

Reverend Clergy, Members of the City Council, Elected Officials, Honored Guests, friends, family and residents:

Elizabeth is a city - where tree-lined neighborhoods meet transportation enhancements and exciting development. It is a place where you can be:

- An Innovative leader
- A Dedicated Responder
- Successful business owner
- Creator of opportunity and transformer of communities

A municipality where people do not just reside together - they share their lives.

It is not just a location on a map, it is our Elizabeth, where individuals stand side-by-side, working together:

- To make a difference
- To make a lasting impact
- To make our home the best for all - because the partnerships in our city are strong, reliable and unparalleled

Whether you live, work or visit our community, having the ability to travel with convenience and dependability is vital to meeting demanding lifestyles.

Each day brings an element of unknown with it - but whether or not your transportation networks are going to be there for you, should not be one of them.

The new project design was unveiled for the Midtown Train Station and plans are underway. Working together with New Jersey Transit, the \$55 million dollar reconstruction project will increase options and services:

- Heated, air-conditioned waiting areas
- Enhanced ADA accessibility
- And upgraded security systems

The Midtown station is one of the busiest in the region and utilized by thousands daily - but being able to get to the train on time is equally important.

Aggressive road re-paving projects have been taking place within our neighborhoods. From downtown to uptown, potholes have been filled and corridors resurfaced, providing:

- Travel with greater comfort
- More secure routes for motorists

Using the latest in technology and grant funds from the Department of Energy:

- Solar
- Flashing stop
- Pedestrian crossing signs were incorporated throughout our City.

And in addition:

- Bridge height signs
- Portable message boards
- And panels were installed on 6 public buildings

Harnessing solar energy through more than 2 million dollars in grants and using it to power municipal buildings defrays costs for taxpayers and conserves resources.

Recognized for its solar growth in an Environment New Jersey report, the creation and implementation of these greener opportunities are transforming the way we conduct business and provide services.

This commitment is visible across our community and reinforced through our initiatives that re-purpose underutilized land and preserve open space.

Together with partners such as Groundwork Elizabeth, we have made the Elizabeth River Trail a success. Construction on Phase 2 will begin this Spring along Pearl Street, from Bridge to South, with funding from:

- Green Acres
- County of Union
- And \$3.6 million from CDBG Disaster Recovery

Phases III and IV, which will extend from:

- Route 1&9 Overpass to Clifton Street
- And South Broad to West Grand Streets are also in the design phase

Taking innovative approaches to creating opportunities produces inspiring outcomes.

The Elizabeth Parking Authority had another successful year:

- Expanding the Pay by Phone - Mobile Now! parking feature
- Managing the Midtown Garage across from the Train Station
- Exploring creation of a Bicycle Depot in a secure area of the garage

When we think of re-imagining spaces for other uses - parking garages usually do not enter into the equation.

However, working closely with the Elizabeth Destination Marketing Organization, the Parking Authority did just that by hosting the kick-off celebration for the Elizabeth Tourism App.

The garage on West Jersey Street was transformed into an elegant cocktail party with:

- Couches, chandeliers
- Tables, chairs
- Showcase for some of the best dining in our city

Attracting visitors, engaging residents and highlighting businesses, the exciting mobile app was introduced providing:

- Navigation Tools
- List of City Events
- Places of interest - to make any stay one to remember

With breathtaking views of the Elizabeth skyline against an equally extraordinary sunset - the event was spectacular and proved that parking garages should be viewed as more than just covered spaces.

Keeping business local is vital to:

- Driving our economy
- Offering options for residents
- Meeting neighborhood demands for fresh food

Efforts of the Elizabeth Avenue Partnership continue to grow with:

- Farmer's Market, Hispanic Heritage Month
- Extra Duty Walking Patrols
- The First Ambassador Program - providing one-to-one interaction 6 days a week

The Avenue created even more opportunities by partnering with local businesses to host special events.

National Hot Dog Day was celebrated in the city by two long-time eateries:

- Jerry's Famous Frankfurters
- Tommy's Italian Hot Dogs and Sausages

Drawing patrons from near and far, approximately 1,000 one dollar hot dogs were sold in a 3 hour period at each location.

