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### **Mayor Delivers State of the City Address to Bridgeport Regional Business Council Annual Luncheon**

**BRIDGEPORT, CT (February 12, 2009)** – Mayor Bill Finch today shared his State of the City address with more than 350 local and regional business leaders during the annual Bridgeport Regional Business Council meeting held at the Bridgeport Holiday Inn.

The overall tone of the Mayor's speech was one of optimism tempered with cautiousness, as the city, the state and the nation deal with one of the worst economic downturns of a lifetime.

In his speech, the Mayor outlined the many steps he and his administration have taken to deal with a \$20 million shortfall in the city's budget, exacerbated by the decrease in the city's "rainy day" fund to a little over \$9 million dollars when he took office in December 2007.

Job cuts, layoffs and union givebacks, totaling nearly \$4.5 million dollars are expected to help the city reach its goal of \$13 million in savings in order to stem the current budget deficit. The Mayor thanked the city workforce for their efforts during these tough economic times during a special address in Council chambers at 45 Lyon Terrace prior to his speech at the Business Council.

The Mayor has asked the Board of Education to come up with \$7 million dollars in

savings to turn back to the city, in order for the City to reach its balanced budget goal before the end of the fiscal year in June. So far, the Board of Education has come up with \$2 million in cuts, but the Mayor expects them to find more savings in their budget.

Overall, the city is moving forward, albeit slowly due to the economic conditions, with projects such as Columbia Elevator and Steel Point. RCI Marine of Miami recently took over as the lead developer at Steel Point, and is scaling back the proposal to a little over 3 million square feet of commercial, residential and marina developments – still a large proposal in this economy.

The Mayor announced today that Primrose Construction of Bridgeport, was chosen as the successful bidder for the former Elias Howe School building. Primrose will pay the city \$350,000 for the building and will invest nearly \$2 million to turn it into much-needed senior housing – all subject to City Council approval.

“We are delighted with the Primrose proposal for the building. This plan will provide much-needed senior housing at an affordable price,” said Mayor Finch . “This is yet another indicator that Bridgeport remains on the map as a viable place for developers.”

Full text of the Mayor’s speech follows:

**Mayor Bill Finch**

**State of the City**

**Feb. 12, 2009**

Good afternoon.

The state of our city is apprehensive and cautious ... but

here in Bridgeport ... we are prepared.

I am here today to tell you, in no uncertain terms, the leadership of our great City is working every day ... in every way, with inspired vigor, an unprecedented sense of teamwork and preparedness, a new sense of honesty and integrity. We are working very hard every waking moment to make the smartest and most farsighted decisions to ensure our City survives these present challenges and thrives far into the future.

And ... we’re going to be successful.

Let me say at the outset, no mayor in America wants to lead in a time of economic reduction. We all became mayors to invigorate our cities, to inject our thinking into the public discourse, create new projects, promote new ideas and to manage prosperity and growth.

Let me share with you a quote from one of my favorite authors, Tom Friedman, author of “Hot, Flat and Crowded.”: “Either we are going to rise the level of leadership, innovation and collaboration that is required, or everybody is going to lose big. Just coasting along and doing the same old things is not an option any longer.”

His quote, in fact much of his writing, has inspired me to promote a greater level of collaboration since I became Mayor.

I want to start today by introducing my table, and let me say I invited these people to sit with me because it is a genuine reflection of how my administration is trying to collaborate with all of our constituents.

**Mark Delmonico**, the chairman of the Republican Town Committee

**Mario Testa**, chairman of the Democratic Town Committee

**Tom McCarthy**, City Council President

**Americo and Laura Gloria**, owners of A&R Electric, Inc.

**Frank Cuccaro**, president of Bridgeport Police Union Local 1159

**State Rep. Don Clemons**, newly elected head of the Bridgeport delegation and head of the Black and Latino Legislative Caucus

**Bob Trefry**, CEO of Bridgeport Hospital and a longstanding member of the BRBC

**Robert McCloud**, CEO of the McCloud Group, the first minority contractor to be awarded a school construction management contract in the city’s history.

I also invited the heads of all our city unions. Perhaps our greatest success to date is the spirit of cooperation we have brought into the workplace. A very good example of this is our cooperative efforts with our Unions.

Ten of our labor unions have worked out significant “give-backs” totaling nearly \$4.5 million dollars.

No matter what you may have read or heard, the truth behind the scenes at City Hall is that management and unions have worked well together, each coming to the table with sound thinking and open minds.

