



City of Trenton



Andrew Wilkinson

Mayor Eric E. Jackson | 2015 State of the City Address



**Mayor Eric E. Jackson**

Mr. Council President, members of the City Council, neighbors, and fellow Trentonians, good evening.

Thank you for traveling to City Hall as I report on the state of our Revolutionary city, the city we all care for so deeply.

When I stood on the steps of City Hall last year, on that hot summer day—the day of my inauguration—I felt ready to meet the challenge of leading our city, establishing new collaborations and supporting thoughtful and effective solutions for its revitalization.

I knew that I was ready to serve the resilient and far-too-often underestimated people of Trenton, a wonderfully diverse population that is a reflection of the hope for America's future.

I want our residents and stakeholders to know that it is an honor to serve you, and I am humbled every day by the trust you have put in me to lead our city. From the bottom of my heart, I thank you.

Let's talk about who we are as a city—what defines the greatness of Trenton, our beloved capital city along the Delaware River.

Although we are 50 miles from New York City and 30 miles from Philadelphia, Trenton is not The Big Apple. We are not the City of Brotherly Love.

But Trenton is very much in the center of it all. Like our urban neighbors, we have helped influence the American experience and been at the forefront of industrial and manufacturing innovation.

The Trenton name is an historic brand that carries weight and significance. Even a high-speed Navy transport ship carries our name.

Last summer, we welcomed Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus to City Hall for a ceremony that lent our city's name to one of the most advanced vessels in the U.S. Navy.

The USNS Trenton, which was built at a shipyard in Alabama, is 2,500 metric tons and is among the fastest vessels in the U.S. Navy fleet. What a wonderful way to honor a city so rich in history and tradition.

We have been at the door of racial upheaval, giving rise to the Civil Rights Movement, lessons that continue to shape social change.

We are a city that has survived the ebbs and flows of our nation's economy.

We are a city whose face reflects a brilliant mosaic of ethnicities and cultures.

We are a city with an emerging community of artists and other creative people who see the possibilities for building their ideas in a small metropolitan hub known for its color and character.

We are a city where people in great need are deeply cared for—services that we do exceptionally well and should continue offering because helping one another is at the heart of the Trenton experience.

As you know, homelessness is a national crisis that has a profound impact not only on the lives of people who are without housing, but also on communities.

I am proud that we have stepped up our efforts to help homeless adults through our Coordinated Entry and Assessment Services Center at 509 Perry Street, which we opened last April.

We are grateful in this effort for the support of our partners, including our City Council members, Mercer County, the Mercer Alliance to End Homelessness, Catholic Charities and the Rescue Mission.

Our CEAS Center is an entry point for single, homeless adults to access comprehensive services, and its goal is to support the chronically homeless as they try to rebuild their lives.

Because of our substantial efforts to end homelessness, we again received a 2.5-million-dollar grant to provide 250 permanent housing units to homeless people in need.

We are steadfast in our commitment with our partner organizations to feed 1,500 Trenton children a day through our Summer Food Service Program, which also provides approximately 60 seasonal employment opportunities.

I am proud to be working with our Congresswoman Bonnie Watson-Coleman to ensure that federal funding for these safety-net initiatives is preserved and increased.

Trenton today is a place of possibilities; a city of opportunity where anyone with a positive idea, determination and work ethic has a chance at success.

We need these ideas! Because innovation coupled with determination help Trenton move closer to reinvention.

Let me highlight an example.

Ten years ago, three business leaders who call Trenton home—a finance guy and two creative architects—had an idea to transform a group of industrial buildings known as Roebling Block-3 into a mixed-used project with residential, commercial and retail space, and parking.

These gentlemen envisioned a walkable community with retail and restaurants, construction of new buildings on the site, a pedestrian bridge over Route 129 and in the center of it all, a robust space for arts programming.

Little by little, they cleared one hurdle after another. Even when the project seemed permanently stalled, they stayed true to their vision.

**Today, their idea has become Roebling Center, a 150-million-dollar project. We will break ground on the 40-million-dollar first phase before winter starts.**

I am pleased that my economic development team was instrumental in clearing the last of the project's hurdles, helping the developers receive the critical tax credits needed to package the financing.

Roebling Center, one of the largest private investments in Trenton in many years, is a game-changer, and it is a catalyst and an example of the shape of things to come.

