



OFFICE OF MAYOR VIRG BERNERO
124 W. MICHIGAN AVENUE – NINTH FLOOR
LANSING, MI 48933

EMBARGOED UNTIL 7PM
Tuesday, March 14, 2017

CONTACT: Randy Hannan
517/483-4147

Mayor Bernero Delivers Final State of the City Address

“Lansing Strong” Highlights City’s Progress Over Past Twelve Years

(LANSING) -- Mayor Virg Bernero delivered his twelfth and final State of the City Address this evening at Sparrow Hospital on Michigan Avenue, reflecting on twelve years of progress under his leadership, including more than \$2.4 billion dollars in new economic development that retained and created over 12,000 jobs.

“I couldn’t be prouder of what we - all of us, together - have accomplished over the past 12 years. We fought our way through the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression,” Bernero said. “We made the tough decisions - and the strategic decisions - that helped put Lansing back on the map, and back on the path to prosperity.”

Bernero ticked off a series of leading economic indicators that demonstrate the strength of Lansing’s recovery, including the lowest unemployment rate in 15 years, rising home values, steady job growth in key economic sectors, three straight years of population growth, and four consecutive years of city budget surpluses.

Highlighting the instrumental role of the Lansing Economic Area Partnership (LEAP) in driving economic progress in the city and region, Mayor Bernero awarded LEAP president and CEO Bob Trezise an honorary Key to the City.

Bernero touted the resurgence of the Michigan Avenue Corridor, the rebirth of REO Town, and major investments by General Motors, the AF Group, Jackson National Life, Emergent Biosolutions and many others for contributing to metro Lansing’s comeback.

“Michigan Avenue is springing back to life, with nearly a half-billion dollars of new investment rocketing down the corridor, from SkyVue to Sparrow’s new Cancer Center to the impactful work of the Brothers Gillespie,” Bernero said. “REO Town is on a roll, sparked by the new BWL Cogeneration Plant, a vibrant new streetscape, and the ingenuity and sweat equity of a new generation of small business owners who are bringing REO Town back - one storefront at a time.”

[more]

Noting his role in securing millions of dollars from the federal government to conduct environmental remediation at the former GM plant sites in Lansing and Lansing Township, Bernero said he is looking forward to the redevelopment of the Verlinden plant site and hinted that “more good news” is coming soon to the vacant industrial property on the city’s west side.

Turning to immigration issues, Mayor Bernero sharply criticized the Trump Administration for its policies and reaffirmed the city’s commitment to being a welcoming city for immigrants and refugees. He announced a new initiative - “A City of Kindness” - that will encourage Lansing residents to embrace and respect the diversity that makes Lansing strong.

“Amidst all the turmoil, division and hatred, let’s not take our eyes off the prize - a truly equitable and just society that honors, respects and values everyone, regardless of race, sex, religion, ethnicity, national origin, sexual preference or gender identity,” Bernero said. “Instead of looking at our differences with suspicion and fear, let us look at them with mutual respect and openness. People of all faiths, let us commit together that we will redouble our efforts to treat one another with kindness.”

Mayor Bernero highlighted his administration’s efforts to improve Lansing neighborhoods through the Block-by-Block neighborhood wellness initiative and the city’s partnership with the Ingham County Land Bank to reduce blight. He noted that safe neighborhoods are the building blocks of a safe city, citing authoritative data from the FBI Uniform Crime Reports that show Lansing’s crime rate has been cut in half over the past two decades.

Looking ahead to the prospects for repairing or selling the current Lansing City Hall, Bernero said his administration will soon issue a national Request for Proposals to gauge interest in redeveloping the prime downtown real estate now occupied by City Hall and building a new structure or refurbishing an existing building to serve as the new City Hall.

Mayor Bernero also surprised former Lansing mayor David Hollister by announcing a proposal to name the current and future home of city government as the David C. Hollister City Hall, honoring Hollister’s lifelong legacy as a public servant.

“Mayor Hollister forged and led the community partnership that kept GM in Lansing. He tendered regional partnerships that share the benefits of new investment and new jobs. He challenged us to think about Lansing as a ‘world class city’,” Bernero said. “David Hollister laid the foundation. Today, we are building ‘Lansing Strong’ on top of that foundation.”

Mayor Bernero highlighted the Board of Water and Light’s successful 12-year project to eliminate lead pipes from the city’s water distribution system, an initiative he championed as Lansing’s state senator, the planned construction of the Central Substation and a new power plant, and the city-owned utility’s “Lansing Energy Tomorrow” plan that will make BWL “the cleanest, greenest utility in Michigan.”

“Soon the BWL will break ground on the new Central Substation that will provide reliable power to the downtown area. In the near future, BWL will build a new power station that will provide the baseload capacity needed to power Lansing for generations to come,” Bernero said. “As a result, the coal-fired Eckert plant will close on schedule, and I am tremendously excited that we already have interested prospects for redeveloping Eckert. We proved it can be done with the extraordinary transformation of the Ottawa Power Station and stay tuned for what comes next.”

[more]

Recounting his administration's accomplishments in advancing regional cooperation, Bernero noted the successful countywide millages for Potter Park Zoo and regional Trails and Parks, as well as recent progress toward establishing a regional fire services authority that would "save money and save lives."

Looking ahead to the future of regionalism in Metro Lansing, Bernero outlined a bold vision for regional governance that he said would establish "a place to start thinking and acting like a region, instead of perpetual, parochial siloes. No community is an island. We sink or swim as a region."

Bernero called on future elected leaders to establish a Lansing Metro Council that would be empowered to administer a regional sales tax, which would fund regional priorities like public safety, infrastructure, transit and economic development. A regional sales tax would have to be authorized by the state legislature and then approved by local voters.

"The expenditures would reflect regional priorities, not parochial ones. It would encourage us to think about what we have in common, rather than focusing on our differences. And, if we are smart in how we invest those funds, we will grow the pie, rather than competing with each other to get a bigger share of a shrinking pie," Bernero said. "Let's be honest: Taxpayers are going to have to ultimately foot the bill for fixing our infrastructure and resolving unfunded liabilities. If the state won't do it, we have to do it ourselves. We must lift ourselves by the bootstraps."

Bernero tied the need for regional governance and funding to the "broken model of municipal finance" and the state's failure to invest in infrastructure, especially local roads that continue to crumble due to the lack of sufficient state funding.

"Like every Lansing resident, I am beyond frustrated with the condition of our local roads. And I am beyond frustrated with our state legislature, which continues to ignore the problem," he said. "The so-called 'road funding fix' approved by the Legislature two years ago will bring us about six million dollars more per year when it is fully phased in by 2022. That's five years from now. I shudder to think what our roads and our cars will look like by then."

Mayor Bernero noted the success of his administration's investments in "our human capital," including the work of the Information Technology Empowerment Center (ITEC) in developing new ways to teach children about science and technology, the nationally-recognized work of the city's Financial Empowerment Center in teaching people how to manage their finances, and the city's efforts, led by Dr. Joan Jackson Johnson, director of human relations and community services, to house the homeless and feed the hungry.

Renewing an inspirational phrase that he used when first elected mayor, Bernero concluded his final formal address to city residents by asking them to "Believe in Lansing."

"Believe in the strength that we have when we put our shoulders to the wheel. We can achieve great things when we stand together. Believe in our people and the values we share. Believe in our future prospects to be an even greater city and region than we are today," Bernero said.

"I believe in all of you, and I thank you for believing in me for all these years."