Building the Center of Opportunity

Address to the Renton Chamber of Commerce

Renton Mayor Kathy Keolker

March 1, 2006

The City Council has adopted a bold new vision for our community—"Renton . . . the center of opportunity in the Puget Sound region where businesses and families thrive." Many of our Council members are here today. Together we can attest that Renton is *well on its way* to making that vision a reality.

This City has never seen greater development and a broader spectrum of housing opportunities. For the past 8 years, new construction has brought us record increases in the total assessed valuation of business and residential property. 2005 was another record-breaking year, with $312 million of value added through new construction. That easily surpasses the 2004 record year, when $280 million of new development was added within the city limits. In fact, over the past ten years, Renton's total assessed value has more than doubled.

While overall sales tax revenue increased only slightly, we saw double digit increases from general retail, hospitality, and restaurants—all indicators of a strong economy -- and our largest retailers continue to grow. IKEA has broken ground on its fifth expansion since coming to Renton eleven years ago. This is the highest-grossing IKEA store in all of North America. After the current expansion is completed this fall, it will be the largest single-story IKEA on the planet. We can't thank our friends Bjorn Bayley and Anders Berglund enough for all they have done for Renton.

We're also having great success diversifying and attracting new jobs to our community.

The Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco is now under construction with its new Branch Headquarters on the former Longacres site. When this state-of-the-art facility opens next year, it will employ about 100 people. Mark Gould is the Branch Manager. Mark, thank you again for your investment in Renton.

While I'm making introductions, please meet Dr. Monte Bridges. Dr. Bridges is the superintendent of the Educational Service District of Puget Sound, which moved its headquarters and almost 400 employees here from Burien last fall. The ESD provides services to thirty-five school districts in Pierce and King Counties as well as Bainbridge Island. Now a thousand education professionals are coming here every week for their own continuing education, and then taking new skills back into schools all around the Puget Sound area.

Here's another new business you may not have heard about. Last year, Lou and Linda Yaseen came to visit me. These are the people who discovered the Dove Ice Cream Bar and turned it into a national phenomenon. Now they're launching a brand new product from right here in Renton -- one to rival their original sensation. After building a 45,000-square foot processing facility in the Valley, the Yaseens are now shipping "Blisscotti" frozen treats to supermarkets up and down the West Coast.

Over the past year we've also welcomed 353 new small businesses to Renton, everything from dentists and attorneys to florists and restaurants. These new entrants to our business community not only broaden employment opportunities for our residents, but add vibrancy to our business community. I know the Chamber is committed to being sure our smaller businesses thrive. Bill Taylor, you can count on the City to help in whatever ways we can.

There are more businesses – big and small -- on the way. Renton continues to be an attractive place for companies of all kinds. Executives are realizing that our central location, our competitive lease rates and land costs, and our pro-business attitude make Renton a compelling place to do business. Every week we're in contact with companies looking to relocate here. Over the coming months you can expect to hear that several significant employers will be establishing major new facilities or corporate headquarters in Renton.

We have all read about the tremendous performance of our "local" businesses that operate on a global scale -- PACCAR and Boeing. PACCAR has added 900 jobs over the past two years and is producing nearly 40 Kenworth trucks each day at its plant in Renton. We want to congratulate PACCAR not only on its celebration of 100 years in business, but also for winning the National Medal of Technology, the nation's highest honor for technological innovation.

The resurgence of Boeing over the past year is absolutely remarkable. The aerospace industry is alive and well in Renton with more than 1,000 new Boeing jobs added in 2005. The City is now home to three of Boeing's six major business units—Commercial Airplanes, Boeing Capital, and the Shared Services Group, which is just now moving into state-of-the-art offices here.

Production at the Renton Plant is outpacing everything we've seen in years. Two hundred and twelve Boeing 737s were assembled and took their maiden flights from Renton last year. Just a few weeks ago, the City Council and I attended the dedication of the 5,000th 737. It was a great day for Boeing workers, for me personally, and for our City.

In 2007, Boeing will begin assembly of the U.S. Navy's new Multi-mission Maritime Aircraft, while it continues to roll out over 1,000 more 737s already on contract. It's clear that Boeing will be building planes at the Renton plant for years, if not decades, to come.

But we need to make sure we don't take our 65-year partnership with Boeing for granted. In late December, Alan Mullaly told the Seattle Times that the aerospace giant could have a 737 replacement in the air by 2012. I've already contacted Mr. Mulally to let him know we'll do everything we can to assure that the new family of commercial aircraft is assembled here. The City will be working with the State, King County and business leaders to make it clear to Boeing decision-makers that the Renton plant is the obvious best choice for building that new plane.

