a process for overcoming those obstacles to success.
* Develop a system for regular reporting to citizens of Plainfield on the status of initiatives.

My administration will meet with the executive committee in the coming weeks  
I do encourage everyone here to go to our website and download a copy of the results which will be available next week. We thank every single one of you who cared enough to come out and be a part of this process and who gave your thoughts and ideas to building a vision for Plainfield in 2025.

…

I’ve always maintained that our community is only as strong as the weakest among no matter how strong we perceive ourselves to be. Everyone at some point in their lives will need a helping hand, and there are times when as a village we have to embrace those experiencing tough times and provide resources for them to pull through.

With this in mind, later this year we’ll be launching a pilot program for an initiative called the **“Plainfield Extended Family”** or **PEF.** This program will seek to assist single parents in our community who may be struggling to make ends meet on a single income. The City of Plainfield will seek to partner with service providers such as barbers, beauty salons, mechanics, tax preparation professionals, daycare providers, etc.  to offer free or discounted services to single parents who have registered and have been vetted through the program.

We will also be actively seeking State, Federal or grants which can be used to subsidize any costs associated with the program as well as utilizing existing programs which have a listing of service providers who are willing to participate.

Our true greatness as a community is exemplified when we help each other. Many single parents often work multiple jobs just to make ends meet and often struggle to provide basic necessities. No hardworking parent should have to miss a day at work because they can’t afford to get the car fixed. No child should have to worry about ridicule because there aren’t enough resources for a haircut. No mother should be forced to take a child on a job interview because daycare is not affordable.

When there is no immediate family to turn to we want our single parents to know that the Plainfield Extended Family is there for them. This is Plainfield unity, Plainfield strength, and Plainfield greatness. We will share more details of this pilot program later on in the year.  
…

There is another vulnerable group that lives among us. Some may not think of them as being vulnerable, but with limited options and even fewer prospects; there is a need to implement an active re-entry program for our residents who have paid their debt to society and have the desire to do well and live honestly. Re-entry programs are not new, yet there is still a disproportionate number of those released who struggle with adjusting and becoming fully functioning members of our community. This year we will redouble our efforts as we provide viable options and a path to successful transition for those who need it.

Studies have shown that effective re-entry programs can cut the rate of recidivism significantly and that is what we want to do here in Plainfield.  To that end, my administration is working to partner with another agency to put together a robust re-entry program...

What would success look like in such a program? Educational and vocational training available, job preparedness classes, assistance with job placement and at least six months of emotional and employment support as they transition back into the community and the working world.

In gathering resources, we were pleased to learn that the New Jersey Department of Transportation would again be implementing the Youth Corps, “Urban Gateway Enhancement Program.” This program provides urban youth with an opportunity to gain experience and exposure to various careers in transportation through paid summer employment. The program is tailored specifically for youth and young adults between the ages of 16 to 25 who have experienced barriers to employment such as; lacking a high school diploma, homelessness, teen parenting, physical or mental challenges or an ex-offender.

The City of Plainfield will be applying to participate with the NJDOT in this program following through on our commitment to vigorously pursue all opportunities for our young people.  
…

In 2017, We sent our junior Pee-Wee cheerleaders to the National Cheer Competition where they placed 1st. Local fencer Malcolm Fields is ranked 13th in the nation and 3rd in New Jersey and is making his mark on the international scene.

Arianna Diaz – from the Plainfield Academy of Arts and Advanced Studies for the second year placed first in the Poetry Out Loud regional competition.

The Plainfield Cardinals Wrestling Team captured the Team Championship at the Urban League Wrestling Classic on Saturday, February 10th  
And, proudly claiming 1st place at the Apollo Theater was PAAAS student, Alexis Morrast…

Our Plainfield youth are eager to excel, they are a force to be reckoned with, and we must find the means to give wings to their dreams and aspirations.

As we enter 2018, I will continue to fight and advocate for improvement in education for all our children and those who are continuing to pursue higher education or trade. Quality education is the backbone of a prosperous future for our children and the foundation for overall economic well-being for the city of Plainfield.

Early childhood education is vitally important, and we've added new early childhood space for Neighborhood House and the new Second Street Youth Center which will have a new facility for the 2018/2019 school year.

As I've mentioned before, I want to see more of our children involved in stem based educational programs. And utilizing technology as a tool for success. We’d like to see Plainfield youth participate in a hackathon and work more closely with institutions such as Union County College, NJIT, Bloomfield College and Rutgers to have programs locally in Plainfield that can teach our youth programming and app building skills that can be used as a vehicle to create self-employment opportunities.

