

**State of the County Address 2007**  
**January 25, 2007**

Mr. Chairman, members of the Board of Chosen Freeholders, honored guests, ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon.

Before I dazzle you all once again with my rhetorical brilliance, ... let me take a moment first to thank a good friend and a fine leader, the former Chairman of the Freeholder Board, Sal Vega.

Sal's steadfast leadership will surely be missed, but his critical contributions to all that we celebrate today will never be forgotten. Thanks, Sal.

Fortunately, another outstanding West New Yorker, Gerry Lange, will ably serve the residents of the seventh Freeholder district. Good luck Gerry.

And the leadership of our legislative branch will remain strong, thanks to the outstanding mix of experience and energy provided by Chairman Tom Liggio, Vice Chairman Jeff Dublin, and Chair Pro-Tempore Doreen Di Domenico.

Building consensus in any legislative body is a challenge, but we all know Tom, Jeff and Doreen are up to the task, and will do the people of Hudson County proud.

Now on with that rhetorical brilliance ...

Over the last four years, in the course of four State of the County Addresses, we have met in these chambers to draw up our blueprint for a better Hudson County.

The actions born of those addresses have become the building blocks for a remarkable new foundation of progress.

That foundation supports the child playing right now in Bayonne's new Rutkowski Park— made possible in part through a grant from our Open Space Trust.

It supports a North Bergen senior saving money today on her medications — through our prescription drug cooperative.

It supports the at-risk Jersey City teen staying in school and thinking for the first time about a career — thanks to our summer youth employment initiative.

It supports the men and women at work this very afternoon — carving out a new Gold Coast along the Passaic River in Harrison.

It supports our ability, this year, to begin closing the decades-old wage gap some of our lowest paid, and hardest working employees have lived with too long — without any changes in their retirement benefits, period.

And it supports high quality public health services and powerful emergency vehicles based in Secaucus, poised and ready to respond to a disaster or terrorist attack.

This foundation for progress, built in cooperation with the Freeholder Board and our outstanding business and non-profit sectors, is solid.

We see it in our expanding economy, strong employment numbers, improved bond ratings, sound budgets, reduced youth detention levels, increased open spaces, new cultural activities, restored playgrounds, and expanded educational opportunities.

Yet surely we cannot rest on our laurels.

A foundation, after all, is something meant to be built upon.

So, to steal a line from *The West Wing*'s Jed Bartlett,

“What’s next?”

I believe we must dedicate ourselves to pursuing a new set of challenges — broad challenges that may not be solved in a single term, or even in the lifetime of one administration.

For as Bobby Kennedy said so well, “Only those who dare to fail greatly can ever achieve greatly.”

And I know we are ready to achieve even more.

So what are these new challenges?

First, County government must become a force for reform — by leading the fight for more shared services among our municipalities.

Second, County government must spur investment in places where the dollars have yet to flow — in order to stabilize struggling neighborhoods.

Third, County government must commit itself to new, long-term efforts to reduce carbon emissions, and increase energy efficiency.

And finally, County government must develop and carry out a plan to eradicate chronic homelessness.

Regionalization, re-investment, reduced carbon emissions, and chronic homelessness — clearly a tall order.

But as President John F. Kennedy was fond of saying, “A journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step.”

In 2007, our administration can and will take the first steps to meet these challenges.

### **Regionalization:**

Regionalization is either a buzzword, or a buzz saw, depending on to whom you’re talking in our state capital these days.

Eventually Trenton will sort out just how it will encourage regionalization.

But it would be wise to get ahead of the curve and start planning.

We will begin by reviewing what services County government may provide more efficiently on a shared basis for our municipalities.

To aid in that effort, we have applied for a \$300,000 grant from the State to bring our municipalities to the table and thoroughly assess their needs.

It will identify areas appropriate for consolidation or sharing with County government.

Already, two shared service opportunities in law enforcement have presented themselves:

The anticipated closing of Jersey City’s Caven Point Police training facility, has prompted the City to move ahead with the development of a new police academy.

We want to partner with Jersey City to create an academy that would serve the public safety needs of the city and the entire county.

A new, expanded academy could train Jersey City police officer candidates, candidates from all of Hudson’s municipalities, and our County Sheriff’s and Corrections officers.

And our criminal justice system would be well served by a centralized CJP court, to streamline the booking and arraignment process.

We will work closely with Prosecutor DeFazio, Sheriff Cassidy and our municipalities, to determine whether this can become a reality.

Wherever our pursuit of regionalization takes us, rest assured that we will not undertake a shared service plan, unless it maintains quality of service, and makes sense for the taxpayers of Hudson County.

**Focused Re-Investment:**

County government already plays a role in economic development.

Sometimes we do so through large investments in infrastructure designed to help leverage private development.

The new 1500-car parking garage that the HCIA is building, as part of the Red Bull Park project in Harrison, is an example of this.

In other instances, our real estate decisions provide economic stimulus for a neighborhood in transition, like McGinley Square in Jersey City.

