

State of the City 2006

Delivered by Mayor Pam Iorio

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Today, in the city of Tampa, 30 children are born -- boys and girls, black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Indian. Some will be surrounded in affluence; some will struggle with poverty. All will call Tampa home; all will help forge our future.

They are the reason why we serve; they are why we make the hard decisions, they are why we must continually work to make Tampa one of the most livable cities in the country. It is easier to ignore long standing issues – drainage problems, decaying sewer lines, crumbling streets, neglected neighborhoods and waterfront. But when we ignore these problems, and refuse to deal with them head-on, we are not creating a quality city for today or for future generations.

Our decisions should always be about the future – short term and long term – based on the premise and promise that the Tampa of tomorrow will be better than the Tampa of today.

Last year I spoke of the key ingredients for a livable city –

- Diversity.
- A Vibrant downtown.
- Pedestrian friendly streets.
- The Riverwalk.
- Mass transit.
- The arts.
- A focus on basic government services.
- Improvements for all neighborhoods.
- Economic development of our most challenged areas.

Today, on our third state of the city report to the people of Tampa, I am proud of the progress that has been made and optimistic about the progress that will come.

Tampa's new direction is evident and bright.

The numbers of cranes that dot our skyline speak of dynamic growth. Almost every part of the city is seeing redevelopment, nurtured by considerable public and private investment.

Great cities evolve over time; some of our country's greatest have evolved over centuries.

We are still a young city. But this stage of our evolution is critical.

Our downtown is transitioning to a residential community as everybody's neighborhood – a dynamic area that will draw people for a variety of activities.

Building our Riverwalk signals a transformative time for our city – a time when we recognized the importance of opening up our waterfront to the people – so that they will enjoy a different way to access the many amenities of our downtown.

Our emphasis on neighborhoods is an investment in basic services. From better police and fire protection, to a cleaner city, to stormwater projects and sewer line replacements, to road resurfacing – to park improvements, this commitment sets a tone for the future – and shows that that we understand that a strong city is a result of strong neighborhoods.

Investment in East Tampa is transformative. It is the city's long term commitment to the redevelopment of an economically challenged area. It is an ambitious undertaking involving 7 square miles – an undertaking that embraces the city's belief in the redevelopment of all neighborhoods and that what happens in East Tampa can be replicated in other challenged areas such as Drew Park and West Tampa.

This is a transformative time for the arts. A new home for the Tampa Museum of Art points to progress for this respected and growing institution. Leading the way with Lights On Tampa, we have become a city for the developing arts, a place where creativity can flourish.

And we will continue to address the need for better mass transit. This past year, in discussions with people throughout this city, county and region, I have heard loud and clear the broad support by the public for better mass transit. It reinforces for me an observation gleaned many years ago – that the public is often ahead of their public officials in identifying what needs to get done. A vibrant city and mass transit are mutually sustaining.

And there is another issue that is important to our city and to those 30 babies born today. It is an issue that belongs to everybody. It is education. Since the start of my administration we have formed a partnership with the school system, creating several initiatives.

We focus on our young people and the needs of our schools because it is important to the future of our city.

A young person without a quality education does not face a world filled with possibilities.

So this year, we have a new initiative – one that focuses on the three schools in our city that have been identified by the state as needing help. We call it the “City’s Make the Grade Program.” This year we will focus on Edison, Just and Potter Elementary Schools and help the students, teachers and staff of those schools with additional resources and partnerships. This is a generous and caring community and lending a helping hand to those schools that need an extra boost is in keeping with our character.

And no state of the city would be complete without an acknowledgment of the city workers who go the extra mile to provide quality services. They are always looking for better ways to do business. They handle issues large and small and take pride in how the city operates and looks. They helped other communities in the wake of a catastrophic hurricane season. They are true public servants and I am proud of the work they do.

We have much to look forward to in the coming year – a year of possibilities.

- The Heights project which could bring the new urbanism to Tampa Heights.
- The redevelopment of Central Park Village.
- A new home for the Tampa Museum of Art.
- The construction of Tampa’s Riverwalk – one segment at a time.
- The continued redevelopment of East Tampa and new affordable homes in West Tampa, improvements to Ybor City, and continued investment in our neighborhoods.
- A continual reduction in crime; better fire protection for our growing city.
- Major road improvements and stormwater improvements.

These are all investments in our future.

Yes, Tampa’s new direction is evident and bright.

And what of these 30 babies born today? What of their possibilities?

This is their city, though they don’t know it yet.

This is their future and we are helping to shape it.

And the future we pass on to them will engender new possibilities as they risk new uncharted paths.

As Henry Wadsworth Longfellow once wrote:

**“Perhaps there lives some dreamy boy ...
Who shall become a master of the art,
An admiral sailing the high seas of thought,
Fearless and first, and steering of his fleet
For lands not laid down in any chart.”**

We are indeed a city of possibilities.
So let us go forth in the coming year-
With progress as our constant hallmark.

Remembering always the birth of 30 babies on a cool spring day,
And the future city they will inherit.

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