

Remarks of Mayor Noam Bramson
State of the City: Wheels Up
March 3, 2016

Members of the Council, City Manager Strome and Colleagues in Government – especially Commissioner Howard Rattner, who is retiring after 23 years of able service – to the Community Leaders, Partners, Neighbors, and Friends who are present and to those watching at home: Good evening.

As we meet tonight, New Rochelle has the:

- Fourth lowest tax rate in the entire state.
- Our highest fund balance in 8 years.
- Our lowest violent crime rate in 16 years.
- Our smallest municipal debt in 25 years.
- Our fewest burglaries in 55 years.
- And our best bond rating since FDR was in the White House.

In 2015, businesses in New Rochelle sold more goods and services than ever before in our history. And in 2016, we're on track to break that record all over again.

Last year, more than 600 families bought a home in New Rochelle; hundreds more rented. Choosing our community as the place to set down roots, raise a family, or retire among friends.

Even Mother Nature's doing her part . . . since last winter, snowfall is down 73%. (By the way, I completely made up that number, but it sounds about right, doesn't it?)

So, in case there's any suspense about the punch line of this speech, let me get right to it: the state of our city is strong.

And I haven't even gotten to the good part yet. We're going to make our city even stronger.

The Best Development Opportunity in the Hudson Valley

Last December, a unanimous, bipartisan Council approved the most ambitious downtown development plan in the entire Hudson Valley.

The potential for up to a million square feet of new retail. More than two million square feet of new office. 5,500 new apartments. Hundreds of new hotel rooms.

It's not the numbers that count; it's what they add up to: a thriving city center where all of us can find a place to shop, a place to work, a place to meet, or a place to live. Sustainable growth for a region that's greener and healthier. Financial terms that put taxpayers ahead, with annual revenue as high as \$70 million. And a message to the world, loud and clear: New Rochelle is open for business.

And this plan won't gather dust on a shelf. We'll achieve our vision through a unique development framework that takes full advantage of all New Rochelle has to offer and that gives New Rochelle an unprecedented competitive edge . . .

- Unprecedented confidence. Our master developers at RDRXR now have an exclusive on multiple public properties, and, therefore, a special stake in the success of our downtown. Their own projects will have enormous catalytic value. But it's more than that, because when a strong, well-capitalized partner places big bets on a place, it says to the rest of the business community: you won't be alone, get in now, because New Rochelle is on the rise.
- Unprecedented flexibility. In fact, the most flexible new zoning code in Westchester. It's something called a form-based code, which means instead of dictating this use for this site and that use for that site, it allows just about any use on every site. That matters, because a vision that doesn't match the market is like a Ferrari without a gas tank – looks nice, but it's not going anywhere. By contrast, when builders can respond quickly to shifting market demands, that's when shovels go in the ground.
- And unprecedented efficiency and predictability, with an approval process that sweeps away barriers to success. Usually, the State's environmental review regulations entail months, if not years, of expense and uncertainty – and that can scare lots of people off. Not here in New Rochelle. We've already completed the environmental impact statement. It's approved. For the whole zone. Essentially that means no dragged-out delays, no costly reports, no last-minute legal obstacles. Any project consistent with the City's vision, gets that monopoly card: Advance to Go.

So there has never been a clearer path to doing business successfully in New Rochelle. And that's a profoundly important change. But there's also another side to this, just as important. Because while a good investment climate is necessary, it's

not sufficient. Our end goal isn't a healthier rate of return for developers – that's just a means; our end goal is a healthier city.

So this clear path for builders is also a smart path for the rest of us.

