

STATE OF THE CITY

Mayor David A. Bowers

August 12, 2010

NOTE: THE MAYOR MAY ABBREVIATE OR ADD TO THESE REMARKS.

With the coming of each summer, the Roanoke Chamber of Commerce graciously arranges for you to join me for the presentation of my assessment of the City of Roanoke. So, first, please allow me to express my appreciation to our sponsor, the Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce, which has always been on the forefront of business development and business advocacy here in Roanoke, and continues to do so under the leadership of President Joyce Waugh.

And to all of you in attendance today, thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to come to this 2010 State of the City of Roanoke address.

I wouldn't expect that any of you, in preparation for today's remarks, went back over my previous speeches from the summer of 2008 and the summer of 2009, but I did.

In 2008, I was able to assure you that the "soap opera" at Roanoke City Council was over, that the Members of Roanoke City Council, everyone of them, had pledged to work towards a collegiality on the Council, towards a positive

attitude of working together and being respectful when we differed on issues. "To disagree without being disagreeable" was sorely needed at the time. In the summer of 2008 we began that courtesy, have adhered to it, and have been respectful of the differences of our colleagues. Consequently, we've put a good face on the image of Roanoke City Council. I've often said that Roanoke is very proud of being a part of Western Virginia and we want all of western Virginia to be very proud of Roanoke, and that starts with the people of the region being proud of the service and presentation by Roanoke City Council members. That, I'm pleased to tell you, we've achieved and we'll continue it with this new Council in place since July 1, 2010.

Last year, in the summer of 2009, I emphasized the importance of our people being involved in the process of our government. I recognized the steady influence of Vice-Mayor Dave Trinkle on our Council and the long tenure of former City Manager Darlene Burcham. We recognized Roanoke Police Officer Bryan Lawrence, who came to this forum in a wheelchair. I'm pleased to tell you that Officer Lawrence continues to recuperate and is again working at the Roanoke Police Department. The personal involvement and hard work of Dean Cynda Johnson of the Virginia Tech Medical School and Dr. Ed

Murphy of Carilion Clinic were recognized as they worked to open the Virginia Tech Carilion Medical School.



This year, I want to start, as I have done in each of my 2 prior State of the City speeches, by recognizing distinguished members of our City Council.

Please join me in recognizing Dr. Rupert Cutler and Gwen Mason who just ended their terms on City Council as of July 1 of this year. We thank them for their service to our City.

I also want to recognize 2 other members, Court Rosen and Sherman Lea, who sometimes serve as a team within a team, building consensus for our Council.

In particular, I want to recognize Court Rosen because he made the bold proposal earlier this year to increase the meals tax for the benefit of Roanoke City Schools. He should be commended for taking that stand early on and working to build a consensus among the Members of City Council in support of it. Roanoke now has positive momentum in turning our inner city schools into one of the premier school systems in Virginia. We have not been lame in trying to address the educational needs of our young people. But, with the current economic slowdown, the prospect of continued momentum was in doubt. This additional revenue source from you, our citizens, and others from around

the region who come into Roanoke restaurants, will, in my opinion, provide the needed financial basis for continued success and improvement in our city schools.

And, my thanks to Sherman Lea. It wouldn't surprise you that Sherman Lea wanted to play football in the NFL, but he's made his mark in the life of this community and this Commonwealth by being a good family man, a supervisor in the state probation office, former school board member and Vice-Mayor of the City of Roanoke. All the members of Council appreciate his warm hearted and caring approach to the issues which we face and we always appreciate his good humor. Please join me in recognizing both Court Rosen and Sherman Lea.



This year, I want to give you a checklist of some of the things that we've accomplished over the last couple of years with this Power Point presentation.

- Our bond rating has been stabilized. I'm not a financial wizard, but I understand the value of having a solid bond rating for our City. I was disappointed to learn after I became Mayor that Moody's rating agency had downgraded Roanoke prior to July 1, 2008. We still have a AA-2 rating with Moody's, but I'm pleased to tell you that, through the efforts of Director of Finance Ann Shawver,

we continue to have a very solid and positive AA rating from Standard and Poor's and AA+ from Fitch's.