While new initiatives and annual events were being held on the Avenue, the Midtown SID:

- Implemented beautification projects
- Provided assistance to merchants

And brought back fan favorites:

- Women's History Month Program
- Car and Bike Show - with more than 170 vehicles, cars, motorcycles

Our city is full of opportunities, to do business, explore and live.

Helping guests navigate our community and maximize their time spent here, The Elizabeth Visitors Center at Snyder Academy will include:

- Staffed welcome desk
- Information kiosk and gift shop
- Exhibits about history, notable city individuals and institutions

Business development and retention creates opportunities as well as strengthens and diversifies our economy - but that success cannot continue without a trained and prepared workforce. Through the On-the-Job Training Initiative, the Elizabeth Development Company, with funding from the County of Union:

- Helps employers find qualified residents to fill jobs
- Encourages business owners to create an On-the-Job Training program and hire trainees
- Identifies hundreds of job opportunities in Hospitality, Customer Service, Warehousing and Transportation

The Workforce Innovation Business Center, located in The Mills at Jersey Gardens, is also providing support with:

- 102 residents trained
- 110 placed in positions during the past year

Increasing the availability of resources and establishing foundations that raise awareness as well as enable individuals to become self-sufficient helps our economy and community grow.

Now a Simon Mall, the Mills at Jersey Gardens is doing its part to reinforce our position in the region as the best place to buy quality and brand-name merchandise at great prices.

Welcoming:

- New Balance
- Express Factory Outlet
- Polo Men's Factory Store

More variety, coupled with the exciting 411,000 square foot expansion breaking ground in early 2017:

- Will add more high-quality restaurants
- Top retail brands

Elizabeth was named by financial company SmartAsset as the 5th best large city for holiday shopping in the nation, we continue to attract visitors and shoppers from throughout the world.

Described as a "hidden gem for shoppers in the New York City metro area...." our municipality earned this coveted spot after 400 of the country's largest cities were surveyed.

Best known for its shops and dining, the mall is also a great place for community events.

Hosting its first Color Run:

- Individuals participated in a 5K around The Mills
- Were doused in paint as they ran
- Drawing an impressive 2,000 participants

Taking proactive approaches to securing our community safeguards our most valuable resources.

Design has been completed on the new Catherine Street Firehouse and will feature increased space for the storage of equipment - creating opportunities to more effectively serve.

New fire apparatus will also enhance efforts:

- A 95 foot Mid-Mount Tower to replace Ladder Three
- 61 foot Skyboom
- Two 2000 gallon per minute pumpers to replace Engine Two and Engine Eight

In Elizabeth, we remain committed to increasing the ranks of our first responders.

Placing the concerns and safety of others above their own, they are there in times of need:

- Searching
- Rescuing
- Protecting our lives and homes

Supporting these endeavors, ten new firefighters were hired and are currently serving throughout the city.

This year 10 more will join the Department, responding to emergencies and exceeding expectations.

The expertise and experience of our firefighters were called into action when a horrific house explosion occurred on Magnolia Avenue.

Heavy rescue equipment was brought to the scene to assist with search and recovery efforts. Through the devastation and debris, residents were pulled from the collapsed home.

The injured were treated and immediately transported to local hospitals. Mutual Aid was activated and departments throughout the region responded.

Critical injuries and fatalities were sustained, but the impact could have been worse if not for the exemplary work of our fire, emergency medical and law enforcement personnel.

Technology is:

- Changing
- Improving every day

The challenge is applying those advances to create the best opportunities:

- Safer environments
- Better Services
- Assistance for all

The Elizabeth Police Department is one of eight Union County municipalities participating in the new body camera initiative in partnership with the Union County Prosecutor's Office. All Patrol, Traffic and Community Service officers have been trained in the use, maintenance and storage of the devices.

This resource provides an additional tool in:

- Relaying
- Documenting
- Verifying information during interactions with law enforcement

Providing a valuable level of transparency, it safeguards the police and the community.

Technology can be a great asset, supporting our safety services and providing extraordinary opportunities to perform the duties of the job like never before. However, it is only a supplement and cannot replace the value of a dedicated professional.

