

## **Mayor Adrian Mapp – State of the City Address January 5, 2015**

Members of the City Council, Cabinet Members, Honored Guests, fellow Plainfielders, and friends of Plainfield, Estoy contento de presentarles el reporté del Estado de la Ciudad para el Dos Mil Quince.

I am pleased to present the 2015 State of the City Address.

Let me begin by congratulating the Council members who are beginning new four-year terms this evening: returning Council member Rebecca Williams and our newest Council member, Diane Toliver. I also offer my congratulations to Gloria Taylor, who was elected to fill the remainder of my Council term.

And I offer my congratulations to Councilwoman Bridget Rivers, on her re-election as Council President, and to Councilwoman Tracey Brown on her election as chair of the committee of the whole. I look forward to working with all of you, as well as Councilwoman Greaves and Councilman Storch this year.

I would like to ask all the members of my Cabinet to stand and be recognized. This is my team, and their talents, skills and commitment are making a difference in Plainfield.

And finally, I would like to offer a deep personal thank you to my lovely wife, Amelia, my partner and my best friend, who brings dignity and grace to the role of First Lady of Plainfield, and to our daughters, Ayisha and Shermona, for their love and enthusiastic participation in public service.

At the beginning of this new year of 2015, I want to take us back for a moment to our reorganization one year ago. We faced many challenges – the restructuring of our financial house, crime, and the critical need for economic development. In spite of those challenges, the state of our city was hopeful.

And tonight, in 2015, I can report that our hope was justified. One short year later, my administration has begun a successful transition to financial stability, greater public safety, and a surge in development that is transforming our city.

When I took office in 2014, the state of Plainfield's finances was no secret. I inherited a derelict city government that was devoid of fiscal integrity. This was not the fault of our city employees, who were doing the best job they could with outdated technology – or no technology at all -- lack of employees in key positions, and no accountability from the former administration.

Simply put, the City's finances were thought to be of no significance and thus, were ignored and were not considered a priority for seven years prior to me taking office.

It is my firm belief that the financial integrity of any organization is the foundation upon which success is built. Therefore, getting our financial house in order was not only a personal priority for me – a CPA and finance professional – but an imperative for our city if we were to survive and eventually thrive.

And here's what my administration did: Beginning with our submission of the first on-time budget to the City Council in 8 years, renegotiated existing contracts and collected back taxes. Those procedures alone saved the City more than \$2 million in 2014. Let me repeat – that's over 2 –

million – dollars in one year alone. We are in the process of refinancing the Series 2007A bonds which will save us \$400,000.00.

Hiring a CFO – a position that had gone unfilled by a fulltime financial professional for more than 8 years – allowed us to reconcile the financial records for all grants. By conducting a clean-up of old capital ordinances, we found and reallocated \$653,000 in funds for road repairs. And we have begun adding new software that will allow all City offices to operate with the speed and efficiency that our residents deserve. It is not too much for our residents to expect their government to function at a level of efficiency that renders it capable of delivering on its promises and meeting their most important needs.

By taking care of business at City Hall – business that had for so long been left undone, my administration accomplished these initiatives:

- Opened the Veterans Building and took the necessary steps to transfer ownership to the City of Plainfield – a partial payment on a huge debt of gratitude that we owe our veterans. Our veterans deserve all that we give to them and even more.
- Drafted a vacant properties ordinance, never on the books in Plainfield -- which requires owners of vacant properties to register and maintain their properties
- Renegotiated the Comcast Franchise Agreement, which had expired in 2010, bringing added revenue to the city
- Renegotiated ownership of Liberty Village after years of neglect from the previous owner, adding new amenities, improving living conditions for the residents and bringing added revenue to the city
- With Council's support, we instituted real fines for illegal alcohol sales and required extra security for bars with enforcement problems, ending the practice of sending Plainfield police officers and letting residents pay their bills
- Hired a full-time health officer and have inspected more than two-thirds of the city's restaurants – a process that was ignored for years

And, what I am perhaps proudest of: my administration has settled ALL union Contracts through 2017. That's ALL 7 of our unions – police, fire, public works, and municipal managers and employees – whose contracts expired in 2013 and who worked without a contract for most of last year. I expect a lot from our employees, and it is reasonable for them to expect to be treated fairly

I'm proud that I fulfilled my pledge. I'm proud of the excellent members of my administration who performed their jobs admirably. I am not proud of where we were – of where we came from – but I can tell you tonight, with certainty, that procedurally, and administratively, Plainfield is no longer a second-class city. We can now hold our own with any city in New Jersey.

I made a second pledge last year, and that pledge was to return the streets and neighborhoods to our citizens and make them safe everywhere across the city.

I said then that it is not in our power to eradicate crime, but it is in our power – and it is our duty and our responsibility – to provide a safe environment for all our citizens. Tonight, I am proud to report that our Public Safety director and the men and women who serve our city so well in the

Plainfield Police Department have fulfilled that pledge. 2014 saw a 67 percent drop in the murder/manslaughter rate and an overall decrease of 11 percent in all violent crimes. We saw a 73 percent drop in arson and a 26 percent reduction in motor vehicle theft, for an overall decrease of 6 percent in nonviolent property crimes. In fact, we saw a reduction in 8 of 9 categories of criminal activity in Plainfield in 2014.

This did not happen by accident. Last year I promised that our police men and women would be fully engaged with the Central Business District and the South Avenue Business District. And in 2014, we redeployed our Patrol Officers to conduct directed patrols in these areas, and throughout the City. During these patrols the officers walked their beats and became a familiar presence, a practice that will continue this year.

