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Bramson Delivers State of the City Address

Upbeat Speech Focuses on Waterfront, Downtown, Environment

NEW ROCHELLE, NY - Declaring that “the biggest opportunities require the toughest decisions,” New Rochelle Mayor Noam Bramson delivered an upbeat, confident – and, at times, pointed – State of the City Address to a standing-room-only crowd at the Davenport Club in New Rochelle.

Bramson, a Democrat elected in a landslide to his first full four-year term last November, focused on three priorities: renewing the Echo Bay waterfront, attracting investment to New Rochelle’s downtown, and promoting environmental sustainability.

“The state of our city today is strong,” Bramson affirmed. “If we now face our critical choices with wisdom and courage, then the state of our city tomorrow will be far stronger.”

Bramson called New Rochelle’s waterfront “the defining feature of our geography and history,” but decried the current condition of the Echo Bay shoreline, calling it “a decaying and contaminated wasteland.”

In its place, Bramson asked his audience to “imagine more than five acres of parks, imagine a shoreline promenade almost a mile long, all completely open to the public, imagine new shops and cafes . . . imagine a village shaped in modest scale and in harmony with its surroundings, with many homes that are affordable to our middle class,” and picture “standing on Main Street, looking to the south, and seeing, for the first time in our lives, a clear view of the water.”

Bramson argued that to achieve the community’s goals for Echo Bay, the City’s public works yard and the abandoned armory in the core of the project area would have to be “relocated with sensitivity and care.”

While noting that such steps would be difficult, Bramson underscored their necessity, “because unless we take them, Echo Bay will remain contaminated and closed to the public for yet another generation. And we will have missed this chance . . . to create a better future for all of New Rochelle.”

In discussing New Rochelle's downtown, Bramson lauded progress, citing the restoration of historic facades, the construction of hundreds of new housing units, the creation of Library Green, hundreds of millions in overall private investment, and "just in recent weeks, the news, so eagerly-awaited and actively pursued, that for the first time in memory, department stores are returning to New Rochelle."

Bramson also called special attention to New Rochelle's "growing, diverse restaurant scene," and, introducing many restaurant-owners and chefs in the audience, declared that "there's no denying the positive trend."

At the same time, Bramson observed that "the improvements, though great, are still uneven and unfinished, and we have a long way to go." He urged that the City proceed with plans for a new mixed-use development, Lecount Square, that would achieve "a more balanced economy, with office space and additional retail to complement the strong elements of housing, entertainment, and services," as well as substantial tax revenue to reinvest in essential services.

Acknowledging that this project entailed difficult choices related to scale, design, and other impacts, Bramson said "let these be challenges to do the job well, not excuses to cast the job aside," and expressed confidence that "our future will be better than our past."

With respect to the environment, Bramson emphasized that "New Rochelle must do its part," to help combat global climate change and promote sustainable energy usage.

Bramson also argued forcefully for smart-growth land-use policies that concentrate development near mass transit, while limiting development elsewhere to "protect the character of neighborhoods, and ensure that the suburban quality of life so many of us value will be preserved."

Bramson highlighted recent City actions aimed at reducing energy consumption, including the conversion of a sanitation truck to hybrid electric. He then established a goal of adopting "the strongest green building policy in all of Westchester" in 2008.

Throughout his address, Bramson returned to the theme of hard choices being essential to the achievement of progress, suggesting that New Rochelle was faced with decisions of special consequence this year.

"The size of the opportunities before us requires that we be equally large in our courage and determination," said Bramson. "The easy road asks very little [and] moves steadily downhill . . . to act is to take the harder road, in the knowledge that it leads to the higher place."

That annual State of the City Address is sponsored by the New Rochelle Chamber of Commerce.

(Full Text of the State of the City Address is Attached)

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