

Good evening and welcome to Rahway's 2016 State of the City address. It is absolutely wonderful to see so many honored guests in the audience tonight – the magnificent City of Rahway residents, friends, family, elected officials, city employees, members of our business community and members of the press. Thank you all for joining us.

Before I go on with the State of our city, I must pause and ask you all to join me in showing appreciation for all of those people that came before me on this stage tonight. To all the honorees, thank you for your service, dedication and efforts. To those of you who took oaths tonight, welcome and my best wishes in your careers. To all of the performers . . . wow – forget America's Got Talent, I say Rahway's got talent. Please join me in giving them all a round of applause.

So for those of you who were with us last year you may have noticed there is a little bit less of me today. In 2014 I launched the Mayor's Wellness Challenge through the LiveWell campaign and I was the first person to take the pledge to lose 10% of my body weight. Well I am proud to say that today I am down 100 pounds, well over my 10% and still working hard.

Diet and exercise have helped me through this challenge and I must say that I am healthier and more active as a result. So when I was thinking about Rahway's story of 2015 and where we are going in 2016, I thought what better analogy than how we are going big by being lean.

Just like literally getting lean takes a great deal of work and effort but offers BIG results, running a lean government means thinking outside of the box and pushing boundaries but the results have a BIG impact on our great city.

First you must listen and learn. I have been Mayor for just over two years now, and every day there are new issues that need to be addressed. Every day I must listen and learn from the residents and business owners. In 2015 we launched a new website, we increased our presence on Facebook and Twitter, we held more community wide events and we updated our TV Channel 34. These were all in an effort to better hear the needs of our community and hear you we did.

In a year when body worn cameras for police officers were a topic of discussion throughout the Country, Rahway was the first municipality in the County to not only endorse, but also fund and approve body worn cameras for every one of our patrol officers. We were so ahead of the curve that we had to wait for the technology to keep up with us and I am proud to say that in the next few weeks this program will be fully operational. Additionally, we expanded our Reach Out Rahway program throughout the City so that residents can meet and interact with their first responders.

We listened when our residents expressed their concerns of flooding in the Rahway River. Flooding has been an issue in Rahway for a very long time and the events of Hurricanes Irene and Sandy exacerbated the issue tremendously. Tonight I am proud to report that due to lobbying from The Mayors' Council on Rahway River Watershed, which I sit on, we have secured all of the funding necessary for studies to be conducted in order to address the issue in a significant way; that is approximately \$3 Million dollars in Federal funds.

The studies are to examine flood mitigation options through the Rahway River and select a plan that will effectively reduce flooding. We expect to have the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers select a plan and submit a request for construction funding to the U.S. Congress this year and for construction to begin as early as next

year. This will be the biggest flood mitigation project to the Rahway River and is expected to have significantly beneficial impacts in our lives.

We listened when residents requested that they have better access to information. This year we provided more documents, forms and information on our website. We purchased software to better integrate communication between departments offering more efficient government services. We also tested a new program in which city offices stayed open late two days a week in the summer months to better accommodate the working schedules of our residents. And we added the Rahway PreView to supplement the Rahway Review providing residents with more timely updates on city business.

We plan to continue this open dialogue to better serve. In 2016 you will see the official launch of the City of Rahway's App for both android and apple devices. I will be implementing open office hours once a month for residents to come and meet with me directly. We will revisit our evening hour program so that we can continue our efforts to serve you best.

L. Listen and learn. It is the only way to continue to improve and strengthen our community.

E. Empower. It is only when we empower the people of Rahway that we can truly grow. For it is not government that makes Rahway great, but rather our people. I believe that an empowered community is a solid community. In 2015 we had many success stories from our empowered residents, and we are setting the stage for an even stronger 2016.

As I stand here tonight I am proud to say that over 30 new businesses opened in Rahway last year! These included retail shops, restaurants, offices and service industry. I want to take a moment to name just a few of these. Restaurants: Fiesta Cancun on Monroe Street, Nygels on Cherry Street, El Patron on New Brunswick Avenue, Flaming Pitt BBQ on Madison Avenue, Little John's on Westfield Avenue and Hugo's on Main Street. For shopping: Hello Gorgeous on Irving Street, Trendz 2 Envy on Main Street. Space rentals through Tabula Rasa on Main Street. Marvelous Hair Salon on Milton Avenue, the Opportunist on Grand Avenue. The Four C's and Healthworks joined us on City Hall Plaza. I was at many of these ribbon cuttings and I said it then and I say it now: WELCOME TO RAHWAY!

