

STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

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MAYOR, CITY OF CHARLESTON, SC

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I am very pleased to report to you on the state of our City. I thank you for the opportunity to serve you as your Mayor and I thank you for your sense of citizenship in the many ways that each of you serves our community as well.

A week ago, I was privileged to be on the grounds of our country's Capital and witness the inauguration of Barack Obama as our 44th President. As many Charlestonians stood on the grounds of Marion Square to view and hear this historic event as well. In Washington, as in Charleston, we all felt an enormous sense of pride that stemmed from the wonderful recognition that we do in fact continue to seek an even more perfect Union. Since our founding, racial prejudice has diminished the fullness of truth in our declared belief that all men are created equal. On January 20th, the citizens of America shared the pride that now we do, in fact, fully and completely believe that and that we do indeed judge people and elect people, the President of the United States, on the content of their character, not the color of their skin.

We in Charleston are especially proud of our connections with President Obama. During his Election Night acceptance speech, he mentioned Charleston. In my meetings with him he speaks so warmly of our City. And we are proud that in our City, where 300 years ago, African

citizens came in chains as slaves, where the Civil War began, where as in the rest of the Southland, Jim Crow racial segregation was practiced, Barack Obama received a majority of our citizens' votes. Yes indeed, we, all of us, have overcome.

Our President and each of us are facing economic challenges, the likes of which our country has not experienced since the 1930s. Charleston faces this with assets that few cities have: fiscal strength, a splendid quality of life, a strong business climate, increased national prominence and more. But nonetheless, we are a part of the national economy and I feel a great responsibility to do everything I can, as your Mayor, to help us weather this economic storm as successfully as possible. Therefore, I have been working very hard to make sure that the proposed Federal economic recovery plan directs funds to cities and local communities for important construction initiatives, just as was done in the 1930s by the WPA. Of course, the importance of this is that every construction project creates jobs and the stimulus effect of people working and materials and supplies being purchased will reverberate positively through the economy. Working with the mayors of our country, I have met with the Congressional Leadership, President Obama and his staff, asserting the importance of having the projects, as much as possible, go directly to local communities. But our proactive approach to strengthening our economy is not limited to Federal initiatives, we will have our own, City of Charleston, recovery plan. And it will include a number of initiatives.

Our Business Services Division will begin holding "Weathering the Economy" business workshops for different business neighborhoods in our community, providing information to

help businesses with challenges that they are facing. We will develop a professional Resource Center to further support new business formation and relocation.

We have launched a new promotion-oriented, web-based portal to aggregate news from all sectors of business activity in the City of Charleston. Our Charleston Digital Corridor Foundation has approved an incentive to pay business license fees for start-up knowledge-based businesses in the City in the areas of computer software, life science and medical devices for a period of up to two years. And, we will do more. And in 2008, when other communities' economies were shrinking, our Digital Corridor showed employment growth of 213 employees, over \$20 million was invested in new knowledge-based companies, and we issued over \$400 million of building permits.

Working with the South Carolina Research Authority and the Medical University of South Carolina, construction is beginning on The Innovation Center on Meeting Street. This state-of-the-art building will provide space for biotech, life science companies to begin. This is a very important step in our becoming a national center in the biotech and life science industry. An important next step is the development of the Horizon District along upper Lockwood. The redevelopment of this part of our City presents a marvelous opportunity for the development of a biotech center and a place for people to live and work.

A thriving maritime industry in Charleston is as essential to the economic health of this region as it is to our State. The recent challenges of the Ports Authority should remind us that we must not take for granted a bustling port, nor can we allow the State Ports Authority to become a political football. I have, along with many, sought to assist the parties engaged in the effort to keep Maersk Shipping Lines here in Charleston and will continue to do so.

With the resignation of the hard-working Port Director, Bernie Groseclose, the Ports Authority should be, as it is, conducting a nationwide search to bring us the best, most experienced Port Director in our country. The structure of the State Ports Authority should not change in that the Executive Director should not be someone who could be changed every four or eight years with a new governor, but rather a non-political professional port executive. I do believe it was a mistake for recent governors to treat the Port Authority Board as positions that depend upon their election. The General Assembly and the Governor should make sure we get back to a system where the Governor recommends and the State Senate considers and then approves the best business minds in South Carolina to serve on the Port Board and they serve their full term. When we get back to that system, which existed at one time, our Port would be on sounder footing and it will continue to thrive.