- The same zoning code that offers all that flexibility on use contains our highest standards ever for design. A continuous active street-front – no more blank walls or empty spaces, upper level setbacks tailored to the width of each road, and special attention to the features that make a city beautiful and exciting – corners, vistas, and the crowns of a rising skyline. Every project has to exemplify the best planning principles and enhance the downtown as a whole.
- We've created a fair share mitigation fund that, for the first time, requires developers to contribute to the infrastructure and capital needs that come with growth, including the construction of classrooms or schools.
- For residents who need pathways to new careers, we're creating a job training program that offers opportunities in construction and beyond . . .
- And for residents who need a decent place to live on a working family's budget, we're insisting that 10% of new apartments be affordable, with incentives for even more.
- And they're incentives, too, for lots of other public goods through our new height bonuses. To build a little taller and get all the income that comes with those great views, it's simple: give us something back that matters to our community . . . preserve a historic structure or show us cutting-edge green design, create a new park or provide some open space. That's what public-private partnerships should be about.

So put it all together. Combine this new shovel-ready development framework, these smart standards for community benefits, with everything New Rochelle already has – the best location, the best transit options, and when Penn Station access is completed, a direct connection to the east and west sides, closer to Manhattan than any other stop – put it together, and from every perspective, this is the most exciting development opportunity in the entire region – maybe one of the best in America.

That's what we did together this past year.

And this year we're wasting no time putting the plan into action.

Just a couple of months in, and RDRXR has already announced their first project – a 28 story tower that will make a bold statement at the western edge of the downtown and – I am especially happy to report – will include a new public performance space that brings life and energy to a whole block of Main Street, while preserving the historic façade of the old Loew’s theater.

To introduce a little much-needed showmanship into this event, I want to invite my Council colleagues up to unveil the rendering. And it’s appropriate that they do so, because even though I get to give this speech, everything I have spoken about is a team effort, for which we share equal responsibility.

[Council Unveils Rendering]

This project is exactly the kind of marriage of private investment and public interest that our downtown plan is purposefully designed to create. And it’s not even on one of the City-owned sites for which RDRXR has an exclusive – that’s still to come. What a great way to get started!

And that’s just the first example.

Because as more people wake up to the extraordinary potential of New Rochelle and learn that we are open for business, interest in our city is growing by leaps and bounds.

At this very moment, within our new downtown development zone, two other projects are already under construction, two more have been approved by the Planning Board, and multiple *major* projects – *transformative* projects – are under active discussion with our staff – ranging from hotels and conference centers, to condos and rentals, to restaurants and retailers.

Not all will make it to the finish line, but then others will be coming on to the track. And if even a few get done, the positive change will be dramatic.

If I sound excited, it’s because I am, and because I know what it took to get here.

Momentum

For so many years, it felt like New Rochelle’s downtown was sort of this big jumbo jet that had all the right parts to cruise at 30,000 feet, but just wouldn’t take off. Sometimes we were grounded by bad weather, sometimes there were too many

other planes stacked up ahead, sometimes the flight crew couldn't agree on the runway . . . or the destination . . . or the in-flight movie. So we just kept taxiing around the airport, getting more impatient.

Well now, finally, for all of us who have struggled and sweated in the cause of a better, greater downtown as good as this city deserves – the professional planners and citizen advocates, the neighborhood leaders and business owners – for everyone who invested time, or faith, or money – whether you're the pilot of the plane or the engineer, a passenger or even a piece of luggage (I won't mention any names.) Finally, for all of us, it is wheels up. New Rochelle is ready to fly.

So what next? Do we set the auto-pilot and recline back in our seats? Do we just say our prayers for a good economy to the Almighty (or to Janet Yellen, not necessarily in that order) and then wait for things to unfold as intended?

That's one approach. And because of the hard work that brought us to this point, because this development framework is, in a sense, self-supporting, we might even do fine.

But let me ask you this?

If your business is finally getting noticed and pulling in more customers, do you pick that moment to cut back on your hours? If you're running for President and you win the primaries on Super Tuesday, do you leave for a long vacation on Wednesday? If your team just scored three touchdowns in a row, do you take your quarterback out of the game? If Steph Curry is on a hot streak, do you put him on the bench? Do you do those things?

Hell no!

When you've got momentum, you run with it. You press it home for all it's worth. If we want the best chance of success, then this is no time to sit back and relax. This is the time to seize hold of tomorrow.

