



The State of the City Address

As presented by Mayor James Bernard

on Tuesday, September 4th, 2007

First, I want to thank the Milwaukie Rotary Club for inviting me here today to talk about the state of our City. This is my sixth time addressing you on this subject. I'm honored to appear on behalf of my fellow Councilors, Staff and Milwaukie's citizens.

There's been a lot of change around here since I delivered my first address back in 2001.

For example, in 2001 on Main and Harrison across the street from City Hall we were still struggling with the future of the old, run-down, vacant Safeway grocery store. The City had control of the property through a lease-purchase with Safeway. It had been the site projected for a new transit center, but that idea fell through. Other development ideas included a coffin warehouse or a taxidermy museum. According to the Downtown Plan that was adopted in September 2000 that parcel was slated to be the location of a downtown anchor. Neither a coffin warehouse nor a taxidermy

museum seemed to be the kind of anchor that would successfully launch revitalization in the Downtown.

Today that property is the site of the mixed-use North Main Village, bringing people and energy back into our Downtown core. In just a couple months North Main will be home to a high-end restaurant.

In 2001 McLoughlin Boulevard was a drag strip where motorists flew through Milwaukie without noticing that they had passed us by.

Today, with our ornamental streetlights and crosswalks, our planted pedestrian refuges, and the removal of the two buildings that once stood in the way of views of the Willamette River, we are treated to a much different scene. We now see spaces of green and river, and you can really imagine the possibilities of our future Milwaukie Riverfront Park. Shortly after we finished the McLoughlin Boulevard Project we received an unsolicited e-mail from a daily commuter that said, "My drive through Milwaukie was the ugliest part of my

commute. Now I look forward to it-it is so beautiful. Nice job Milwaukie!"

And back then, light rail was almost a dirty word in this community. Those who supported it had seen the possibility evaporate in the late 1990's. But as the region grows, and we see the congestion build all around us, this community has become excited to take advantage of the kinds of things light rail brings: increased investment, development, and better public transportation access to the City of Portland, Portland International Airport, and communities east, west, and south of Milwaukie. Light rail also affords others an alternative for accessing our City and the revitalized Downtown we envision.

In 2001 Milwaukie had been part of the North Clackamas Parks and Recreation District for almost ten years—having been transferred by the City to the District pursuant to the City's decision to join the District when it was approved by the voters in 1990. Other than the transfer and a change in signage identifying it as a District park facility, nothing had been done to realize the vision that voters

thought they had approved. This past spring the District began play on a new, state of the art softball facility that has already been host to regional softball tournaments and new visitors to our region. Most important, our kids (and their parents) now have a real alternative activity they can pursue, and it is in the City of Milwaukie. Thanks to the Board of County Commissioners, County Administrator John Mantay and his staff, we are doing something to bring in tourism dollars to this region. More important, we are investing in our kids rather than just talking about it.

I have talked about real physical changes since 2001, but something else has changed – something that’s harder to define but I think is much more important. Every Sunday I work our Farmers Market. I talk to hundreds of people of all ages and walks of life—many of them Milwaukie residents and many non-residents but long-time Market customers. Despite their varied backgrounds they are united by two things. The first—and it has been present for years--is their dedication to the Market. The other—which has developed in the past few years--is their excitement about where Milwaukie is headed.

There is an optimism in this community that I had not felt the first time I made this address in 2001. Today people picture a revived Downtown with shops and restaurants to visit. They see a Riverfront Park that draws people from around the region and a North Clackamas Park that provides a real alternative for kids wishing to do more than hang out in the mall. They see a Milwaukie that is no longer being passed by time and progress—a Milwaukie that is taking an active role in its future and the region.

I don't think this kind of growing optimism comes out of nowhere. I believe it's the product of past successes and a sense that the City and its residents are joined in an effort to awaken Milwaukie and help realize all of its potential.

The new North Main Village is a part of this. The new McLoughlin is a part of it. The new Safeway Store on King Road is part of it. The new Gramor Development across from the Milwaukie Marketplace is a part of it. All that we are working on right now that will come about in the years to come is a part of it.

I mentioned light rail a second ago. In many ways this project reflects the change in attitude I'm talking about. Early this spring, with the I-205 light rail project underway, TriMet and Metro turned its attention to Phase II of the project, Portland to Milwaukie light rail. It had been a while since the community had thought about light rail, so staff went out and held a series of meetings around town to reacquaint people with the project. As a result of these meetings, staff heard that another alignment, one that uses Main Street, McLoughlin or 21st Avenue, or a combination of the three, should be considered for further study. In July I called for a pair of workshops and invited interested parties to examine the idea. We had about 75 people attend the first one, more than 100 attended the second one. A couple of design options were created. Milwaukie staff reviewed these options and studied how they would function within the vision of our Downtown & Riverfront Plan and other long-range planning documents. In the end City staff recommended that an alternate downtown alignment not be forwarded for study. On August 7th City Council adopted that recommendation, and the study--and the

project—now move forward. On August 17th Governor Ted Kulongoski signed legislation adopted by the State Legislature this year that commits \$250 million in lottery funds as a significant part of the local match required to secure federal funding for the project. Current projections have construction beginning in 2011 and for the line to be up and running in 2013. The six and one-half mile alignment between Milwaukie and Portland, which would enter Milwaukie along the existing Tillamook Line tracks, will connect an estimated 20,000 daily riders to the existing MAX system, creating access to the central eastside, south waterfront, downtown Portland, Hillsboro, Gresham, and Portland International. You will be able to catch your flight or pick up visiting family and friends by riding light rail from Milwaukie rather than searching for the least costly and most accessible airport parking alternative.

