



Mayor Virg Bernero
2008 State of the City Address

“Building Lansing’s Future”

Hill Career Academy
January 30, 2008

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the Hill Career Academy.

Thanks so much to Superintendent Dr. T.C. Wallace, Jr., Board President Hugh Clarke and the members of our Board of Education for hosting us tonight.

I want to acknowledge and thank the most important person in my life -- my love, my compass and my strength, Lansing's First Lady, Teri Bernero. Teri and I are blessed to have with us tonight our beautiful daughters, Kelly and Virginia, the lights of our lives. Happy birthday, Kelly.

I want to thank my colleagues on the Lansing City Council for their partnership in moving Lansing forward. In particular I want to congratulate new Council President Brian Jeffries and Vice President Derrick Quinney and welcome our two newest Council members, Eric Hewitt and A'Lynne Robinson.

I look forward to working with all of you in the years ahead. This year -- 2008 -- can be a GREAT year for Lansing if we work together to build Lansing's future.

In public service, no one accomplishes anything alone, and I am blessed with an all-star team that is second-to-none. Will the members of my Cabinet and staff and all city employees please stand and be recognized for your outstanding service.

I am pleased to report that the state of our City is good -- and growing stronger.

2007 was another banner year of economic growth and investment in Lansing. Even as our state continues to battle the economic storms, Lansing is making strides toward economic recovery and renaissance.

Change is no longer just in the air, but on the streets, in our neighborhoods, along our riverfront, and in our downtown. Everywhere I go people are talking about the positive changes in Lansing.

And folks, it's just the beginning.

The best is yet to come.

Lansing has all the ingredients for greatness. The Capital City. Michigan State University, our world-class university. Cooley Law School, the largest in the nation. Lansing Community College, where people of all ages pursue their dreams. One of the world's leading corporations -- General Motors. And a creative workforce and talented citizens second-to-none.

I know that if we simply leverage these incredible assets and get us all rowing in the same direction, we can grow Lansing into one of the great Midwestern capital cities.

In these tough economic times, the smart citizens of Lansing haven't waited for things to get better. We are actively engaged in making it happen. The year ahead promises to be one of incredible transformation for our City.

Michigan's Capital City is on the move. Because we dared to believe in Lansing, our City stands on the cusp of an economic renaissance, a resurgence that you can see and feel.

Our unemployment rate is far below the state average. We are leading the state in new job creation. We have leveraged more than half a BILLION dollars in new investment that will literally transform the skyline of our City and create thousands of new jobs.

We have sent the message loud and clear -- Lansing is open for business. We are rolling out the red carpet -- instead of the red tape -- and we are getting results.

Already work has begun on the Accident Fund's monumental effort to bring the historic Ottawa Power Station back to life. Vacant for nearly two decades, it will soon be transformed into a powerful new engine of economic growth. The redevelopment of the Power Station represents a public and private investment of more than \$180 million and the retention and creation of more than 1,000 jobs.

The team that is making it happen is with us tonight.

Accident Fund CEO Liz Haar. Christman Company President Steve Roznowski. Mark Morante of the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. Lisa Webb Sharpe, Director of the Michigan Department of Management and Budget. BWL General Manager Peter Lark. And Bob Trezise, President and CEO of the Lansing Economic Development Corporation.

Will you please stand and be recognized for helping us to build Lansing's future.

And there is more -- much more. The Capital Club Towers condominium project. The Kalamazoo Gateway project. The new Michigan State Police headquarters. And the proposed Market Place and Ballpark North projects that will build a new urban village along our riverfront, creating a vibrant new future for the historic Lansing City Market.

Another of our Lansing-based insurance companies -- Jackson National Life -- is planning to invest \$60 million and create 400 new jobs. We are pulling out all the stops to make sure they grow their business right here in Lansing. Our partnership with Alaeidon Township to help JNL expand is a model of intergovernmental cooperation that benefits our entire region.

