

City of Flint  
State of the City  
Mayor Dayne Walling  
February 2011

Good Evening. Here we are. Together in 2011. Thank you for coming. Thank you to the Flint City Council, President Poplar and City Clerk Inez Brown for hosting this state of the city address. Your leadership and commitment to the city of Flint is very much appreciated. A number of important decisions have been made in this Chamber in the last 12 months and there are many more to come as we work our way out of this storm.

Before getting started, let me acknowledge my wife Carrie, our sons Bennett and Emery, my parents Paul and Reba Walling and my grandmother Dorothy Cross who are here this evening. Our children are the 5<sup>th</sup> generation of our family to be here in Flint. This is our home and we all deeply care about our community.

I would also like to recognize the elected officials who are present today, including Jamie Curtis, chairperson of the Genesee County Board of Commissioners. I also want to give special recognition to our elected officials serving us in Lansing. Representatives and State Senators. We are relying on your leadership at the State Capitol and we are trusting in you to protect our working families. Thank you all for your dedicated public service during this very trying time.

So here we are. Together in 2011. We are here together because we care about our city and our community. We are here together because we share concerns, but we

also have hopes. When you look through the dark of these long nights, you can see that progress is being made and good works are being done all across our city, by great people, aspiring entrepreneurs, innovative students, committed teachers and strong leaders.

No one can deny that 2010 was a year of difficult storms. We lost too many lives to violence. We lost too many houses to arson attacks. Many workers are still searching for a way to make a living and pay the bills. Many businesses, organizations and churches are facing difficult decisions.

Here today in 2011, we can declare that we made it through the storms of the past. But there is a lot of work to be done, starting with the foundation. I inherited a house that needed a lot of work and the messes were more than I expected. The national economic recovery has been slow. The state of Michigan has lost more than a million jobs and all the tax revenues that accompany those workers, families and businesses. Working in Flint, we need to dig out around the foundation, stop the leaks, clean up the mold, demolish the unsound pieces, and haul away the old debris. A strong city starts with a strong foundation.

The work of strengthening Flint's foundation has been difficult without the financial resources of times past, but many people have stepped in to do their part, make their invaluable contributions. This new year of 2011 has been marked by a new spirit of cooperation and new reminders of progress that show us this job can be done.

We have strong building blocks as a start. The new report released today, *Building Blocks for Flint's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Future*, shows why we love our city, why we are

proud of our community, and why we believe in a future where every child, every student, every business, and every family has opportunities here.

A strong foundation starts with citizens. People are the only real foundation a community has. It is about people. Everything we do here at City Hall has to be about Flint's citizens first!

I could not agree more. This is why we have created forums for more public participation and citizen engagement than anywhere else in the state. Another first for Flint's citizens. The Neighborhood Action process gave residents the opportunity to help guide limited resources in ways that best meet their needs and desires. It was a citywide initiative that covered every ward. More than 40 Neighborhood Action Sessions were held in churches, schools, community centers, and on college campuses. More than 1,000 residents participated, along with all nine City Council members. All of the participants were asked to rank their needs according to importance. Public safety and economic development emerged as the top two concerns. There were also a number of neighborhood concerns, from streets and infrastructure to parks and senior and youth programs and blight elimination.

Last year at this time, we were in the middle of the Neighborhood Action process. I want to ask all of the partner organizations and people who participated to please stand and be recognized. I think we can all agree that Flint's citizens are first, first-class and first-rate.

Our charge at City Hall is to take the community's priorities and turn them into actual projects and real change by using the building blocks we have here in Flint.

The work of strengthening Flint's foundation has been difficult without the financial resources of times past. The financial constraints are serious, and the necessary reductions have been severe. After already having to work with less than \$10 million in the City's general fund from compared with only 2 years ago, the latest State budget proposal would decrease the City of Flint General Fund again going into 2012. By all accounts with rising costs, the City would have less than 40 cents for every dollar in next year's budget for services compared with a decade ago.

This presents Flint with what I believe is a generational challenge. Every generation in Flint has faced a defining challenge. I believe that this is our test and just as other generations overcome their challenges, we will overcome this.

It will take hard work and all of us have to do our fair share, but we can do it, by working together with those who truly care about city and keeping Flint's citizens first.

We need to recognize that there are some who do not believe Flint's financial challenges can be fixed by those of us who live here, work here and our raising our families here. There are some who want to walk off the job and leave it for an appointed manager, or a consulting company, or a bankruptcy judge to force certain solutions. We all know that some people gave up on Flint a long time ago. But not us, Not me, And not you.

I'm not giving up and I know the people of Flint aren't give up. We've got too many hard working and committed people who love Flint who aren't willing to just throw their hands up and let their future be dictated by outsiders because times are tough and the pressures are high.

The fixes that our foundation needs are best done by us, even the big hard jobs. And I want to say more about this later this evening because there is one job that must be done that goes right to core of our local democracy and government.

