



State of the City 2007 – Mayor Karen Majewski

Welcome everyone, to the 2007 State of the City address. We're all here because we have a profound interest in the future of the City of Hamtramck--whether our family goes back generations here, or whether we are the ones setting down new roots and establishing new homes in this city that has welcomed so many before us. And so even as I have been welcomed here, I welcome all of you.

Once again, the State of the City address comes when nearly half the year is already behind us. We can attribute that to the many projects that are in process--just as last year, I waited in the hope of being able to give you definitive word on some of them. And just as last year, some have come to fruition, and others are still working themselves out.

But it's a product of our enormous energy and potential that there really never is a moment when we can take a breath and rest easy--even when one project is finished, not only is there much yet to be done, but more essentially there is much more that is in the process of being done. So today I want to tell you how far the city has come in the last year, as well as update you on what you can expect to see as the rest of 2007 unfolds. We all want a Hamtramck that offers us the security and stability of home, and the inspiration and opportunity to develop our potential and stretch our souls. A Hamtramck that is vibrant, healthy, and just. And I know that you are willing to contribute your own energy and resources to creating a Hamtramck in which we can be safe and comfortable, but also challenged to develop and grow. No one in this city fought harder to see that Hamtramck residents were treated fairly and that standards of health, safety, and quality of life were given the same weight here as they are in richer communities, than the late councilman and Mayor Pro Tem Rob Cedar. His loss in March was a staggering blow--professional and personal.

Hamtramck is a better place because of the battles he was never afraid to fight on our behalf; and at the time of his death he was working on several vital projects--including the still-evolving bike trail and a multistage lead poisoning prevention initiative. It was a test of our new charter when his vacant position, as well as that created shortly thereafter by the resignation of Councilman Tim I Nowakowski, was filled and council business resumed with relatively short interruption. On behalf of the entire city I welcome our new councilmembers Alan Shulgon and William Hood, who bring their own strengths and priorities to the council and for whose presence I am grateful. These were unforeseen challenges, which we met and overcame. Were Rob still with us, I know he would have been fighting in two additional causes that we've been dealing with in 2007. One was the copper theft crisis which resulted in portions of our neighborhoods repeatedly losing phone service over several weeks. It took a lot of pressure from all of you to get AT&T to adequately address that problem, and while the jury is still out on a long-term solution, your pressure seems to have paid off. Our voices are strong when we join them together and direct them strategically.

A new issue that has just come up is the State of Michigan's plan to close its Department of Human Services facility on Denton Street by the end of June. We are also bringing every influence we can think of to bear to keep that facility open so that our residents in highest need are not further disadvantaged in seeking the services for which they qualify and which our taxes support. When I spoke to you last year, we were consumed by budget issues. And the budget is still our biggest headache. So it is for the entire state, and for nearly every municipality in it. It is truly a tribute to our City Manager and our Finance Director that even in this frightening



economic climate, we've been able to keep our heads above water. We ended this year, once again, in the black, and have a balanced budget proposed for 2007/08.

Of primary importance is our settlement of the Dickerson Jail PILOT dispute with Wayne County, which was finally resolved this spring, after two and half years, on terms we consider fair and acceptable. I never imagined, when this first became an issue in late 2004, that it would take till 2007 to settle. But I've been discovering that nearly everything takes much longer, and happens by a much more circuitous route, than common sense would suggest. So it is, also, with our state-mandated Emergency Financial Status. In fall of 2006, the State of Michigan officially announced that Hamtramck had met its benchmarks and that full financial independence would be restored. We are still awaiting the governor's decree to this effect. It's rather a moot point, since we are now functioning independently and without state oversight, but it is nevertheless one of those loose ends we expect to see tied up in 2007. Of greater concern to everyone in Hamtramck should be the contract signed by our state-appointed Emergency Financial Manager Lou Schimmel with the fire fighter's union.

