

Our York, One York:  
Still, We Will Rise  
Inaugural Address  
Mayor C. Kim Bracey  
City of York, Pennsylvania  
Monday, January 4, 2010

Distinguished guests, federal, state, and county officials, members of City Council, City School Board members and administration, City Department Directors, front line city employees, friends, and fellow citizens, good morning! Today, our York, one York revolves into a new, crisp day radiant with possibilities.

Governor Rendell, your leadership, compassion, and endurance have secured your place in the group of transformative governors, and you have brought genuine hope and help to cities and citizens throughout this great Commonwealth and we like to call you a friend, here in York. State Representative Eugene DePasquale, your energetic representation of greater York has brought a gust of fresh air to Harrisburg. Senator Waugh, thank you for your leadership and I look forward to working more with you too, in the coming years.

To all members of our seasoned York County delegation to Harrisburg, the city reaches out to you with open arms to seek real change in Harrisburg to enable the core and the hub of our county to become financially self-reliant and stable so, together, we can benefit all of our constituents.

Councilwoman Smith, Councilwoman Ray, and Councilwoman Hill-Evans, your wisdom and leadership on City Council have been invaluable. Councilwoman Nelson and Councilman Nixon, you will bring welcomed and distinctive perspectives to our work ahead. I look forward to working cooperatively with all of you to navigate York through revolutions to come.

To my friends and family here today; you are my north star, my compass, my heart. The little girl who trembled in her Penn Street house as a National Guard tank rumbled by in 1969 stands before you today as mayor of our York, one York, for all of our people, because of you. My waters run deep in this city; they sparkle and flow with the values, inspirations, and love of countless others who were born here, who labored here, and who worshipped here. I am but an instrument of you.

Mayor Krout, Mayor Marshall, Mayor Althaus, in absentia, and Mayor Robertson, thank you for your legacy of leadership and your devotion to the city. As mayors emeritus, you have “equity” in the city’s hopes and promise. My special thanks goes to Mayor Elizabeth Marshall for shattering the glass ceiling in order for a little girl from Penn Street to stand here today as your mayor.

Mayor John Brenner, your untiring leadership over the past eight years has created a foundation of enthusiasm, inclusion, and progress from which future dreams can now take shape. For the first time in 50 years, the city’s population has stabilized and is poised for modest growth. We cleaned polluted sites, instituted first-ever public budget hearings, settled potentially debilitating lawsuits, and aggressively searched for and secured a wide range of federal and state resources. We implemented the YWCA Olde Towne East Renaissance project – the first “Elm Street” program in the state. After 13 years of fits and starts, we built, without using local tax dollars, Sovereign Bank Stadium. We completed the thankless grunt work necessary for the Northwest Triangle to start construction. Finally and fittingly, the officially approved Strategic Comprehensive Plan now charts the city’s priorities until 2030.

The slate is clean and the foundation ours. Our history is a prelude to our progress. Still, we must rise again to squarely confront the formidable social challenges and fiscal tsunami that threatens the city's long-term viability.

So the following questions cry for candid answers.

Will Harrisburg enable the land-locked City of York to be self-reliant, that is, to be able to chart its own destiny through a modest sales tax, an alcohol tax, mandatory payments-in-lieu-of-taxes to be made by tax-exempt entities, and development impact and public art fees, as opposed to an over-reliance on property taxes? Will it?

Will the federal government and the Army Corps of Engineers finally see that our Codorus is a worthy funding priority so it can become an aesthetic, recreational, and neighborhood asset? Will they?

Still, we will rise to answer the following questions.

Will we empower city residents to take pride of ownership in every neighborhood and block, and, speaking of ownership, as my former colleague mentioned in a piece that was published in yesterday's paper...can we increase York's homeownership rate to and above the tipping point of 50%?

Will we grow our existing community policing operations city-wide and cement a sustained effort among citizens in all neighborhoods?