I see Supervisor John Daher from Lansing Township is with us tonight. John, I look forward to working with you for mutually beneficial growth as well.

Stay tuned for even more good news. Soon we will announce yet another major new development in the heart of our downtown.

With the help of an amazing group of public and private sector partners, we are reinventing Lansing's urban landscape. Giving our City more curb appeal will help us keep more of the young people who graduate by the thousands from our colleges and universities.

Our success in making Lansing a cool city that retains young, creative people is most evident in Old Town -- our own "Capital of Cool." The proof is in Old Town's thriving arts and music scene and the unique galleries and boutiques that fill their storefronts.

And, of course, their incredible victory in the national IKEA design contest. The spirit of Robert Busby is indeed alive and well in Old Town!

Last year I spoke about my plan to combine two of our existing assets -- the Capital Area District Library and the Impression 5 Science Center -- to create a world-class library and children's museum. This incredible new attraction in our downtown, just a stone's throw from the State Capitol, will draw visitors from across the region and around the state.

Tonight I am pleased to report that this exciting plan is moving forward. This summer, voters will be asked to approve a new millage that will enhance libraries across the Lansing region and build the new combined facility in our downtown. Thanks to CADL Executive Director Sue Hill and I-5 Executive Director Eric Larsen and their boards for joining forces on this terrific project. Sue and Eric, let's make it happen!

My friends, there is no doubt that our downtown is driving the economic progress of the entire City. With each new development, with hundreds of new workers and downtown residents, we are building a stronger tax base, generating new dollars that we can use to enhance neighborhood safety, improve youth recreation, fix our roads and maintain our parks.

And let's not forget that these major construction projects will employ thousands of workers in the skilled trades. When we are building, brick masons are working. Ironworkers, electricians and plumbers are working -- and carpenters, too. New investment means new jobs for Lansing.

I want to thank the men and women of the Building and Construction Trades who are helping us build Lansing's future. I appreciate your partnership and look forward to working hand in hand with you to move our City forward. Will those of you here tonight please stand and be recognized.

Beyond the borders of our downtown, Lansing's economy is showing undeniable signs of strength. Lansing-based manufacturers are rising to the challenge of low-cost foreign competition. Demmer Corporation is adding 1,000 new jobs. Peckham Industries, Barnes Aerospace, S and S Die Company and many others are hiring new workers.

And how about our hometown car company, General Motors? Talk about hitting on all cylinders. The national automotive press has unanimously declared that our cars -- Lansing-built cars -- are some of the best cars in the world. I couldn't be prouder of our hometown team that has put Lansing on the map in a very powerful way.

Please welcome the teams that are building these outstanding vehicles. From Lansing Grand River: Plant Manager Bob Glass, UAW Local 652 President Tiny Sherwood, Recording Secretary Fred Charles and the UAW team that builds the all-new Cadillac CTS, the 2008 Motor Trend Car of the Year!

And from Lansing Delta: Plant Manager Randy Thayer, UAW Local 602 President Doug Rademaker and the UAW team that builds the Buick Enclave, a finalist for 2008 North American Car of the Year.

Citizens of Lansing and the region should take pride in this incredible achievement. We should toot our horns about the great vehicles and the great partnership between the UAW and General Motors management that helped make it possible. Let there be no doubt -- you have restored the roar to the GM product line. Not only are you building great cars, you are building Lansing's future.

And how about this amazing award? The 2008 Motor Trend Car of the Year. These Golden Calipers are recognized around the world as the pinnacle of automotive excellence. This is the Stanley Cup of car building. And these are the world champions who brought it home to Lansing.

Folks, we CAN compete in this global economy. Thank you GM and UAW for reminding us that American ingenuity is still the best in the world.

Just as our hometown car company is retooling to be more competitive globally, we are retooling our local economy to diversify our jobs base -- and create a high-tech hotspot right here in Lansing.

Lansing-based technology companies are racing ahead to bring the latest innovations to market. MSU spinoffs like Niowave, AquaBioChip and XG Sciences are taking cutting-edge technologies from the research lab to the marketplace, right here in Lansing.