- The rating agencies say that Roanoke's strengths include successful redevelopment downtown, growth potential related to the Virginia Tech Carilion and Riverside development, and "strong" and "proactive" financial management down at Roanoke City Hall. These include good current financial positioning, sound financial practices, policies concerning debt issuance and the use of debt, a strong management team supported by your elected representatives on City Council and a demonstrated ability to repay the debt. As your Mayor, I pledged 2 years ago to make sure that our bond rating is stabilized and ultimately improved, and I believe we're now on that course.
- Our new City Manager, Chris Morrill, was hired after an extensive search and interview process.
 - He took office March 1 and I can tell you without a doubt that Chris Morrill has brought a new positive tone among the employees of

Roanoke City Hall and a "can do" attitude as to the city government's involvement with citizens and businesses. Someone down in Savannah said, "We'll loan you Chris Morrill with a double back money guarantee", but I believe that this bright young executive has charmed his way into the hearts of Roanoke, and I also believe that Roanoke has charmed its way into his heart and that of his family, and that Roanoke has become home for Chris Morrill.

- Roanoke successfully hosted the Virginia Municipal League Annual Conference in October, 2009.
 - We had an opportunity to showcase our City to other Mayors and other leaders from other parts of Virginia. With the help of the Virginia Tech Highty-Tighty's, the Hotel Roanoke, Taubman Art Museum and others, Roanoke really shined as the "star" of Virginia.
- Roanoke was named a bicycle friendly community in May by the League of American Bicyclists. Roanoke joins Alexandria, Arlington and Charlottesville as Virginia's only bicycle friendly communities.
- Greenways are a hit with our people.

- Back on a cold day in the winter, we opened the missing link of the Roanoke River Greenway near Roanoke Memorial Hospital. The greenway is now open from Wasena Park to the Buzzard's Roost treatment plant, a total of 6 miles. We will soon be dedicating the bridge over the Roanoke River west of Wasena Park to the new Vic Thomas park by Memorial Bridge. Within the next 2 ½ years, we will extend the river greenway west to Bridge Street in Norwich and will build another bridge over the river on the east side of Roanoke extending the greenway past the Buzzard's Roost treatment plant to connect to the Tinker Creek greenway. We've also added interpretive kiosks along the Roanoke River and Pathfinders for Greenways and the Kiwanis Club of Roanoke have added river trail mileposts.
- A recent census on a Saturday along the Roanoke River Greenway showed that 3,000 people on that 1 day walked, ran, rode bicycles or pushed child strollers along the greenway and enjoyed the outdoors and the natural amenities of the Roanoke River and the beauty of our mountains.

- Clean and green efforts have continued in the past year, demonstrating our commitment and stewardship of the precious environment which we have here in Roanoke. The Virginia Sustainable Building Network recognized the City of Roanoke's Clean and Green campaign as the most sustainable community program in our State in 2010. A conservation easement was enacted on Mill Mountain preserving for eternity most of the land which has been entrusted to us. We held contests for "the greenest loser" and "fill your bin and win" to encourage citizens to implement green practices into their daily lives. The Clean and Green Business Coalition announced in June that it had surpassed its goals. It's business members have reduced their carbon emissions by 80,000 tons, or 20% in just 2 years. Our citizen of the year, Stan Breakell, has been a leader in this business effort.
- Roanoke earned its national certification in February of this year from the National Weather Service, which indicates that the City has done everything possible to improve emergency first responder and citizen preparedness in the event of a natural disaster. This was quite an accomplishment.