To all of you here today from Boeing and in particular to Renton's constant friend and supporter Bob Watt, many thanks for all you've done for our City!

Now I want to share some good news about "*hometown* Renton", where *families* also thrive.

In the first half of this decade, more people moved to Renton than any other city in King County aside from Seattle. That's an amazing statistic, and there are clear reasons for it. We know that home prices are more affordable here than in Seattle, Bellevue, Redmond and many other places in the County. Our central location affords commuters easy access to other employment centers around the Puget Sound. Especially for two-income families whose jobs take them in opposite directions, Renton is the best bet for dinner together at home on a work night!

But people are also coming here because of Renton's outstanding quality of life, and the improvements we're rolling out with great regularity. We're making strides to improve our neighborhoods and assure that high quality housing is available for families of all income levels. We want Renton residents to enjoy the best living environment the Puget Sound has to offer.

Last year at this event, I told you we were going to clean up Renton. Our Clean Sweep program was an astounding success, collecting over 280 tons of garbage and ten tons of recyclables. At the spring and fall recycling events another 200 tons of recycling and 1600 gallons of hazardous waste was removed. Then we had a little fun with our "Reuse It!" community swap event. Seven hundred people came by Renton Stadium in one day and traded 12 tons of gently-used furniture and household items.

REACT, our focused code enforcement effort, has brought about significant and visible results. REACT team members in several City departments are working with the community to clean up neighborhoods and deal with chronic nuisance properties using the tools at hand -- code enforcement, education, training, community teamwork, and economic development incentives. Perhaps the best example of REACT's success is the former Bagnariol restaurant -- a longstanding nuisance and an eyesore at the corner of NE 4th and Union Avenue. Now that the building is down and the lot is cleared, that corner is ready for a new life! It was a proud moment for the City when REACT received the Association of Washington Cities' Municipal Achievement Gold Award in 2005.

Along with cleaning up our *established* neighborhoods, Renton continues to provide new, attractive communities for our families. Last year we issued permits – 90% of them within two weeks -- for 521 new single-family homes and 109 multi-family units. We're expecting nearly a thousand additional units to be added to our housing stock in 2006.

We're also making sure that our neighborhood amenities and recreation facilities keep pace with the other improvements all over town. Last year over a hundred neighbors worked with us to design the new nine-acre park in the Heather Downs neighborhood. We now have the funding in place, and that park will be under construction this spring.

We're going after State and Federal money to build the Sam Chastain waterfront trail. This is the missing link that will connect the Cedar River Trail to Coulon Park, and help complete the trail system that goes all the way around Lake Washington.

Our Libraries are another essential piece of our quality of life. They are unique and beloved by many, but with technological advances and major annexations in the offing, the City needs to re-think its libraries. Watch for more on the future of our library system in the months to come.

I've always said that Renton has a heart and soul that is very special. I'm reminded about this whenever I talk to other mayors from around the country, when we meet to share ideas and best practices from our cities. Other mayors are amazed when I tell them about our community partnership with the City, schools, hospital, technical college, businesses and non-profits all working together for the benefit of our citizens. It's something we've *all* learned to do *very well*!

The Renton School District continues to offer exceptional education opportunities to Renton's kids. The District will finish construction this year on Kennydale and Renton Park Elementary schools. Thanks to strong voter support, every comprehensive K-through-12 school in the District will have been completely rebuilt or substantially remodeled within the past 11 years. That's so important, not only to our families but for the message it sends to businesses considering locating in Renton.

Renton Schools have come a long way since Dr. Dolores Gibbons took the helm. Although we're all delighted to see Dolores entering a new phase in her retirement, we'll really miss her leadership, inspiration and dedication to our community. Thank you so much, Dolores.

As the City expands with annexation of portions of the East Renton Plateau, more and more Renton families live within the boundaries of the *Issaquah* and *Kent* School Districts. We're committed to building the same spirit of collaboration with these new District partners as we've enjoyed with the Renton District.

Education is also a key sector in Renton's *economy*. I'm sure you've heard that Americans, on average, change jobs more than six times in their careers. Renton is ready to help build the skills they'll need. More than a dozen higher education and training schools are located here, including Renton Technical College, City University, and the new Kaplan College branch.