I am confident that our crime rate will see continued reduction in 2015 with the installation of 30 high-definition cameras at various locations throughout the entire city, and funded at no cost to the City. We will also outfit 20 patrol vehicles with GPS Systems with funding from a technology grant the Police Division received.

These systems will decrease our response time and will support officer safety. The end result will be a real time crime center for Plainfield which includes analytics, surveillance cameras, and sensor technology. Our public safety efforts will continue to be enhanced by my "Light up the City" initiative which was implemented in the latter part of 2014. Through this initiative we identified and replaced many of the broken lights across the City and we are installing new lights to illuminate many of the dark areas throughout the City. Plainfield is leading the way in urban policing and crime reduction, and we are making our city safe for all of our residents and businesses.

And that brings me to my final pledge -- the final element of the transformation of our city -- economic development.

Last year, I pledged to continue my advocacy for the one-seat ride to New York City on the New Jersey Transit Raritan Valley Line. One year ago, we had NO direct trains to New York. NONE. Tonight, I am proud to note that NJ Transit has officially posted the new 2015 rail schedule for the Raritan Valley Line, effective January 11th, with a total of 16 direct trains overall.

We have yet to see direct trains during peak hours, but I am convinced that this will become a reality this year. We said last year that the one-seat service was vital if Plainfield was to attract new businesses and new residents. And we have already seen the results. The value of a Plainfield home increased by approximately 2 percent in the last year, and we have seen the impact in commercial real estate as well. Construction and leasing are underway downtown, and on South Avenue, with more activity than has been seen in Plainfield in decades.

We have revised our permitting and licensing processes to attract developers and to improve the quality of life for Plainfielders.

I'm so proud to note that Plainfield's unemployment rate has already shown vast improvement, dropping 4.5 percent in the first six months of 2014. As our local economy improves, we must be certain that our residents are ready for these new opportunities. In 2014, my administration partnered with the US Postal Service on a Job Fair that drew 800 participants, and with FedEx Freight and Plainfield Board of Education on a Job Fair that drew 200 participants. We are working with the NJ Department of Labor and the Edison Job Corps; we established the Hyatt Regency New

Brunswick Partnership, and we conducted numerous small business workshops and got 35 Plainfield businesses online through our partnership with Google.

My administration is also following through on our commitment to communication. Because you, our residents, asked for it, this year we have:

- Initiated weekly email blasts from my office and put a mass communication system in place to provide telephone and email alerts
- Begun my weekly office hours, Wednesday evening from 6-8 pm open to all Plainfield residents
- We held community hearings on the Muhlenberg Hospital site and completed a study that will help us take the critical first steps to redevelopment
- We held a summit on police and community relations, and as a result, this year we will implement the Police Chaplain Program, creating a partnership among law enforcement, clergy, and the community.
- We opened online registration for all recreation programs using Community Pass, the industry standard, following the recommendation of the Citizens Budget Advisory Committee.
- We appointed members of PACHA – the Plainfield Advisory Commission on Hispanic Affairs – the first appointments since 2010 – and we will work with them, beginning this month, to assist on issues around President Barack Obama’s executive order on immigration.
- And we have begun work on a new, improved city website, fulfilling another pledge made last year.

I should also mention Executive Policy 248 – I have made it crystal clear to all cabinet members that a sense of urgency is important to me, and that our residents deserve their prompt attention and response. This policy simply says that requests made by residents and businesses to my administration, for service, must be responded to within 24 to 48 hours. All requests must be acknowledged by someone within my administration; no one will be ignored.

I said last year that we must renew our commitment to our city, and I rejoice in that renewed commitment. Many of our resources here in Plainfield are thriving: our historic districts, our recreation system and our open spaces, which will be improved as a result of the open space referendum passed last November.

This year we received national recognition as one of America’s most exciting small cities, and one of New Jersey’s most caring cities. Those of us who live here know that we deserve these titles, and they enhance our pride in Plainfield.

One final, but critically important note: My administration has created a constructive working relationship with the Plainfield schools, and I commend Superintendent Anna Belin-Pyles and the Board of Education for their work. This past September marked the first anniversary of the Maxson STEM Academy (Science –Technology-Engineering-Math), and this past October my administration warmly welcomed a group of students, parents, teachers and administrators from the Academy who presented an idea for a community garden. I am pleased to announce that the City will partner

with the students from the Maxson STEM Academy to create community gardens on Berkeley Terrace.

Tonight, I pledge the City's continued support for our schools, and I ask all Plainfielders, those who live in the city, and those who own businesses and properties in our city, to commit as well. Plainfield will not achieve its full potential until we educate all of our children and give them the future they deserve, and my administration will do everything in its power, working in close partnership with the Board of Education and the Superintendent, to make that happen.

We have come far since I stood before you last year. At times it's hard to see progress. We live in the day to day and we can become discouraged by petty politics and minor disagreements. That's why it's so good to stop and take stock of what we have accomplished, working together.

I am proud to report that tonight, January 5, 2015, we have begun our transformation, and the state of our city is strong. We look forward to this new year with optimism and good will and a deep, abiding faith that together, we are creating a Plainfield that is rising to new heights. The diversity of our city creates a rich tapestry that gives us a unique strength and the ability to build UN PLAINFIELD, UN FUTURO -- One Plainfield, one future. Thank you for the trust you have placed in me as your Mayor. I wish you all a happy, prosperous, and blessed New Year.