

REDWOOD CITY STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS – JANUARY 2009

Vice Mayor Diane Howard

It is truly an honor to speak before all of you today.

It has only been a few short years, since I remember standing in Stafford Park, listening to residents complain that because of our vibrant economy, there was no reason to maintain such a high financial reserve.

They also felt that we should end the Utility Users' Tax, since there was plenty of money to go around.

Fortunately, I was part of a Council that realized that the good times would not last forever, and that there would likely be some rainy days in our future.

Well, ladies and gentlemen, the rains have come and they are the heaviest that our generation has ever seen.

However, because of our determination to maintain a balanced budget with adequate reserves, a philosophy our state legislators have consistently failed to adopt, our city has been able to maintain a high level of service for our residents.

In 2008, we made no cuts to our fire and police services, and no city employee had to face this Christmas without a job.

Maintaining the UUT has allowed us to enhance and expand our park system at a time when others are reducing services.

The citizens of Redwood City recognized the importance and usefulness of this tax and 80% voted for its continuance in 2007.

We are a council that is so singularly committed to keeping our community fiscally sound, that we were recently criticized in a local newspaper for being too uniform in our voting.

To support their position, they solicited the opinions of 2 individuals who happened to be the leaders of the Yes on W movement – hardly unbiased bystanders.

It is hard to imagine, they would prefer the confusion and gridlock that has paralyzed our state government.

Many of you are business people, and you understand that a city, in order to survive and flourish, must be run as a business, and like you, our City faced significant challenges in 2008.

An example of one of the toughest challenges we faced this past year was the development of the Downtown Precise Plan – a blueprint of our city's future. A plan which will provide developers and businesses with our expectations of the quality and innovation their projects should achieve.

The Northern California Chapter of the American Planning Association awarded our Downtown Plan with its 2008 Comprehensive Planning Award.

This plan, which has involved significant public input, has been stalled in the legal system. This lawsuit has placed developers and businesses in a situation where it is difficult to know just how to proceed.

Let me assure you, this City Council is aggressively pursuing a multi – prong effort to get the Downtown Precise Plan EIR reinstated and moving forward.

Our city also faced a contentious election this past year surrounding the Cargill properties. It drew time and resources away from the operation of our city with its biggest impact on our City Clerk and City Attorney departments.

More time must now be spent mending the wounds created by that confrontation.

Our city, like all cities, has sustained investment losses in the wake of this global economic upheaval.

We face the difficult challenge of providing a high level of community services in the face of declining sales and property taxes, and a fiscally irresponsible state government, that will likely try to appropriate funds that should have come to our community, to help solve their fiscal quagmire.

As difficult a year as 2008 was, we still have many accomplishments to be proud of.

It was a year that saw a transition to a new City Manager. He has taken the reins at a most difficult time, but his experience, leadership and commitment to the concept of community building, has kept our City moving forward in a positive direction.

His office has helped launch our Environmental Initiative Program, which is focused on long term sustainability and creating a healthy environment for ourselves and our children.

It has brought together programs such as Youth Outdoors, the Redwood City Cool Campaign, and Cool the Earth.

We have assisted 10 Redwood City companies in becoming certified in the County's Green Business Program.

There has been a renewed commitment to our neighborhoods through the Neighborhood Liaison Program – a program that has embarked on projects that have strengthened neighborhood bonds and helped build stronger communities.

In 2008, there were 1) 7 neighborhood training workshops, 2) the initiation of National Neighborhood Day in Redwood City and 3) an increased commitment to our neighborhood watch program.

Our commitment to the environment continues with the progression of our recycled water project, where over four miles of new pipeline were installed, and with the restoration of Inner Bair Island.

We are even recycling mud by partnering with our port using 180,000 cubic yards of dredging material to help restore the wildlife habitat on Bair Island.

Our commitment to making our environment healthier and our air cleaner is evidenced by our new shuttle programs which serve commuters, businesses and the community at large thus reducing the need for single occupancy vehicles and providing congestion relief.

How many of you have seen our new community shuttle, The Climate Best Express?

It is a free, on demand shuttle, and one of the most popular stops is, of course, our beautiful, vibrant Downtown.

We have also continued our water and energy conservation efforts with programs that provide landscape water management services, free home energy audits, and rebates on high efficiency appliances.

Our Community Development Services Department had a banner year. This dept encompasses planning, engineering, housing, redevelopment, building, and code enforcement. In collaboration with our Library team, it has brought to fruition the Redwood Shores Branch Library, which opened this year to rave reviews.

It is working diligently with significant community input to develop our New General Plan, a monumental undertaking, which will continue into the coming year.

And then there is the incredibly successful progression of Courthouse Square in becoming the Heart and Soul of our community.

Last year, on top of the long – awaited closing of the old Century 12 and the resulting increase in DT movie – goers, there were 116 public events in our Downtown bringing over 80,000 visitors and an estimated additional \$1.4 million in revenues.