As his parting gesture to the city (I leave the nature of that gesture to your imagination), Mr. Schimmel negotiated a contract that created a tiered caste system that left new union members with a limited benefit and pay package, while buying off long-time fire fighters with bloated incentives. Contrary to what some outside of city government are saying, in spring of 2006 the city manager, finance director, attorney, and myself met with union officials numerous times, for many, many hours, over the course of several weeks in an effort to renegotiate the contract in a way that would balance the benefit package more equitably. All the city's many proposals and counter-proposals were rejected by the union negotiators, without ever having been brought to the rank and file for consideration.

As a result, in the end, Mr. Schimmel's contract stood, and a recent interpretation by an arbitrator resulted in certain benefits being tripled--in essence, accumulating as though each day consists of 72 rather than 24 hours; .No one discounts the vital and dangerous work done by firefighters. And we are all grateful for the fact that we have a professional, well-trained, and dedicated fire department that can reach any corner of our city within minutes. We want to see those public servants fairly compensated. But "fairly" has to mean in balance with the other vital services our city is obligated to provide, legally and morally. It does us little good to have one of the best-paid fire departments in the State of Michigan if we can no longer pick up garbage. If we can't pay for street lights on Jos. Campau. If City Hall is shuttered. It is the responsibility of the City administration to maintain a fair balance.

The arbitrator himself admitted that we are forced by this contract to pay "benefits at three times the amounts most citizens would consider normal." That is not fair, and it's not balanced, and please remember that the City offered alternatives which were rejected. I spend so much time on this issue because I know it's of concern to everyone, and that some inaccurate information has been circulated.

But also because I want you to know what the City has managed to do with limited resources in the last year, and the kinds of programs we would prefer to spend your money on. Not the least of which is to provide the fire department with a new pumper, which we have struggled to include partial funding for in the 2007/08 budget We all experience every day the poor condition of many of our streets. And we know all too well that we can't afford to repair every street at once. But we have to start somewhere, and start we have. Our capable and dedicated Public Works Director, Marty Ladd, has instituted an aggressive road maintenance program, in



conjunction with a long-term plan to repair, repave, and in some cases rebuild city streets. Think of the last time you saw this kind of proactive attention paid to our infrastructure.

The process has not always met all of our quality expectations, but we've been making adjustments as problems arise, rather than denying and ignoring missteps. As part of this plan we will be expanding and rebuilding Alice--undoubtedly our most neglected street--with special attention to sidewalk repair and other improvements for Holbrook School. In addition, federal funds will largely pay for rebuilding Dequindre and Nagel streets--which will dovetail with MDOT's reconstruction of our bridges and overpasses, and the placement of decorative fencing and attractive new landscaping at I-75, to commence in 2008.

Finally, Wayne County is committed to rebuilding Jos. Campau south of Holbrook and north of Caniff, the first phase of which will begin in July. While a handful of streets at a time may not seem like much, in conjunction with these partnership projects we will see a visible difference in our streets, entryways, and alleys. And as we continue this program think of where we'll be five years from now, then ten. And think, too, of other initiatives coming out of the Department of Public Works. New, simplified plans have been worked out with Preserve our Parks for the bike path which is planned to come up along Hamtramck Drive to Veterans' Park, and eventually connect with the other segments reaching south to the Detroit River and north to Pontiac. Largely through Mr. Ladd's initiative, the City is applying for a grant for improvements to Zussman Park, including a bandstand, making full use of the park's central location to bring us all together for community events. In the longer term, we are working on ideas for improving Veterans Park and for new productive uses of the skating rink, handball courts, and grandstand.

At long last the first group of bus shelters was installed. It does my heart good every time I see folks getting to sit down, out of the rain and cold, as they wait for a bus. Those who argued against this program warned that homeless people would be sleeping on the benches, and that the shelters would soon be covered in graffiti. We've had no problems that I'm aware of with people using the bus shelters as hotels; we've had occasional problems with graffiti, but the DPW crew has been cleaning those up right away, and as a result the taggers have been focusing elsewhere. Regarding the graffiti problem--which is a major source of blight, especially in our alleys--the city is investing in specially-formulated graffiti resistant paint, and is in the process of putting together a program for cleanup and repainting, which still must rest mainly in the hands of property owners.