We have to become a city dedicated to embracing technology, applying 21st-century job skills and creating ongoing opportunities for our residents.  We can become a city that is filled with entrepreneurs. We can change our future.

The problem is we’re still not reaching enough kids, and we’re not reaching them in time.  That has to change.

Last year in my State of the City address I shared with you my idea for a program which would give a start to every child enrolling in kindergarten in the City of Plainfield as well as provide funding for students who qualify to attend Union County College but who are unable to afford it. This program is called the Plainfield Promise.

I'm gratified to share with you that we are adding partners every day. We have eager partners in Union County College, The Robert Wood Johnson School of Nursing and most recently in partnership with the Board of Education we have begun exploring possibilities with Bloomfield College, who is excited about working closely with us and potentially being a vessel to create more opportunities for our Plainfield scholars.

Education promotes equality and lifts people out of poverty. Education should never be just for a privileged few; it is for everyone. It is a fundamental human right.

As Brad Henry, the 26th Governor of Oklahoma said, “No other investment yields as great a return as the investment in education. An educated workforce is the foundation of every community and the future of every economy.”  
Education will always be one of the essential tools in influencing outcomes and creating the future that we envision for our city. Without a strong educational foundation for our children, we are essentially building a community without a positive, sustainable future.

Education transported me from one opportunity to another and enabled me to create a life for my family far different than the one I had as a young boy. I am passionate about education, and I will never stop until we can offer every single child here in Plainfield the opportunity to change their circumstances.

I want our young people to dare to dream.  Dreams have the power to elevate you beyond today, they should never be stopped by the walls of poverty, but instead, be given the means to propel one into the future. We need to provide means for the dreams of our young people to soar.  
**…**

As we grow and evolve, we have to find solutions that not only fit our lifestyle today but will meet the needs of our changing community. With that in mind, I am pleased to share a new and innovative program called **LIMEBIKE.**

This year, my administration aims to revolutionize our city's public transportation by introducing a smart mobility solution. A smart bikeshare that will empower residents with a greener and a more affordable way to get around. At zero cost to the city, we will be partnering with a smart mobility company to bring in bikes that are enabled with GPS, wireless technology, and self-activating locks to make it simple for riders to find, unlock and pick up a nearby bike using the iOS or Android smartphone app. This is part of our bigger initiative to solving that first and last mile transportation challenge that accompanies all transit-oriented development.

Limebike will offer our city an innovative, new kind of connectivity between home and around town. Not only will residents be able to effortlessly move around Plainfield but it supports our Healthy Plainfield initiative which advocates for increased physical activity for residents.

We’re positioning ourselves to be a city of the future, lower emissions, greener alternatives and a millennial, transit supported lifestyle. Welcome to Plainfield, our Future is NOW.  
…

My friends, over the past few decades we’ve had a bad rep, we cannot sugarcoat it. But, it is a reputation that has been misconstrued. They should have been applauding the resilience of our residents instead of vilifying our communities. We've endured, rebellions, depressions, wholesale abandonment. We've floundered as we look for direction, but not once did we give up.

We have shown grit, and we have shown determination. When whole neighborhoods shut down across the country in the wake of the housing bubble fiasco, Plainfielders dug in their heels and hunkered down for the long haul because we are no strangers to adversity, we are not easily defeated, and if nothing else, history has taught us that we will overcome.

So, as we leave tonight, I want us to focus on the things that make Plainfield great. Pride in our City, love for our community, strength for our children, and the character to stand up for what is right.  Our young people are defying stereotypes and carving their space in the pages of Plainfield’s history books and we owe it to them to work at building a Plainfield that is united and embraces the diversity that makes us special.

Plainfield has a rich historical past which we will never forget, but we are reaching into the future to create a new Plainfield. We are diverse, we are eclectic, we are unique, we are evolved, and we are unapologetic.

Success in Plainfield will not be defined by the standards set by strangers who are not acquainted with our City and our people. We will not waste time trying to please those who are afraid to cross the border and spend time and money with our local businesses. We are a city that has weathered adversity, we have held on with grim determination, and we are proud of how we have evolved.

We’re going to support our own and continue to write the brand of Plainfield across the State of New Jersey and the United States of America. When they say crawl, we’ll say walk. When they say walk, we will run. And, when they expect us to run, we will fly. We will not be constrained, we face adversity with determination and courage. Plainfield is stronger than it’s ever been, our Future is NOW and we have risen to meet it.

I thank you for coming tonight, may God bless you, Bless our City and these United States of America.