The point is that we will weather this storm and we will keep working on our financial foundation. Look at what was achieved with two of our local City unions. The two local unions with the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, AFSCME, have agreed to a double digit concession in their new contracts. This is a historic agreement that addresses our generational challenge.

I am proud of the spirit of cooperation and fairness that was demonstrated by our AFSCME union leadership and membership. I want to recognize everyone here in attendance with our AFSCME unions. These are the workers who provide essential services through our roads, parks, sanitation, water services, grant management, record keeping and many other jobs. Please stand and be recognized for your service to our community and your willingness to do your fair share.

Unions are another one of the building blocks in our strong foundation. Unions built the American middle class and this City. Today, we are all in this together, this is a time for true solidarity, and we all have to do our fair share. Again, thank

you to the hundreds of City of Flint's workers who have committed to being part of a strong foundation for our future.

A large building block in our future is basic public safety. Too many times in our past, public safety has been a road block to progress. Too many guns and drugs have been allowed over the years to move in as jobs have moved out. Now violence has become a way of life for too many in Flint, and our police officers are responding every night to dozens of 911 calls for shots fired, fights in progress, arson attacks and even domestic assaults. Loiterers, prostitutes, vandals and thieves have taken over too many streets.

Today, we have the largest public safety force that we can afford and more of those officers are out working in the community instead of being at the station. The hard working men and women in uniform are doing a very good job under difficult circumstances. I want to thank all of you who take time to compliment our police officers and firefighters. They rank among the hardest working public servants anywhere in the state and they deserve our sincere thanks.

Now, as a community, we need to get involved in doing our part to make our neighborhoods, streets and homes safe. I applaud those who are stepping up and answering the call to service.

Many citizens have participated in the Blue Badge Volunteer Corps and are building up the Police Mini-Stations. And I am proud to announce that with the opening of the Police Mini-Station at Foss Avenue Missionary Baptist Church in Ward 3 that we now have a mini-station in every ward—a promise that I made when you first put me into this position less than 2 years ago.

We have new community partnerships in public safety. Many leaders and organizations are involved in the implementation of the CeaseFire FLINT initiative that will deal with the drug dealers who are the cause of so many crimes and so much violence. The Flint Area Congregations Together and the Community Action Group and many others have come forward and have committed to the effort.

All of the community policing and the community partnerships in public safety all depend on tough enforcement. I applaud the members of the Flint City Council who had the courage to forward a proposal to the voters for a millage to operate the City Jail. There has to be a consequence for offending our laws. With the City Jail open, there will be consequence for those who loiter, steal, prostitute, and fight. Right now these criminals walk away from their own arrest with a ticket to appear in court. This is not right and I urge every Flint voter to vote yes on the jail millage on the May ballot. I think it is fair for all of us to dedicate a few dollars each month for our own safety. The jail is an important tool in reducing crime, it has worked in the past and it will work again with your support.

But don't think that the jail is the solution by itself. We have to change lives, especially with our young people. This is why I am so proud of the Haskell Center now being the home of a chapter of the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Flint and the Police Activities League. Free afterschool programs, homework help, nutritious food and sports are offered every day of the week at the Haskell Center now. With the support of the U.S. Department of Justice and the Downtown Weed and Seed program, the Haskell Center is a safe haven for our youth.

To make our community safe, we have to invest more in the next generation. Our young people also have to see economic opportunities here, they need to have a good chance of getting a good job through good education. The Genesee Regional Chamber of Commerce and the Flint Community Schools also have afterschool programs, youth employment initiatives, and career prep education. These are essential efforts in fighting crime and revitalizing our economy.

New jobs are part of Flint's strong foundation too. Despite the slow national and statewide economic recovery, the coordinated efforts by the City of Flint and economic development partners assisted dozens of businesses such as Witherbee's Market and Deli, Swedish Biogas International, Precision Tool and Die. Our 2010 goal was to create at least one new job every single day—that goal was reached nearly three times over.

Entrepreneurs and established businesses created or retained more than a 1,000 jobs with the support of economic development initiatives since my administration took over. The capital investments in these businesses and institutions totaled over \$300 million, which are supporting more than 2,000 additional construction jobs across the region. This builds on the momentum established in recent years by the major investments downtown and with colleges and universities.

Our goal for 2011 is to create more than 1,000 new jobs and to keep this momentum going year after year. 2011 is off to a strong start with the announcement of a third shift at the Flint Truck Assembly. But overall, half of our new jobs will be in the health and life sciences sector. Investments by Diplomat Specialty Pharmacy, McLaren Medical Center, Hurley Medical Center, the Insight Institute, and many others are the drivers of economic growth, along with the

educational and training programs that are preparing workers for jobs in the health and life sciences sector.

The growth of health care and life science industries has brought to us the power and resources to help make our community more healthy and fit. This is vitally important for our future.