The unions in our City play a vital role to advocate for their membership, and they have done an admirable job at that. They are keenly aware, as we all are, of our unprecedented economic

challenges and nearly all of them have stepped up and made meaningful contributions. I want to ask each of the union officials here today to stand for a moment. I want to speak directly to you and thank you. I want to thank you on behalf of the taxpayers of Bridgeport .

Please join me in applauding the workforce of our city.

The same is true for City Hall managers. They have rolled up their sleeves and have been innovative in doing more with less. They have joined me in taking a week without pay, and they are working daily to improve efficiency by working smarter.

As Mayor, I represent everyone, and during these trying times, we all need to set aside our partisan, personal and parochial agendas to work together, fix our problems together, and build a better Bridgeport together.

I met with the Governor yesterday, and thanked her for her work in keeping school funding level and keeping the aid to towns and cities, like Bridgeport , whole in her budget. I had spoken to her about these issues early on in her budget process and I want to thank her for her willingness to work across party lines and her commitment to these issues. Her cooperation has been, and will be essential.

Since I came into office 14 months ago, the city has dealt with back-to-back \$20 million deficits that no one running for office predicted, or could have predicted. On top of that, I found out that very first week, that Bridgeport didn't have any money in the bank to pay its bills. I had to sign \$45 million tax-anticipation loan, and several more since then, just to keep City government running.

Let me break last year's \$20 million number down for you, because when you hear about it on TV or radio, or read it in the newspaper is just sounds like a number – but that number was enormous and impacts real people's jobs, forces us to make choices about our public safety, our schools and our lives. The City's "rainy day fund" or Fund Balance was nearly completely wiped out by that deficit. It left us with little cushion against future shortfalls. And boy what a shortfall this current economy has handed us just a few months later. Imagine how much our current difficulties have been magnified, now with the greatest global economic failure in our lifetimes upon us.

To prevent this from happening in the future, I implemented a "Rainy Day Fund" policy, which the City Council passed, for the City to gradually replenish the fund, increase our bond rating and prevent the bad budgeting of the past.

No matter what our minor differences may be, we are all trying to work hard and do more with less. Please join me in applauding our city council members who are here today, who helped pass that policy.

This fund balance policy is but one of many steps my administration has taken to address these back-to-back deficits and keep the city from state financial takeover.

The reason I have dedicated so much energy and time to preventing a state takeover is because I

lived through the last takeover and it will undoubtedly mean massive tax increases and severe reduction in services for every Bridgeport resident.

To avoid this untenable option, we've done a lot in a short amount of time. Let me recount the highlights for you:

- We've cut jobs, and positions – 222 total since I took office.
- Our Unions have given back: two years of zero percent pay increases, and 5 and 10-day furloughs, and for the first time in a long time, police overtime is being reined in.
- Voluntary furloughs – resulting in a half-million dollars in savings
- We negotiated a reduction of take-home cars by a remarkable 43 %
- We've increased revenue from the Bootfinder – a little over a half-million dollars, and a new “get tough” attitude toward tax delinquents.
- I implemented a ban on all non-essential travel
- Increased collection of personal property and real estate tax delinquents – in the case of the top 50 offenders, we have either collected the money that is owed to us, foreclosed on property, or we are in court on behalf of the taxpayer.

In my administration, everyone does their part, and everyone, no matter who you are, or who you know, or pays their fair share of taxes.

No ifs, ands or buts.

Dealing with these back-to-back \$20 million deficits meant that I came to office with a 10% shortfall. Imagine having to decide during your first month on the job how to immediately generate millions of dollars in new revenue or how to trim millions of dollars through either service cuts and job reductions.

I have agonized over each and every one of those decisions. It's painful to see a person you know, someone supporting a family, your neighbor perhaps, lose his or her job because of your decision. I know it's possible, for those of you who have been reading about these actions as they're reported in the media, to think that these decisions are being made by unfeeling people. I will tell you that it couldn't be farther from the truth.

But despite these challenges, we are going to make it – and in the long term I believe we are going to be stronger and better off because of the tough decisions and innovations we are making today.

Perhaps many of you came today expecting a speech about our woes, the turbulent economic times, our budget challenges, layoffs and hard times in general. Well, we hear about this 24/7 on the news ... you, the business leaders in our community live and breathe it every hour of every day ... and I don't need to keep re-stating the obvious.

Worry and negative thinking never solved a problem. I want to assure you that my administration has its sleeves rolled up, our eyes wide open and our forward-thinking, problem-solving minds at work.