The Dock Street Theatre, the site of the first theater in America, actually was built within six historic buildings in our City in the 1930s as a New Deal Project. It is undergoing a \$15 million renovation achieving seismic retrofitting and beautiful and careful restoration of its

historic features. It will reopen next year and be home to Charleston Stage, Spoleto Festival U.S.A. and many wonderful community arts activities.

Charleston's treasured Memminger Auditorium, also a New Deal Project, was beautifully renovated with the leadership of Spoleto Festival U.S.A., support from the City and generous donors and opened in May. This, along with the renovation of the Dock Street Theatre, now allows us to turn our attention to the last missing element of Charleston's performing arts venues and that is a modern and beautiful symphony hall and performing arts facility. Much thought has been given to where would be an appropriate location for a new facility. This effort has led us to the conclusion that the best site is what we have now: the venerable Gaillard Auditorium. A very generous benefactor has offered a substantial gift to assist with the renovation of the Gaillard Auditorium and has provided the services of a distinguished architect to study how the Gaillard could be transformed. Preliminary studies show that this building, named after one of Charleston's great leaders, could become one of the great new performing arts venues in our country, and the exhibition hall restored and enhanced. This would be a challenging project and it would depend on substantial sums of private money raised. But it is a project that merits our energy and attention and I look forward to working with City Council, Spoleto Festival U.S.A., the Charleston Symphony and others to put this needed and final jewel in our artistic crown.

Until recently, our bridges our highways and many streets were built without thought given to pedestrians. We of course now require pedestrian facilities in all new residential developments, in our streets and highways, but we also must retrofit existing infrastructure.

Working with Charleston County, we announced the plan to retrofit the Allen Legare Ashley River Bridge with a bike and pedestrian path that will connect across the marsh and be an extension of the 10-mile West Ashley Greenway. And we are also working to add bike and pedestrian facilities to the North Ashley River Bridge. We opened the East Bay bike and pedestrian path this year, expanding the ability of our citizens on foot or bike, to access the fabulous bike and pedestrian path on the Ravenel Bridge, which has become one of our region's most special places.

Our newest park, Bees Landing, is now under construction and will be open by the end of this year. Ball fields, tennis courts, a gymnasium, wonderful paths and walkways will make this a beautiful and well-used addition to the City's recreation facilities. On a different scale is the new park at Morris Square, a wonderful, award-winning urban infill development on Morris Street which will, when completed, have added substantially to the quality of the City's public realm.

On Daniel Island, both Etiwan Park and the new Freedom Park received handsome new improvements and 36-acre Governors Park is now under design.

Working with committed neighborhoods, volunteers, and generous benefactors, we opened the Elliottborough/Canonborough Park on Line Street this year. The Opening Ceremony was filled with people and children and rather than cut a ribbon, we all blew bubbles. This park was the result of an idea of the residents of the neighborhoods, another example of the positive

benefits of our City having 103 neighborhood organizations that continuing to strive to make their neighborhoods, and thereby the City, a better place.

Morris Island, a national treasure once slated for development, was acquired by the City of Charleston this year working with the Trust for Public Land, Charleston County Council, Bobby Ginn and many other partners. We have preserved forever Morris Island from any commercial development.

Not far from Morris Island is Demetre Park on James Island. With a pier nearing completion, it will give enhanced access to our harbor on this beautiful space.

Parks will be an important part of the Magnolia development as they are in every neighborhood in our City. Using Greenbelt funds, we purchased a 15-acre tract of land that will provide athletic and recreational opportunities for citizens of that part of our City. Also, using Greenbelt funds, we purchased this 12-acre parcel of land on James Island. It will connect the James Island Charter High School with the James Island Recreation Center and will provide new pedestrian connections to the very popular Recreation Center for citizens of many neighborhoods on James Island. This will also allow for the expansion of playing fields, tennis courts, a dog park and more.

We also purchased a 9-acre tract of land on Woodland Road and a 3-acre trace on Long Branch Creek. Additionally, we have contracted to purchase of 200 acres on Bear Swamp Road as part of the overall 1,800-acre park system at Long Savannah.

We celebrated the announcement of the creation of the Charleston Parks Conservancy this year, the extraordinarily generous donation of \$10 million by Darla Moore and her husband Richard Rainwater. This non-profit organization will partner with the City to enhance existing parks like Colonial Lake, build new parks and create volunteer opportunities for citizens to become Park Angels, caring for parks in their neighborhoods and around our City. This will become a national model.