- As I said earlier, in my opinion, Roanoke City Schools have turned the corner and we have a positive momentum for the schools in our community, thanks to the leadership of School Board Chairman Dave Carson and Superintendent Rita Bishop.
 - We've spent over \$100 million of tax payers money to open a new Patrick Henry High School and now a new William Fleming High school.
 - We're continuing the Virginia Western Community College scholarship access program allowing more than 100 eligible seniors from Roanoke City Schools to attend Virginia Western.
 - More than 100 students from Forest Park Academy graduated as part of the 2010 class. This is the 2nd year of the specialized middle and high school program designed to meet the needs of over age and under credited students.
 - I'm pleased to tell you that Fishburn Park elementary school continues as a model environmental school and that's where we conducted the Arbor Day ceremony in the spring of this year.

- Fallon Park elementary won the 2009 National Excellence in Urban Education award.
- Patrick Henry High School was named one of the top high schools in the United States by Newsweek magazine.
- Most impressive, our graduation rate, which just a couple of years ago was at 58%, has been inching upwards and I'm pleased to tell you that the graduation rate for the school year ending 2009-2010 was 66%.
- Roanoke City Council continues to be committed to public art being placed at our civic facilities and in our neighborhoods.
 - Here are some of the art pieces that have been installed over the last year, including "Beneath the Roundhouse", a kinetic sculpture at the market square walkway bridge, the "Aspire" bus shelter designed by students of Patrick Henry and the "Coalesce" bus shelter designed by students at William Fleming, and "Reading Garden" sculptures, one of my favorite, is now located at Gainsboro library.

- Public Safety is still priority #1 for a local government:
 - You can rely on the professional response of Roanoke's Police Department, Fire Department and 9-1-1 services.
 - We've opened a new firehouse on Orange Avenue in northwest Roanoke to serve that neighborhood.
 - New recruits recently graduated from the Roanoke area fire training school and we're pleased to have these young men and women as part of our nationally accredited fire department.
 - The Roanoke police department continues to be nationally accredited and we extend our thanks to Chief Joe Gaskins for his 12 years of leadership. The department was first accredited 16 years ago in 1994 and has been successfully reaccredited 4 times, including a perfect on-site assessment in 2008 with all 459 applicable, mandatory and nonmandatory standards met 100%.

- The statistics tell a good story: the crime rate in the City of Roanoke has been going down for the past 5 years.
 - Violent crime has dropped city wide more than 26%.
 - Property crime has dropped more than 18%.
- One of the most intriguing and interesting new police efforts here in Roanoke is the department's use of the geographic policing system, which has become a model for police departments across the nation. With this scientific analysis, Roanoke Police can actually see on a map where crimes are occurring and can send our police officers in that area to apprehend the criminals who are doing those crimes. It's not a perfect system, but it is a pretty good predictor and it has helped to bring our crime rate down in Roanoke.
- I want to end my remarks regarding our police department and fire department by recognizing Officer N.D. Comas, a former Marine, who earlier this year reached over the railing to save a woman who was jumping off of the 10th

Street bridge. It is acts of daring and courage each day, performed by our police officers and fire personnel, who literally save the lives of Roanokers like you and me.

Congratulations and thank you Officer Comus and the members of the nationally accredited

Roanoke Police, Fire/EMS and 9-1-1 departments.

- The Virginia Tech Carilion Medical School just opened its doors to its new enrollees just days ago. Much of the credit for this goes to Dean Cynda Johnson, Dr. Ed Murphy and their staffs, but the City played a big part in identifying a deserted, dusty backside of the south downtown area, reclaiming it and redeveloping it into Riverside Center, an area that has now seen over \$100 million of investment. The opening of a new Cambria Suites Hotel and our biggest pride of all, landing the Virginia Tech Medical school with it's Hokie stone right on the front entrance, are all part of the biggest economic development initiative in the history of Roanoke since the railroad came to town over 100 years ago.



Now, having looked back at our accomplishments, let me spend the next few minutes looking to the future. We need to

jump-start our "Big Mac" capital improvement program. "Big Mac" stands for the market, the amphitheater and Countryside. While it is important to maintain good performance of municipal services, it's also important for the City to maintain a progressive capital improvement program, an investment of taxpayer dollars in the building of new projects or renovations that create jobs and economic incentive for the future. Council took a go-slow approach during these economic times on 2 of the 3 "Big Mac" projects, I challenge the Council to move forward on the other two. And...by the way...the money available should dictate the magnitude of the project, not vice-versa.