So here are three big things that can help us make the most of this moment and help ensure that progress downtown lifts our city as a whole.

Tell Our Story

First, tell our story.

We may have the best economic development plan in the Hudson Valley, we may have a city with the best bones and the best potential, but none of that will do us any good if the right people don't know about it.

Now, some level of knowledge just emerges naturally through the press, or word of mouth, or presentations to business and planning groups (. . . or by forcing people to attend this speech.) Like I said, there's already good interest. But I don't want to leave any stone unturned. You never know which contact could lead to something special.

That's why our development staff is working hard right now to create and then execute a systematic and comprehensive strategy for reaching out to the business and investment world, with professional marketing materials that tell our story in a compelling way.

We'll take our show on the road. We'll bring potential investors here. We'll have one-on-one talks, group presentations, bus tours, meet & greets. I'll bring a bullhorn to Times Square, if that's what it takes (or maybe Luiz can do that.) And we will do it with no time to waste – starting this spring.

While we're at it, we'll also tell our story to a wider audience, too. Because we all know image can be self-fulfilling. When it's positive, it can boost your ability to attract customers, your housing market, even your civic pride. Everything.

That's why last year, we created our new brand – ideally yours. And now this year, we're rolling it out.

Here's the new logo on my lapel. You all have yours at your tables. Soon you're going to see it on City entry signs and on t-shirts, on baseball caps and on shopping bags, in store windows and on street banners. (I'd tattoo it on my forehead, if Catie would allow me. Which she will not.)

And it's not just a logo. You'll hear and see why New Rochelle is ideally yours when you browse the web, when you listen to the radio, and when you watch TV . . . maybe even when you take the train or subway (right next to Poetry in Motion and Dr. Zizmor.)

To help us do it right, we'll be assisted by a team that shaped the imagery and message for top-flight clients like Nike, Banana Republic, and the NBA – and that's lead by homegrown talent: New Rochelle's own Greg Valvano. Greg, take a bow.

And to make sure we have the biggest possible reach with a message that's repeated and amplified, we'll invite the key institutions of New Rochelle to join us. Our three great colleges, our invaluable hospital and elder care providers, our outstanding Library, and our award-winning School District – we'll ask them not only to integrate our brand into their own communication, but also to pool our resources to augment an effective campaign.

After all, we're in this together. Just as New Rochelle is, in large measure, defined by its opportunities to learn, its access to medicine, and its centers of employment – so, too, each of these vital institutions is lifted by the success of our community as a whole. It just makes sense for us to work side-by-side for the common good.

And, by the way, that same philosophy applies also to each of us as citizens, because telling our story well isn't just a governmental or institutional responsibility; we all have a role to play.

Every time you introduce yourself as a resident of New Rochelle, every time you describe your hometown to a friend – whether you're commenting on-line through social media, or chatting on line at the supermarket – you shape how people look at our city.

So talk us up. Be a good will ambassador. Express the confidence you want others to feel.

To be honest, we could probably do better on this front.

People who share a community can be a little like a family. And nobody knows your flaws better than your own family. (Jeremy and Owen could describe my flaws for you in very great detail – hopefully, not right now!) So sometimes we say things out loud – in company – that are better kept amongst ourselves.

Look, I know that New Rochelle has its share of real problems that should never be swept under the rug. And I think lots of folks in town feel like the best way to get a problem solved is to post it on Facebook or announce it at a public hearing.

But this is a moment when our city really needs to put its best foot forward. So, let's do ourselves a favor. If you've got an issue or complaint, write me an email, call your Council Member, come by the City Manager's office – we'll respond. Keep it in the family. You don't have to shout it from the rooftops.

We can be our own worst enemies or our own best friends. With such a great opportunity hanging in the balance, let's each demonstrate the New Rochelle, let's each be the New Rochelle we want others to see and know.

Let's come together and tell our story proudly to all the world.