Energy conservation, the reduction of greenhouse gases and protecting our earth's environment are actions that must begin at home. Our Charleston Green Committee has had an extraordinary year and I will soon be appointing the City's first Sustainability Director. This person will help our City government and our region become a leader in energy conservation. The City has been working on energy conservation for a number of years with Johnson Controls. We have saved over \$4 million in the last several years in energy expenses and expect to save \$21 million over the next 15 years through the work that we have already done and work that is underway. And we truly have just begun. An exciting event this year was the Green Festival which drew huge crowds in Marion Square and showed us how festivals can become sustainable by recycling or composting almost all of the materials that normally would be thrown away and

ending up in our landfills. Hands On Charleston provided volunteers for the event. If you would like to be a volunteer, log on to www.handsoncharleston.org.

Our Council of Governments Land-Use Committee under the leadership of Larry Hargett, member of Dorchester County Council, has been working hard on developing our region's first land-use plan. This initiative will help guide all of us in the region in making wise decisions about land-use growth and development.

We were very proud in Charleston to have participated with our citizens in the wise planning of Long Savannah. This new community will be buffered by an 1,800-acre park system and will contain neighborhoods where people and children can walk to work, schools, parks and playgrounds and ride their bikes.

The leadership of our excellent Chief of Police, Greg Mullen, and the 384 police officers of South Carolina's largest and best Police Department, working with our citizens, have made Charleston even safer. Last year our violent crime rate decreased by 12%. The Police Department, using new technology and new techniques, helps provide quicker identification of crime patterns and trends. Saturation details are employed to impact the areas that have seen an uptick in criminal activity. Our Special Investigations Unit has worked closely with State and Federal criminal justice system departments

Chief Mullen has placed a high priority on community involvement and has developed citizen advisory group meetings in every part of our city to make sure that our Police Department and average citizens are in regular and direct dialogue. Our Police Traffic Divisions stepped up efforts that made our City safer as well. Since 2006 we have had a 15% decrease in collisions, a 33 1/3% decrease in traffic fatalities and a 362% increase in DUI arrests.

The members of our Police Department do a great job arresting criminals. The State's criminal justice system does not do a great job in making sure they receive the punishment that they deserve. Therefore, working with Chief Mullen and our Legal Department, we developed two years ago a package of needed criminal justice strengthening legislative proposals. However, none of these proposals passed the General Assembly. I am forming a statewide committee and we will be meeting in Columbia Thursday. I need for your help in encouraging the members of the General Assembly to pass these pieces of legislation. If you want more information about the legislation, you can go to the City's web site and click on the icon at the bottom entitled Support Tough Crime Legislation.

I am proud to say that in Tom Carr we found the best person in America to lead our Fire Department. Chief Carr was Chief of the Montgomery Rescue Service leading over 2,000 career and volunteer firefighters and paramedics, and had achieved a national reputation as a leader in firefighting techniques, training and best practices. The City also hired Chief James Ghi from Fairfax, Virginia to head our Training Division. Our Training Division has conducted over 2,700 hours of training for our Department in the last year and held two recruit classes

graduating 40 new City of Charleston firefighters. And we will add 24 firefighters this year. We purchased two new fire engines and a substantial amount of state-of-the-art firefighting equipment. Our firefighter peer support team has become a vital component of our Department. They are working with our firefighters and family members. Under Chief Carr's leadership, our dedicated Fire Department is committed to acquiring the coveted accreditation achieved by only one percent of fire departments.

On June 18 we held two memorial services in memory of the Charleston 9. The first, at the Gaillard Auditorium, allowed citizens throughout our community to pay homage to our fallen heroes. Then a private ceremony for family members of the Charleston 9 was held at the site of the tragic fire.

Now working under the leadership of Jimmy Bailey, the Firefighter Memorial Commission has been created to help develop a plan for the appropriate and respectful way to honor our fallen heroes at this site.

St. Andrews Shopping Center, one of the first in South Carolina, is being restored and revived, and a new grocery store and shopping center improvements are underway. Just down the street, we will be implementing streetscape and pedestrian improvements for the Avondale shopping district, likewise one of the first of small suburban shopping districts undergoing an amazing revival as well.

The intersection of Maybank and Folly Road has been difficult to negotiate. Working with Charleston County Roadwise this intersection has been redesigned to be more attractive and safer. Construction will be underway soon. Also, Harborview Road, a recipient of the ½¢ sales tax funds, has been designed. Harborview will gain sidewalks, bike and pedestrian paths, will become easier to negotiate safely and allow for more expeditious travel.

