

STATE OF THE CITY  
MAYOR JOSEPH P. RILEY, JR.  
JANUARY 22, 2012

Tonight I am pleased to report to you on the state of our city -- a city that because of you becomes safer, more beautiful, livable and economically stronger every year.

One critically important part of every citizen's life that local government can help with is the opportunity to have a fulfilling, higher wage job. A growing diversifying economy is essential to every citizen of Charleston. This is a huge priority for us. And it is a great challenge as the competition for more, higher wage jobs is intense. But I believe strongly that Charleston has what it takes to be among the most dynamic, innovative cities in America. Last week we learned that WE ARE, when a national leader in economic strategy placed Charleston in the Top 10 of its Best Performing Cities for 2012. The Milken Institute ranks 200 large cities and their regions by how well they are creating and sustaining jobs and economic growth.

This isn't just another accolade. The Milken Institute is a nonpartisan, non-profit think tank of specialists in the fields of capital markets and economic growth. Their Best Performing Cities Index is a very important measure of how we are doing when it comes to ensuring Charleston is a place every child can grow up and stay here, have a successful life and compete with the greatest businesses across the world.

That we are at the top of this list is not an accident. More than 10 years ago we started the Charleston Digital Corridor. This economic development initiative is focused on high-wage, creative industries. It has become a model for the rest of the country and is responsible for a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship that is becoming part of Charleston's DNA.

The quickening of Charleston's emergence as a significant national player in the knowledge economy is exciting. Benefit Focus, an internationally recognized benefits management company, a company that began here, opened its new Design and Engineering Building and will be adding 300 jobs.

Not far away, SPARC, a computer software company, announced the construction of a new building and that will add 300 jobs in our community.

People Matter, also headquartered in Charleston, is nearing completion of its building on King Street with plans to build a second one bringing 220 jobs to our community.

Our Digital Corridor companies report that all of them – 100 percent – are hiring staff. We created a CodeCamp for further intensive computer training. Our Flagship incubators are full and graduating companies on a continuing basis. We have free WiFi at Marion Square, the Governors Park and hope to have it at the Waterfront Park soon. California has Silicon Valley – the Charleston region has Silicon Harbor.

And the Horizon Project, which will be a wonderful life science, biotech business and residential neighborhood along the Ashley River on Lockwood Drive, is receiving proposals for

master developers. Our goal is to have the first phase of this project in design and under construction next year.

Our construction industry continues to see substantial expansion and recovery. This year we had the highest number of single family building permits since 2007 – an increase of 24 per cent over last year and the total new building construction value was \$420 million.

Our airport is an important part of community success and our tourism economy. The tourism economy of the region produces an economic impact of \$3.2 billion a year. This was enhanced, as well as the success of local businesses that are required to travel a lot, with Southwest Airlines coming to Charleston and JetBlue giving more direct flight option beginning February 28. And our airport will be undergoing an expansion with \$162.5 in construction costs, and enplanements have increased by 24 percent since 2010.

We are so proud of the Boeing Dreamliners that are rolling out of the amazing Boeing Assembly Plant and that our community is producing the most advanced airplane in the world.

The completion of I-526 is essential. When completed it will reduce traffic congestion, make streets and highways safer and enable citizens to more conveniently travel throughout the West Ashley, James Island and Johns Island parts of our community. I congratulate Charleston County Council for their decision to move forward on the construction of this needed highway.

A wonderful component of the highway will be an 8 mile bike and pedestrian path that will connect the West Ashley Greenway with the James Island County Park.

In the debate about the completion of I-526, there was understandable discussion and concern expressed about protecting the special nature of Johns Island, including its physical beauty and its rural nature. I know our community shares my belief that the protection of Johns Island is important -- not only to Johns Islanders, but to our region.

There are two steps that should be taken to further insure the protection of Johns Island. One, which County Council has under consideration, is using newly freed up Greenbelt funds of approximately \$12 million for the purpose of acquiring conservation easements on Johns Island. A carefully thought out program of acquiring forever development rights on land that has been in cultivation or contributes to the rural nature of Johns Island will be an important and permanent step in protecting this special place. The second step would be for City and the County to together create a Johns Island Land Use Commission that could help guide the City and the County in years to come on the consideration of any proposed planning and zoning changes.