Renton Technical College continues to be a leader in technical and vocational education, constantly adding new programs to prepare students for tomorrow's jobs -- like medical informatics, lab technician and ophthalmic assistant. The College is also working with the State to establish a registered nursing program. Don Bressler was not able to make it today, but I understand he's in Olympia right now, perhaps promoting that new program.

"Remarkable things happen" at Valley Medical Center. Have you seen those engaging TV ads? Valley is putting Renton on the map as a center for health care in the region. Its Center for Joint Replacement has become one of the top five such programs in the nation. Patients are flying here from all over the country to undergo these delicate surgeries.

The hospital has completed its new birth center – a modern wonder of technological advancement in a home-like setting -- to welcome our newest residents into the world. And more growth is underway. Valley's new surgical unit and lobby are under construction, and expansion of the emergency room is on target for 2007.

Not only is Valley Medical a tremendous asset for the health of Renton's families, it's an economic engine in itself. With nearly 2200 employees, Valley is the City's second largest employer. Rich Roodman, this community is indebted to you and your Board members.

Last year, I said we'd be focusing on expanding and improving our four major commercial areas—the Valley, the Highlands, the emerging South Lake Washington neighborhood, and Downtown Renton. I've already told you about the continued growth of IKEA and other development in the Valley. I'm also pleased to report this year on substantial progress in the Downtown and South Lake Washington.

Economic development in Renton began Downtown. Remember how risky that seemed at the beginning? I was on the City Council at the time, and I recall how we all complained for years about the condition of our Downtown. And we wrung our hands over the big steps we needed to take to change it. There were so many unknowns! But first we had to *believe* change was possible. Then we had to learn to trust each other. And finally, we needed to agree to be open to new ideas as we embarked on this unfamiliar journey.

Well, the investments of the 1990s have certainly paid off and, as we had hoped, a second wave of redevelopment is now in the capable hands of private developers. Merrill Gardens will complete its 155-unit senior housing facility this fall. Just across the street, the Parkside at 95 Burnett will add more than 100 new market-rate apartments, and dramatically change the scale of Burnett Avenue.

We should also see construction begin this year on 100 new units at Fifth and Williams in South Renton, and 50 condominium units at 110 Williams. Altogether these projects will bring hundreds of new residents into our downtown, and of course they'll need more restaurants, leisure activities and places to shop. That's exactly what we had in mind when we decided to take the risk to push the market and be pro-active in our downtown.

This past year we've also seen substantial reinvestment in a number of our existing buildings and businesses. Armondo Pavone and Denny Dochnahl deserve recognition for the transformation they have made to the block of Third and Wells. They proved that making your *property* more attractive makes sound business sense.

An essential partner in the success of Denny and Armondo's project is our own First Savings Bank of Renton. Without their willingness to step up and support local redevelopment, this project might have really struggled to find the needed financing. Also, the investment made by First Savings in *its own* new financial center project – under the leadership of Harry Blencoe and now Victor Karpiak – is further testament to the bank's longstanding commitment to this community. Harry and other Bank Board members are here today. Thanks for believing in Renton and investing in our future.

I'm also thrilled with the re-creation of Ron McGowan's restaurant. Jerry Jackson has breathed new life into that space with Fin-n-Bone. If you haven't been there yet, I encourage you to visit this new dining opportunity in Downtown Renton.

The City worked to help the Evergreen City Ballet find a suitable place to locate its dance company and school after it was pushed out of its long-time home in Auburn. This top-notch ballet school now serves more than 200 students in the former McLendon Hardware location. I can't imagine a better use for that big old building, and I'm placing my bet that this new partnership will attract more arts-related activities to our community. Maurice Cooper from the Ballet is here. Maurice, I welcome you to the Renton family. I also want to extend special thanks to the McLendon family for their support of the Ballet. Without their generosity, and frankly their rent subsidy, the Ballet would not have been able to bring this building back to life.

We're also pleased with the success of the Spirit of Washington Dinner Train in the Pavilion building where space is now available for corporate meetings, weddings, parties, and community events.

In December, we dedicated "*River*," a striking work of public art that graces the south side of the City Center Parking garage. Ellensburg artist Richard Elliott created this magnificent work – 76 feet tall with 13,500 colored reflectors – designed to represent our own Cedar River.

The contribution that all of these projects have made to Downtown Renton is a significant step in the right direction. I'm confident that others will follow. The City is committed to partnership with Downtown business owners to keep the energy alive and

keep improvements coming in the Downtown business core.