Our First Day Festival was a huge success. Over 9,000 children and their families came to Liberty Square. It is an exciting way to celebrate the beginning of school. Also, we were proud to have 106 businesses join the Mayor's Honor Roll in encouraging employees to take time off to take their children to the first day of school. Our goal is for that number to grow so that there are more businesses and organizations that give a high priority to their employees being able to take their children to the first day of school and getting their children off on the right foot. Another goal is to increase the number of people who are serving as mentors to our young people. We have 15 schools now participating in our Lunch Buddy program and our goal is to have the program in every elementary school in our City next year. If you would like to be a lunch buddy or a mentor, call 769-7715. Sixty new mentors signed up in January so far. We also want to make sure that all of our children have positive after-school experiences and especially at their schools. We are working with School's Out and other organizations to have positive, active after-school programs for our children. If you would like to be involved, call 937-6292 for more information.

Young people also want to serve. We are working to double volunteerism and community service in our high schools by partnering with the Jefferson Awards Youth Service Initiative and seven Charleston leadership high schools. And, if you know of an unsung hero and special volunteer you can nominate that person for a Jefferson Award by contacting the *Post and Courier*.

Our City's Recreation Department was named the South Carolina Athletic Program of the year. I am very proud of Director Laurie Yarbrough and her great recreation team. This past year we saw a 59% increase in participation in youth sports and developed a very successful collaboration with St. Andrews Parks and Playgrounds producing a seamless program for children west of the Ashley. Last year 8,066 children participated in sports and 9,756 adults participated in sports offered by the Recreation Department. 17,000 residents participated in health and fitness programs.

The need for affordable housing only continues to grow and we are so proud to produce beautiful affordable housing. Longborough in this redeveloped neighborhood in our City has 42 homes for first-time homeowners and in Peecksen's Court, an old alley in the City has been revived with these attractive new first-time homebuyer opportunities. The City's Housing and Community Development Department provided 428 households with housing assistance with a number of initiatives.

We are so proud of the excellent day-in and day-out service that you receive from our dedicated City employees. For example, last year our Sanitation workers picked up 122 million pounds of trash and garbage with an over 98% on-time pickup rate. Our drainage crews cleaned over 143 miles of ditches and 6,400 catch basins. Our pothole crew filled 1,500 potholes and 90% were done within 48 hours of notification.

Obviously we must provide alternate means of transportation. CARTA's ridership increased dramatically last year. The Express Buses have proven to be exceedingly popular.

The region's Commuter Rail Committee, which I chair, has put together an application to the State Infrastructure Bank for \$98 million to fund the first phase of our State's first commuter rail system. It would connect communities from Summerville to downtown Charleston.

All that has been achieved by the City of Charleston is done by our terrific City employees. Each year we select an Employee of the Year after a yearlong process of receiving monthly nominations. This year's award winner is Marion Pyatt of our Parks Department.

The International African American Museum has selected award-winning architects to design the building and will soon announce its exhibit designers. Thus this year, we will begin to have a vision of what this extraordinary institution will be.

Engineers have been working very hard to finalize plans for our next two major drainage initiatives, Market Street and Spring/Fishburne/Highway 17. We believe that these state-of-the-art drainage initiatives would fit well the economic recovery act and we intend to submit these projects for consideration.

The fabulous South Carolina Aquarium will open a fascinating penguin exhibit on the 21st of March. This exhibit is something that no family is going to want to miss.

Cool Blow will prove to be an award-winning urban infill sustainable development. Employing the best green energy conserving construction techniques and materials, this mixed-use development of offices and residential, including workforce housing, will be very successful.

Our historic City Market has begun a new chapter in its history as the new team of business leaders is directing its management. This very popular destination for residents and visitors alike will become even more successful.

We are very proud to be one of 10 communities selected by the Stuart Mott Foundation to participate in a new day of learning and study. We will work with the Charleston County School District and North Charleston to seek to develop a model, a new system of learning for full days and opportunities for year round.

Also this year we will be working very hard with Communities in Schools in reducing the number of high school dropouts. This requires a comprehensive approach and our entire community must be engaged. Every child who doesn't graduate from high school faces a much more challenging time of being happy and successful in life.

We are very proud of the City's fiscal condition and low tax rate, especially during these challenging economic times. While credit ratings are being reduced by credit agencies across the country, it is remarkable that the City of Charleston has received an increase in its bond rating to the highest level possible, that is Triple A. The City of Charleston now is the only city government in the state with a AAA rating. Steve Bedard, our Chief Financial Officer and his working team, and Charlton deSaussure, our bond lawyer, deserve special recognition for this.

This is the state of our wonderful City. We are extremely proud of the progress that we are making together and we are determined during this challenging time to make this one of Charleston's greatest eras. The way we respond to challenges determines the kind of people we are. That is how Charleston has always approached its challenges in the past and that is what we together will do this year.