We knew we were a world class community. You, our citizens, have made it so. We are so proud for the *Conde Nast Travel* magazine to reaffirm that by announcing Charleston was the Top City in the World as well as Number One in the country!

There are so many reasons for this. And one is the way that the citizens of Charleston take care of their city. A special example of that was witnessed last year when the community came together to preserve this historic church. The church was not threatened by demolition, but with its use being forever changed – that from a place of worship to a residence. What makes Charleston special among the cities of the world is that this city -- so interesting and inspirational

to visit -- is a living, working, loved home to its citizens. Home in a city encompasses many things, including its places of worship. This church will always be a place of worship in our community.

For the 6<sup>th</sup> year in a row, violent crime in Charleston has steadily decreased. Since 2007, violent crime has decreased by 70 per cent – from 909 violent crimes to 272 or there are 637 fewer victims of violent crime last year than in 2007. This is a result of so many things: the excellent leadership of Chief Mullen, the sense of urgency and the “all in”, everyone working together mentality of our Police Department -- the largest in our state and I believe the best in our country -- and the wonderful partnership we have with other law enforcement agencies. This year, working with local, State and Federal authorities, we arrested 40 dangerous career criminals in a complicated, long investigated series of conspiracy cases.

We must continue to encourage our Legislature to make our criminal justice system stronger. Through the hard work of Chief Mullen, the citizens of our community and our Legislative Delegation, a very important bond revocation bill was passed last year. We are now working on two additional bills and ask you to encourage our legislators to pass them as well. One would tighten the bail process to further keep violent offenders in jail pending trial and the second would substantially enhance the penalty for possessing an illegal firearm.

Also, we should encourage our Senators and Congressmen to support President Obama’s common sense gun control program that would eliminate high capacity magazines, ban assault weapons, close loopholes and create a universal background check for the purchase of guns. These measures and others will reduce gun violence in our country and in this community.

This year the Charleston Police Fund was established, chaired by Medal of Honor recipient Major General James E. Livingston. The Fund will enable citizens to support special Police Department initiatives to develop new crime fighting techniques and technology as well as to assist with important Police Department initiatives like Camp Hope, which mentors children from the ages 7 to 14, and gives our police officers leadership development opportunities working with neighborhood children. A community where all children respect their police officers is a better and safer community.

And this year Stand Up Charleston, a community empowerment initiative, was started; led by a wonderful civic leader, Margaret Siedler. It is recognition that as closely as we work with our community in a host of ways, we can do even more working together to make our city safer.

This last September Chief Karen Brack became the Chief of our Fire Department. Chief Brack brings the experiences of a distinguished career in firefighting in Georgia and more recently in Oregon. We are not only very proud, but we are positively benefiting from Chief Brack's great leadership.

We christened the City's first fire boat and have a fully trained and highly skilled maritime fire company. It gives us the ability to handle fires from the waterside as well as fire events out in our harbor and rivers.

The City's newest and largest fire station is now under construction. On King Street

Extension and Heriot, this fire station will have the capacity to handle 2 fire engines, an aerial truck, a hazardous material unit as well reserve fire engines and to provide the administrative headquarters for our Fire Department.

Two new fire engines have gone into service this year and 3 new pumpers and a ladder apparatus is being purchased in this year's budget.

An Arson Task Force was set up to bring the combined resources of the City's Police Department, Fire Department, County, State and Federal law enforcement agencies together to solve the dangerous and perplexing problem of arson in our city. Through some of the best investigative and detective work possible anywhere, an arrest was made this year. This does not mean that citizens should not continue to be vigilant --everything from making sure your home or apartments have working smoke alarms, not leaving trash or combustible furniture on porches, having porch lights illuminating front and back door lights, and keeping a watch over your neighborhood.