Instead of a speech about gloom, let's talk about good news. I'm going to talk about what we've accomplished in just one short year, and about the path we are going to take here in Bridgeport to survive, thrive and protect those in need.

There are a five central points I want to highlight as the focus of our administration.

- First, we want to run a city government with honesty and integrity. Over the past 20 years, the lack of integrity has been a blight on our city and we have made dramatic strides turning this around in year one;
- Second, we want to protect our residents by providing jobs, protecting our current homes and providing housing to those who want to live here. We've initiated major programs, and additional funds and new programs will be announced shortly;
- Third, we want to improve efficiency and eliminate waste, and you'll hear more in a moment about our dramatic improvements in this area;
- Fourth, we want to participate in the national and global effort to be sustainable. My first Executive Order was on Sustainability and we are going to make Bridgeport a leader in the national and international search for solutions to one of the greatest challenges facing our nation and our planet – climate change;
- And, Fifth, we want to make our city inviting to new business and put new companies on our tax rolls. While the homerun projects like Steel Point continue to move forward, we've also had many successful singles and doubles that excite us.

All of these will help make Bridgeport the cleanest, greenest, safest, most affordable city, with schools and neighborhoods that improve each year.



Let me talk about these points in a little detail.

We have instilled a new sense of honesty and integrity into the way we do business.

Our government has worked best at those times, as in the Kennedy years and now with our new President, when citizens feel the call to selfless action, when people enter government for service to the common good not service to their own interests. I have hired people who believe in service to the common good and you are seeing this in action. Honest, open, service-oriented government is going to be central to our success.

And while the economy and budget shortfalls have grabbed the headlines, our City has made great strides in becoming more professional, more accountable and more sustainable, all of which are the foundations of our future success.

And, I can't tell you how refreshing it is to not see the story of corruption in Bridgeport government on page one.

Integrity also extends to our diversity efforts. All City contracts are now made with diversity in mind. They are awarded based on cost and merit and not who you know. It's evident in who we

employ, the best and brightest person for the job, not the one with the right connection or closest relative in power.

One major step we've taken toward making the business of our City government more honest and fair was the creation of the Small and Minority Business Resources Office headed by Deborah Caviness. This was one of my very first acts in office.

It has become the main point of entry for small, minority and women-owned businesses seeking opportunities with the City of Bridgeport . This new office makes sure city contracts are given to the most qualified.

The office provides minority-owned businesses and contractors that may not have received a fair shake in the past with information about contract opportunities with the City. The office has done well, and I pledge to make disparities a thing of the past.

Of the more than \$18 million of primary contracts that Bridgeport awarded in 2008, more than \$5 million, or almost 30 percent, were awarded to minority-owned businesses.

At the same time, minority-owned businesses were awarded more than 70 percent of the subcontracts issued by the primary contractors.

Let me introduce you to Americo and Laura Gloria of A&R Electrical. They are a Latino-owned, Bridgeport-based electrical contractor that was awarded a \$755,000 contract in November to install the electrical system for the new expansion at Harbor Yard Parking garage. They also were awarded a \$103,000 contract for repairs to Harding High school and Read school. Please join me in congratulating them on their hard work and success.

This office also joined forces with Housatonic Community College and the Regional Contractors Alliance to offer eager minority entrepreneurs a rigorous course on construction management. At the end of October, 77 graduates participated in one of the most moving ceremonies I have ever witnessed. Graduates, like Juliette Phang of Unity Security CO., LLC, said they were thankful for new opportunities to participate in the exciting projects rebuilding the Bridgeport community.

## **JOBS**

In the coming year, we will be focused on what has become the nation's agenda. We will help to create new jobs through:

- economic development efforts;
- through major public works projects;
- by cooperative efforts with the private sector to create green jobs; and
- by building high quality affordable housing for that very same workforce.

Jobs are an important part of City government. We employ many people, but we also work to make sure jobs are created with you, our private-sector employers. In the past year, we've worked with the state to transition our school based health centers to a community-based model administered by the state. This saved \$1.5 million for the city, while still providing much-

needed high quality healthcare for the children of Bridgeport .

We are continuing to work hard to help businesses create jobs through our economic development efforts.

A good example: the recent announcement that Columbia Elevator Products Co. is moving from Port Chester, N.Y., to a soon-to-be cleaned-up brownfields site on Horace Street, adding 100 jobs to the Bridgeport economy in the process. Columbia is moving both its corporate offices and its manufacturing facility here to Bridgeport . Bridgeport remains an attractive place for commercial offices and for manufacturing.