I am also pleased to announce that this year we will be seeing more empowered businesses joining the Rahway family. The eTransaction company IMM, has just announced that it will be moving to Rahway this year, filling out all of the space at the library building and bringing about 70 new employees to our City. Additionally a growing biotech graphic technology firm will be relocating to Rahway from Somerset County and bringing with it 20 employees to start. Finally, I am also thrilled to announce that a successful restaurateur from a neighboring community will be opening up two locations right here in downtown as well as a Latin Soul food restaurant from one of Rahway's own residents this year. These are just some of the results of an empowered business climate that we have learned to create in Rahway.

We have empowered our developers to come to Rahway taking land that previously generated only minimal tax revenue and redeveloping it to revitalize our City and bring in greater rateables. You have probably seen the substantial progress on the Meridia Lafayette project on Main Street. That will open up this year and offer over 100 luxury rental units in the heart of our downtown. Additionally, demolition is underway at the old Wheateana site which will not only result in additional luxury housing but will also provide for the remediation of a severely contaminated site. We are happy to welcome R2N2 Developers to the City of Rahway, who will be working on an approximate 50 unit project on Cherry Street set to begin this summer

and will house a coffee shop café on the first floor. Further I believe we will see ground breaking on the Main and Monroe project by the end of this year.

And keeping with the go lean theme, we did all of this with a Redevelopment Agency operating with over \$70,000 in reduced salaries.

Perhaps our greatest accomplishment this year was empowering our residents to be safer, healthier and more civic minded.

In 2015 Rahway had its second lowest crime rate in 20 years. Burglaries were down 27% and robberies were down almost 30%. We gave out signs encouraging drivers to be more mindful of children in our neighborhoods. We implemented park watch to protect our recreational spaces and we issued a survey to our 9th and 11th grade to better understand how our youth view drugs and alcohol. We completed the 14th year of the Youth Police Academy impacting over 400 children and had two dozen citizens participate in our Auxiliary police force.

Over the past two years, hundreds of Rahway residents joined me on my mission to lead a healthier lifestyle by signing the LiveWell pledge and we shared in the journey countless times throughout the year including the City's first Firefly 5k Run where we had over 1000 participants, dancing on the streets at Big Thursday Nights, LiveWell exercise classes on Train Station Plaza, Participating in Global Mala Yoga for Peace Day and joining us at our First LiveWell Expo.

Dozens of volunteers joined us for the Volunteer Rahway program throughout the year working on projects like park clean ups, event coordination and maintaining the State's Largest rain garden located on Saint George Ave. Personally, one of my most empowering moments was learning that we had collected over 10,500lbs of food and over \$3000 for Food for Friends at Rahway's first Foodstock program held last October. That event shows that together we can accomplish great things.

So we will continue this momentum. This year we will continue all of these programs and expand. We will work with the youth sports organizations and the Rahway Prevention Coalition to promote a community-wide scholar athlete recognition program and instituting an All-Star Hall of Fame at our Recreation Center. We will also be coordinating with the school ROTC program to work on City beautification programs. And starting in March we will be instituting monthly LiveWell challenges posted on Facebook and the City website.

First we L: Listen & Learn and then we E: Empower. Next we A: Act.

In order to run an efficient government it is imperative that we ACT when there are opportunities to save money and to improve services. We acted last year when we began what will be our Annual Sanitary Sewer Inflow & Infiltration Reduction Project in order to reduce significant storm & ground waters form the City's sewer system, and thereby reduce considerable sewage treatment fees, which will help to stabilize taxes. Additionally, we secured over \$1 million in surplus government equipment at little to no cost to Rahway to better serve and protect.

We acted on new legislation that allows municipalities to require properties that are vacant or going into foreclosure to register with the City of Rahway. This allows the City to monitor these properties to make sure that they are safe, free from intrusion and kept in a manner consistent with the City standards. Additionally, the fees raised by this program have brought in over \$250,000 annual revenue to the City of Rahway.