We are blessed to have two strong and growing hospital systems -- Sparrow and Ingham Regional that are strengthening our physical and our financial health.

Both have recently completed multimillion dollar expansions.

But these fast-growing job providers need a workforce that keeps them well stocked with talented employees. To meet this imperative, we must better train our young people for the jobs of the future -- computer programmers and systems analysts, laboratory technicians and engineers.

Earlier this week we announced that the shuttered Holmes Street School on Lansing's East Side will become a high-tech learning center for young people. One of Lansing's fastest growing technology companies, Spartan Internet, will expand into the school and partner with us to create the new Information Technology Empowerment Center -- ITEC. ITEC will help our kids develop the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in the emerging global economy.

I want to thank the team that is making ITEC a reality. Ryan Vartoogian from Spartan Internet. Dr. Hi Fitzgerald from Michigan State University. David Hollister, president and CEO of the Prima Civitas Foundation. Adam Pitcher of the Holmes Street Neighborhood Association. Andy Kotarba, CEO of Dewpoint. And Kenny Szymusiak of our Economic Development Corporation. Please stand and be recognized.

Last night, Governor Granholm issued a challenge to communities throughout the state to help create 21st Century Schools that better prepare our young people to succeed in today's high tech world. Her proposal to create smaller, more effective high schools comes with critical state funding to help make the plan a reality.

Tonight, Dr. Wallace and I are embracing this plan for our children's future. We will bring together key partners in health care, technology, business and higher education to make it happen, right here in Lansing.

I want to thank Sparrow Hospital CEO Dennis Swan, LCC President Dr. Judith Cardenas, LSEA President Jerry Swartz, and MSU Associate Provost for Human Health Randy Hillard for agreeing to join us in this groundbreaking endeavor.

When it comes to investing in our youth, Lansing takes a backseat to no one. Kudos to Police Chief Mark Alley for making the HOPE Connections program such a huge success. Chief, thanks for all you do to help our kids make it across the finish line and qualify for two years of tuition at Lansing Community College.

Just as we are rebuilding Lansing's economy, we are rebuilding Lansing's neighborhoods. Our Neighborhood Enhancement Action Team -- NEAT -- has stepped up enforcement against absentee landlords who allow their neglect to erode the quality of life in our neighborhoods. With the help of City Attorney Brigham Smith, we are cracking down and getting results.

We have strengthened neighborhood safety by adding four new Community Police Officers. A fifth new officer is working to expand neighborhood watch, giving people the tools they need to work together to make our community safer.

But we aren't stopping there. New residential developments are breathing new life into older neighborhoods, attracting hundreds of new residents to live in our City. In the year ahead, more new homes will rise on the campus of the School for the Blind and on the Ottawa Parcel just west of the Capitol.

We have launched an exciting new partnership with the Ingham County Land Bank to buy deteriorating properties and transform them into affordable, quality homes. Ingham County Treasurer Eric Schertzing has spearheaded this exciting initiative, which is seeing results all over Lansing. Eric, please rise and be recognized for your leadership.

At the same time we are working with a broad coalition to address the foreclosure crisis confronting Lansing and cities across America. This crisis is an enormous threat to the growth and long-term health of our community. It affects us all.

If you are in danger of losing your home to foreclosure, please don't wait -- communicate. Seek help now by calling 2-1-1 or visit our website at **holdontoyourhome.org**. The help is free and confidential.

In the year ahead we will form another exciting new partnership to strengthen our neighborhoods. The Greater Lansing Housing Coalition and its new Executive Director, Lynne Martinez, is teaming up with our Planning and Neighborhood Development Department, led by Bob Johnson.

Together, they will create a new Neighborhood Empowerment Center that will serve as a one-stop neighborhood shop for first-time home buyers, help with home repairs, community services and much more. Lynne and Bob, will you please stand and be recognized.

