

State of the City Report Released

City Manager Jay Ash's annual "State of the City" report highlights the City's resolve to accomplish much while addressing the challenges that a tough economy presents. That determination could be considered "steadfast," which by no coincidence is the title given to the twenty page report on the City's accomplishments in 2009 and goals for 2010.

"Yes, times are difficult," stressed Ash. "However, the City remains firm in our unwavering commitment to address our shortcomings and build upon our strengths. That's the essence of being 'steadfast,' and that's why we're seeking to accomplish so much for all the City's stakeholders."

The report describes Ash's adherence to what he calls the "Fundamentals," six guiding principles which form the foundation of City Hall actions. To hear him discuss the Fundamentals, one gets the feeling that Ash might recite them on a daily basis.

"A strong 'Financial' base is central to all else we do. 'Economic Development' supports the promise of a stronger financial footing while also accelerating the city's overall rejuvenation. Promoting 'Public Safety' is a top priority. The three are critical in ensuring that 'Neighborhood Enhancement' reaches its goal of making every neighborhood more livable and attractive, and that the City has the resources to help individuals achieve their own level of success through the 'Community Development' Fundamental. Lastly, promoting a 'Government' that is open and honest ensures one and all that a single, 'pro-Chelsea' agenda is at work for them," listed Ash.

In the Financial section of the report, Ash reflects upon another year of balanced budgets and solid audits; leading local and statewide efforts on regionalism and reform, and the ways in which the City might continue to navigate what many are calling the "worst municipal finance period" since the Great Depression.

"We've got much to cheer," emphasized Councillor Brian Hatleberg. "It's great that we're withstanding tremendous financial pressures while still making advances, like seeing our credit rating actually increase to an 'A+' this past year."

Ash also gives readers what he refers to as "A Closer Look" at each Fundamental. In Economic Development, Ash describes how the original plan submitted to the City for the redevelopment of the Mystic Mall could have seen a self-storage facility on the parcel. Instead, Ash pushed and when a new ownership team took over control of the 25-acre parcel the City got a spectacular Market Basket and the promise of much more.

"I think we all continue to marvel at the development," speculated Councillor Leo Robinson. "Even now, while the economy is still down, there's talk of a new hotel and what looks like an amazing build-out of the rest of the Mall property. That's a far cry from yesteryear when, even in good times, developers wanted to go anywhere but here."

This past year in Public Safety, the City increased the police force by 10% and committed more than \$3 million to adding new fire equipment and upgrading the Mill Hill Fire Station. A canine unit and overlapping police shifts for maximum city coverage during the busy late evening and early morning hours are among other advances Ash cites.

“Public Safety is critical, perhaps most critical to residents and Councillors,” suggested Councillor Paula Barton. “The advances we have and continue to make are ensuring that our community gets the best public safety services possible.”

Neighborhood Enhancement advances this past year included another round of street repaving and the opening of Chelsea Commons Park and the Kayem Park on Fifth Street, as well as the start of construction on the Island End Park at the base of Admirals Hill.

“We can all be proud of what is being accomplished here around open space,” noted Councillor Roseann Bongiovanni. “And we’re not finished, as we’re working on adding additional new parks and creating an even more livable community.”

Ash reported that a significant success in 2009 in the area of Community Development was the successful transition of the school system from the management of Boston University back to local control.

“Yes, I would say that was significant,” confirmed School Committeeman Morrie Seigal, the only School Committee member to so serve during the entire 20 years of the BU/Chelsea Partnership. “Certainly, the accomplishments of the last two decades are noteworthy, but that we were able to transition back to control without ‘missing a beat’ means that progress in our schools is continuing.”

Regarding Government in 2009, Ash’s report includes references to utilizing the Reverse 911 to call out and Channel 15 to publicize important messages to residents, the work of the City Council to establish regular review meetings with department heads and the establishment of the Youth Commission.

“We have to do that and more to let residents know that we’re continuing to be transparent in our approach and most honest in our efforts at City Hall,” commented Councillor Marilyn Vega. “In the end, it would be great to get more people engaged in the actions of their City government.”

The report also contains passages about community organizations, which Ash said are a “huge reason why the City enjoys so much success.” Also included in the booklet are a community calendar, important telephone numbers and a “Did You Know” section that contains a little bit of history, trivia and other interesting municipal facts.

That State of the City Report is not required by the City Charter but is a regular publication of Ash’s.

“There’s so many contributing to so much good here, and we also have so many good intentions going forward,” praised Ash. “This report should remind regular observers and give those who may be looking at us for the first time all of that and more.”

Copies of the State of the City are available at City Hall and the Library, on-line at chelseama.gov and by requesting a copy from Ash at jash@chelseama.gov or by calling 617-466-4100.

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