

Creativity Unleashed

The City Of York

Address to The Rotary Club Of York

**C. Kim Bracey, Mayor
City Of York, Pennsylvania**

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**Yorktowne Hotel
City Of York, Pennsylvania**

INTRODUCTION

Pastor Rooney, City Council President Ray, Councilman Nixon, elected and appointed officials, friends, Rotarians, and guests, it is a distinct privilege to address you here at the Yorktowne Hotel this afternoon, a little over six months since I took the oath of office and announced such initiatives as our 9 in 9 initiatives for the first 9 months of the Bracey Administration. The 9 in 9 have taken off and we have been diligently moving each initiative along, such as our Faith Net initiative which included a summit among our faith community leaders that gathered together and strategically planned their collective impact to our community for years to come. To advance our Economic Development Strategy, this fall a summit will be held to do much of the same type of strategic planning.

I am delighted with the progress made towards these initiatives and today, I would like to share my vision for York as a clean, safe, beautiful place to live, to visit, to do business in, to practice one's faith, and to raise a family. Let us embrace York as a walkable, healthy place of vibrant energy, of youthful exuberance, where anyone and everyone are encouraged to unleash their own creativity and most of all a place that everyone, everyone can take pride in. Make no mistake about it, I want you to share this vision, to encourage it, to perpetuate it and make it thrive.

So, it has only been six months...and what a six months it has been.

First, in case you haven't noticed, we are cleaning up our City. In April we saw record turnout for our Citywide clean up. Neighborhood associations, youth groups, community organizations, Rotarians, businesses, social organizations and churches all turned out and participated to sweep up and spruce up our City. Don't worry, for all those in the audience unable to attend that event ... *We know who you are and we've a scheduled a second clean up to be held on September 18th.*

Not a day goes by that I am not stressing the importance of curb appeal to someone. Ask any one of my Directors what two words I repeat emphatically and often: "Curb Appeal, curb appeal, curb appeal." I implore you all today to look at your York with fresh eyes. Help us rid our City of unwanted litter and garbage that so often detracts from its charm and beauty. Encourage your neighbor, your friend, your coworker to Keep York Beautiful. **The number one littered item in our City is cigarette butts. Smokers... Please think of this next time you flick.**

And we in government are doing our part too and it is often the little things that make the most difference. Hopefully by now you have noticed we have had our Public Works crew working overtime to remove graffiti, repaint and repair curbs, restripe parking spaces. *Heck,*

I even had them refinish the doors to City Hall. We have added a part time employee solely focused on litter and weed control throughout our City. I have a direct line to this persons cell phone folks, and let me assure you...I use it. In part of our effort to spruce up our City, I would like to commend and thank Downtown Inc for being a true partner in this effort. Their recent hiring of two part-time downtown litter control specialists augments the work of our often, over stretched employees. This has already been an enormous assistance to our team and will enable them to properly patrol our Downtown and work their way further up thoroughfares and into our many neighborhoods. This fundamental service provided by Downtown Inc has had an immediate impact to our City's curb appeal and are resources well spent by Business Improvement District Assessment. Thank you to DI.

And to extend our curb appeal beyond litter and weeds, I have charged our Administration, City staff, and Redevelopment Authority to aggressively target blighted, vacant, nuisance properties throughout our City. We are addressing '*Broken Window Theory 101*' by improving our blocks one broken window at a time to have a longer-standing impact and restore pride to our neighborhoods. Our Zero Tolerance for Blight Initiative has done just that. In just six months we have condemned or taken action against over 59 properties along our main thoroughfares, within the Central Business District or surrounding

designated improvement neighborhoods, such as Olde Towne East, Salem Square, South George Street, or the Northeast Neighborhood. We will continue to take a hard line approach with irresponsible property owners. It is their negligence that causes diminished quality of life, reduction of property values and can ultimately be attractive havens for criminal activity.

