

Mayor's Address to the Citizens of Berkeley Lake
regarding the
State of the City
February, 2008

It has been a busy and very challenging year in Berkeley Lake. We finished an unprecedented infrastructure repair project as well as a second project to rebuild and repair roadsides. We very carefully and thoroughly researched possible architects for our new City Hall, identified an outstanding firm, and began the design process. We struck off into uncharted territory by declining to join the county's stormwater utility, thus saving our citizens significant cost, but saddling our staff with some difficult new tasks. The staff has had a tough enough time just dealing with turnover and new jobs. All of them are relatively new to us and the process of finding and training good people is never easy. One clear trend is that we are no longer able to rely on good-hearted, hard-working citizens to do many things for our city as volunteers, or as underpaid employees. For years the City gotten by in this way, but as the pace of life increases, people now struggle with so many responsibilities and claims on their time that volunteers are getting scarce, and thus the paid staff are taking on more and more. To further exacerbate this situation, the tasks they must perform are getting more complex and challenging while citizens reasonably expect and ask for better service and performance. For all these reasons, the City is paying more than ever before in salaries, although still less than our outstanding staff is worth and could earn elsewhere. To give you one example that I hope will make this clear to you, I asked our new City Administrator to make a list of the changes he's made in his first few weeks here. Modestly he sent this to me with the request that "these accomplishments should be attributed to the City:"

- 1) Installed a new file server and configured it for higher security.*
- 2) Installed Virtual Private Networking allowing City Staff secure remote access to the City's Local Area Network.*
- 3) Enhanced wireless LAN security level to prevent unauthorized access and use.*
- 4) Improved security of the City's website to prevent unauthorized access and editing.*
- 5) Negotiated an increase to the storage capacity of the City's website to from 1 giga-byte to 100 giga-bytes at no additional cost to the City.*
- 6) Performed an end-to-end review of the City's website and updated all stale references.*
- 7) Completed website back-end upgrade to allow citizens to listen to the voice record of Council meetings on the web.*
- 8) Increased our accounting system's ability to store records for more than 2 years.*
- 9) Working to implement our new business license ordinance.*
- 10) Reviewing options for tracking of licenses, permits and code enforcement.*
- 11) Urged and achieved the removal of unsavory material from a website referencing BLEMA.*
- 12) Performed a review of telephone service and equipment technology and made a recommendation to Council for improvements related to City communications.*
- 13) Negotiated with AT&T to provide twice the number of telephone lines to us for the same price.*
- 14) Evaluated the current cost of operations banking and reduced those fees by \$865 per year.*
- 15) Currently learning and planning for implementation of the Stormwater Management Plan.*

16) Tightened City Hall's security systems and brought the management of security codes in-house.

17) Researching costs associated with outsourcing the distribution of the Mayor's Message.

18) Distribution of the PrepareFirst documents to citizens.

I think you can see that we get what we pay for. Our Deputy City Administrator has used her outstanding professional competencies and a lot of hard work to make significant changes for us this year that move us in new and better directions. This past year would have been disastrous without her. Significantly, all of our accomplishments this year were made with a millage rate decrease, and the City is in excellent financial shape.

The coming year holds its own challenges and they are compelling, I must say. I have been very proud of the job our police have done for us, and I deeply regret that the county will no longer allow them to continue in the working arrangement that has been so positive for us. We must find new ways to protect our citizens. A council member who is interested in security guards is looking into that possibility. I have spent a lot of time investigating the possibility of hiring our own police officers, and that research goes on. There are many complexities in that consideration, and the safety of our citizens is so important that this decision must be made with the utmost care. There are no easy answers.

Also in the coming year, we will begin building our new City Hall. We have moved very slowly and deliberately in the planning and preparatory phases. Soon the vision of our citizens will become a reality. At this point everyone becomes more interested and questions arise. Will our citizens be allowed to gather informally in this building for book clubs, study groups, or just to visit with each other, or will they be limited to specifically approved formal meetings? What will it look like? Knowing our City's propensity to get so passionate about things that we become cranky with each other, I would hope that we'd all maintain some openness and patience with each other as we work through the final phases. This building will be the heart of our City for many years to come, and we have to get this right. It will belong to all our citizens, and I sincerely hope they will all be proud of it.

We will complete the Comprehensive Plan for our City's future this year. There are some thorny issues in that process as well. Should we strengthen the City's tree and septic ordinances? If we seek to annex nearby commercial or residential areas we can bring in additional tax dollars and benefit from some economies of scale, but many fear this would change the character of our City more than they would like. We must decide this year what to ask for in the next SPLOST, which will have a huge effect on us. I think you can see that 2008 will be the most challenging year our City has ever faced. Decisions made in the next few months will affect us all for a very long time. To meet these challenges it will be more important than ever for our citizens to participate and pay attention, and for us all to work together - not for our own personal agendas, but for the overall good of our City.