

New Rochelle mayor outlines challenges, successes in speech

By Hannan Adely

March 12, 2010

NEW ROCHELLE — Mayor Noam Bramson on Thursday called for more realistic plans for two downtown and waterfront developments due to the poor economy, while also rallying for a new vision for Davids Island.

In his fifth State of the City address, Bramson said the city had made strides to cut costs and help local business, but acknowledged that "economic development has slowed to a crawl."

Two major projects, Louis Cappelli's LeCount Square and Forest City's Echo Bay, have been put on hold due to the economy and lack of capital. Bramson said the developers should consider changing or scaling back their projects.

"To move forward, we need to acknowledge and adjust to this new reality," the Democrat said in his speech at the Davenport Club last night.

At the same time, the mayor said the city should continue to plan ahead for improvements downtown and at Davids Island. Last year, the Army Corps of Engineers finished a \$26 million cleanup at a former military post on the 80-acre island, tearing down buildings and structures and removing asbestos.

The mayor asked city planners to start work on a conceptual plan for the island, with community input, that could be the basis for development.

Bramson did not offer specifics, but said he wanted plans to include "meaningful public access," open space and sustainable design.

Past discussions have focused on public parkland, a recreation center, a military museum and commercial development.

Bramson said he wanted to continue downtown growth by attracting business and homes near mass transit. The city will request consultant services for such projects on Garden Street and near the Prospect municipal lot in the next few weeks, he said, "so we'll be ready to hit the ground running when better times come."

In his speech, Bramson also touted the city's work to cut spending by more than \$4 million in 2010.

The city reduced its workforce by nearly 40 positions and cut capital spending. The city also reached a deal with the owners of Avalon on the Sound residences to get \$9 million in tax payments about two decades ahead of schedule.

Councilman Albert Tarantino, a Republican, said he agreed that the city has to rethink development plans. He also said he would support efforts to define the future of Davids Island, which lies in his district.

"I think he was realistic in how the economy will affect development going forward," Tarantino said.