We would like you to share in our vision of a safer York. In March of this year, Wes Kahley was appointed as our Chief of Police. Chief Kahley has immediately begun to change how our “policework” works. By installing a new network of community police, our officers are walking neighborhoods, interacting with the community and gaining more support from residents and businesses to control crime, reduce fear and identify suspects. We now are very proud to say we have four community police units in our City. Our Southwest Patrols are stationed out of the Eagle Fire Station on Jackson Street, our West End Unit is stationed out of Dentsply’s College Avenue campus, many of you know Officer Blake McBride who regularly patrols the Downtown and our newest City unit is now patrolling the Northeast Neighborhood.

This renewed emphasis on neighborhood patrols has immediately proven positive and has helped forge a new found bond between citizens, officers, the Guardian Angels and the County Sheriff’s Department. I personally thank the County of York and the Sheriff’s

Department for their partnership with our police to provide more “feet on the street” patrols and help coordinate work crew “clean ups” in underserved areas. There is a rekindled enthusiasm in our Police Department as we integrate changes and methodologies. However, I have to be completely candid with you. We cannot conduct these efforts in a vacuum. We need your help to spread the message that York is, in fact, an overwhelmingly safe place. Our City is a fun, walkable, growing community with much to see and do and be proud of.

Further, let us be reminded that York is a growing geographic, historic, and cultural crossroads of the east coast. Forty percent of North America's population is within a four-hour car drive. One of the fastest growing counties in Pennsylvania and the fastest growing county attracting 20-35 year-olds in the state, is York. York features a rich array of medical and educational, design and engineering, construction, trades, professional services, manufacturing and agricultural businesses and jobs.

So to continue these trends our downtown districts and neighborhoods must be poised for growth. Thanks to nearly **\$5.1 million** in federal and state funds that the city has received commitments for in just the last six months, we are doing just that.

We are fortunate to be one of the only small cities in Pennsylvania with two authentic, 19th century markets. **Central Market** and **Farmers Market** are poised for major renovation thanks in part to a **\$780,000** commitment from Senator Bob Casey that the city received in January. And to further develop our Market District, in April my staff and I met with **Governor Rendell**, along with **Senator Waugh** and **Representative DePasquale**, to once again pitch the concept of a multi-use cultural arts center on Philadelphia Street, coupled with major renovations to the Central Market. We successfully received the Governor's pledge of over **\$4 million** to develop the multi-purpose Arts Center at the FOE building and major improvements to the Central Market and surrounding Market District streetscape.

Our team continues to move these projects along. I cannot belabor the merits of these projects that will produce more feet on the street between our Markets, the Strand-Capitol, Sovereign Bank Stadium, and our restaurants, shops and galleries.

This Fall will be an exciting season. Our City will see construction underway at the Thomas Somerville building, as part of the Northwest Triangle, the FOE building which will bring York College's Fine Arts Program to our Downtown, the opening of Mudhook Brewery on Clarke Avenue, thanks in part to Jeff Lau who has been a true City patron from his substantial investment and restoration of the Insurance Services

United Building along North George Street to his '*Get It Done tactics*' to reduce litter in our City. Jeff and his family will be fermenting away bringing a brewery to York and energy to Clarke Avenue. And speaking of Clarke Avenue, this fall will also see the occupancy of CODO 28. At 28 North George the second installment of CODO will continue to attract a new residential population to our downtown. In this exciting venture, CODO has partnered with the Art Institute of York to be the new home offered to some of Ai's student artist population. We welcome this opportunity to bring more residents to our City that they may immediately embrace our urban fabric and *unleash their own creativity*.

A healthy, creative downtown is inextricably linked to healthy neighborhoods. York is a great place to raise a family and we intend to make it greater. With construction already underway, the Salem Square project is de-converting blighted, multi-unit properties to beautifully restored, single-family homes along the 600 block of West Princess Street, and the replacement of several dilapidated single-family homes with new single-family homes along South West Street.

After many months of behind-the-scenes work, in May, the State Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) pledged a **\$250,000** grant through the New Communities - Elm Street program to the City's West End Revitalization Plan. This plan is a

partnership of the city, the neighborhood, the YMCA and the faith-based community. This funding will go to streetscape and lighting in that area to promote a better, walking-friendly atmosphere for our residents.