Thank you John Hatch, David Henderson and Michael Goldstein for believing in Trenton, brainstorming transformative projects for Trenton, and continuing to invest in our great city. Please join me in giving them a round of applause.

My friends, although times have changed, Trenton is in a better place now to capture new opportunity and investment than it has been in many years. Under my leadership, and with the capable, guiding hands of my administration and support from City Council and community leaders, we can realize the goals that we set out to achieve.

We must reestablish and create new relationships. We must work together to conceive strategies for driving our city's rebirth. I am pleased to be working with our like-minded stakeholder partners in business, labor, education, government, nonprofit and faith, including the Capital City Community Coalition, Mercer County Trades, and clergy across our city. Thank you for your counsel and for your leadership.

We must take advantage of new economic trends—such as the Millennials boom, the renewed interest in urban living and the rise of the creative class—if we want to become a stronger community that is capable of forging its own destiny.

We must work together in common cause to position Trenton to capture new perspectives and new opportunities for social and economic growth.

My friends, we have begun this work.

**We've had a turnaround year in which we've worked very hard to forge a new path for our city, build new relationships and heal existing ones.**

We've focused our efforts on restoring our municipal government, getting its finances in order, addressing critical personnel matters and the myriad tasks our employees must accomplish everyday in a professional manner.

To that end, we are executing a governance strategy that is supported by eight pillars: restoration, collaboration, communications, accountability, benchmarking, measuring results, transparency and innovation.

The residents of Trenton expect nothing less, and as Mayor, it is my charge to deliver on that promise every day, every minute, every hour.

Thanks to the work of Business Administrator Terry McEwen and the staff of the Department of Administration, we prepared a 188-million-dollar budget encompassing 11 separate departments. And with the help of City Council, we passed that budget. Because of the renewed confidence that the state has in our management team, we successfully negotiated a 2-million-dollar increase in our transitional aid.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my thanks to the City Council—Council President Zachary Chester; East Ward Councilwoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson; Councilman at Large Duncan Harrison; North Ward Councilwoman Marge Caldwell-Wilson; Councilman at Large Alex Bethea; South Ward Councilman George Muschal; and Councilwoman at Large Phyllis Holly-Ward—dedicated leaders who advocate not only for their own wards but for the city as a whole.

**Please take a moment to join me in giving our City Council members a round of applause for all that they have done and continue to do to advance our great city.**

**Their leadership guides my administration's path toward change and revival.**

We've strengthened our policies on the way we buy goods and services; hired more than 200 new, qualified employees into much-needed positions; overhauled the management of grants; entered into new contracts with the city's collective bargaining units; improved our benefits administration; and devised a way to strengthen risk management and the city's exposure to claims, such as worker's compensation.

We are repairing and upgrading our city infrastructure, resurfacing roadways in all four wards, and improving our maintenance efforts on more than 50 city facilities. For example, we have replaced roofs and heating systems, all work that was long overdue.

**Strengthening our public safety infrastructure is a significant part of my administration's plan to advance our city's revival.**

Here is a compelling statistic: Since July 1, 2014, our Trenton Police Department has received more than one hundred thousand calls for service. It is critical that we have the manpower to address this demand.

When my administration took office, I asked the city's Business Administrator Terry McEwen and Police Director Ernie Parrey to begin the process of hiring more police officers. That work yielded 22 more officers protecting our streets.

We worked with members of the New Jersey Senate and Congressional delegations to successfully secure a 1.5-million-dollar federal COPS grant to hire a dozen more officers, bringing the total of new police officers hired under my watch to 34. And we made sure that the police unions are no longer operating without contracts.

The most exciting outcome of all of this is that, thanks to our courageous men and women in uniform, we are making our capital city safer.

Our Trenton Police force—our cops—are some of the hardest working people in America. They know what's at stake, and they are getting the job done to improve Trenton's overall security and its public-safety image.

We've reached contract agreements with both police unions. **A feature of the new contracts, for example, is the elimination of the 4-on-4-off schedule, increasing the number of annual work hours from 1,856 to 2,184. As a result of this agreement, the department has increased manpower patrolling our streets by 22 percent and improved the effectiveness of the department's proactive units, without breaking the bank.**

At this time, I wish to express my thanks to the Trenton Policemen's Benevolent Association and the Trenton Superior Officers Association for their efforts in helping to achieve these important contracts.

