

State of the City Address 2010

(presented by Mayor McLaughlin at 1/19/10 City Council meeting)

Good evening. I am honored tonight to share with you the 2010 State of the City address here in our city of Richmond California.

As we enter this new decade, the 2nd decade of the 21st Century, we have much to reflect upon.

Much hard work was done throughout 2009, and I thank all who have worked hard and put forward incredible efforts, City Councilmembers, City staff, and members of our wonderful community.

A major accomplishment in this very busy year is certainly the completion of our Civic Center revitalization project. Our Gold LEED certified buildings and plaza, laced with Richmond's incredible public art, has brought us well-deserved attention, being recognized in architecture magazines and news reports regionally and nationally. We are now able to experience the benefits of being home here in the center of the city, with easier access by our residents to visit and do business at our city hall.

It's important we analyze the state of our city in terms of our successes and, of course, in terms of our ongoing challenges. It is also important that we analyze our city challenges in the context of the overall challenges faced by the state, the nation and the global community.

First let's look at what continues to be our first and highest priority -- that of crime and violence prevention.

Crime and violence prevention

In the year 2009 overall violent crime has slightly decreased, but our city continues to be assailed by homicide. 47 lives were lost on Richmond streets last year. Additionally, extremely cruel assaults involving young persons have pained our residents and further hurt our city's reputation.

This is disheartening given that homicides in 2008 had been cut almost in half. A lot of good efforts went into that dramatic reduction.

The correlation between economic hardship and violent crime has long been established and is inarguable. The higher the unemployment rates in California and Richmond, the higher the number of violent crimes and homicides.

The current unemployment rates are the highest since the Great Depression. This is compounded by the thousands of home foreclosures taking place in Richmond, and the crisis in our schools.

When unemployment rates doubled as they did in 2009 it is not surprising that violent crime and homicide also skyrocketed. In 2009 the number of homicides in our city rose again to what they were in 2007.

Let us always remember that these statistics represent real human lives and people loved, and mourned, by many.

And let's also be clear that the nationwide economic collapse is not currently resolved nor will it be in the near future. Furthermore, help from the federal and state government, which was promised and to which we are entitled, is slow to arrive.

Unfortunately, the money we need for jobs and education is going to foreign wars for oil and to Wall Street bankers. It costs \$1 million a year to keep each soldier in Afghanistan or Iraq. We could also solve many of our problems just with the bonuses being paid with public money to Wall Street CEOs.

As priorities at the national level continue to neglect our communities, the responsibility for preventing violent crime in Richmond rests more and more on our shoulders. We need to continue the efforts that gave us the significant advances of 2008, and to become more creative and more determined to take them further, to use all the resources we have, and to garner all the resources needed, to offer help, hope and employment to our young Richmond residents.

Clearly, we must double our efforts once again. And that is precisely what we are doing. I am meeting with our Police Chief, our Office of Neighborhood Safety director, and others to examine and review some new initiatives for reducing homicides. We are both examining new initiatives and keeping up the effort with projects and programs that are currently in place. For example:

Our police dept. is currently hiring 8 new police officers, thanks to Cal Grip funding. I was at the swearing-in ceremony welcoming 5 of these new officers to Richmond last week. More dispatchers have been hired, more code

enforcement officers have been hired, and more cadets and explorers have come on board to help the RPD provide law enforcement services for our neighborhoods.

In 2009 Our Office of Neighborhood Safety focused on re-entry services for parolees. Given the massive numbers of parolees that enter our streets monthly, this is essential work that must continue. My office, along with community groups and other city staff participated in the Office of Neighborhood Safety Advisory Committee until it was disbanded this year. We hope to see a new community process whereby residents can continue to give input to our ONS.

A trauma center opened in Richmond. The Family Institute of Richmond temporarily located on 37th St. provides valuable services for our residents. We also are in the beginning stages of establishing a Family Justice Center in Richmond, based on a collaborative of many community groups, our city and the county.

We continue to provide the much needed healing that our community needs through the Healing Circles of Hope project my office supports. Outreach increased this past year. More support groups were formed with trained facilitators. My office also continues to participate in Frontline Richmond's Wreath laying vigils for homicide victims. Healing is part of the human process, without which anger and pain only continue to fester.

A critical aspect of anti-violence work is the work to end rape and hostility against women. We know that violence against women continues in Richmond, as it does everywhere. Every nine seconds in our country, a woman is sexually violated. We are part of a society that needs to work harder at bringing forward the kind of gender equality that elevates respect for women, and teaches our children and youth to build healthy personal relationships. We also must build the kind of society that encourages our youth and all our residents to speak out when injustice occurs, whether that injustice occurs at a local high school or in the greater society that has yet to bring about an end to war, racism, sexism, and massive income inequality.

Economic equality

And speaking of income inequality, we must continue our efforts to build an equitable and sustainable local economy in Richmond with healthy jobs for all. Toward that end, here are some things we have done in 2009:

The many programs of our Employment and Training Department continue to be successful.