I think this is an important story to tell because it highlights a couple of things.

First, the City was responsive to the community, and the community was fully engaged in the public process that was created.

Second, staff made a tough decision – a decision it knew would make some people unhappy – but one they believed was the best for Milwaukie and consistent with the Downtown vision.

Third, the vast majority of testimony provided to Council early last month was in support of the staff recommendation to stay the course and in favor of bringing light rail to Milwaukie.

Finally, Council made a tough decision that advanced the objective of bringing light rail to Milwaukie.

I think this all points to this basic idea I talked about at the very beginning of this speech. There's a different feeling in Milwaukie, and I believe it exists because we are actually doing something to move a vision forward. There's a confidence in this town that we are heading

in the right direction. And because of this confidence, Council was empowered to make a tough decision about light rail.

With that as a backdrop of sorts, I'd like to tell you about a couple of projects I believe will help grow this confidence.

On August 21st Council signed what is called a "Memorandum of Understanding" with Tom Kemper and Main Street Partners to develop the Town Center Project at the corner of Main Street and Harrison across from City Hall.

This is the next step in the Downtown's revitalization. As you can see here, at the site of the former Olson Brothers Texaco, is an entire block that will hold a mixed-use development with storefronts on the bottom and condos and town homes on top.

Plans call for 76 town homes and condos, 10,000 square feet of retail space on Main Street, 6,000 square feet of office space facing McLoughlin, and 80 residential parking spaces within the first floor.

This will be a signature project for Milwaukie. It's right on McLoughlin, and the upper floors facing the west will have some of the greatest views the Willamette River has to offer.

Now the hard work will begin, can the project be built and still produce a profit for Tom Kemper and Main Street Partners. Competition for raw material prices are on the rise as is an over burdened labor force, for example competition for raw materials added an addition \$1 million to the North Main project. We will be working hard to address these issues over the following months.

I've mentioned Milwaukie Riverfront Park a couple times. I'm excited to report that we're making good progress here. We've already adopted the concept plan, shown here, and the City has allocated \$300,000 for David Evans and Associates to develop the final design plans and to navigate the land use approval and permitting

processes. Once completed, staff will begin submitting grants in the spring of 2008, and construction is planned for 2009.

What I think is so impressive about this design is that it is the product of more than five years of hard work and a lot of citizen input. Our citizen-based Riverfront Board did a fantastic job working together in order to come up with a plan that is friendly to both boaters and for those who want to see more green space. It wasn't easy, but they did it.

There are some great features in this design

Milwaukie's Riverfront has been underutilized and underappreciated for far too long. The development of Milwaukie Riverfront Park will mark an end to all that. This park will become the jewel of our City, and I'm sure it will draw people from around the region.

Just to the south of the future Milwaukie Riverfront Park is the Kellogg Treatment Plant. The region's growth has pushed the existing system to its fullest capacity and for the past several years the City

has worked with Clackamas County and nearby communities to find a regional solution that is cost-effective and environmentally responsible. I believe that any solution we might arrive at will include the removal of the treatment plant from our Riverfront. Our vision of a Riverfront without the treatment plant remains constant and our policy will be to support an alternative that realizes this vision.

In a nearby project, the City has secured just over \$1 million in federal transportation grant money to pay for preliminary engineering, environmental analysis, and design work for the Kellogg Lake restoration and enhancement project.

Once completed, this project will allow us to replace the Kellogg Lake Bridge over McLoughlin and build a mixed-use path that runs underneath McLoughlin Boulevard to gain a straight connection between our downtown and Riverfront Park. Furthermore, this project includes the removal of the Kellogg Dam and restore fish passage for several endangered and threatened fish species.

We have much to be proud of here in Milwaukie. There's so much more to talk about:

The updating of our Transportation System Plan, which implemented the most extensive public outreach and involvement process to date in the State of Oregon. In total the City hosted almost 30 meetings in which over 100 people participated.

The TSP is an important document that contains the City's long-term transportation goals and policies for pedestrians, cyclists, drivers, transit users, and freight carriers. It identifies the issues and projects that are important to the community, and it helps the City obtain transportation funding from State and federal agencies.

We can also be proud of the fact that in 2006 our Police Department reported a 27% decrease in "Part 1" crimes, which include homicides, burglaries, robbery, and assaults. 27% - this is the greatest drop in Part 1 crimes in the entire nation.

In 2006 we adopted a Street Maintenance Program that will protect our substantial investment in our roads – a public asset worth more than \$65 million dollars.

Staff went out and educated our citizens and businesses of the benefits of implementing such a program, and you all responded.

Increasing taxes is never easily done, but our residents and business community recognized the shape our roads are in and of the City's financial position. I thank you for your support.

The program took effect in July and your dollars are already at work.

This construction season crews finished repairs to 37th Avenue from Lake Road to Highway 224 and 42nd Avenue from Johnson Creek Boulevard to Harvey. Next year we'll take on King Road from 43rd Avenue to Hollywood and Oak Street from Highway 224 to Monroe.

Our local economy continues to boom. Over the past year, companies including PCC Structurals, Portland Mechanical, and Day Wireless have all announced significant expansions. In total between 600 and

750 new jobs have been added to the local economy. PCC Structural's alone committed to investing over \$25 million in new plant and equipment in Milwaukie and nearby facilities.

In closing, a lot has changed and in the coming year and beyond things are going to change even more here in Milwaukie. But if we hold on to the things we value most, like citizen input and citizen participation, I'm confident we will continue growing in ways that respect our past.

There's a new feeling here in Milwaukie, and I'm proud and excited to be a part of it.

So back to the purpose of this speech—the State of the City. I think we can say that the state of the City of Milwaukie is great!

Thank you.