Under the leadership of Police Director Ernie Parrey, a veteran cop, our police force is helping to bring the city's crime rate to an all-time low.

**Violent crime is down 30 percent.**

**Shootings are down 39 percent.**

**Homicides are down 41 percent.**

**Crimes against property are down 17 percent.**

**Overall crime is down 21 percent.**

**We launched "My Block," a web-based resource that empowers residents with the ability to provide information about criminal activity and other quality-of-life issues anonymously, if they choose.**

We want our residents to have the option to play a more active role in community policing, and we believe that "My Block" gets us closer to achieving that goal.

**We've upgraded and expanded ShotSpotter to cover three square miles of our city.**

This technology enables patrolling officers to receive information about gunfire in ShotSpotter-covered areas directly to their mobile data terminals only seconds after shots are detected. Greater speed means more lives saved and it increases the probability of identifying potential suspects.

As with most endeavors, we must look to the future. Our youth are critical in our efforts to strengthen the community ties with law enforcement.

We are introducing our young people to careers as police officers and related law enforcement professionals through our Police Explorers initiative.

At our all-hazards Fire and Emergency Services Department, we continue to ensure that we are prepared for any emergency that threatens our community or those that surround us.

We secured a one hundred thousand dollar grant to enhance our emergency preparedness.

**We hired and trained 12 new firefighters, and we continue to provide advanced training to all of our firefighters for homeland terror response, hazmat, rescue and rail tank operations.**

And thanks to a team effort, continued advocacy and the hard work of U.S. Representatives Bonnie Watson Coleman and Chris Smith, U.S. Senator Cory Booker, grant writer Lisa Willever, Chief John Gribbin and Mark Robotin, for a third time in four years **Trenton received a 14-million-dollar federal SAFER grant to help fund the operation of our fire department, preserving the jobs of more than 60 firefighters.**

We owe a great debt of gratitude to this group, who illustrates how working together in common cause can result in powerful outcomes. Let's give them a round of applause.

**We have ordered three new fire trucks to replace equipment that has reached the end of its product life. New equipment means better technology, expanded water-pumping power, greater efficiency and more lives saved.**

We are completing a 4-million-dollar upgrade of the department's multi-channel radio system. More channels means better communication, faster response times, and more lives saved.

We are committed to keeping our department equipped with the necessary tools and people to save lives and protect our property.

We have been aggressive in our education outreach and fire-prevention efforts.

We partnered with the Red Cross, faith organizations and civic groups to canvass targeted areas, distribute fire-safety information and install hundreds of free smoke alarms.

We will continue our work to equip all Trenton residents' homes with these life-saving devices.

When I was elected, I said that we would activate economic development and integrate community input into the process.

I said that we would engage key stakeholders and seek ideas from accomplished business leaders to inform and refine our economic development strategy.

**We are doing just that.**

The revitalization of New Jersey's capital city, a Garden State Growth Zone, is not a one-man job. Economic development and the policies that support it cannot be conceived in a vacuum.

It takes working together in common cause and with transparency.

We have met and will continue to work with strategic partners and stakeholders, such as the MIDJersey Chamber of Commerce, the Princeton Regional Chamber of Commerce, the New Jersey State Chamber, NJBIA, the Capital Region Minority Chamber of Commerce, the African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and other business organizations and leaders, including our Latino Advisory Council and the Mayor's Economic Advisory Council (MEAC).

Together, we believe that Trenton can move forward through an economic-development mission that is centered on the people.

Now, please allow me to debunk a myth once and for all.

The myth unfolds something like this: Our historic city—Trenton Makes, the World Takes—with all of its assets and competitive advantages, is incapable of attracting market-rate housing development, commercial real estate development; incapable of attracting jobs, public/private initiatives, innovation, entrepreneurship and new ideas.

That has never been further from the truth. In fact, Trenton's economy grew by 2 percent in 2015, at a time when many urban economies are still suffering the effects of the recent financial crisis.

What Trenton has lacked is leadership—leadership that sees to the important needs of our city and the short and long-term goals of its citizens.

I believe that my administration delivers the leadership that Trenton needs at this moment in our history.

In the last 15 months, we've achieved noteworthy results.