The DDA and the block clubs are also looking at solutions to this problem, particularly in the alleys. But let's take an example from the bus shelters and from other cities that have successfully fought this problem--when graffiti is quickly and repeatedly removed, taggers move on. Mr. Ladd has also instituted a sewer inspection and cleaning program which has already covered 22 of the 47 miles of sanitary sewer. We will be protecting and prolonging the life of the water main in front of city hall with a new lining, in addition to making other mandated safety improvements to the building. We've begun scheduled street-sweeping, planned for every street, residential and commercial, in the city (and we ask you to please pay attention to the signs and stay off the streets when they are marked for sweeping).

City-owned lots are now being mowed, through a contract with one of our local non-profits. After several years in which abandoned properties were not even boarded up, demolitions of derelict properties will be proceeding throughout the year under a couple of different programs. I know it seems to take forever for problem properties to be addressed--this is an issue on some of even the most well-maintained streets in the city and with our state economy as it is, coupled



with the bottom falling out of the low-cost mortgage industry, the situation is likely to get worse before it gets better.

But there are legal requirements that complicate and prolong the process, to all of our frustration. Rest assured, however, that complaints are taken and properties are put into the system, then channeled to the most appropriate program. Mr. Ladd is also exploring the possibility of a Blight Court, similar to that set up by other municipalities, to expedite and simplify this process. In the meantime, through both Mr. Ladd and his staff and Mr. Erik Tungate and the Economic and Community Development department, we are working with the State on a demolition program, for which we've just submitted paperwork this past Friday; we have our own city program, for which we contract out and which has ten properties on its initial demo list; and we are participating in Wayne County's blight abatement program, which is also a long process, but which after close to a year is starting to show results--some of the empty homes you see being fixed up around town or slated for demo are a result of the county's pressure.

We're using every tool we can think of, plugging into every available program, to get these problem properties taken care of. It's a huge task, and a frustrating one. But like the streets, we are tackling it one house at a time, and while the progress may be slow, it is steady. We're finally starting to see the results of processes we began in 2006, and the effects will be cumulative. Let me say a few more words about the work of Mr. Ladd's office. I get a lot of complaints about code enforcement: from the people who get tickets who think they shouldn't; and from the people who think more tickets should be issued. I'm sure Hamtramck is like every city from that perspective. But here's my word of warning: if you as a property owner or resident bring down the quality of your neighborhood, bring down the quality of life for your neighbors, because you abandon your property, neglect your property, because you allow your property to deteriorate, your weeds to grow, trash to accumulate, because you disrupt your neighbors' peace, because you rent to people who make life less secure and less pleasant for those around them--in short, if you treat your property, your neighbors, and the community without respect, you will be pursued to the highest degree the law allows.

It may take us a while to get to you--we have an overworked and understaffed office and legal requirements to follow--but believe me, we already have you on our radar--this is a small town after all--and you will be called to account. And finally, another piece of good news I know you've been waiting for, as I have. Our new street signs will start to go this month. This will include new Handicapped signs that conform with changes in the law that requires them to be placed higher up for greater visibility. It took a couple of years to finally get everything in place, but I'm ready to kiss the guy who puts the sign up at Pulaski and Mackay. Related to these quality of life and enforcement issues is the question of public safety.

Last year I told you about the Weed & Seed 1.5 million dollar, five year grant program, administered through the U.S. Justice Dept., for which the City of Hamtramck is applying. Our Weed & Seed grant was submitted on time this spring--and I can tell you that it was a Herculean. We have not yet received word on the status of our application because of delays at the federal level that have nothing to do with us. But the work of the Weed & Seed steering committee and the neighborhood activists that have plugged into the effort through newly-formed or revitalized block clubs, neighborhood watch associations, community gardens, and organized clean ups, have given a shot in the arm to localized commitments to fight the good fight for our neighborhoods. About half the city has now been organized, with plans to establish block clubs in the rest of the city as well.



The Hamtramck Police Department has demonstrated its commitment to community policing, doing outreach through the block clubs, and offering reduced-cost clubs and organizing VIN etching to combat auto theft. This spring, the department was evaluated by an outside agency which will report back with its own suggestions for improvement as well as indications of what we're doing well.