There, we worked cooperatively with the City, to sell our shares of the old Jersey City Medical Center for redevelopment.

Just a few blocks away, we purchased a vacant industrial building to house our new County Government Plaza.

And Hudson County Community College has continued to invest in the Journal Square section of Jersey City, constructing outstanding new buildings, like its nationally recognized Culinary Arts and Conference Center.

It is also a valued presence in Union City, where the college's North Hudson Campus is rising above the new 48<sup>th</sup> Street Light Rail Station.

However, not all of our economic stimulus efforts are large scale. We provide modest investments, like those offered through our Economic Development Corporation's Microloan program for small businesses.

These loans, generally in the range of five to twenty-five thousand dollars, provide critical working capital that allows the recipients to adapt and grow their businesses.

Helping these individual small businesses prosper, helps stabilize the traditional business corridors where they are located.

So these microloans are really investments in the long-term health of Broadway or Bergenline Avenue — not just one small store.

In discussions earlier this year, we began to consider how we might apply this kind of “small bore, big impact,” approach to neighborhood redevelopment.

How often have we seen otherwise nice blocks, weakened by one dirty, vacant lot or boarded up house; or a decent neighborhood struggling with the blight of an abandoned commercial property?

We believe one way to address this would be to create a new Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) program, focused on neighborhood redevelopment.

Modeled on our popular Open Space Trust, the CEDS Challenge Grant Program would create annual \$50,000 awards available to municipalities expressly for neighborhood redevelopment.

Like any challenge grant, the municipality would be required to provide a 100% match. Those funds could come from the municipality, the state, or the federal government.

Municipalities could use the grant to encourage the clean up, or redevelopment of single properties, such as abandoned buildings or vacant lots.

Or, they could underwrite the cost of neighborhood redevelopment plans designed to attack these kinds of problems over several blocks.

This year, we will test this approach with a pilot program issuing a single grant.

Long term, our goal will be to develop a regular funding stream for this new approach.

A century ago, the famed progressive reformer Jane Adams summed up why we must do this.

She said, “The good we secure for ourselves is precarious and uncertain — until it is secured for all of us.”

We must do more to help every neighborhood share in the bounty of our economic resurgence.

Let this be the first step.

## **Reducing Carbon Emissions**

You can't pick up a newspaper or a magazine these days without seeing stories about the impact of global climate change.

More and more greenhouse gases are being pumped into the atmosphere — with troubling consequences.

Over the last three decades, Hudson County did cut back on its industrial carbon emissions. We were forced to do so, as our economy went through a wrenching change from manufacturing to services.

But we should do more when it comes to this critical issue.

Our Open Space Trust is already securing parcels of land for parks and passive green space.

We've welcomed several new lower-emission hybrid and alternate fuel vehicles into our County fleet this year — with more to come in the years ahead.

And we are the leader among New Jersey's twenty-one counties when it comes to selecting green energy sources to power our buildings.

But there is another, very simple approach to reducing our carbon emissions, one that would also do much to beautify our County.

We can plant more trees.

Consider the benefits:

According to a recent study published in the scientific journal, *Urban Forestry & Public Greening*, a single mature tree will take 283 pounds of carbon monoxide out of the atmosphere annually.

A single mature tree evaporates 100 gallons of water during a typical summer day, the equivalent of five air conditioners running for 20 hours.

Trees that directly shade buildings and surfaces can reduce temperature by as much as 8-10 degrees and deflect cold winter winds.

This eases heating and cooling loads and cuts energy costs.

Urban trees can reduce storm water runoff by 12-17 percent.

And they look pretty, especially in the springtime.

It's time Hudson County developed a coordinated Urban Forestry Initiative.

This initiative would have three goals:

First, plant more trees along County roads, like Kennedy Boulevard, Paterson Plank Road and Schuyler Avenue.

If we planted an average of just 17 new trees along each mile of our nearly 57 miles of County roads, we could add 1,000 trees to our greenscape.

In the process, we would remove 140 tons of asthma-inducing smog from the air every year.

Second, the initiative would focus on planting more trees in County parks and properties.

Last year we began dedicating a small percentage of capital funds for creation and installation of public art on County property. Surely we can find the space and the funds to add some trees as well.

And third, we should require developers whose projects are pending before the planning board, to plant a reasonable number of trees based on their frontage along County roads.

Planting, nurturing and maintaining trees in an urban environment is not cheap. And it will require cooperation from our residents.

We will begin with a modest goal of planting 1,000 new trees over the next five years, with the intent of expanding that number to 10,000 over the next ten years.

Common sense cries out for us to keep seeking more ways to reduce Greenhouse gases.

Common decency for future generations demands we start now, even if we begin with small steps.

### **Eradicating Chronic homelessness**

This morning I met with a group of remarkable volunteers and professionals taking part in **Project Homeless Connect**, and our annual homeless **Point In Time (PIT) count**.