Will we continue to develop a dynamic economic climate where businesses add family-sustaining jobs without disrupting York's landscape or endangering historic places?

Will our non-profit, governmental, and business sectors equal the examples of their counter-parts in other cities by increasing their contributions to our Fair Share program to help make up for the 37% of the value of city real estate that is tax exempt?

Will we grow successful, non-tax revenue initiatives, such as the County-City Nuisance Abatement Partnership, Angels in the Park, Bring on Play, and the Beautiful York endowment?

Will we acknowledge, as a Metropolitan York community, that a city of only 5.2 square miles with a poverty rate of 20% is unacceptable, totally unacceptable, and thereby decrease the city's rate of poverty without displacing our people?

I have no illusions. In one administration, we will not divide in half or make a devastating dent in the percentage of impoverished city residents. We likely will not overthrow a century-old local governmental structure and taxing system, shackled by rigid state law, in the next four or eight years. Really, many of York's most menacing problems have been festering for fifty years or more. They will not dissolve or disappear in the blink of one administration. And we will not be able to help anyone who does not want to help themselves.

So I have no illusions, but we must continue to seek answers for the tough questions and fight the good fight so we can continue turning the corner toward hope and enlightenment. Our progress will not be shown in lightning bolts or silver bullets, but measured by modest metrics and converted civic souls.

Together, we will make this city better. That is our sacred pledge. Raging against the injustices of history, land-locked boundaries, an inequitable taxing system, and pension payment spikes, we will manufacture hope and help at home.

We will do this one job created at a time, one house rehabilitated at a time, one block and park blooming at a time, one neighborhood revitalized at a time, one city department re-engineered for new challenges at a time. We will sustain steady progress by nurturing neighborhoods, districts, blocks, and parks to be what they yearn to be – engaged, inter-connected, interactive, clean, green, and filled with people.

Therefore, I reaffirm my pledge to lead an administration that truly engages the community. We will re-evaluate our programs, challenge ourselves, and work organically, based on the aspirations and wisdom of, by, and for the people. Mind you, we will not always agree. And we would do well to remind ourselves always that reasonable people may agree to disagree without resentment or spite. And we may not always succeed. But we will listen intently, and we will fight valiantly for you and for projects worthy of our energy.

Regardless of your skin color, creed, sexual orientation, or political views, our administration will listen to you with genuine interest, civility, and respect. I embrace all of you and invite you to be actively involved... nudging our city forward. Let us not let ideologies displace our shared goals for social, economic, and entrepreneurial growth, for self-reliance, for creating a thriving urban community. At the local level, we are all one, because we are all York, one York, united to improve the lives of all of our brothers and sisters.

So, ladies and gentlemen, we will hit the ground running. I pledge to you that we will launch the following nine initiatives within nine months of today. I guess you could say that these are nine tasks for our administration's first nine months in York Town!

First, a new Community Policing Network, comprised of representatives of neighborhood associations, Weed & Seed, City School Board, and the County will work hand-in-hand with our Police Department to implement sustainable Community Policing, with measurable goals and outcomes, city-wide. Building on the "Take 30" program, nuisance abatement efforts, our downtown officer and Segway patrols, and our civil enforcement team, our Community Policing strategies will emphasize police and neighbors truly engaging each other to take ownership of our neighborhoods.

Second, we will develop an Action Plan for Neighborhoods that focuses on softening, cultivating, and enlightening our neighborhoods. From Salem Square to Newton Square, from Fireside to Springdale, from Olde Towne East to West Hope, from King's Mill to King Street, from Princess to Prospect, from York College to College Avenue, from Broad to Pine, we will develop a plan that is forward and appealing. The Action Plan for Neighborhoods will help to instill neighborhood pride, market key opportunity sites, lend accountability to public-private efforts, and stimulate reinvestment.