**We are rebuilding our market-rate housing development pipeline with more than 600 housing units coming online in the next 18-24 months.**

Market-rate housing development is fundamental to growing Trenton's economy. We must position the city to take advantage of the millennials' boom and the fact that housing prices in nearby urban markets are pricing homebuyers out.

Our mission is clear: We must facilitate the development of market-rate residential housing, rather than more low-income housing. Our city has an excess of 2,700 affordable-housing units, according to the state's Council on Affordable Housing.

And we must encourage our neighbors in Mercer County to take up their responsibility in developing workforce housing. Trenton can no longer take the lead on this kind of development.

We know this to be an important imperative as a result of the Citywide Market Study that we advanced and completed.

Along with our community-driven Trenton 250 master planning initiative, which asks our residents what they want their city to look like by 2042, the Citywide Market Study has become the foundation of our economic development strategy.

We are using what we learned in the study to increase density, elevate quality of life, capitalize on our diversity, target industry, and expand retail development...and to better understand how we should apply our relationships, resources and staffing strategies to anchor those five pillars.

**Through the RFP process, we are seeking a talented and accomplished marketing firm to rebrand our city.**

We want people to know that Trenton is a great city on the cutting-edge of exciting things—with the assets and opportunities for incredible growth.

It's essential that we do this if Trenton is going to not only attract new people, but retain existing ones. We will build a brand that our residents and businesses can be proud of.

**We have facilitated the development of 50,000 square feet of retail and office space that is coming in the next 18 to 24 months.**

Our city has not seen this kind of development activity in the last four to eight years.

We have reactivated the Real Estate Division of the Department of Economic Development.

The Division was previously defunct for eight years. With the support of City Council, we revived the division and its important work.

**With the successful auction of city-owned properties—the next phase of our vacant-property strategy—the Division is on track to realize more than three quarters of a million dollars in revenue.**

You've directed us to deal with blight—specifically the more than 3,500 vacant properties and lots.

Approximately 16 percent of Trenton's real estate is unproductive, an unacceptable economic trend that we need to tackle intentionally and aggressively.

We partnered with Isles, who conducted a sweeping survey of our city's vacant properties last year, and who is managing the database at [restoretrenton.org](http://restoretrenton.org). Thank you Marty Johnson and your staff.

**We leveraged its work to establish an innovative vacant-property initiative. More than a thousand property owners have registered and are complying with the new law.**

You have asked us to increase home ownership and link city-owned properties to achieving that goal.

We launched a homesteading initiative that first identified livable housing and then connected eligible participants to lenders to potentially get mortgage financing. We are eager to get those properties back on the tax rolls.

We have successfully auctioned off city-owned property that was unproductive on the city's balance sheet.

**We are translating negative value into future revenue and leveraging existing assets to establish new resources.**

**We selected Ajax Management to transform the downtown Bell Telephone Building, which has been dormant for 35 years, into 80 market-rate residential units and 12,000 square feet of retail space.**

The YMCA of Trenton has expressed an interest in anchoring the building with a gym. Thank you, Mercer County Freeholder Sam Frisby, who is also the CEO of the YMCA, for your vision, commitment and leadership.

We are supporting the lending needs of Trenton's small and mid-size businesses by establishing the 1.5-million-dollar Trenton Capital Fund. Administered by a nonprofit community-lending organization, the fund provides low-interest loans to help these enterprises expand, buy equipment and create employment opportunities.

Our students are Trenton's future. I've had the pleasure of visiting all our public schools over the last 15 months to hear our kids share their perspectives on education, Trenton and their future. I so enjoy reading to our third and fourth graders. Highlighting the importance of childhood literacy is definitely an objective that is high on my education policy agenda.

And, although Dr. Francisco Duran is taking on a new role in his professional career, I wish to thank him for his leadership and impact. Transformation starts with strong leadership, and I believe that our district had that in Dr. Duran.

I am proud to say in this Chamber this evening that I am an unwavering supporter of public education, our public schools, including our charter and alternative schools. You're all doing great work.

I've illustrated this commitment through the school-board appointments that I've made over the last 15 months. I would like to thank School Board President Jason Redd and the other school board members for their commitment to public education.

Please join me in giving these capable people a round of applause.

I tapped these leaders because I know how committed they are to strengthening and transforming our public schools and the impact that such work can have on the educational development of our students.