Our Whole City

Next. Although the downtown is rightly our top priority because its condition affects everything else, New Rochelle doesn't begin at Maple Avenue or end at River Street. Ten square miles is a lot of territory. And 80,000 is a lot of people.

We have gracious homes representing every architectural era and fitting every lifestyle.

We have neighborhoods of incredible cultural dynamism like the West End, which for a century has offered new Americans a gateway to a better life.

We have multiple commercial centers, from Wykagyl to Weyman to Wilmot, that each have their own distinct needs and challenges.

And we have hundreds of acres of parkland in which to kick a ball, swing a bat, hike a trail, take a swim, or simply enjoy the quiet peace of nature.

You know, there's a good reason that Barry Fertel fights for Beechmont Lake. And that Liz Fried advocates for the Wilmot Woods Pond. Assets like these are essential to the long-term value homeowners receive for their investment in New Rochelle, not to mention strong and growing property values.

So if telling our story is the first big thing we can do to make the most of this moment, then the second big thing is this: take the same determination that shaped our downtown vision and apply it now with equal vigor to rest of our city.

Big picture, that means finishing our Comprehensive Plan. A good Comp Plan can help us make smart decisions about what to preserve and what to change. It can bind individual land use choices and approvals into a coherent, community-supported whole, so that we know where we're going and don't stumble into controversies on the way.

Our current Comp Plan is twenty years old, long past its useful life. With tons of public participation, we've been working to update it for long while now. No more

waiting. Let's put in place a clear vision that extends from Davenport Neck to Lincoln Avenue to Scarsdale Park, and let's make a commitment to getting it done this year.

And, of course, nothing's more important to our neighborhoods – and to our lives – than the health of the environment. A few years ago, New Rochelle adopted its first sustainability plan, GreeNR. And we've already made big strides in meeting its goals.

This year, we'll do even more . . .

We'll introduce New Rochelle's first bike share program, making cycling easier than ever before, and helping reduce emissions while we boost public health.

We'll replace all of our nearly 7,000 streetlights with new LEDs that cut electricity use by about two-thirds and cut the City's electricity bills by about \$650,000 every year.

And soon residents looking to cut their energy costs will get help from:

- Energize New Rochelle, which offers free expert consulting, connections to contractors, financing tips, and much more for home weatherization and HVAC upgrades. Check it out at EnergizeNY.org.
- And from Community Choice Aggregation, which will pool the buying power of all electricity consumers in several municipalities to give us all lower prices and a better mix of clean, renewable energy sources – that starts in May.

All these efforts and others reflect GreeNR's guiding principles. They're right for our environment. They're right for our wallets. They're right for our city. And they're right for our world.

Finally, if there is one area that deserves special focus from every perspective – neighborhood, environmental, and economic – it's the waterfront.

OK, it's fair to say that the City's waterfront efforts haven't always gone as intended. (And by that, I mean the same way that the voyage of the Titanic did not go as intended.)

And we all get why. The choices are hard. Undoing the planning mistakes of the past is a bear. And sometimes getting to a big benefit tomorrow requires making a sacrifice today. We all want to get it right, but don't always agree on what right is.

But that doesn't mean we should stop trying. When you stumble, you get back up; you learn from your mistakes. You do better the next time. That's what we teach our kids. And now that the hard, labor-intensive zoning and environmental work for the downtown is done, we have the bandwidth to turn our attention back to the shore.

So let's set a few important, but achievable, waterfront goals for this year.

First, let's complete the Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan. Like the Comp Plan, the LWRP sets big picture standards for the whole shoreline. It puts us in a better position to apply for grants. And, to offer just one important example, it would be an essential precursor to implementing the great recommendations of the Davids Island Task Force.

Second, let's take a fresh look at the combined potential of the Municipal Marina, Hudson Park, Wildcliff, and Five Islands. Together, these invaluable public spaces offer sweeping access to the Sound, a relatively affordable opportunity for boating, and a wonderful venue for performances.