Last spring we brought in University of Washington architecture students and their Storefront Studio to give us a refreshed look at what Downtown could be. We also re-focused City staff resources to work with businesses to assure that these good ideas turn into reality.

When word came to City Hall about inappropriate behavior at the Transit Center, we took quick action to address real and perceived concerns about disorderly conduct in the downtown neighborhood. The Council Public Safety Committee and the Mayor's office pulled together Metro Transit officials, the King County Sheriff's Office, the Renton School District, and nearby business owners. We challenged this group to assess the problem and figure out what can be done to avert trouble before it starts. Our partnership is already making a difference. We fully intend to keep our City Center – just as it was designed to be – a lively but safe and comfortable urban place with great restaurants, shops and access to the arts.

Plans for the stunning new development at The Landing have us all so excited. The Landing is on track to break ground this summer and is expected to open in October 2007, just in time for Christmas shopping in Renton.

In its first phase alone, The Landing will include over 600,000 square feet of retail space, restaurants, a multi-screen movie theater, and 900 apartment units —instantly adding a vibrant multi-use gathering place that will transform the face of our city. With a second phase of more than 200,000 *additional* square feet of shops, The Landing will certainly put South Lake Washington on the map. Factor in Fry's and a new Lowe's Home Improvement store in the parking lot to the north of Frye's, and this part of Renton will become one of the largest retail destinations in the Puget Sound region, seemingly overnight. Bob Baker is here today. Bob, we can't wait to shop at the Landing!

This summer the City will start construction on the roads and utility systems needed to support this new development. At a cost of more than $20 million, this will be Renton's *largest ever* public works project. Thanks to the leadership of our State Legislators – in particular Senator Margarita Prentice – we secured a $5 million State grant to help offset these costs. And with some extra wrangling by Congressman Dave Reichert, we're on track to receive another $1 million in Federal grant funding. We have Congressman Reichert's local staffer Anne Laughlin here with us today. Please thank Dave again for his help.

After the State and Federal grant funding, we'll issue revenue bonds to cover the remaining city share of the project. You may remember that the City's 2003 development agreement with Boeing called for a public contribution to the project as long as revenue from the development was sufficient to cover the City's debt service. This City investment is essential to insure that we see the highest quality development possible.

A pioneer in the South Lake Washington neighborhood is Michael Christ and SECO Development, developers of The Bristol. Michael has broken ground on a second apartment building, adding another 200 units of housing to the neighborhood. Within the next few years we hope to see the rest of his project -- 750,000 square feet of office space and a destination waterfront hotel.

Southport is one of the largest office campus sites in the region. It certainly ranks up there among the most spectacular settings. As lease rates in Seattle and Bellevue creep up, and more people recognize this unprecedented opportunity on the shores of Lake Washington, I know Southport will draw forward-thinking companies that will generate thousands of new jobs in our city. Michael, we're eager to help you make great things happen on the Lake.

Renton has taken major leaps forward over the past several years, and I must say it's pretty clear that the *pace* of our progress is accelerating. We have a lot to celebrate. We've stimulated a renaissance, and we've demonstrated how good we are at planting the seeds and then engaging public and private partners to reap the harvest.

Now I'd like to turn our attention to a section of our City where, despite our best efforts, success has proven elusive – the Highlands neighborhood.

It's important for you to know exactly the area I am talking about here. We know the name "Highlands" is used widely – to some it includes everything east of 405. When I talk here about the Highlands "study area", I'm referring to a specific portion of the Highlands roughly bordered by Edmonds and Harrington on the west, and Kirkland Avenue on the east, centered on Sunset Ave between about NE 7th and NE 20th.

As we all know, conditions in this Highlands study area have been below par for decades, and are still declining. This is *not* a new issue. We've all known about it, watched it, complained about it, and wrung our hands over what to do.

Much of the housing in the Highlands study area was built in the early 1940s to support the war effort. The work commissioned by the War Department – building tanks and B29s -- is certainly a proud part of our history. But when thousands of workers came here, housing had to be built quickly and cheaply from whatever building materials were available.

Unfortunately, not much has been done to improve those temporary units in the 60 years since they were built. Several hundred still stand – some just barely – and are home to families with very limited means. Many live with sagging and leaky roofs, boarded-up windows, asbestos in the attics, and lead paint on the walls and window frames. Duplexes still teeter on cinder block foundations. According to official census data, some units have no kitchens and some have no tub or shower.