And last year alone we brought in well over a million and a half dollars in grant funds to better run and operate our city. Including nearly \$675,000 in Community Development Block Grants for public improvements, senior citizen activities, code enforcement and home improvement programs. We got funding to build New Jersey's largest Rain Garden, we received funding to re-level our levy and prevent drug use among our youth just to name a few.

We also were quite efficient in our shared services – working together with other towns to save money and reach economies of scale. We extended our contract with Kenilworth to pick up bulky waste for an additional three years, we worked with Union County's Department of Public Works to pave portions of River Road and Lafayette Street and we continued our interactions with neighboring communities including Woodbridge, Linden and Clark for equipment sharing, training and services.

It is by acting swiftly and efficiently that we have been able to achieve these successes in City government.

And in 2016 we will continue to act.

Tonight I am announcing that I will be sending a recommendation to Council for their consideration next month to restructure City government in an effort to save money and improve services. My proposal will streamline city government by reducing the number of City Departments from nine to eight. We will cross train employees to be proficient in various tasks and put a focus and emphasis on customer service. At the same time, through this restructuring and redefinition of employee roles, I anticipate saving the City at least a quarter of a million dollars in the first year and an increase in that annual savings over the next few years.

But city government cannot act alone. We need everyone's help when opportunity arises and we have an opportunity now to act as a City. As mayor, one of the biggest requests I get from residents is to get a grocery store in Rahway. More specifically, one of the most frequent stores I get requested is Trader Joes. So tonight I am going to ask all of you to ACT with me in requesting that Trader Joe's comes to Rahway. On their website it says, and I quote, "If you have a recommendation for a city/address that you think would be a good fit, please let us know [here](#). There are no guarantees, but being wanted matters to us." I requested that they come to Rahway earlier this afternoon and I ask that you all do the same. Let them know that Rahway wants them here. Spread the word, tell your neighbors, friends, relatives, colleagues to also spread the word. If you don't know where to go, you can visit the City's Facebook or webpage starting Monday for a link to the online request form. Let's try to get 10,000 requests by the end of next month. And to entice Trader Joe's even more, the City recruited a developer who has a location for their new store and the DEVELOPER is willing to offer them either free rent for a year or, if they would prefer to own, the DEVELOPER will pay the property taxes for a year. Let's convince all the naysayers out there that Trader Joes and Rahway are a good fit! The citizens have made a request and we are acting.

So once we listen & learn about the needs of our community and we empower our citizens and businesses and we act when opportunity strikes we are well on our way of making a BIG impact on our relatively small community. The last piece of our efforts is N: Notice.

People have begun to notice our City for all the positive things that are happening here. I don't know if you have heard but Rahway IS Happening! Last year we were all very proud when Rahway's Own Shanice Williams starred as Dorothy in NBC's hit production of The Wiz Live. Shanice is such a fantastic young talent and we are honored that she calls Rahway home. At one point in the campaign they had an image of Shanice with the caption "There's no place like Rahway" and I couldn't agree more. Over this last year we have had countless press articles including spots on NPR and in NJ Monthly. We have welcomed thousands

of visitors at events such as Culture Crawl, Foodstock, Munch Madness. Every day our office gets calls from people interested in learning about the great things happening in our town. And when I leave the City boarders I constantly have people come up to me and say “I want to be like Rahway”. Frankly, I don’t blame them.

Now time for a small plug. Later this year, as part of the Winter Wonderland festivities, Rahway will welcome seven time NAACP image award winner; Tony, Emmy and Grammy nominated; actress and singer, Vanessa Williams to right here to the UCPAC for a performance. Tickets go on sale on Tuesday.

All of these programs promote economic development throughout our entire city. People stop at our stores, restaurants and service businesses. They see our incredible housing stock. They gain an interest in our city and that benefits all.

Rahway’s history has not always been easy. We have seen economic peaks and economic valleys, we have seen floods and we have seen droughts we have blank and we have blank. But one thing is for sure, we always come back bigger, stronger and better. We will continue on this “lean” path for the best for our community.

In Rahway we Listen & Learn from each other, Empower one another, Act on opportunities and people are beginning to Notice. Yes, Rahway is going BIG by being L. E. A. N., lean.

I thank you for your time tonight, but more importantly for sharing this journey with me.

Goodnight.