



Eddie A. Perez
Mayor

TO: Court of Common Council and the Residents of the City of Hartford
FROM: Eddie A. Perez, Mayor
DATE: March 10, 2008
RE: State of the City Address 2008

Pursuant to Chapter V Sec.2 (i) of the City of Hartford Charter, I hereby respectfully submit my written report on the state and condition of the City of Hartford:

President Torres, members of the Court of Common Council, and most importantly, the residents of Hartford, the State of the City is vibrant and getting stronger every day. But we must continue to be financially smart to maintain the momentum we created over the past six years. Together we must have one plan, based on one goal-- grow Hartford!

We must all believe that "Hartford is a Great Investment" As policy leaders, we must all protect the investment we made, in order to ensure that the investment continues to pay-off for years to come. So, whether you dine at one of our fine restaurants, buy tickets to a show, buy a house, or start or expand your business--- you are an investor in Hartford. It is the job of this Mayor and this Council to make sure that we grow the confidence of our investors with every decision we make.

One of the city's biggest and most important investments is Public Safety. Let's face it. Hartford cannot prosper unless our residents, our employees, and our visitors all 'feel' safe. So, let's use facts to reduce the fear:

- 1. Crime is down to a historic low**
- 2. There were 2700 fewer crimes than in 2003 and 17,000 fewer than in 1981**
- 3. And we have hired 190 over six years. These investments have paid off. Last year alone HPD retrieved 400 illegal guns.**

Council has done its part too. Thanks to the City Council, an ordinance that requires Hartford residents to report lost or stolen guns within 72 hours was passed. We were the first in the state and I'm proud to say that Hartford took the lead on this important issue and state lawmakers followed suit by passing a similar law.

That's great news, but we must do more. We must reduce the murder rate and reduce the negative perception we face as an urban community.

Here's how we're going to do it:

- 1. The Fugitive Task Force will track and apprehend "Hartford's Most Wanted"**
- 2. The City is working with State and Federal Authorities to maximize the prosecution of those arrested for gun violence**
- 3. And I am one of many urban Mayors calling on the State to add more parole and probation officers for persons re-entering our neighborhoods.**

We're also planning ahead. The HPD has already begun planning its "Safe Summer Initiative" to increase the visibility, availability, and accountability of cops on our streets.

My friends, safety is worth every dime. That's why in addition to the 80 officers in the current budget I will request 30 more next year. Let's take a moment to recognize some of the new members of the Public Safety personnel who have just completed their field training and who are now assigned to serving your neighborhoods. Thanks to all the dedicated men and women who represent police, fire, and emergency services. You are the front line of defense and we are forever grateful.

Safety is priceless and so are Hartford's children. The City spends 96 million in local tax dollars on education. We spend more per capita than any other town or city. Over the past four years, we have made tremendous progress in reforming our schools:

- 1. New school construction: Seven are complete and another six are on the way**
- 2. New dress code implemented: The uniform policy is a success and is now expanding into our freshman academies**
- 3. The opening of three new school models this fall: Achievement First, Montessori, and Breakthrough**
- 4. And new teacher contracts: Restructured so that teachers are rewarded when our kids achieve their academic goals. This is the first time in the City's history that we're connecting achievement to compensation, and the first in the state.**

In the end, when we put young people first, our investment is leveraged. We are offering more options than ever for parents and students. With more and better "choice" we have more engagement and more involvement that will lead to the positive change we all want. We are not only building schools, we are creating better ones. By redesigning some of our lowest achieving schools, we have begun the transition of public education in Hartford toward an "all-choice" system where kids come first and parents are engaged in all aspects of education.

In the school year 2008-2009, Hartford Public High School will be the home of four Academies, implementing the key characteristics of successful high schools: Rigor, Relationships, and Relevance.

- 1. The 9th Grade Academy builds a foundation of core academic knowledge and skills**

2. **The Engineering and Green Technology Academy is an innovative program of thematic courses in partnership with the Connecticut Business and Industry Association, or CBIA**
3. **The Law and Government Academy is for students interested in law, government, and community leadership**
4. **And the Nursing Academy is a college preparatory model steeped in science, technology, and healthcare. This is an expanding workforce needed in this region. These are all great choices.**

Let me remind you, with “choice” comes change. Milner Elementary will become The Core Knowledge Academy and Burns Elementary will become The Academy of Latino Studies. But, change is not just reserved to the academic side. We’re also changing the way education is funded to make it transparent, equitable, and accountable. The money follows the student, not the school or the adult. This is a direct investment in the child. The pay-off will be a more educated and competitive workforce for the 21st Century.