The crowd viewing the opening of the 2008 Olympics on our outdoor, inflatable movie screen was truly inspiring, over 2000 people!

Courthouse Square was awarded the 2008 Project of the Year by the American Public Works Association and the California Redevelopment Association has given our Plaza its Award of Excellence.

In my opinion, that is taxpayer money well spent!

As the economic difficulties of 2008 deepened, our Park, Recreation and Community Services Dept continued to provide our residents with dozens of concerts, art shows, theatre performances, outdoor movies and dance events.

These events help bring our community closer together as well as get people Downtown.

The Dept also completed the installation of new synthetic turf at Sandpiper and Marlin Parks.

They have developed after school programs that serve over 900 children at 7 school sites.

In 2008, the California Park and Recreation Society has made Redwood City the recipient of three Statewide Awards of Excellence!

1. The 1st for a Downtown Marketing Campaign.
2. For the 'Neighborhood and Community Life for Teens' event in Courthouse Square.
3. For our Downtown Economic Development plan and activities.

Normally, I do not point to specific individuals in a City address because I so strongly believe in the team concept of "Building a Great Community Together,"

But today, I must strongly acknowledge and thank Brian Ponty, Redwood City's Finance Director. His experience, skill, and dedication to preserving our City's financial stability have guided us through these difficult economic times.

He leads a team that is responsible for assuring that we maintain a reserve fund equal to 20% of our annual budget which in 2008 equated to \$23 million dollars.

His expertise will be even more tested in the coming year, as our state attempts to raid our coffers to resolve their economic crisis.

We are all aware of the wonderful job our Police and Fire departments are doing in keeping us safe.

The rate of violent crime significantly decreased in 2008 and our Fire department responded to almost 7000 calls.

However, I would like to speak about some of the other contributions that they have made to our community that you may not be aware of.

Our Fire department trained over 200 members of the community in the Emergency Response and Are You Ready programs.

The dept sponsors and participates in many other programs, e.g.

1. The Fire Cadet Program.
2. Fire Prevention Programs at schools and homes.
3. Earthquake and Disaster Preparedness or CERT training.

Our Police Department:

- 1) Partnered with the school districts to implement a new truancy reduction program.
- 2) Partnered with the County on effective Gang suppression teamwork.
- 3) Served over 4000 kids in their very successful PAL program.

4) Partnered with the Port and the Aqua Terra Committee to secure grants and a boat for ongoing surveillance of our over 15 miles of waterways.

As for our Redwood City Port, it continues to hold its own in this slow economy. It remains profitable and continues to provide jobs and economic diversity to our City. The tonnage handled this past year remains steady at 1.5 million tons and their plans for a future ferry terminal continue to move forward.

At this time, I would like to echo some of the sentiment our Mayor has promoted this past year and, I am sure, will be brought up during her speech, but are so important that they are worth mentioning twice.

The next few years are likely to be difficult economic ones and will test our resolve to succeed as a City.

If we are to weather this economic tsunami, we must look for ways to contribute.

Businesses must not look at other businesses as competition but as allies, and work together to find ways so all can succeed.

Business must be aggressive and inventive in order to attract new customers. There is an old baseball saying that says, "You can't steal 2nd base if you keep one foot on first."

Creativity is the order of the day.

George Bernard Shaw said, "People who succeed in the world are those that get up and look for the circumstances they want, and if they can't find them, they make them."

Individuals need to look for ways to volunteer to help their neighbors and our community at large.

Some wonderful examples of volunteerism this past year –

1. RC Library Foundation raised \$850,000 to fully stock our new Redwood Shores Branch with beautiful new books.
2. The Redwood City Friends of the Library raised \$50,000 to support programs for our adults and youth.
3. 157 teens in volunteer programs put in 1200 hours of volunteering.
4. At our own Veteran's Memorial Senior Center, over 24,000 hours of volunteering were donated in 2008.

In the League of California Cities Western City Magazine, January 2009 edition, Chris McKenzie, the Executive Director, wrote:

Charles Dickens' classic novel a Tale of Two Cities begins, "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times..."

This description has deep meaning.

It conveys that often in the midst of real deprivation and need, you can find acts of mercy, innovation, or community building, that not only make the condition bearable but even exceptional.

I would like to conclude this morning by thanking all of you.

This may be the last time that I will be privileged to speak before you as my term on the City Council will end this November.

It has been an honor and great fun working with all of you these past fifteen years.

We have seen our City make great strides and I am very proud to have been a part of the process.

As I mentioned last year, one of the greatest challenges has been in the PERCEPTION of our City – both by our own citizens and by other communities.

I'd like to think that now; we hold our head up just a little bit higher and walk with a bit more swagger.

My thanks to all of you for helping make all of this possible.

Now, at this time, I would like to turn it over to our Mayor, who will share her vision for the future of Redwood City.