And they will get better:

- Fresh off their success with Amy's Greenhouse at Barnard School, Millie Radonjic and her board of community volunteers have taken up the challenge of renovating the greenhouse at Hudson Park. Thank you, Millie, for your energy and drive.
- After the devastation of Hurricane Sandy, the Hudson Park sun deck was completely rebuilt. Hats off to Commissioner Bill Zimmermann for his supervision . . . and to our friends at FEMA who wrote the check.
- And thanks to the New Rochelle Council on the Arts, the bandshell will soon be ready for a star turn. They secured an anonymous gift of \$100,000 to pay for new sound equipment, lighting, and much more. (I don't know who that anonymous donor is, but I would like to invite him or her to exchange gifts with the Bramson family this holiday season. We can get you a sweater, you can pay off our mortgage.)

But still, even with these great efforts, those four public spaces aren't what they could be, partly because of neglect, partly because of underutilization, mainly because we've never done a good enough job of putting all the sites together as a package, with complementary uses that give more of us a reason to visit the shore.

So this year, let's issue a Request for Proposals for all four sites in concert, with an open invitation to submit creative ideas.

If we do it right, then appropriate commercial activities could pay for public improvements, with any development modestly-scaled to respect surrounding neighborhoods and maximize community access.

Maybe it's fine dining at Wildcliff, maybe it's a pedestrian bridge from Hudson Park to Five Islands, maybe it's a great boardwalk and boutique hotel at the Marina, maybe it's all of those things . . . or none of them. This much is for sure. New Rochelle has four waterfront gems side by side. And with the right partners, we can really make them shine.

Finally, to wrap up this verbal tour of the waterfront, let's decide, once and for all, what to do with the City Yard.

Look, whether you liked the last plan for Echo Bay or not, most of us can agree that the shoreline is not the ideal place for our garbage trucks. Most of us can agree that the City Yard's in awful condition and makes DPW's already hard job even harder. And most of us can agree that creating a direct connection from Main Street to the water would be a benefit for everybody in New Rochelle, especially the East End. That's the goal of our work with the capable team from Twining Properties.

It's no secret why this is tough. Moving the City Yard will cost a bucket of money. But I promise you this: it's still cheaper than doing nothing and keeping the Yard where it is right now, because in that scenario taxpayers lose coming and going. Today, we'd have to spend a ton for direct repairs and construction, and then tomorrow – and forever – we'd have to kiss goodbye all the new revenue that could be created through the positive development of the site.

And waiting doesn't make the choices any easier. It's not like holding off until December 26th for the post-Christmas mark-down. There's no sale coming. The price only goes in one direction, and that's up.

100 years ago, when the waterfront was seen as an industrial access point, the decision to put the City Yard on the shore was an understandable mistake. Today, in 2016, doubling down on that decision would be an unforgiveable mistake.

So even if we don't finish the job right away, let's start. Let's determine finally and conclusively where the Yard's going to go, and then begin the process of getting it there.

Commitment to Infrastructure

If we do those two big things – if we tell our story well, and if we extend our sights beyond the downtown, then New Rochelle will make huge progress. But I promised you three big things to take advantage of this moment, so here's the last one: let's make a serious commitment to our infrastructure.

To be the city we deserve, New Rochelle needs a strong physical foundation.

A lot of that foundation is more than a century old and falling apart. 161 miles of road. 192 miles of sanitary lines. 87 miles of storm drains. 40 public buildings. Not to mention dozens of playgrounds, plazas, traffic signals, median islands. And if you can't keep track of those numbers, I'll give you something a lot easier to remember: last year's potholes.

Of all the categories of municipal spending, this is the one that is most severely and chronically underfunded. An estimated \$200 million of need here in New Rochelle, covered by a roughly \$5 million capital budget. It can't go on this way.

As Lou Trangucci rightly reminds us from his personal experience: in the private sector, you'd never get away with skimping on your capital needs. Smart businesses budget strategically. And the public sector should be held to the same standard.