But these future workers are going to need jobs! The City is working diligently to attract businesses to create good jobs with good wages and good healthcare. We’re building on a strong track record:

1. **Remember the Hilton? We bought it. We sold it. And we even saved and added jobs for Hartford residents**
2. **School construction has meant almost \$23 million in wages for city residents and companies--- especially women and minority owned businesses**
3. **And since 2002, 762 new businesses have set up shop in the Capital City--- 112 in the last year alone.**

Some of these investors include:

1. **George Harte of Harte Nissan in the North Meadows**
2. **Alfonso Lopez of Gitano Food Warehouse in Frog Hollow**
3. **And Stan Stadlak of the Hook and Ladder Restaurant in Downtown.**

These are a cross-section of the businesses that call Hartford home and continue to invest in our city.

More jobs and more businesses could be created if a new arena is built in Downtown Hartford. I have assembled a Task Force of state, regional and corporate leaders to determine the level of private support for a world-class facility. A feasibility study shows the current XL Center would be the best location for a new arena because it is adjacent to significant investments that already exist and best connects Downtown to our neighborhoods, our region, and to our state.

Connecting the City’s progress by reducing blight is also crucial. I’m proud we’re making our first installment of the Hartford Neighborhood Development Fund. The first four targeted areas are:

1. **“The Constitutional Curve” that starts at Downtown’s empty Clarion Hotel, heads north across I-84, and hooks over to Myrtle Street in Asylum Hill**
2. **Barbour Street, in the City’s Northeast neighborhood from Capen to Westland**
3. **Frog Hollow --- from Capitol Avenue to Park Terrace, down Park Street and over to Broad Street**
4. **And Lower Franklin Avenue in the South End, just south of Hartford Hospital.**

This money will be utilized to create more homeowners as well. Despite the trouble of the nation’s housing market, Hartford has created almost three thousand new units of housing throughout the city with 1500, or half of them, being new homeowners. We did this together in less than six years.

Some of the new housing includes:

1. **73 units at Dutch Point in Sheldon-Charter Oak**
2. **48 units for Grand Families Housing in the Northeast**
3. **73 units at Goodwin Circle in the West End**
4. **And more than 262 Downtown units**

The foreclosure rate in Hartford is far below cities like New Haven and Bridgeport but we must fight to help hardworking families keep their homes. The City is working with the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston on a new program to help those refinance subprime loans.

Young people also need a leg-up on the housing market. Hartford is taking this opportunity to focus on a new concept: “Worker Housing.” This will help maintain and grow Connecticut’s workforce, especially in the financial and insurance sectors. These moderate-income housing units adjacent to the major employers would be available to entry-level employees, particularly those immediately out of college. The “worker’ housing would allow companies to recruit and retain their workforce.

I have requested \$2 million in Federal aid to be used for this important initiative. Specifically, these funds will be used to secure rights to properties that can be revitalized.

This is the plan:

1. **Improve public safety**
2. **Improve education**
3. **Increase jobs**
4. **Increase homeownership.**

This is the goal--- to grow Hartford by continuing to build on our momentum. In order to stay with the plan, we must pass a city budget that can support these initiatives. As you can see by our long list of accomplishments in a short period of time, we’ve come too far to turn back now.

Let's put things in perspective by putting everything in terms of today's dollars--- adjusting for inflation:

- 1. In 1990, the property tax burden on Hartford residents and businesses was more than \$338 million**
- 2. In 2007, it was about \$228 million**
- 3. If you do the math, we've actually reduced the tax burden by almost \$110 million**

I want to remind Hartford that we have had three straight years of budget surpluses. All along, we've maintained a strong bond rating by growing our fund balance, invested in critical infrastructure like roads, schools, and libraries, and our pensions are funded at over 100%. This is something that eludes many other towns and cities in our state.

To continue this sound financial policy, we've already instituted a number of actions:

- 1. We've grown the grand list**
- 2. Trimmed the workforce**
- 3. And increased energy saving efforts**

With the help of Council, we have kept the budget growth low for six years but in order to make it seven:

- 1. As requested by Council, we have asked the Legislature to fully fund Payments in Lieu of Taxes, or PILOT**
- 2. And I would like to thank the Hartford Delegation for supporting this effort.**

If this funding happens, there will be no need to raise taxes in Hartford. If the state doesn't, then we have to act quickly and that includes asking our taxpayers to make the sacrifice to keep the momentum going.

Let me be clear, the state needs to meet its obligation. I ask the Governor and the General Assembly to set aside their differences and work together to achieve real property tax reform.

No one wants to stop, slow, or lose the progress we've made. Hartford is a great place to live, work, play, raise a family and own a business. Last year, we attracted 275,000 new visitors to the city. We're doing the right thing, but we must do more. We must think big and we must think smart. We must continue to get the good word out about Hartford. As the commercial said, "Come see for yourself."

In closing, we need to believe that great things are possible. Well, my friends. I do believe and it is possible. Si Se Puede! Yes we can and together, yes we will--- for years to come. Thank you, God Bless, and "Grow Hartford."