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Mayor Bernero Calls on Citizens to Help Build Lansing's Future

Calls 2007 'Banner Year' for New Investment and Job Growth

Announces New Incentives to Revitalize City's Housing Stock

(Lansing) – Calling 2007 another “banner year” for economic growth and investment in Lansing, Mayor Virg Bernero tonight reviewed his Administration’s achievements over the past year and challenged Lansing citizens to be the “architects of our own future.”

In his third State of the City address, Bernero said that Lansing is poised to become one of the great Midwestern capital cities, propelled by a resurgent downtown, new investment in high-tech jobs, award-winning performances by General Motors cars built in Lansing and new partnerships to strengthen neighborhoods and public safety. To help revitalize the city’s neighborhoods, the Mayor announced a new initiative to offer Lansing homeowners tax incentives for qualified home improvements.

Bernero delivered his 2008 State of the City address at the Lansing School District’s Hill Career Academy. The city recently announced that it will invest \$2 million to create a new South Side Community Center at the facility.

“I am pleased to report that the state of our city is good – and growing stronger. 2007 was another banner year of economic growth and investment in Lansing. Even as our state continues to battle economic storms, Lansing is making strides toward economic recovery and renaissance,” Bernero said.

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“Change is no longer just in the air, but on the streets, in our neighborhoods, along our riverfront, and in our downtown,” Bernero said. “Everywhere I go, people are talking about the positive changes in Lansing. And folks, it’s just the beginning. The best is yet to come.”

Mayor Bernero listed many of the region’s assets – the seat of state government, Michigan State University, Cooley Law School, Lansing Community College, General Motors, and a creative and talented workforce – saying that Lansing had all the “ingredients for greatness.” He called on citizens to help leverage these assets and grow Lansing into one of the great Midwestern capital cities. Michigan’s Capital City, Bernero said, is poised for transformation, standing on the cusp of an economic renaissance.

“Our unemployment rate is far below the state average. We are leading the state in new job creation. We have leveraged more than half a billion dollars in new investment that will literally transform the skyline of our city and create thousands of new jobs,” he said. “We have sent the message loud and clear – Lansing is open for business. We are rolling out the red carpet – instead of red tape – and we are getting results.”

Bernero touted several new economic development projects that are in the pipeline for the city -- part of \$500 million in new investments – including the redevelopment of the historic Ottawa Street Power Station on Lansing’s riverfront, the Capital Club Towers condominium project, the Kalamazoo Gateway project, the new Michigan State Police Headquarters and the proposed Market Place and Ballpark North projects that aim to revitalize Lansing’s downtown riverfront and create a new home for Lansing’s historic City Market.

“With the help of an amazing group of public and private sector partners, we are reinventing Lansing’s urban landscape,” Bernero said. “Giving our city more curb appeal will help us keep more of the young people who graduate by the thousands from our colleges and universities.”

Endorsing a proposed summer millage initiative to enhance Lansing’s libraries and build a new, world class library and children’s museum -- a merger of the Capital Area District Library and the Impression 5 Science Center -- Bernero emphasized that downtown Lansing is driving economic progress for the entire city.

“With each new development, with hundreds of new workers and downtown residents, we are building a stronger tax base, generating new dollars that we can use to enhance our neighborhood safety, improve youth recreation programs, fix our roads and maintain our parks,” Bernero said.

Beyond the downtown, Bernero hailed the recent achievements of General Motors’ automobiles built at the Lansing Grand River and Lansing Delta plants. Joined by the UAW production teams from each facility, he hoisted the 2008 Motor Trend Car of the Year Award – the famed ‘Golden Calipers’ -- won by the 2008 Cadillac CTS, built at the Lansing Grand River plant. He applauded the cooperation between GM and the UAW, saying the great vehicles built in Lansing are the result of their great partnership.

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Like GM, Bernero said other companies are helping to retool the local economy, infusing it with new, high-tech jobs. He pointed to the announcement earlier this week that the now-closed Holmes Street Elementary School on the city's East Side will soon be reopened, allowing local technology firm Spartan Internet to expand into the school and to partner with the city and MSU to create a new Information Technology Empowerment Center – ITEC – to help Lansing youth develop the knowledge and skills to succeed in the global economy.

Bernero said that the economic renaissance in Lansing is having a direct result on the quality of life in the city's neighborhoods. He pointed to beefed up enforcement efforts against vacant, deteriorating properties through the Neighborhood Enhancement Action team, and strengthened community policing efforts and neighborhood watch groups. He lauded new housing developments that will leave the drawing board and break ground in 2008.

In announcing his new proposal to offer incentives for home improvements, Bernero said it would be modeled after successful incentives that the city offers to downtown developers. He said the incentives would help the city grow its tax base, increase home ownership and create new construction jobs.

Bernero also offered help to those homeowners struggling in the country's mortgage foreclosure crisis, saying it is "an enormous threat" to the city's economic health. He said the city is ready to offer help to homeowners who are having mortgage problems, urging them to call 2-1-1 or visit the website www.holdontoyourhome.org.

The City's new Go Green! Pledge is aimed at helping the city become a national leader in environmental stewardship and energy efficiency, Bernero said. The mayor encouraged Lansing residents and businesses to help make the city greener and cleaner by visiting the new Go Green! website at www.gogreengolansing.com.

Bernero noted that the city has made great progress in putting a stop to the irresponsible spending habits of the past, but warned that tough decisions still lay ahead. "Over the last two years we erased \$17 million in budget deficits without raising taxes, without laying off employees and without draining our reserves," Bernero said. "In the year ahead we will face our greatest fiscal challenge yet. To overcome this challenge, we must take bold action to contain exploding health care costs."

"Last year my team and I led the way by becoming the first city employees ever to pay a share of our health care premiums," he said. "Tonight, once again, I call on this Council and on our employees to join us. In these tough times, Lansing citizens have made sacrifices and so must we."

Bernero concluded his address by reminding citizens that change is often tough, but necessary in an ever-changing world. "Won't you join me in dreaming big dreams for our city, for ourselves, and our children? Let's work together to make those dreams come true," Bernero said. "We stand at the doorway to our future. Together we can walk through that door and build a better future for Lansing and each of our residents."

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