Nineteen new police officers joined the Department - representing the diversity of our multicultural city :

- Enabling greater presence in our neighborhoods
- Creating opportunities for enhanced communications
- And establishing more effective partnerships within the community

Our city is safer and crime has been reduced thanks to our collective efforts. Together we have:

- Addressed issues
- Implemented sound plans
- Increased patrols - and 14 more officers will be sworn in this month

These actions have had a positive impact on many areas of our municipality - including our business districts, where more secure and inviting atmospheres sparked outdoor dining at restaurants including:

- Applebees
- Manolo's
- Minhoto's
- El Roble
- Las Palmas
- Magic Fountain

Enjoyed by many throughout the warm weather months, this added value:

- Provided options for patrons
- Increased opportunities for business owners

Generating more profits, supporting our local economy.

Our commitment to residents is strong and unwavering. Whether:

- Visiting an office
- Having an inspection conducted
- Or interacting with an employee on the street - the contact we have with the public is defined by our sense of duty to provide the assistance that is needed with the utmost excellence

For many, these interactions begin with a call to City Hall. From seeking information about events to guidance on how to proceed with home improvements, residents can now be more efficiently aided through our new, cost effective phone system.

Featuring:

- Texting ability
- Retrieval of voicemails from outside the office - receiving important information anywhere, anytime

Social media is vital to communicating:

- Instructions
- Services
- Updates and response throughout the community

With likes, visitors and followers increasing, our Facebook, Twitter, You Tube and Instagram are sharing what is happening in our city, when it is happening.

- Flyers
- Photos
- Events

And this year we will continue to enhance and refine our information technology, using:

- The Cloud
- Analytics
- Mobile Devices

Streamlining services creates opportunities to interact more efficiently and better connect with residents. It is the investments made that are a testament to our commitment, to provide what is needed today as well as help prepare future generations for productive and long lives:

- Resources that encourage preventative care
- Access to growth opportunities
- Locations that promote active lifestyles - enhancing the health and wellness of our children

From the debris of Hurricane Sandy rose opportunities for hope and renewal. A new playground was created in Veterans Memorial Park through the “Where Angels Play Foundation.”

Dedicated to restoring what was lost, the site honors the victims of the Sandy Hook Elementary School tragedy in Connecticut as well as all of New Jersey’s firefighters.

Featuring:

- Slides
- Climbing walls
- Toy replicas of police and fire apparatus - provides a place to play, reflect and pay homage to heroes of every age

Recreation and exercise feed the mind as well as the body. Creating opportunities that:

- Increase services
- Enhance activities

- Elevate experiences to learn and grow - it is these factors that draw a distinction between residing somewhere and living a life

The new, heated in-ground pool opened at the Erxleben Recreation Center, features:

- Children's pool with sprinkler
- Shaded areas
- Picnic tables, benches

With funding from the Union County Kids Recreation Trust Fund, this investment provides a place where:

- Swimming could be practiced
- Friends could gather
- Memories created

From playing in water to being surrounded by it, our Mickey Walker Spray Park continues to draw families as the largest of its kind in Union County. A great success since it opened - this year it will no longer be the only one in the city.

The Miller Evans Logan Spray Park will create even more opportunities for fun while staying cool. Construction has begun at the former Mack Building, adjacent to the Miller Evans Logan Recreation Center and will include:

- Sprinklers, water sprays
- Fencing, landscaping
- Improvements to the existing Center

These initiatives are the product of determination and inspiration. Acting as avenues for:

- Skill development
- Achievement
- Community contributions

These opportunities create meaningful doors to participation and experiences that can last a lifetime.

Building upon our accomplishments and strengthening services within our city, the Recreation Department:

- Operated seven spray fountains
- Conducted five day camps
- Sponsored our first Playball USA at Brophy Field. Held in conjunction with Major League Baseball and the US Conference of Mayors, more than 300 youth and adults stayed fit and had fun playing America's favorite pastime.

And this year, the opportunities to exceed expectations will continue with:

- New synthetic turf field at Kenah
- New spray feature, equipment and lighting at Jackson Park

Our Office of Youth is:

- Implementing innovative programs
- Incorporating positive influences
- Demonstrating that giving back through service is commendable and priceless

With:

- Harvest Fest
- Book bag and Toy Giveaways

Whether spent with family, friends or meeting personal and professional obligations - time is precious. When we are younger, the days seem to be endless - but as we grow older, every moment becomes more valuable.