But the evidence of some things the department is doing well are clear: While we all know that crime is likely to increase in a bad economy, and in fact that increased vigilance, which the block clubs rightly encourage, can mean higher crime statistics because fewer crimes go unreported, I can report that while robberies were slightly up in 2006, forced entry burglaries and auto theft--2 of our greatest public safety concerns--were down by about 20%. In addition, the department has been aggressively and proactively cracking down on speeders as well as apprehending carjackers and other violent criminals. In the last six weeks alone, the Hamtramck Police Department has arrested five carjackers and recovered weapons as well as the stolen autos. Drug traffickers have also been targeted: this month the department will auction over 20 vehicles which were seized from drug dealers, with the proceeds going to further narcotics enforcement. You'll be seeing a notice in the paper soon. The department also has some new tools and soon will have new personnel: City Council has mandated a Traffic Program which will dedicate two officers to targeting the bad driving habits which are especially dangerous in a city with so many pedestrians.

The department has 3 new vehicles, and is waiting for a proposal to replace antiquated video and radar for the entire fleet. New Mobile Data Terminals will allow officers to run checks on suspects from their vehicles, to fill out reports on the road rather than back at the station, and eventually even to identify individuals by thumbprint from the squad car. In addition, the Office of Homeland Security has supplied 12 new radios which will allow seamless communication with other police departments in the event of emergency. These equipment upgrades and supplemental funding are much appreciated, but our auto theft program is under threat as the governor's proposed plan reapportions the money that pays for our two auto theft officers. The attorney general has ruled against this aspect of the plan and in favor of cities on this one, but we know how tense these state budget negotiations are right now, and encourage you to let your state legislators know that Hamtramck depends on this program in our ongoing fight against auto theft. It would be shameful to lose the program now, especially when it is showing such strong success. The Hamtramck Police is doing its job, but we all have our own role to play in combating crime. Hamtramck used to be known as a place where everyone knew each other's business--I don't know if that was considered good or bad--but let's take it in its best sense--and recommit ourselves to keeping an eye out for each other and our ears open.

This is our home. We can't ignore the sound of breaking glass in the alley or footsteps on the porch next door; we have to go back to peeking out the window when we hear voices in the street or a car starting up in the middle of the night. And we have to call the police when something doesn't look right. Pure and simple. The responsibility for maintaining a civilized society rests with each of us. We each have to own our little piece of the block. To facilitate that, the Hamtramck Police Dept. has established a Street Crimes Officer position, and encourages you to anonymously report suspected criminal activity. The number is 876- 7838. It is monitored



24-7, and as I've said, you can report suspicious activity without identifying yourself. Not only can, but MUST. This is our obligation as citizens. But the hardest lesson is not to be discouraged when that drug house isn't shut down immediately, or stolen property continues to pass hands-- investigations often have to be carried out over a long period of time to create an airtight case, and rushing the process can be counterproductive. Speaking of neighborhood improvement, I hope you're as excited as I am to see all the new homes being built as the city moves forward to fulfill its obligations under the R-31 judgment, which we should have completely behind us by August of 2008. At that time, we should have about 150 brand new homes built for the plaintiffs in this racial discrimination lawsuit against the City.

THE thanks for putting the pieces together for this historic, momentous (maybe even miraculous) achievement go to Community and Economic Development Director Erik Tungate. Try to imagine the amount of red tape and paperwork, not to mention the weight of long years of inertia, that had to be overcome to push this project through after 38 years. The implications of putting this case behind us are many: we will be able to market other city residential properties which until now the city has not been allowed to sell; we will have hundreds of new residents, paying taxes, spending money, attending school, and adding to the cultural framework and viability of our communities; we will have attractive new housing to increase the value of local properties and encourage neighborhood revitalization; and we will, most profoundly, have owned up and done the right thing. There are other residential developments in the works as well.