Tonight they will go out into the bitter cold in search of people living on the streets — to count them, and to let them know about available services.

The annual count not only tells *how many* people are homeless, it helps us understand *who* is homeless.

In our hearts, of course, we know who they are already: family members and friends, someone's son or daughter, a mother trying to do right by her kids.

But if we look inside the numbers, we can gain an insight into how we might finally address this frustrating issue properly.

Last year's census found that there were at least 2,973 people experiencing homelessness. Of those, 308 were considered chronically homeless.

These numbers mesh with what experts find nationwide, that the chronic homeless generally account for about 10 percent of the total.

The overwhelming majority is *transitionally homeless*. They are often Moms with children, undergoing a difficult transition brought about by domestic or employment difficulties. On average, they usually find shelter within a period of 30 days.

The *chronically* homeless are typically older single men, struggling with addiction, mental illness, physical disabilities, and the health problems associated with long periods of exposure.

As explained in a February 2006 article in *The New Yorker* magazine, our current, haphazard approach to dealing with chronic homelessness is shockingly expensive — and ineffective.

Reporter Malcolm Gladwell chronicled how a leading service group for the homeless in Boston tracked the medical expenses of 119 chronically homeless people.

In the course of five years, they found that 33 people died and seven more were sent to nursing homes, and the group still accounted for nearly 19,000 emergency-room visits—at a minimum cost of a thousand dollars per visit.

Gladwell also described how the University of California, San Diego Medical Center followed fifteen chronically homeless inebriates.

They found that over eighteen months, those 15 people were treated at the hospital's emergency room 417 times.

They generated medical bills that averaged \$100,000 each. One person came to the emergency room 87 times!

While an equivalent study has yet to be done in Hudson County, local experts believe our chronically homeless fall into much the same pattern, making them one of the stressors on an already strained charity care system.

There is something else to consider as well: *approximately 14 percent of our chronic homeless are disabled veterans.*

We are rightly proud of our new medal program honoring our Hudson veterans developed by former Freeholder Barry Dugan.

But we owe our veterans more.

There are disabled veterans out there today, being counted, in the cold.

In a sense, they remain on the battlefield.

We must finally bring them home.

That is why today, in conjunction with the Board of Freeholders Task Force on Homelessness, we present for the Board's consideration a resolution.

It calls on Governor Corzine to **create a statewide system of County-based Trust Funds to prevent and end homelessness.**

Governor, if your priority is reducing the cost of services in the name of property tax reform, here is a great way to do just that.

And best of all it is the right thing to do.

Already 76 counties across 10 states in the U.S. have instituted Homeless Trust Funds, paid for in a host of different ways.

Sometimes the funding is provided through the dedication of a small percentage of document recording fees, through bond fees, or drawn from existing hotel and motel taxes.

Counties then leverage those funds from other sources, including the private sector and the Federal government.

They have reported an average leverage rate of five times the original trust allocation.

One of the nation's most successful, in Miami Dade County, raises \$11 million annually.

These trusts can be used to deal with chronic homelessness, to support those at risk, and to promote affordable housing construction.

We will leave it to Trenton to hash out the administrative details for these trusts. But we are developing a plan that can work — if the resources are made available.

In partnership with the City of Jersey City, Hudson County is designing a ten-year plan to eradicate chronic homelessness.

It is based on a new approach — one that has produced real progress.

It includes a “housing first” strategy, that focuses on getting the chronically homeless into permanent housing as quickly as possible.

Cities like Baltimore, Columbus and Denver have used this approach to cut their number of chronic homeless cases by as much as half — and they have significantly reduced the attendant medical and social service costs to the taxpayers.

A trust fund dedicated to fighting homelessness will give us the stable source of funding needed to make this plan a reality.

Doesn't it make far more sense to finally solve chronic homelessness — than to go on endlessly, expensively managing it?

### **Conclusion: Dream Greatly—Achieve Greatly**

Before I close, let me thank a handful of folks who are fine examples of the partnerships that have been so important to our successes over the last four years:

Nick Sakiewicz, President of AEG New York & New Jersey, who stuck by the Hudson County to bring major league soccer to Harrison.

Pete Busaca, President of the Hudson County Central Labor Council, whose members have supported our Summer Youth Employment Initiative year in and year out.

And the members of our new Hudson County Public Art Commission — they are all volunteers, all working to make my executive order to create public art a reality.

Well, we have outlined some great challenges today, and we have offered the first steps to address them.

We may stumble on the way to our goals.

But it is worth remembering a quote I've become familiar with, thanks to our Planning Director Stephen Marks, who uses it to close every email.

They are the words of America's first great urban planner, and the father of modern Chicago, Daniel Hudson Burnham, who wrote in 1910:

"Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood and probably themselves will not be realized.

Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will not die, but long after we are gone be a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing insistence."

I look forward to working with all those assembled here today, who have helped forge our foundation of progress — and are ready to aim even higher tomorrow.

God bless Hudson County and our brave fighting men and women around the world.

Thank you.