- The Market Building is the 1 of the 3 that is underway. I have not always been impressed with City maintenance of it, nor have I felt that we've done right by the tenants that have faithfully occupied that building. Be that as it may, the Council has now decided, with my concurrence, that the building must be closed. It's in bad shape. It has electrical, air conditioning and plumbing systems that are more than 25 years old. No wonder the mice were running through there a couple of years ago. It must be gutted, it must be cleaned up and we must

undertake this process so that it will be of benefit to our downtown and to our market area for the next quarter century. The building will be closed after Labor Day, but we got a good bid from Martin Brothers, one of the oldest and most reliable construction companies in Roanoke, and they think that they can speed up the opening before Memorial Day 2011, just 9 months from now.

- The City has created a website to share updated information about the market building and photos of its progress throughout the next several months, and I'm convinced, under the leadership of new City Manager Chris Morrill, a team has now been put in place to actively monitor the project with a daily presence at the Market Building and inspectors specifically assigned to continually review progress and move the renovation along speedily.
- I can't tell you yet what tenants will be present in the building, but I am of the opinion that we are going to do everything that we can to get the current tenants back in the building and to make sure that, when the market

building opens just 9 months from now, it really will be, once again, the "gem" of downtown and a place that people from all over the region will want to visit.

- But, as to the other 2 projects of our "Big Mac" capital improvement program:
 - Vice-Mayor Dave Trinkle has been the leading advocate for a downtown amphitheater, and we were right on the verge of getting that project underway. Roanoke City Council wisely decided to pull back on the project at the behest of our Director of Finance in order to maintain our bond rating. It was a tough, but correct decision at the time. But, now let's see if we can re-start that amphitheater discussion.
 - Likewise, the 3rd project in "Big Mac," Countryside, has been an ongoing problem for the City for some time going years back before I became Mayor. I'm determined to see that something good is done out there. It's still my thought that our best option is to turn Countryside into a municipal golf, tennis and swim center. If other members of Council or

other citizens, have other ideas in mind, then put them on the table. But, it is not right for the people of the Countryside neighborhood to wait in limbo for another decade.

Countryside should not be another Victory Stadium debacle that lingers on and lingers on and lingers on. "We" need to get it done.

- My challenge to the Council regarding our "Big Mac" capital improvement program is that we've got 1 down and 2 to go and, in just the next 18 months, Roanoke City Council should make a decision to move forward on the amphitheater and on plans for Countryside which are acceptable to the neighborhood. The clock is ticking!



Finally, I want to tell you about some of the many volunteers who help us here in Roanoke. I've asked several of them to set up booths around our breakfast meeting this morning. You'll see representatives from the Clean and Green group and the Cool Cities environmental advocacy group. We have Pearl Fu here representing Local Colors and Jack Tompkins represents our very popular 7 sister cities. Old Southwest neighborhood

representatives are here because their neighborhood was named number 1 in America, and Estelle McCadden was recognized by the National Conference as being the neighborhood leader of the year in America! Our thanks to the folks here at Member One who have financially sponsored the gushing of the fountain between the Hotel Roanoke and the Roanoke Civic Center.



Let me end with recognition of the Members of Roanoke City Council who now serve you. As I said 2 years ago, and I'll say it again, every member of this Council, has pledged to work together and be respectful of the differing views of our colleagues. We will continue to govern and, although we may not always agree, we will NOT be disagreeable. That's what our people want and that's why we can say to you once again that Roanoke is proud to be a part of Western Virginia, and we want all of Western Virginia to be proud of the Star City.

We are Roanoke, a spectacular, one-of-a-kind, all-American, great place to live, work and visit. Roanoke is a Star!