As I've said before, nothing goes as smoothly or as quickly as we expect it to, but at last the Polonaise Manor Townhouse project on Mitchell Street is on track, with construction of seven three-story units to begin by July 30. The Unique Urban Space Live/Work Lofts are nearly completed on Jos. Campau's south end, with a grand opening later this month. And other Jos. Campau loft redevelopment projects are in the pipeline. When it comes to commercial properties, Hamtramck continues to provoke a lot of interest among developers. The Maine Street Plaza on the corner of Gallagher and Caniff was scheduled to break ground this past week, but ran into a small glitch that should be cleared up later this week. (I'm beginning to get used to this, now!) However, four of the six retail storefronts in that project are already leased, and include a fruit market and local coffee shop. Across the street, Bozek's market is expanding after its 2006 fire. Fresh Valley Fruit Market is moving to a larger location on Caniff and expanding its operations. The parking lot next door will also be the site of a monthly farmer's market, organized with as part of the state's Cities of Promise program's Arts and Culture component and facilitated by Councilman Scott Klein. Each month's farmer's market will have an ethnic theme, and it will kick off on Saturday, June 23. Other projects, including a proposed National City Bank parking garage, are still on the drawing board. And a handful of other projects--some of them quite substantial--can't be discussed as yet, because negotiations are still underway.

Until things are more definite, you'll have to make do with rumors. I know that everyone is waiting to hear about plans to redevelop the Shopper's World site. And I have to disappoint you all by telling you that we're not yet in a position to discuss that.

Things do move slowly and in fits and starts. But it's worthwhile to remember that eventually, change really does happen. This site, as well as the other larger vacant properties on the north



end of Jos. Campau, are a constant sore point for us, and their redevelopment is an active concern. One important force for positive change in our downtown district is the Downtown Development Authority. Last year I congratulated the DDA on its rebirth, after being dismantled--rather I might say disemboweled--by Mr. Schimmel.

This year it was Wayne County that created one obstacle after another for DDA funding. In the end, however, recognizing how essential the DDA is for revitalizing and reinvigorating our Jos. Campau business climate, the City agreed to retrace its steps and jump through the County's evermoving hoops to make sure the DDA was not just up and running, but fully funded, with a legally-recognized development plan and a professional downtown manager. This we finally succeeded in doing just last month. Continuing on the economic development front, the Hamtramck Economic Development Corporation, which brings together municipal, corporate, and non-profit partners from Detroit and Hamtramck to facilitate cooperative development and employment opportunities has had its first meeting, and will soon be incorporating with the state. And the state of Michigan, through the Cities of Promise program, will be funding a revised Master Plan for the city of Hamtramck with several additional components, including an arts and culture plan (through Artserve), an industrial development plan, an infill housing development plan (to help us deal with the lots freed up after our R-31 obligation ends), a revised parks and recreation plan, and a revision of our zoning ordinance. We see abundant possibilities for the City, and want to make sure that we're well prepared and have the tools and resources in place to make wise decisions and take advantage of opportunities developing around us.

We have especially been looking for various ways to plug into evolving plans for public transportation, including light rail, to connect us with the City of Detroit and our neighboring inner-ring suburbs. On a smaller scale, for instance, our participation in the Motown's Downtowns initiative connecting us with downtown Detroit, Ferndale, and Royal Oak for special events has been an enthusiastic success. And by continuing to create connections and participate in regional and state-wide organizations and initiatives, we are committed to keeping Hamtramck at the table as long-range, fundamental decisions that effect us are made. An important component of that interconnectedness has been our cooperation with the State of Michigan as one of 9 Cities of Promise, which began about a year ago. Together we have instituted five areas of focus, each with very specific projects and partners: economic development, housing, infrastructure, social and cultural, and a signature project, which in our case is a much-anticipated Hamtramck Historical Museum. I've already covered some of the activities of these different committees as they fold into other projects and city departments.

Another I want to point out is the Safewalks to Schools initiative, spearheaded by Councilman Scott Klein, which is bringing together representatives of the state and federal government and the charter and Hamtramck Public Schools to work on specific safety and well-being issues effecting the immediate neighborhoods of our school buildings. While no one will deny that there have been tensions between the charter schools, the Hamtramck Public Schools, and the city administration, this program is a hopeful sign that we are all willing to work together for our common goals. But I especially want to update you on the Historical Museum. This week the Friends of Historical Hamtramck, which is the non-profit corporation supporting the work of the Hamtramck Historical Commission, will be putting an option on the former Pieronek Studio on Jos. Campau as the site of the future museum.