Last summer, I walked this neighborhood. Honestly, I came away disheartened. The conditions for families living there are not something we can be proud of. I needed to

understand why this neighborhood continues to decline. Why has it not benefited from the housing boom like our other older neighborhoods? Here's some of what I learned:

Absentee landowners are responsible for a great deal of the neglect. Only 39% of the units in the Highlands sub-area are owner-occupied. Numerous Renton families who lived in this part of the Highlands moved out as conditions worsened over the years.

Many people who live there now have fewer choices; they're unable to leave due to poverty, language barriers, or disabilities that keep them locked into this unhealthy environment. Some qualify for HUD Section 8 Housing benefits. Absentee landlords charge them shamefully high rents, collecting whatever the tenants can afford for shelter, plus lucrative subsidies from the federal government.

Tenants don't complain about the conditions. Why? Because their fear of eviction keeps them quiet. A roof of any kind is better than living in a car or on the streets. And many of these people have nowhere else to go.

As you might expect, this neglect and physical dilapidation has resulted in a concentration of crime and poverty. Let me give you a flavor of what residents of today's Highlands neighborhood are dealing with. The 360-acre Highlands study area is just 2.4% of Renton's total land mass. But over the past five years this area has suffered a *vastly disproportionate* share of the City's criminal activity:

- 40% of citywide gas station robberies,
- 24% of all vehicle thefts,
- 18% of public nuisance cases, and
- 15% of all the armed robberies, murders and drug- and alcohol-related crimes in the City, plus fully
- 20% of all the fire calls, aid calls, and code enforcement complaints.

All of this in just 2½% of the City's land area. These figures are staggering!

This is unacceptable in Renton. No one in our community, no matter how old or how poor, should be living in conditions like these.

We've already taken the usual steps to address the problems we've seen in the Highlands – code enforcement, special police emphasis patrols, and the like. We also set aside $1½ million of City funds for infrastructure to try and stimulate investment and demonstrate that the City is ready to partner in the revitalization of this area.

We've tried to find someone to purchase the old shopping center and make it new again. We even built a state-of-the-art fire station, a very visible symbol that we want to improve this area. But our efforts so far have failed to generate the kind of renewal we've seen in the Downtown and at the south end of the Lake.

The Highlands study area presents vastly different challenges. The owner of a run-down duplex can make more money charging high monthly rents than tearing down the building and redeveloping the property. While residential developers definitely show

interest in building new housing in the Highlands, they've told us that, given the economic realities, they can't accumulate the contiguous parcels they need for a workable project. And no one – neither an individual property owner nor a home builder – is willing to build high quality housing when the surrounding neighborhood is so poorly maintained.

What can be done? I'm going to start with two proposals. First, the City needs to add another $1 million to the money already set aside for infrastructure improvement. This added investment can come from 2005 year-end savings. I can't think of a more worthy place to invest our one-time money.

Second, I'm proposing that we rezone portions of the Highlands. This will help to stimulate development of housing to meet the needs of families who want to live there, as well as support shops, services and restaurants that make a neighborhood whole.

Our plan will include partnerships with one or more homebuilder(s) to assemble land areas big enough to make new housing projects feasible. We'll engage the Renton Housing Authority to create affordable housing in the study area and other places close by, so Highlands residents can relocate to safe, decent and affordable homes. We'll also join forces with other housing providers and non-profit agencies that have the experience and capacity to make this a smooth transition for current residents. No one living there today, who has suffered through the conditions in the Highlands, will end up homeless or disadvantaged by the renewal process.

The exception is this . . . If you are a criminal, a drug dealer, a car thief, a meth addict, or a gang member, you will no longer be able to prosper in the new Renton Highlands!

The Highlands poses unique challenges. I believe that it's time to meet them head on.

Remember, we invested in the Downtown – where we bought out the car dealers and seeded a renaissance by building the Piazza and the Transit Center. We're now investing in South Lake Washington – installing infrastructure to support development of an exciting new retail and entertainment village. It's time to invest in the Highlands and make it safe for families again.

The community renewal plan I'll propose will include new public spaces and pedestrian connections. It will call for street and sidewalk improvements. We're exploring brand new concepts in storm water management, and envisioning a rebirth for the North Highlands Community Center and the Highlands Library. Along with these *public* investments, new housing will attract shops and restaurants so residents can dine and shop within walking distance of their homes.

The Highlands will become a neighborhood where people *choose* to live, not one where they *have* to live because they can't afford to go anywhere else.

You'll be hearing much more about the Highlands in the months ahead. There will be

opportunities to hear your ideas too.