And that's not all. Few things are more important than revitalizing our housing stock, growing our tax base, strengthening home ownership and creating hundreds of construction jobs in our City. Tonight I propose an innovative new program that promises to do just that.

Under my plan, if you make qualified improvements to your home, or if you transform an old, abandoned house into an owner-occupied home, we will offer you a 50% break on the increased taxes resulting from those improvements.

We offer similar incentives to downtown developers -- and they are working. They will work for our neighborhoods as well.

And now I invite you to look around at this beautiful Auditorium. For decades the people of south Lansing have wanted a community center to call their own. Tonight I am pleased to report that we are making that dream a reality. The City will invest more than two million dollars to create the long-awaited South Side Community Center right here at the Hill Academy.

Dr. Wallace, thank you so much for your partnership as we transform this building into a neighborhood community center for families, children and seniors. Special thanks to the South Side Citizen Action Team, chaired by Frank Lain, who worked diligently to develop this plan. Thanks also to the Lansing City Council and our School Board for their support and approval. Will all of you please stand and be recognized.

Last year I signed the Mayor's Climate Protection Agreement and unveiled the Go Green! Go Lansing! Initiative to make our City a national leader in environmental stewardship and energy efficiency. Our major partners in this effort are the Lansing Board of Water and Light and Lansing Community College. East Lansing Mayor Vic Loomis also has committed to join us. Together, we are inviting leaders across the region to "Go Green". It is truly the only way to facilitate sustainable growth in the region.

Tonight I challenge Lansing to take the Go Green Pledge. I invite every citizen and every business, large and small, to visit our new website at **gogreengolansing.com** to take the pledge.

Thanks to the Granger Company and the Greater Lansing Convention and Visitors Bureau for supporting this important effort. Together, we will make Lansing cleaner and greener for generations to come. Will all of our Go Green partners please rise and be recognized.

Conserving energy is just one way that we are changing how City Hall does business. In the last two years we have made great progress in putting a stop to irresponsible spending habits of the past. Over the last two years we erased \$17 million in budget deficits without raising taxes, without laying off employees and without draining our reserves.

But I must be frank with you. In the year ahead we will face our greatest fiscal challenge yet. To overcome this challenge, we must take bold action to contain exploding health care costs. Last year my team and I led the way by becoming the first city employees ever to pay a share of our health care premiums.

Tonight, once again, I call on this Council and on our employees to join us. In these tough times, Lansing citizens have made sacrifices and so must we.

I have worked hard to bring necessary changes to City Hall. And we are not done changing, just as we are not done living.

Yet change is still scary to some. When we explore uncharted territory the willingness to risk is part of the journey.

Change is tough. Change is unsettling, especially to those who are wedded to the status quo. But we will not get where we need to go by doing the same things in the same ways. That's not how GM won the Car of the Year Award and it's not how Lansing is going to succeed.

My friends, the world is changing fast. We have to run, not walk, just to stay in the game.

As long as I am your Mayor, Lansing will not be left behind. "Good enough" is not good enough for Lansing any more.

We will never take the leap from good to GREAT unless we have the courage to leave our comfort zone and reach higher.

When I accepted the job as your mayor, I asked: why not Lansing? Why not Lansing in the same sentence as great capital cities like Madison, Columbus and Indianapolis? I asked you to believe in Lansing and to join with me in seeing the possibilities for what our city could be.

Tonight I invite you to take a good look around our city and tell me if you don't agree -- we are building Lansing's future, right before our very eyes. But first we had to believe it was possible and we had to be willing to embrace change.

It may be human nature to resist change. But it is also human nature to push ahead. We are innovators. We are builders. We are the architects of our own future.

Won't you join me in dreaming big dreams for our city, for ourselves, for our children? Let's work to make those dreams come true.

We stand at the doorway to our future.

Together, we can walk through that door and build a better future for Lansing and for each of our residents.

Thanks so much for the opportunity to make a positive difference for all of us.

Good night, God bless you and God bless Lansing.

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