--This has been a year for deepening green job partnerships. Our Richmond Build program is working in partnership not only with Solar Richmond, but also with Rising Sun, Grid Alternatives, and Solar Living Institute to train our young people for the new green economy. We expect to be putting our Richmond Build graduates to work this year using green practices to renovate many city-purchased foreclosed homes. Side by side with RichmondBuild we are working specifically with young people in a new program called YouthBuild, educating and preparing them with both life skills and work training.

-- E & T is working closely with Lawrence Berkeley Lab to train young people through a green academy, teaching them scientific principles of new green technology.

---We are also beginning to implement a Richmond Youth Job Corps. This is an initiative that is based on a project I proposed, and we are working with E & T to employ 20-25 young people in departments of the city for 6 month periods throughout the year, focusing them on the green efforts of our city departments with an educational component and a work ready certificate upon completion.

-- We saw another successful Summer Youth Job Program, employing hundreds of young people in 2009 and work has already begun on next summer's program.

In terms of funding for projects, we have been awarded considerable stimulus funding which will enhance our employment efforts, including a 1 million dollar energy block grant for energy efficiency projects. 3.3 million dollars were awarded in neighborhood stabilization funding for affordable housing projects and homeless services. We are working with community groups, like REDI, and community non-profits, to seek out the best use of these funds to provide more equity in our city. Housing is a human right, and too many of our residents lack sufficient protection against the outside elements due their inability to afford and maintain a decent home.

I want to thank our staff for bringing in nearly 20 million dollars from federal stimulus recovery act funding thus far. In the past week and a half, the Dept. of Labor has authorized 250 million dollars for green job training. I encourage our staff to continue to seek out as much available green federal project money as possible to stimulate our local economy and bring about equity for our residents.

Other projects include updating the Local Business Ordinance and the Local Employment Program Ordinance. My office is working with E & T and stakeholders and we will be bringing forward to the City Council a new improved ordinance which requires higher percentages of Richmond residents and businesses to be utilized in construction and capital improvement projects.

We continue to be an active partner of the East Bay Green Corridor, which hired a new executive director in 2009, allowing us to advance further in our regional efforts and move forward our goal of making the east bay the economic engine of the green economy. The Green Corridor has also brought in increased regional job funding, some of which will be channeled into our Richmond green job programs.

And this brings me to the many innovative sustainability policies and achievements of our city this past year.

Environment/green initiatives

In addition to having acquired Gold LEED certification on our Civic Center Project, we finished our extensive Green House Gas Inventory; we started our Clear Air Action Plan at the PORT; we are in the beginning stages of creating a Climate Action Plan and have taken a leadership role by including a Climate Change Element in our General Plan; we passed a food ware ordinance which includes a ban on polystyrene; we passed a preferential purchasing policy for city purchases; we approved a commuter benefits ordinance requiring businesses to offer commuter benefits to their employees; we implemented a city hall employee shuttle from Richmond BART; and we passed the first reading of a Green Building Ordinance for private buildings.

This was a particularly big year for solar in Richmond. We received two state solar awards for being among the top California cities for wattage of solar installed and number of solar rooftops with solar installations. We have reached our goal set in 2005 by Solar Richmond and in fact went beyond that in installing more than 5 megawatts of solar in the City of Richmond.

With a new solar thermal system installed utilizing RichmondBuild graduates, Fire Station 64 became more sustainable and is saving money on their utility bill.

We want to thank the RPD for organizing a great National Night Out. Our first Green National Night Out featured block parties competing for who could be the

most green in the areas of recycling, use of compostable goods, and sustainable practices in these neighborhood events.

Health, Education and Well-being

In conjunction with our green efforts, we are improving our community health, education, and overall well-being.

Our Health and Wellness Element of our General Plan (soon to be approved) will focus on improving key neighborhoods in the city which are needing immediate improvements such as our historic Iron Triangle;

Groundwork Richmond is a new organization to promote and work on various environmental health and urban renewal projects, such as creek cleanups, urban forests, community gardens, and blight removal.

We passed 3 Tobacco Control ordinances and shifted our grade from F to A, winning state recognition from the American Lung Assn of California.

We helped and continue to help our schools. The City committed to give 3 million dollars over two years to WCCUSD starting in Sept. 2010; we also adopted a resolution to maintain ESL at WCCUD; and we passed a resolution of our Human Rights and Human Relations Commission supporting our teachers and our schools; my office also welcomed 2 Haitian educators to Richmond and assisted them in their presentation to our LEAP program. This summer, I had the honor of participating in the Rosie's Girls summer education program helping middle school girls reach their potential in a holistic way.

All this leads to what is essential in moving our city forward, and that is community empowerment.

Community Empowerment

Whether it's being out there at the Greenway planting trees and edible plants; whether its participating in one of our many city commissions and boards that were infused this past year with new energy and diversity to add to the ongoing energies of reappointed members; whether its participating in neighborhood councils, or whether its engaging in planning some of our great city events, the community of Richmond is more engaged than ever.

