

Dear City of Passaic Residents & Friends,

The past few years have been a trying time for the City of Passaic. Since my election last May, my City Council colleagues and I have been committed to restoring confidence in our municipal government.

Members of the City Council and I understand the economic challenges facing all of us and we have necessarily taken steps to ensure every tax dollar is spent wisely. I recognize there is still a lot of hard work ahead of us, and just like Passaic's families, our City has struggled with budgeting during these tough economic times. This year's budget included many difficult choices. The following are some of the taxpayer saving initiatives commenced by my administration:

- Transferring our 911 dispatch system from firefighters to civilians which will have net benefit of four additional firefighters to the working line and save overtime dollars.
- Rebidding our garbage contract to produce a savings of \$450,000 per year for 5 years.
- Rebidding our recycling contract so that we can sell our newspaper and other recyclables to save an annual \$150,000 per year.
- Working with our state representatives, Assemblymen Gary Schaer and Fred Scalera and Senator Paul Sarlo to secure \$1,000,000 in extraordinary aid from Trenton. This extraordinary aid allowed us to save \$94.00 for the average homeowner.
- Beginning negotiations with our police, fire and city employee unions to have them contribute towards their health benefits for an approximate annual savings of \$600,000 per year.
- The City has decreased spending in all departments except for public safety and the court with an overall effort to maintain all levels of essential services. For example, the Department of Public Works was decreased by 7 employees and \$360,000 saved within its operating account. Public Works will still provide all the essential services to maintain a clean community.
- A city-wide hiring freeze remains in place, and I have recently eliminated two director positions within my own administration, saving tax payers over \$200,000 annually. The City will continue to reduce its workforce by not filling positions of employees that have retired.
- My administration is looking at taking away health benefits from 34 part-time crossing guards, at a savings of approximately \$600,000. The crossing guards were receiving health benefits that were grandfathered to them under a past administration in 2002.
- My administration is proposing to close for one day per month, requiring most employees to take 12 days of unpaid leave, saving taxpayers approximately \$500,000.

In addition, the City continues to apply and receive new grants or increases to existing grants. The Police Department recently received state funding for a camera installation along Route 21. These new cameras will provide our police with a new tool to keep first responders and motorists safe. And thanks to Congressman Bill Pascrell, our Fire Department has received federal funding to assist in the purchase of a new fire truck that replaces one more than 20 years old.

Within tough budget constraints, I have orchestrated public/private partnerships to help restore parks and provide more access to recreation. In providing access to parks and recreation, we help to keep our children away from the streets and interested in sports, community and family. We re-opened a playground at Columbia Park which was made possible by the use of Community Development Block Grants and a private grant award. I have also called for stepped up police patrols in the parks to discourage vandalism, and our DPW will continue work of keeping parks clean.

Passaic also smartly made a \$1 million investment in the old Bank Building located at 663 Main Avenue to clear it of asbestos. When I was a child, the Bank Building was the heart of downtown and the linchpin to our local economy. My administration has been in contact with several potential investors interested in purchasing the building, converting it into businesses or housing that will not only return the property to the tax rolls but also bring new energy and life to the heart of our downtown.

In addition, we are also in negotiations with a various investors to redevelop the long-ago fire ravaged 8th street property located at Passaic's eastern edge. Ideas potentially include an ethnic food market, a big box store or other types of businesses that would provide good jobs for our residents and needed tax revenue that will ease the burden for all of us.

These negotiations are ongoing and, regrettably, are slow. But I am committed to the long-term resurgence of our city and will continue to work towards fresh ideas and initiatives that will help stabilize your taxes.

My administration has also put on display the diversity that brings us our strength. Working together, we orchestrated a well attended art exhibit entitled "Mi Tierra" by artist Eduardo Guzmán Valverde. This exhibit was the first in a series of art exhibits organized by the City, and I will bring more exhibits to highlight the arts and the multiculturalism which defines Passaic.

I am committed to the inclusive, transparent and fiscally responsible agenda Passaic residents sent me to implement just a few months ago. Leading Passaic is hard work, and I continue to be committed to a balance between the many needs of our community and the ability of taxpayers to pay for them.

The City of Passaic has undergone many changes since I was sworn into office for my first full term less than one year ago. The road has not been easy and I expect more obstacles as we emerge from the scandal and corruption that plagued our city for far too long. Make no mistake; however, our City is on the right track and I am honored by your confidence as we move forward together.

Respectfully submitted,

Mayor Dr. Alex D. Blanco