It was an honor to be recognized by First Lady Obama as Flint became the 500<sup>th</sup> city in the nation to join the Let's Move campaign. I want to thank my wife, and Flint's First Lady Carrie Walling, who has encouraged us to get moving and be a partner with First Lady Obama. Our goal is to make sure that we are not the first generation to raise children who are less healthy than our own generation. I want to recognize the Greater Flint Health Coalition and partner organizations like the Crim Fitness Foundation who are providing positive recreation activities and encouraging fitness and nutrition. Please watch for details of an April official kick-off for a community wide campaign to combat obesity and to take responsibility for becoming more fit.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, jobs and health and neighborhoods and the environment are all linked. They are all part of a strong foundation.

Today, with the assistance of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, many of our former factory sites are being cleaned up. Approximately \$30 million has been designated from a trust fund to clean up the Buick City brownfields. A major renovation of the Flint River flood control project is in the design phase. The Chevy in the Hole properties will become green through a grant from the U.S. Forestry Service. These activities create jobs, make our community more healthy,

and help stabilize our property values. My administration will continue to take on the big projects. We have filled the Great Lakes Technology Center. We are cleaning up Buick City. We will get these projects done and take on the next tough ones like the Genesee Towers. Flint's transformation has only just begun.

Neighborhoods in every part of the city are being improved through infrastructure improvements, housing initiatives, and nuisance code enforcement. With more than \$30 million in federal grants from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for Neighborhood Stabilization projects, there are demolition, rehabilitation, and construction of new homes planned in federally identified areas throughout the city.

Then in the spring of 2011, the City of Flint will begin a new home construction development on the North Saginaw corridor in Smith Village. More than Eighty new homes will be constructed in an area just north of Downtown Flint. The project is funded with primarily with federal Neighborhood Stabilization Program funds. When completed, residents of the Smith Village Neighborhood can walk to work at the University of Michigan Flint, bike to the Flint Farmers' Market and downtown, or take a short trip to Hurley Medical Center and Kettering University. This is the only new subdivision planned for Genesee County in 2011 and it will be happening right here in Flint, in the heart of the county and the region.

This shows that we can fix old problems when we work together. And I want to recognize our City Administrator Gregory Eason for his tireless work to restructure the City's Department of Community and Economic Development. This department has been recognized at the state and federal level for its internal

improvements and now the community is starting to see the positive results and there is more to come. Flint's transformation is only just beginning.

On March 1<sup>st</sup>, the City of Flint is ready to begin the long overdue process of Comprehensive Master Planning. I am calling on City Council members to pass the resolution on Monday night accepting the \$1.5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. It has been 51 years since the previous master plan was adopted and we can not wait any longer.

The funding for the Comprehensive Master Plan for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Sustainable Flint came as a competitive award from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for \$1.5 million over three years. This was the largest award in the State and it was awarded to us in Flint. Many partner organizations and the Flint Planning Commission and the City Council have all contributed their ideas and will be helping to lead the process. Many organizations have pledged to match the federal grant so all of the resources will be there to see this through. This plan will be like the blueprints for the great new renovated house that we will build together on top of the strong foundation that we are setting now. There will be tough decisions along the way, but I believe in Flint's future and know we will find a way forward.

But change is not easy and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Flint will be different than the Flint of the past, of the lumber era, of the carriage era, and of the car era.

Years ago the Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jr made a prophetic statement: *"We must think of the challenge we confront and the new responsibilities that stand before us. We must prepare to live in a new world."*

We can not expect to meet the challenges of today's new world with the dated structures of the past. To live up to our priorities today, to put every possible available dollar into our public safety system, to have the energy to support job creation, to have the time to dedicate to community building, we have to let go of some of the burdens we have been carrying these past years.

The latest state budget proposal would cut away even more of revenues, so now it is time for us to prepare for the future.

This evening I am announcing a new reform agenda for Shrinking City Hall. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, City Hall has to be a building block and not a road block. If we are to keep public safety at the highest possible levels, we are going to have to do without a few City Council members following redistricting, we are going to have to do with fewer mayoral appointees allowed under the Charter, we are going to have to end general funding for the Civil Service Commission, Ombudsman Office and Human Relations Commission.

My plan is to revise the City of Flint Charter to reduce City Council to 7 members, reduce Department appointees to 7, reduce Executive appointees, and make other changes to Shrink City Hall and save money every year. Some will say that this can not be done. I say it must be done to line our priorities up with our spending, to fight crime, to create jobs, and to strengthen our neighborhoods. My proposed changes would save the City of Flint over \$6 million over 4 years, over \$15 million over the next 10 years. These are essential savings at a time when revenues are declining but when the need for public safety and economic development has never been greater.

Working together we will build a strong foundation for Flint's 21<sup>st</sup> Century future.

FINAL REMARKS TO BE DELIVERED BEGINNING AT 5PM ON  
FEBRUARY 24<sup>TH</sup> AT OFFICIAL STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS IN  
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE FLINT CITY COUNCIL