This year marks the formal retirement of a very special and most creative public servant, Ellen Dressler Moryl. Ellen has directed our award winning Office of Cultural Affairs for 27 years. Fortunately for us she will continue to serve this community on a part-time basis directing Piccolo Spoleto Festival and assisting our new Director of the Office of Cultural Affairs, Scott Watson. Ellen's contributions to our city have been huge. Her extraordinary energy and profound belief in the importance of the arts in the life of every citizen have helped make Charleston such a special place.

The construction of an 8' wide, meandering paved surface on the West Ashley Greenway has substantially enhanced the use and enjoyment of this special community amenity. Not only will this greenway connect to the James Island County Park and the I-526 extension, but working with Charleston County Council we will not rest until it connects with new bike/pedestrian access on the Legare/Ashley River Bridge connecting into the bike and sidewalk system on the peninsula.

The first phase of the Septima Clark Parkway Drainage Improvement and Reconstruction is essentially complete. Not only is it the first phase in solving the drainage problems, but we took advantage of this opportunity to transform an ugly scar into a beautiful parkway going through the peninsula.

The second phase of the drainage improvements will get underway this year, improving the drainage on the Spring/Cannon, President/Fishburne and Ashley Avenue. The subsequent phases of the \$154 million project will eventually create a 12' diameter tunnel, 140' underground, to connect all the drainage and bring it all to a pump station on the Ashley River that will have the capacity of pumping 360,000 gallons of rainwater per minute.

A shaft is being sunk right now as the beginning of the Market Street Drainage Project. As part of this \$25 million infrastructure improvement project, a tunnel will be constructed 120' deep under Market Street and will take the storm water through a 4,000' long underground pipe to an existing pump station on the Cooper River.

Another major drainage project is under final design for the Forest Acres section of the

City, West of the Ashley, to address the drainage needs in these neighborhoods. This project, estimated to cost approximately \$7 million will be under construction later this year.

We will also be getting the design process for the West Calhoun Street drainage basin that will address the area generally west of Smith Street towards the Ashley River. This area was once a large pond that served a saw mill a couple of hundred years ago. We are proud to be addressing these, in many instances ancient, drainage challenges, and are very proud of the progress that is being made.

The Ravenel Bridge construction necessitated the widening of the highway system coming onto the Crosstown, which caused South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) to buy land adjacent to the highway. Working with DOT and adjacent land owners, we were able to put together this wonderful public/private partnership that will create 21 new residential homes in a combination of restored older buildings and new ones, and affordable and market rate housing. In 2012, the Department of Housing and Community Development impacted 1,487 households through rental and ownership opportunities, new construction and rehabilitation of existing structures.

Chaired by community leader, Jimmy Bailey, the City's 10,000 Trees program is off to a great start. One thousand, one hundred and eight (1,108) trees were planted this past year. The continued reforestation of our area makes it more beautiful and improves our environment.

The Gaillard Center is proceeding on schedule and within budget. It is scheduled for opening two years from now and will give the Charleston region one of the finest, most beautiful

performance halls in our country. This is an amazing project in so many ways including that one-half of its cost, or \$71 million is being provided by the private sector. The Gaillard Center will enhance our economy and will reach out to our school children, giving them an opportunity to experience the performing arts in a most inspirational setting.

The Maybank Tennis Center on James Island was beautifully renovated this year. It is essentially brand new. We are very proud to have been voted the Best Tennis Town in America (2011) and our 87 tennis courts are bustling with activity. Our Courting Kids program has been seen as a national model.

The Angel Oak Park grew by six acres this year using Greenbelt funds to acquire land that would wrap around the park, not only protecting the tree but with thick vegetation protecting the sense of seclusion that adds to the beauty of the experience of this ancient tree.

Our newest park opened this fall – Governors Park on Daniel Island -- providing over 75 acres of soccer fields, ball fields, playground and more.

Two iconic water's edge public venues and a new one are being addressed this year. The Battery, one of the most loved places in our City, will have three phases of reconstruction. The first, beginning this year, will be at the turn of the Battery where Murray Boulevard and East Battery come together. When this construction, estimated to cost over \$3 million, is completed, High Battery will then be restored. After that is completed, the Murray Boulevard section of the Battery will undergo substantial rehabilitation.