Many special events and honoring occurred this past year. We honored local African American leaders for Black History Month, including former Black Panther Party leader Bobby Seals; we held our 2nd International Women's Day event with special speaker Elaine Brown, who also was a former Black Panther Party leader; we also held an extravaganza of a Civic Center grand re-opening. We also held, as always, our successful Cinco De Mayo, Juneteenth, and Homefront festivals. This year the City of Richmond showed its support for the North Richmond Shoreline Festival by making a 10,000 dollar contribution to this great event, which proved even more successful than expected, with countless participants enjoying a beautiful day along our spectacular north shoreline at Pt Pinole Park. Later in the year we held a successful and well-attended Senior Ball and Youth Snow Ball event.

In 2009 the city co-sponsored with the Richmond Chamber of Commerce the Green Expo, which was an extraordinary event with many vendors coming together to share information on their green products and services. This event also included community groups dedicated to moving forward green and sustainable practices. My office and other departments of the city were pleased to join forces with the Chamber of Commerce in making this event happen. We are looking forward to another Green Expo this year!

In 2009 we became a Human Rights City, declaring our support for the UN Declaration on Human Rights. This year, on International Human Rights Day in December, I joined our Human Rights Commission in serving breakfast to our day laborers as they stood in the cold waiting for work, thanking them for their participation in our community.

We made some other great gains this past year for our immigrant community, in passing a resolution that put driver's license checkpoints as a low priority for our police department. We need our police department to keep its 1st priority on violent crime in the city.

Other community empowerment activities included some very informative study sessions presented by community groups: REDI provided a discussion and presentation of its proposals for overcoming the foreclosure crisis and moving in the direction of social and economic equity; the Zeneca Community Advisory Group provided us with a study session with technical advisors informing us of the need for comprehensive cleanup at the toxic Zeneca and UC Field Station sites.

Other successes advocated by community are evidenced by completed projects such as the Nicholl Park Skate Park, thanks to city staff, Parks and Recreation Commission, and community groups.

All this is the result of a community that organizes itself and becomes empowered by that organizing effort.

I have saved till last some very special community empowering efforts. I refer here to the community empowerment of our youth.

One of the greatest activities of the year occurred in October of 2009. My office had the privilege of co-sponsoring the annual Youth Stopping Violence Summit. This summit was organized by our many and diverse youth groups, with SEAYL (Southeast Asian Youth Leaders) taking the lead. Our youth are leading in Richmond. We saw how students from Richmond high and our other high schools stood strong in the face of national media coverage attempting to characterize all our youth and our entire community in light of the horrific rape at Richmond High. Our youth refused to be stereotyped and organized press conferences and vigils saying loud and clear: We are the youth of Richmond and this is our community. I'm looking forward to some of these young leaders coming on board our new youth commission in 2010 to help us identify new youth projects for the city. We, as adults, stand for and with our youth as a community that knows our value and our worth.

Together, we have clearly come a long way this past year, in spite of economic difficulties. We are seeing our 2nd phase Greenway project going forward; the Richmond Plunge is nearing completion; Macdonald Ave from Harbor Way to Richmond BART is laced with a beautiful streetscape renovation; Carlson Ave. reconstruction is underway; and work has begun on the historic Winters Bldg for our renowned East Bay Center for the Performing Arts.

We reinfused our global connections this year with our ongoing sister city relationships with Zhoushan, China, Shimada, Japan and Regla, Cuba. My office worked tirelessly in conjunction with our Richmond/Regla Sister City Committee in planning a trip to Regla Cuba. Unfortunately, the US Dept. of Treasury denied our application for a license to travel to Cuba. We hope that US travel restrictions to Cuba will be lifted soon so that we can visit our brothers and sisters in Regla, who continue to welcome us with open arms. We marked our 10 yr anniversary of our sister city relationship with Regla in December with an educational and celebratory event.

So, to sum up, we have taken great strides in 2009. Yet we must commit to work harder than ever, as we double our energies in 2010. We have efforts underway that will make our burdens lighter. We have the opportunity to pass the End Chevron's Perk ballot measure, supported by every member of this city council. Imagine what 10-15 million extra dollars in the general fund will do for us. Imagine a city-funded year-round employment program broadening horizons and helping to ensure a future for 1,000 youth. When we remove perks for large corporations and require them to pay their fair share of taxes, that's exactly what can happen.

Let's remember the words of Martin Luther King Jr. when he said: No one can ride your back unless it's bent. A community is like a person. Just as a person must stand strong against injustice, so too a community and also a city must stand strong against unfairness and injustice. Richmond will not bend its back; we have the courage, the strength, the talent, and the wisdom. **And we have the community willpower.** I want to thank you all (City staff, City Council and members of the Richmond community) for your attention. I look forward to a great year ahead. Thank you again.