The State of Michigan has committed \$20,000 for architectural renderings of the site, which are the first step toward a full-fledged fundraising campaign to purchase and renovate the building. We have been working with State officials, with local experts in museum administration and fundraising, and with a management and development team to put all the pieces in place. This will be another long-term project, but we are ready for the next step. People like to say that with Hamtramck it's one step forward and two steps back. But no path worth walking is ever smooth, and I hope you agree with me that we are on a good, good path. You know, when I went back to graduate school in 1988, I couldn't actually envision the day I'd actually graduate. I just knew I was taking on this project, and being stubborn I wouldn't stop until it was finished. It was incredibly hard; sometimes it was humiliating; often I doubted my abilities. And it took 10 years, but the day did come when I walked up on stage to accept my Ph.D. (and now, amazingly, it's almost 10 years later). But this is how I did it, and this is how Hamtramck will do it--you get up every day and you do a good day's work whether you feel like it or not, you take on each task as necessary, you get excited by some and some you just slog through to the end, you stand up for yourself when you need to, and you find good people to work with who have expertise you lack, while you give them a hand with your own expertise.

And while you're too busy doing all that to give much thought to it, time really does pass, the projects do get checked off, and things DO get accomplished. This is the job the city staff, and I, and my city council associates, are now committed to for the City of Hamtramck. I know we've always taken a certain pride in being the underdog, but I hope you see that the self-image of Hamtramck as poor stepsister has outlived its usefulness. We are growing in population--the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments estimates that our population has grown by over 2,000 residents, that's nearly 10%, since the 2000 census.

We have arguably the most diverse per capita population in the state, in an era in which diversity is recognized as a positive cultural component and economic stimulus. We are situated in shouting distance of the largest municipality in the state, with its own problems, we grant, but also with an exciting energy of revitalization that we should be applauding and exploiting. We have a fiercely loyal populace, and a positive reputation that I can tell you follows us all over the state. We may not be rich, but we are not without resources, not without energy, creativity, will, and positive drawing cards that attract others to us.

We've not always been treated fairly, but it's time to stop thinking of ourselves as victims--victims of the economy, victims of Lou Schimmel, victims of geography--you can fill in the blanks yourselves. It's time for us to take our rightful place at the table with confidence that we belong there, that what we bring is of value and importance, that we expect respect and deserve to be considered on our own considerable merits. This is the direction the City has been pursuing for the last year, and the results are showing. We are on a good path, a worthy path, and we are worthy of the good places that path can take us. A city is a work in progress, and we are the energy that drives that progress. Though I hear a lot of complaints, I'm heartened by peoples' overwhelming willingness to contribute, to find a way to help.

Even the complaints are a positive sign that no one is giving up on Hamtramck, no one is complacent, that everyone sees around them our great potential, and that the will survives to see



that potential realized. How can you yourself get involved? There are ways and more ways, big and small. I'm just going to quickly run down a few. Please consider plugging yourself in to ongoing projects like the block clubs (if your neighborhood doesn't have one, there are folks who can help get one started), community gardens, and especially clean ups (the Beautification Commission is very active and one of the driving forces in keeping our city liveable).

Take part in local cultural, sports, religious, veterans, and civic activities--you will meet your neighbors and help weave a cohesive community. Consider offering your skills to the city as a member of a city commission--these are appointed, unpaid positions about which the city clerk can give you more information. Make a commitment to, as far as possible, keep your money in Hamtramck--save gas by buying from Hamtramck merchants, eating in Hamtramck restaurants, and using Hamtramck-based services. Save even more gas and do your business in the city on foot--you'll contribute to a lively street life and by your presence help make our city streets safer. Keep your own property, your sidewalk, and the street in front of your home or business clean. It doesn't take but a few minutes a day to pick up the stray papers and pull a few weeds. You can do it during a commercial break.

Be kind to each other.

Look out for each other.

Report crime and suspected crime.

In short, be responsible and connected.

This is your Hamtramck. This is OUR Hamtramck. Love this crazy place, respect it, nurture it, take responsibility for it. Watch it grow and help it grow.

In other words, OWN it.

Thank you all.