Third, engaging our stakeholders, we will update our city's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy with the emphasis on developing impactful projects to increase the number of family-sustaining jobs and expand our tax base. We will work together with others to incorporate strategies for cultivating a Market District.

Fourth, grow our novel performance-based incentive programs, such as LERTA, RETAP, Artist Homestead and the Fresh Foods Revolving Loan Fund programs. Our innovative cost-effective programs successfully have retained existing; and attracted new businesses by infusing much needed capital and providing free services, thereby fueling our creative economy. We will continue and

recapitalize these programs...AND, in 2010, we will launch a small business revolving loan fund. By providing niche finance opportunities we can successfully attract, retain and grow business thus wisely investing in the future success of our local economy.

Fifth, Faith Net. It is no mystery that poverty is the major culprit in crime. Bringing together leaders from our faith-based community, Salvation Army, York Rescue Mission, Community Progress Council, Crispus Attucks, and York's Helping Hands for the Homeless, Faith Net will explore opportunities to consolidate facilities and streamline services so not only are we humanely serving our less fortunate, but making meaningful efforts to get as many of them as possible back on their feet.

Sixth, I will charge our city departments to institute a Zero Tolerance For Blight initiative. Blighted, vacant buildings are cancers that must be remediated to make neighborhoods safe and to improve curb appeal. Working with our neighborhood associations, our administration will create an inter-departmental Blight Status Hot List to track and to navigate vacant, and nuisance properties.

Seventh, customer service, which is job one of any municipality, will become an essential, shared organizational value of all city departments through our Job One initiative. Job One will encompass a range of accountability measures, facility upgrades, and incentives: developing a strategy to centralize front-line services, performing customer service training and audits, and instituting annual performance awards and other incentives to front-line staff who exemplify excellence in customer service.

Eighth, today, we charge city staff, Planning Commission and City Council to efficiently draft and pass a new, neighborhood empowering Zoning Ordinance. Our new zoning ordinance must encourage functional, attractive "back-to-the-future" neighborhoods; insist upon design excellence; and favor the person over the vehicles and machines.

Ninth, we will develop cost-effective, aggressive public relations and marketing campaign to broadcast the message loudly and clearly through a host of mediums that York is a lovely, authentic place for visitors to indulge their appetites for farm fresh foods, creative fare, eclectic arts, live music, rich history, and exhilarating recreation. We also will market our historic real estate and performance-based incentives, while letting audiences know that York is ripe for business and ready to unleash creativity.

These nine initial initiatives for our first nine months in York Town are but the beginning.

Make no mistake about it. We have the minds, we have the plans, and we have the visions. As I previously mentioned, we have an excellent Comprehensive Plan that charts York's future until 2030. We have a much anticipated plan from a destination expert for a Market District. The "Recapture the Riverfront" plan paints a wonderful concept for green amenities along the Codorus as well as a new village of Codorus Homes. Thanks to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Heritage Trust has an excellent plan for improving assets within and beyond "The Colonial Complex." Finally, the Cultural Alliance recently published a visionary cultural plan.

So we are very fortunate to have such a flurry of pro-active publications, and let me be clear: our administration supports all of these and other high quality plans. We must guard, however, against analysis leading to paralysis, or plans that do not credit and work with other efforts, and studies leading to segregated silos of interests and information. All of us who have a stake and who care must strive to meet with other minds, and marry strategies to action steps in order to deliver results. We must implement visions now.

Let us begin our quest now. The stakes are too high for deferment. When feet falter, when words halt,

when tears scald; may the whispers of those who toiled, yet sang here before us, force us through the opening prepared for us this day. Their whispers join together into a chorus:

“Stakes are too high for small swipes,  
For rest and repose,  
For we have lived so you dare this dawn,  
This gritty gift  
Sparkling, rippling with hope.  
You must rise, rise again; be bold,  
Through chaos, mystery,  
Still, you will rise again.”

This is our charge. May God bless you, God bless our efforts, and God bless the City of York.