Two notable public works projects that are on the near horizon are the two new schools planned for Bridgeport . The Discovery K-8 Magnet School and the Interdistrict Magnet High School . Both will help reduce class sizes while creating much-needed jobs. The Discovery School is moving through the approvals process and we hope to see a groundbreaking in the very near future. Both of these schools will have a high Leadership in Environment and Energy Design or LEED rating.

We are prepared to make sure Bridgeport gets its fair share of President Obama's federal stimulus package. I've already spoken with members of Congress, including our Congressman Jim Himes, and we've got our lobbying effort all ready to go. We've planned the "shovel-ready" projects we want the stimulus funds to pay for, like a new Congress Street Bridge and the sewer separation project that will divert rainwater away from the sanitary sewers. This long overdue modernization will safeguard water quality, improve the health of Long Island Sound, comply with legal mandates and avoid costly litigation.

The President's Recovery Act and the much-needed infrastructure improvements that it will fund should help you and I create jobs and a better life for all Bridgeport residents.

To attract and retain this robust workforce a city needs to have high quality, affordable housing.

The nation's mortgage crisis hit Bridgeport hard, forcing many of our families to the brink of foreclosure. Like most great challenges, this also presents opportunities. I recognized that my neighbors going through financial turmoil needed help.

My administration created Homeownership Opportunity Preservation Effort, otherwise known as HOPE, a three-part program to address issues of mortgage foreclosures brought about by the nation's subprime mortgage crisis. The HOPE program works to prevent foreclosures, help homeowners who are going through foreclosures, assist tenants, and ensures that foreclosed property doesn't become blighted property.

As part of this program we have secured about \$6 million in Neighborhood Stabilization Funds, more than double any other municipality in the state and possibly more than any other municipality in New England . The funds are being used to do exactly what the name of the grants imply – stabilize neighborhoods, while preventing homelessness by providing permanent housing, and helping homeowners and developers.



## **EFFICIENCY AND COST-SAVINGS**

Our initiative to make Bridgeport 's government more cost-effective, efficient and accountable has led us to create CitiStat.

CitiStat, pioneered by the City of Baltimore , is estimated to have saved that city about \$30 million dollars over 10 years.

It's a continuous improvement process that allows us to track, analyze and utilize data from every department to provide superior customer service from the inside out and the bottom up.

This focus on efficiency also prompted us to look at the structure city government. For example:

- We're consolidating city departments in order to save taxpayer dollars while improving efficiency. For instance, we have merged the Department of Housing and Community Development with the Central Grants Department.
- We've also taken the separate emergency dispatch operations of police and fire departments and put them under a single, central Emergency Operations Center .
- We hired an auditing company to audit healthcare enrollment for City employees, something we expect to result in a minimum of a half million dollars in savings for the City.
- We've installed GPS devices on Department of Public Facilities' vehicles, helping us develop more efficient routes that will save gasoline, save time, and therefore also save tax dollars.

## **SUSTAINABILITY**

Sustainability has become the byword not only here in Bridgeport , but nationally and globally. We took a step forward in this area when I signed the Executive Order on Sustainability in October. This will lay the ground work for things like:

- Building Fuel cells and other renewable energy sources;
- Weatherizing hundreds or even thousands of homes;
- Promoting cutting-edge green industries – creating jobs that will stay here in Bridgeport ;
- Promoting mass transit and transit-oriented development, such as the adaptive reuse we've seen sprout up all around downtown;
- Requiring the use of only green cleaning products as St. Vincent 's Hospital has done; and,
- Perhaps, most important of all – to recycle more. Every pound you recycle is money in your pocket, rather than up in smoke at the trash-burner.

I cannot stress enough that we as a society must become more environmentally sustainable. It will not only help the environment, it will create jobs and save taxpayers money in the process.

And while we're talking about cost savings we can achieve through better environmental planning, we also distributed new garbage cans on wheels – called Toters – to each and every resident of the city.

Toters mean:

- Fewer workers are injured
- Less trash is spilled
- The City looks tidy
- And when used properly with the lid closed, Toters keep trash drier and lighter, and we save tons of money when the trash-to-energy plant burns our lighter trash.

We're also now picking up the trash from our city's condominium complexes instead of hiring private haulers. This is actually a cost savings for the city, while improving an essential service to our condominium residents. I want to especially thank Council member Michele Lyons for her leadership in this effort.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

You heard me mention Columbia Elevator's move to Bridgeport as a good sign that the city is still on the map when it comes to economic development.