The good news is that the City Council has already taken a big step forward. Last year and again this year, the Council significantly upped our commitment to road paving, and we aim to continue.

But, as Lou will also tell you, maintaining what we've already got is only part of the job. Smart companies don't cling to outmoded technology, or cede the future to the competition, they invest in R &D, they position themselves for what's next.

Who wants to waste money laying down new asphalt on a road that might need a complete redesign? Or rebuilding a traditional storm water pipe, when permeable pavers or a rain garden might do a better job?

Plus, there's more at stake than the basic safety and functionality of our infrastructure, although that comes first. It's also the look and feel of the public spaces where we gather, the look and feel that can shape the daily experience of residents . . . and the first impressions of visitors.

So here's more good news. The Council has directed our staff to prepare a complete streets plan for New Rochelle – to design a better road network, better for pedestrians and cyclists, better for safety, better for access, better for the environment. And helping to ensure that every precious capital dollar is used to build the future, not just patch up the past.

And because reimaging our public spaces will be an ongoing challenge and should be a continuous focus of our work, we're bringing on retainer some great talent – the architects and planners at CDR – to help us visualize changes creatively and professionally.

Even if the money isn't there to execute certain improvements immediately, by visualizing and designing them now, we put ourselves in a stronger position to secure grants and to implement a serious multi-year capital plan – just the same way that the City's downtown studies laid the groundwork for our master development agreement.

Let me give you some examples, so you know what I mean . . .

Take our train station.

The new murals and information kiosk have really brightened things up in the station itself. But when you cross the bridge over the tracks and exit the south side into our downtown, you are confronted with . . . nothing. A bare, charmless street, the back of a building, nothing warm or human or inviting. Welcome to New Rochelle. We can do better.

That's why our Department of Development issued a call for proposals to reshape the south gateway. Here on this poster board is a preliminary image of the look we're aiming for, and we intend to fund these improvements through the community benefit contributions that flow from new downtown projects.

Or take the North Avenue Bridge that spans I-95. During the next few years, the Thruway Authority is going to replace it, but we don't want a new version of the same old bad design – a design that chokes down traffic and squeezes pedestrians onto this measly strip between a rusty fence and a busy road. That's why we've been working with the Thruway Authority to widen the platform, with more space both on-road and off-road for every form of transportation, including our own two legs – and engineered to allow a future expansion with public plazas or parks over the highway.

And here's one last minor little example – two-way traffic on Huguenot and Main. For lots of us, this'll take some getting used to . . . and, for me, it did require some convincing. But the experts tell us that two-way traffic is far better for retail, the computer modeling tells us that the traffic will flow just fine, and common sense tells us it's easier to get to our destination when we don't have to circle around the block.

And make no mistake, this is an infrastructure issue as much as a policy question, because you can't just take down the one-way signs and let drivers figure it out. You have to replace the signals, partially reshape the road, and so on.

(Also: we'll be instituting capital punishment for those who double-park. Not really – just life without parole.)

Fortunately, to help us work through complicated choices like these, the City can draw on decision-makers who couldn't have a bigger stake in getting it right and for whom this is more than an academic exercise. Every day, Ivar Hyden and Al Tarantino bring their real-world experience as downtown business owners to the Council, and we're all better off because of it.

Now I offered these specific examples to illustrate a point: that infrastructure is more than just paving roads. But don't focus too much on those specific examples, because a real commitment to infrastructure isn't about this project or that project – it's about a sustained and predictable policy that rebuilds New Rochelle over a period of years. The same way we target a minimum fund balance, the way same way we expect a minimum number of fire fighters and police officers on a shift, the same way we have a minimum number of sanitation routes . . . we should have minimum expectations for our capital investments.

At our meeting just this past week, the whole City Council talked about exactly this kind of strategic approach, moving toward consensus on a better way forward.

So with the Council's leadership, let's make sure the body of our city is as strong and beautiful as its soul.

The Bigger Picture

Why is all this important? Why is it worth the effort and time, when we could just sit back and enjoy the ride?