If you have not already heard the good news, the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC sees something special in our kids, too.

Last month, the organization selected Trenton for its "Ensuring the Arts for Any Given Child" program, which will help our district strengthen arts education. Trenton is the first city in New Jersey to be chosen by the Kennedy Center for its national program.

We worked very hard to win the Kennedy Center grant. That deserves a round of applause, don't you think?

My friends, Trenton is changing. Do you feel it? Because we certainly do. A once-tepid climate is now heating up with renewed energy, ideas, new resources and meaningful collaborations.

New Jersey's Lt. Governor Kim Guadagno promotes Trenton's renaissance by saying, "Trenton is the train you need to be on before it leaves the station."

I wholeheartedly agree.

Trenton's revival has begun. Get on board. Take your seat. And be part of our intentional and successful economic turnaround. Our destination: a metropolitan center that will become legendary for all the right reasons, as we roll out an impressive recovery.

In the months and years ahead, we will continue to attract more market-rate development by leveraging state incentives.

We will recruit new businesses and jobs and retain existing businesses and jobs in the City of Trenton like LMT Mercer Group, Trenton Steel Corporation and the NJ Association of Realtors, whose new 9-million-dollar headquarters is taking shape along our South Broad Street business corridor.

**And with our new public/private partnership Greater Trenton, which I announced on Monday at Trenton Business Week, we'll attract new private investment and renewed energy into our downtown business district with the help of our partners: NJM Insurance Group; Capital Health; Thomas Edison State College; Investors Bank; Princeton University; Bristol-Myers Squibb; and Wells Fargo.**

Greater Trenton, which is being funded by nearly 2-million-dollars from its member organizations, will focus on development from the inside out – starting with the downtown area and permeating into the surrounding neighborhoods.

We're working to end veteran homelessness by 2016. Look for our announcement in the coming weeks. And we'll soon start renovations to our city's four senior centers to provide more welcoming places for our senior residents to enjoy meals and programmed activities.

And with the help of our community partners, we're gearing up to launch a "My Brother's Keeper" initiative to provide more rich opportunities for our disadvantaged youth. This work will create a pathway toward success for our children of color.

**We're leveraging the power of our relationships with the Trenton business community and partners in Mercer County to establish a year-round jobs initiative for youth. Thank you, MIDJersey Chamber CEO Bob Prunetti and former Trenton Mayor Douglas Palmer for helping to coordinate this significant effort.**

We will continue to connect with our city's business community through our business walks, visiting Trenton businesses of every shape and size from light manufacturing to retail to warehousing, asking them about their needs, how best we can assist them, and learning about their expansion plans.

We're laying the technology groundwork to outfit our cops and police vehicles with high-tech cameras to protect our citizens and our police officers. My fellow Trentonians, you asked that our police officers be equipped with body cameras, and they are coming.

And we'll launch a Fire Explorer Program to prepare city youth for a potential career in the fire service. More importantly, though, this will be an organization that has a positive influence on our youth and helps to steer them away from gangs and other negative influences that threaten their future.

**We will implement parking stations to increase the revenue performance and efficiency of our parking utility, while we examine more effective ways to modernize and integrate our parking infrastructure into our economic development strategy.**

We will secure more grant funding for arts programming that benefits Trenton residents, just like we did with the successful award of the Levitt Grant, which helped pay for outdoor concerts near the State House this past summer.

Every day, I engage in work that is guided by your interests. It is a leadership concentration immersed in collaboration and centered on building an environment of positive change.

Only by working together can we build a modern metropolitan center where big dreams and high ideals translate into the social, cultural and economic tangibles. Tangibles that not only advance our city's renaissance but create boundless opportunities for our residents who call our city home; our immigrants seeking a better life; our artists doing their craft; our entrepreneurs and business owners investing everything they have to build their businesses and create jobs.

**I want you all to succeed.**

We are working tirelessly to embrace a strategy of growth that is guided by your interests, supported through collaboration and centered on fostering an urban environment that is known far and wide for its social, cultural and economic assets. We do not only want to advance our city and create valuable opportunities, but also improve people's lives.

## 2015 State of the City Address

With my team and with all of you at my side—not on the sidelines—we have a framework of leadership and support to make sustainable progress in our city's economic rebirth. Working together, we will build our future.

Thank you, and God bless you and all the people of Trenton.





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