Unlike other cities where developers have left town with no forwarding addresses, we have continued to work hard with the developers who want to

make sure their proposals become reality.

This effort moved forward recently with the announcement that, RCI Marine of Miami, has taken the primary investment position and is committed to a robust, yet scaled-down version of the Steel Point project.

Make no mistake, though the project has been revised, it will still be huge. It will include 3 million square feet of housing, offices, retail and marina – about the size of three People's United Bank headquarters.

Let me take this opportunity to thank the leadership of People's Bank – CEO Phillip Sherringham, Executive Vice President Bob D'Amore and the People's United Bank Community Foundation for their very gracious donation to help Bethel Recovery Center pay their back taxes. An unfortunate series of events landed their property on the city's delinquent taxpayer rolls, and foreclosure was imminent. Phillip Sherringham read of their plight and decided the bank's foundation should help them out, and I was there with them last Friday when they presented a check for \$35,000 to the tearful staff of the shelter. Please join me in applauding their efforts on behalf of Bethel .

I would like to announce here today a significant piece of good news – the selection of Primrose Construction of Bridgeport as the successful bidder for the former Elias Howe School .

Primrose will pay the City of Bridgeport \$350,000 and invest nearly \$2 million dollars to convert the school into much needed senior housing, subject to ratification by the Council.

This is one of the first of many city-owned surplus properties that are being put up for sale, coming off our books and getting back on the tax rolls.

And then there are the downtown restaurants that have opened recently. There's Cafe Roma, Epernay, and Two Boots joining Joseph's Steak House, all clustered in the Fairfield Avenue area, along with Metric Bar & Grill and Joseph's new sister restaurant State Street Bistro, all joining established downtown eateries such as Ralph 'n Rich's, Thelma's and Carmelina's. It's the making of a "restaurant district," something every up and coming City should enjoy ... something we do enjoy. We also anticipate five more restaurants opening by the spring, ranging from upscale coffee shops to a Cuban restaurant and a brew pub.

Many years ago, when Paul Timpanelli and I, and a few others envisioned what downtown would look like in a few years, we realized, that if you build it they will come. And, we worked with CHFA and the state to get money for the Read's Artspace project, which was followed by the renovation of the Citytrust, Arcade and State National buildings. Now, we can see the fruits of our efforts, as more people come to live close to our transportation hub, the demand for entertainment and dining opportunities grows.

Speaking of entertainment... I'm also pleased to recognize the new owner of the Bridgeport Bluefish – Frank Boulton, who is here with us today. He stepped up to the plate to rescue the team and ensure that baseball would be played in the city for many years to come. Thank you, Frank, for providing Bridgeport with a true home run!

Meanwhile, our economic development efforts have not been confined to just Steel Point. For instance, we are continuing to make public property useful, and generate taxes again. The sale of 333 State St. and the old American Fabrics property will lead to almost \$14 million in investment. Bridgeport had owned both properties after taking them from their previous owners for non-payment of taxes.

We've talked a lot about the sacrifices we've made and the path I am charting for the city.

Now, let me tell you how you can help the city of Bridgeport through this challenging period. I am asking each member of the business community to contribute to a marketing fund administered by the Bridgeport Regional Business Council. These funds will promote our city's key cultural assets to numerous to mention. We have so much to offer to the rest of Fairfield County, and the state.

We have so many wonderful places to visit and learn, and we now have the beginnings of a vibrant downtown with exciting dining and retail options. This fund is hugely important to the future success of our city and is even more critical during this time of economic downturn.

Residents across our state as in our own city are doing more with less. This presents a wonderful opportunity to market all of Bridgeport's many affordable entertainment, dining and shopping options. As I said before, difficult times can present us with opportunities.

The economic challenges we face are like a great wave; a wave that can bury us, or carry us.

This is not a time to waver or falter or shrink. This is a time to rise to our national challenge, a time for renewed patriotism toward our nation, our state and our city. Those who accept this challenge, those who sacrifice for the common good, will be honored, those who remain selfish will be forgotten when our history is written.

I believe this wave will carry us and our contributions will not be forgotten.

Thank you very much and I look forward to continuing to serve the citizens of Bridgeport and its businesses.

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"Together we are making Bridgeport the cleanest, greenest, safest most affordable city, with schools and neighborhoods that improve each year" .... Mayor Bill Finch