Part of the answer is obvious. As taxpayers and homeowners, as workers, and business owners, and consumers – or just as residents who want to feel proud when we say “I live in New Rochelle” – we'll be better off.

But there's a bigger picture, too.

We sometimes think of ourselves as competing with White Plains or Yonkers or Stamford. That's not right. New York as a whole is in competition with Shanghai and Vancouver, with London and with Boston. Our whole metro area is in competition for the jobs and the workforce of tomorrow.

And if our region fails, the result won't be pretty: higher costs, weaker tax base, aging workforce, declining investment.

To come out ahead, the Regional Plan Association says we've got to welcome 3.7 million new people and create 1.9 million new jobs.

The five boroughs can't absorb that kind of growth by themselves, and the last thing we want to do is push it all to the far edge of the metro area, where infrastructure costs go up, commuting times are twice as long, and everything consumes more energy.

So cities like New Rochelle are a vital part of the equation. We can only succeed as a region, and our region can only succeed with us.

That's why everything I have mentioned tonight, from the downtown plan itself, to the other steps that look past the downtown, add up to a community where our children and grandchildren can live and want to live, can work and want to work.

Walkability, diversity, affordability. From being less dependent on the car to being more connected to the web, from the alternative energy powering our appliances to the cultural energy filling our galleries. Parks that we want to visit, streets where

we want to gather, shops where we want to browse, a shoreline where we want to stroll, neighborhoods where we want to grow up and grow old.

That's what it takes to win the future.

Ideally Yours

And for those who worry that the essential character of New Rochelle might somehow be lost, let me affirm: that's also what it takes to preserve and carry into the future the qualities we know and love today.

Ideally yours – that's our brand. But for a brand to ring true, it has to be about who you are, not just who you hope to be.

So, tonight, even though I've spoken about many things that ought to change, I want to close by celebrating the things that should never change at all.

You want to know why New Rochelle is ideally yours?

Look around the room at each other. At all the walks of life and strands of experience, all the traditions and cultures and perspective that find, here, in our city, common ground on a human scale.

Why is New Rochelle is ideally yours?

Ask the organizers of My Brother's Keeper. With Councilman Jared Rice taking the initiative, and with invaluable leadership from Reggie Richardson, Kelly Johnson, Gustavo Barbosa, Devron Chambers, and Colleen Gardephe, plus a vital assist from Angela Taylor and so many others, they've brought together an unprecedented coalition of community organizations to make sure our young people, especially young men of color, can succeed before school, in school, and beyond. They remind us that we have a stake in each other's lives, and that equity matters just as much as prosperity in measuring a community's health.

Ask the New Rochelle Arts Collective. Led by David Krinick, Ben Kent, David Gonzales, and Matt Demeo (three of whom are here) and filled with young talent, they came together a year ago, united by their creativity and loyalty to New Rochelle. Since then, they've engaged us with an Inside Out Living Room at Ruby Dee Park, surprised us with pop up displays on Memorial Highway, and charmed us with this friendly dinosaur cuddling the K Building. That's just for

starters. There's nothing in Williamsburg that the Arts Collective can't bring to New Rochelle, except the sky-high rents.

Or ask Muhammadu, Nazaf, and Mohamed of ICON, the Islamic Center of New Rochelle. When they founded their mosque on North Avenue, just across from City Hall, they wanted to be in a place where everybody is recognized as a full stakeholder, where every faith has a home, every tradition is embraced with pride . . . and where we know: what makes America great isn't blood or soil or walls, it's brotherhood from sea to shining sea. They found that place in New Rochelle, and we are better for it.

You want to know why New Rochelle is ideally yours?

Ask Sgt. Calvin McGee. He's been with the NRPD for just about 33 years. Must have started when he was 6. For the last decade, Calvin's been directly responsible for training every officer. And I don't mean just how to hold a gun. I mean how to engage a community. Coordinating the Youth Police Initiative, overseeing our Citizens Police Academy – Calvin has strengthened the bonds between citizens and law enforcement over and over again, to the benefit of both, and has helped New Rochelle be a positive example for the entire country.