The Colonial Lake, about 100 years old, will be part of a partnership with the Charleston Parks Conservancy and the City of Charleston. The lake and surrounding area will be restored and enhanced with the City of Charleston sharing the cost with the Charleston Parks Conservancy. The Conservancy will pay one-fourth of the cost through the generous involvement of the citizens of our community. This project, estimated to cost around \$4 million will be under design this year and construction in 2014.

Then there will be a new park on the water at the end of Charlotte Street. The Charlotte Street Park will contain a monument to the City's Irish ancestry and will be the terminus of the waterfront access along the Cooper River that begins at The Battery..

Nearby, Concord Park will undergo its construction this year. It will be a six acre park with ball fields, walkways, playgrounds and more.

Lighten Up Charleston is a challenge to our community to become more fit, improve our quality of life and our life expectancy. Our challenge is to lose 100,000 pounds. So far over 22,000 pounds have been lost. Log into our wonderful website, courtesy of Benefit Focus, at [www.LightenUpCharleston.org](http://www.LightenUpCharleston.org) and see how you, your family, your neighborhood, your office, your club or more can participate. Sign up, log in your weight and help us lose 100,000 pounds.

One wonderful way to exercise is biking. We are very proud of our new bike paths and bike lanes and the biking use requires us to provide more places for bicycles. Bike corrals are being developed to make it easier for you to safely rest your bike and enjoy our city.

This year Meeting Street Academy opened its new home. This wonderful school, made possible through amazing generosity and vision, is becoming a national model.

The Midtown Development is well underway with the Élan residential community at Spring and Meeting and is due to open this spring. The Holiday Inn on Meeting Street two blocks down will be opening next month and the hotel and office development including parking at Spring and King Street will be under construction early this year.

We will be working with the Evening Post Publishing Company in the redevelopment of their property that is a very strategic twelve acres in the upper King and Meeting Street part of our city.

Almost exactly one year ago, I had the opportunity to speak personally with President Obama, reaffirming my belief in the great importance of harbor deepening for the economic growth of our country and, of course, this part of South Carolina. I am very proud that the President acted decisively. Charleston Harbor deepening was placed in the Obama Administration's budget as well as his "We Can't Wait" initiative. And with the hard work of the Corps of Engineers, Senator Graham, Congressman Clyburn and Senator Scott the harbor deepening study is proceeding faster than predicted. We will have a 50' harbor which will allow Charleston to further increase its preeminence as one of the most efficient ports in the country and bring increasing jobs to our region.

Our community is very proud indeed of Charleston being the home port for a cruise ship and the plans are excellent for a new state of the art cruise terminal in the northern part of Union

Pier. This project has been slightly sidelined by unfortunate litigation, but we will prevail and not only will the community have a new state of the art cruise terminal but we can begin working together to redevelop the southern part of Union Pier further connecting our citizens to the waterfront in that part of our community.

We are very proud of the national and international significance of many things that we do here in our community. In that way we will be so proud of the International African American Museum at Arrival Square. Planned overlooking our harbor essentially where the wharf was located that brought enslaved Africans to this community, we will work to build a wonderful museum that will instruct, enlighten and inspire us all.

The City remains committed to sustainability and environmentally responsible practices.

We just completed the second year of our Green Business Challenge. This program has helped a total of 135 businesses meet their goal of providing a healthier and more sustainable work environment. In the first year, businesses averaged over \$6,000 in financial savings as they achieved their green business goals.

2012 was the first full year of CharlestonWISE, our community energy efficiency program led by the Sustainability Institute. In 2012, 600 homeowners and businesses were served by CharlestonWISE and 100 homes were renovated for energy efficiency. Log onto the City's website at [www.charleston-sc.gov](http://www.charleston-sc.gov) or call 724-3765 to find out how you can be involved.

This is the state of our city – safer, more beautiful, more successful and proud of our past

with our best years ahead.