Programs administered by the Office on Aging are keeping minds and souls active:

- Dance, exercise classes
- Nutritional program
- Computer labs - with WiFi now in every senior and recreation center

New initiatives are increasing physicality, providing support and improving communication with:

- Water and chair aerobics
- English as a Second Language for Spanish and Creole-speaking seniors

Staying healthy and active are vital to ensuring that residents continue living life to the fullest and doing the things they enjoy most. The first step in accomplishing this is preventative and proactive health care:

- Administered 725 adult flu shots
- Nearly 800 received free vaccines through our clinics

Support from those who care - can make the difference on any journey.

The Health and Human Services Department organized efforts to unite as a community with:

- Autism and Breast Cancer Awareness Walks

- Prostate Cancer Awareness Week
- National Public Health Week - with screenings, clinics and goal of becoming “The Healthiest Elizabeth - 2030”

Named a top hospital for the second consecutive year by Castle Connolly, Trinitas broke ground on its \$18 million dollar Emergency Room renovation and expansion project. As a Center of Excellence in Nursing Education, it continues to be an innovative health care leader and invested community partner:

- Designated a Primary Stroke Center
- Prepared for response with Ebola Task Force
- Recognized as one of the Most Wired Hospitals in the nation

Creating opportunities and spearheading projects that connect residents with:

- Services they need
- Access they want
- Interactions that enlighten and empower - is what makes our neighborhoods places we are proud to call home

Just last month, ground was broken on Division Street at the site of the former New Jersey Transit Bus Garage. With more value and opportunities, the new Point Grande Plaza Shopping Center will transform an underutilized space into:

- 25,000 square foot Foodtown
- A Dollar General
- Turn Key Laundry

With state, county and local funds, this much-anticipated supermarket-anchored initiative:

- Increases options for nutritional, fresh produce
- Enhances services
- Creates nearly 150 new jobs

Down the street on Route 1&9 in the building formerly known as Daffy Dan’s, another new supermarket opened its doors to rave reviews. Citi Grocer is offering more food selection:

- With 37,000 square feet
- Hired 80 members of our community, including individuals, who lost their jobs when Pathmark closed

Places to shop and help prepare for the future are important, but being able to place a roof over your head and call a space your own is paramount. Expanding housing opportunities, the Spring Street project:

- Added 20 new units
- Including 6 with accommodations for special needs

Once damaged by a terrible fire, these parcels of land have been revitalized to include the City's first African American Cultural Center.

Complete with a stage for performances, the location also offers:

- Culinary instruction
- Art gallery
- Celebrating inspiring leaders and our rich history

With:

- Resource allocation
- Demand changes
- And market shifts, many residents are commuting to their jobs

Finding a place to live with amenities and access to public transportation, can be tough. In Elizabeth there continues to be interest from developers to embrace opportunities and re-imagine spaces into elegant places to live.

Located near the North Elizabeth Train Station, the 6 story Station Commons on Pennsylvania Avenue was completed with:

- 100 units
- Fitness, business center, courtyard
- 1800 square feet of retail space

Judy Blume, one of our City's most celebrated and noted authors chose to return home to kick-off her latest book tour.

At a standing-room only event in Council Chambers:

- She captivated the audience
- Entertained with stories of her childhood
- Shared insight into *The Unlikely Event*

Gracious and kind, she:

- Answered questions
- Interacted with attendees
- Signed copies of her book

Like so many before from our city, these great contributors have:

- Influenced lives
- Made an impression
- Attained fame, while staying true to who they are and where they began

President John F. Kennedy once said, “the American, by nature, is optimistic. He is experimental, an inventor and a builder, who builds best when called upon to build greatly.”

In the City of Elizabeth we are builders of opportunities - creators of possibilities:

- Determined
- Motivated
- Organized and disciplined

Ready to:

- Identify alternatives
- Bridge existing gaps
- Do what is good and right for our residents

It is this inspiration that serves as the catalyst for :

- Innovation
- Revitalization
- Transformation - because life is not about any one thing, it is about the collective efforts that result in an inspired journey

One defined by:

- Leadership
- Response
- Integrity

May God Bless the City of Elizabeth and May God Bless the United States of America.