Ask Fire Fighters Anthony Margiotta, Dan Thompson, and Jarred McLean. One night this past September, they answered an EMS call at the Drake Firehouse, and arrived to find a woman in the late stages of labor. Her water had broken, her contractions were just five minutes apart, but New Rochelle's bravest didn't miss a beat. They administered oxygen, coached the mom through, and fifteen minutes later were the first to greet our city's newest baby girl. They even cut and tied the cord. (Diaper change not included.)

Or ask Police officers William Odell, Evangelos Geralis, Dwayne Jones, Chris Hearle, Claudio Carpano, Sean Kane, Yadilene Machado, Michael Vaccaro, and Chris Guglielmo. I mentioned New Rochelle's low crime rate early on, but there still are some bad guys out there, and it takes guts and quick thinking to confront them. Just about a month ago, the PD received a report of an armed robbery downtown. Long story short, pursuing by car and on foot, putting themselves at risk, our team rounded up suspects that turned out to have a violent criminal history throughout New York and Westchester. Our whole region is safer thanks to their good work. Most of those officers are here tonight. One who is not is Dennis Kiernan, who sustained an injury while preventing the suspects from approaching our high school. With that kind of heroism, even his father, the former Fire Commissioner, might have to forgive his son for choosing a blue uniform.

I'm not done.

You want to know why New Rochelle is ideally yours?

Ask Alisa Kesten. As the Executive Director of Volunteer NY, she oversees an organization that mobilized nearly a quarter million hours of volunteer service to assist 500 not-for-profits at a value of more than \$7.2 million, enriching the lives both of those who deliver services and of those who receive them. Alisa is a leader for our whole region, but New Rochelle is her home, and, in fact, this year, we're launching a new local partnership with Volunteer NY focused specifically on our own city to enlist the time and talent of more residents in meeting needs right here.

Ask Charles Fazzino, maybe the best known pop artist in the world, whose instantly recognizable 3D works officially commemorate such minor events as the Super Bowl and the Grammy's, and such obscure locations as the Statue of Liberty, the Grand Canal of Venice, and the Hollywood Hills. You can see a Fazzino at hundreds of galleries around the globe. But there's only one place where you can see them made: New Rochelle, NY. Someone of Charles' stature might be forgiven for ignoring local civic matters, but that's not Charles, he's been a mainstay of the annual ArtsFest, contributed enormously to our 325th celebration, donated a sculpture that greets visitors to City Hall, mobilized support for mental health care and so much more. Now we're working with Charles to integrate his signature style into our evolving downtown streetscape. New Rochelle is already Charles Fazzino's place of business, soon it will be his canvas, too.

Or ask Phil DeRaffele. Phil leads the last of America's great diner manufacturing companies – a dominant presence along the eastern seaboard, where Phil has constructed about 1,000 restaurants, and done as much as anyone to shape the landscape of our country. If you've eaten in a diner this side of the Mississippi, you've probably experienced Phil's handiwork. His immigrant father started the business, but Phil made it what it is today. And he did it with smarts, skill, and vision that are exceeded only by his modesty and generosity. Phil's home is here in New Rochelle. His office is here in New Rochelle. And, at the corner of Weyman and Main, thanks to Phil, there's a new diner here in New Rochelle.

Let me tell you, I had a heck of a time drilling down to just these examples of people who inspire us in their own ways to be our best in the public square and to feel pride in what New Rochelle represents. Because our city is filled with such examples.

They are New Rochelle. We are New Rochelle.

People who define our spirit of inclusion and optimism, of accomplishment and creativity, who show what it means to find your ideal and what it means to be your ideal.

It's wheels up. And as our city takes flight, lifted by the hard work already done, aiming higher through the hard work still to do, may we never forget why the journey matters and why we are so privileged to take it together.

Thank you for listening. God bless you. And God bless New Rochelle.