As catalysts within these neighborhoods, this fall will also see the opening of LOGOS Academy along the Codorus and the expansion of New Hope Academy Charter School. Connecting the two will be a repaved King Street, as year two of Rebuild York unfolds, more York City streets will be repaved this year sprucing up our thoroughfares, quintessential *curb appeal*. When you think about it, the *King Street Corridor* connects Lincoln Edison Charter School, New Hope Academy, LOGOS Academy, the Heritage Rail Trail, City Hall and the Broad Street Greenway. Our Administration is looking at affordable ways to improve the King Street Corridor, better linking these assets, and more, with a healthier, walkable AND bikable passageway.

It is amazing that a city of only 5.2 square miles concentrates so much investment, creativity, diversity and originality as well as educational, recreational, cultural, and civic activities!

In just the last six years, four vacant cigar factories, as well as a vacant ice production plant, auto parts outlet, figurine factory, silk mill, wallpaper tannin and dyeing factory, candy company and store, grocery warehouse, and a former casket manufacturing factory have or are in the process of being converted into green commercial centers and market-

rate condos or apartments drawing professionals from the region. All are testaments to York's industrial past and the creative and adaptive future we are forging for future generations.

York already is embracing people with imaginations, and appreciations of quality and authenticity – people who want to think creatively, be independent, and live in authentic environments. With your help, York can have people and projects in the 21st century that are as innovative, inventive and individualistic as York of the 19th century.

Your City Government will continue to innovate as well. In the near future we will introduce a redesigned, “creatively inspired” city website, overhauled to better streamline information and provide more efficient user-friendly experience. The website will also include a new interactive system for online permitting, again providing our customer more accessibility and a more enjoyable experience doing business with the City of York. Similarly, we are adding a touch of innovation to our own internal processes to leave no stone unturned in search of cost-saving efficiencies we can employ.

As we continue to recover from this recession, and Harley Davidson's earnings announcement yesterday is one more very positive indicator we are track for recovery, we predict a renewed sense of nationalism and

local pride. For a small city such as York, to remain competitive we cannot be solely focused on our own fiscal survival. We continue to practice stringent economic management but unfortunately no amount of financial austerity can inhibit or surmount the inherent flaws of our Commonwealth municipal structure.

Our small cities need reform at the state level to keep us fiscally stable and to improve our prospects for expanding our tax base and growing family-sustaining jobs. At the same time, it is important that we all keep in mind that York's financial challenges are similar to those facing small cities throughout the state. Last year, York and four surrounding Cities participated in an economic analysis performed by the Pennsylvania Economy League. The study showed what we collectively knew. These problems are not of our own creation they are handed down from a Pennsylvania government that has too long overlooked its own archaic system of fragmented Commonwealth government. There is absolutely no reason in this day and age that we have over 2,500 municipalities in Pennsylvania and 500 school districts.

We will continue to meet with our sister cities and are currently in the process of hiring a benefits consultant to pool resources and possibly bid our collective Five City Health Care plan.

Therefore, I continue to respectfully encourage all those who are interested in our city's future to put our challenges into proper

perspective. We have very real fundamental flaws in the way we “do” government in this state. And the challenges are no longer solely born by the cities. As townships and boroughs now face financial hardships the impractical nature of the system has been brought into question. And now more than ever do we have a larger interest of people discussing reform. Until we as Pennsylvanians push these issues to the top of the agenda our Cities, townships and boroughs will all be relegated to compete locally rather than band together, demand excellence and compete regionally and nationally for a brighter Pennsylvania future. We are not looking for a bail-out but rather that we receive the equitable resources to chart our own course and not settle for mediocrity but truly make York great.

Progress will not happen on its own. For the city to thrive, all partners -- all of us -- have to row in the same direction, and it will take dedication, persistence, and perseverance. And we need your help in moving forward and spreading the word of York’s great opportunities. It truly is an honor to speak before you today and it truly is an honor to serve our great City. Thank you.