For our City Council members, there are tough decisions ahead. I'm committed to working with you on a solution. Here's our reality . . . If we are bold in our approach, we will be criticized. If we do nothing, we will be criticized. If we only do a little bit, we'll be criticized for not doing enough. If we take too long to make a decision, we'll be criticized. There is *no easy, risk-free path*!

But here's the bottom line for me. We know the problem. We know the numbers. We know that living conditions in many of these homes are unacceptable. We can't look the other way any longer. We must take action while our economy is strong, and while we have community partners willing to help implement the needed improvements. It won't be easy, but it is the right thing to do!

There are two other topics of major importance to Renton in the coming years. I'd be remiss if I didn't take a few minutes to tell you what's happening in transportation and annexation.

Between now and the year 2011, $316 million will be spent to expand I-405 in Renton, thanks to adoption of the 5¢ and 9½¢ gas taxes, and the defeat of Initiative 912. Sixty percent of Renton voters understood that 912 would have scuttled the projects we need to restore mobility in Renton. I'm guessing that at least some of this wise voting was a result of the Chamber and the City Council stepping up to explain what would – and would not – happen to congestion if the initiative passed.

When and if a Regional Transportation Improvement District measure appears on the ballot, it should contain at least another $1.3 billion for I-405, with $1 billion earmarked for the stretch from the Cedar River to I-90. This is the section of the freeway with the heaviest and most persistent congestion in the region. We need to watch carefully as the RTID package is assembled, and once again make sure our citizens are well informed when it comes time to vote.

The good news from Sound Transit is that the planned improvements at Rainier and Hardie, and the project to extend SW 27th will receive funds in Sound Move Phase One. We've still got work to do on Sound Move Phase Two. We're not yet seeing the mix of projects on that list that provide meaningful benefit to Renton and its taxpayers. City staff and the elected officials who represent Renton on regional transportation committees are assessing our next moves in making Renton's priorities a part of the Sound Move Two package.

Another major dynamic facing Renton in the next four to five years is annexation. Annexation has been a steady feature of Renton's history. Since incorporation in 1901, the City has grown piece by piece, annexation by annexation, 182 times! But the annexations we're facing *now* are totally different. They're *big*. They're *intensively developed.* And they're all part of a statewide plan to bring urbanized areas into cities, and concentrate development around urban centers. A third of all the unincorporated land inside King County's Urban Growth Boundary lies within Renton's Potential Annexation Area.

We're looking *now* at three large potential annexations that will expand Renton's land area from 18 square miles to 35½ square miles, and its population from 57,000 to 120,000.

This fall, residents of a large portion of the East Renton Plateau will vote whether or not to annex.

While some people in Fairwood are talking about forming their own city, others in both Fairwood and the Cascade neighborhoods are considering annexation to Renton.

At the same time, community leaders in the West Hill area are planning a public education effort they hope will lead to an annexation initiative. The City Council voted last year to re-establish the West Hill as part of Renton's Potential Annexation Area. I appreciate the Council taking that action. It was the right thing to do. All of the West Hill is in the Renton School District, and West Hill residents come to Renton for shopping and services. Renton is their community too.

We need to be thinking now about how to organize City government for these annexations, and how to position Renton for the time when it is the second largest city in King County and the fifth largest in the State.

In 2005, City government made great progress on streamlining city operations. We're looking at the City like a business – a business that measures itself by outcomes, and specifically the outcomes its customers say are important.

Continuous improvement of City operations will go on in the background, as the Council and the Administration focus our energy on the major initiatives I've described here.

We need to be single-minded about the big challenges at hand, and ready for the unprecedented growth that annexations will bring.

I commit to you that as we take on these challenges, we'll be paying close attention to preserving the good things that make Renton your favorite city – a quality of life that's out of reach for most cities, and a vibrant business environment that's getting the attention of business leaders everywhere.

To be the Renton we know we can be, we all need to work together. The *City Council* needs to be there with insightful questions, good policy decisions, and big-picture leadership. We'll be counting on the *business community* to keep us pointed in the right direction. And our *citizens* will need to help us identify the services most important to them, and be willing to support those services with their tax dollars.

There's so much to look forward to. This is an exciting time in our City's history. The state of Renton's economy is strong. And I'm convinced that we now have the experience, the tools, the team – and the compassion – to tackle the challenges ahead.

Every day, I feel blessed to be Mayor of this great city, and I'm honored to be part of the team that is making Renton the center of opportunity in the Puget Sound Region.

Thank you!