



# City of Orange Township

29 North Day Street  
Orange, New Jersey 07050

## **Mayor Eldridge Hawkins, Jr. Remarks at Orange Chamber of Commerce Breakfast Tuesday, March 10th, 2009. 8:00am. BPO Elks Lodge, 475 Main St, Orange, NJ**

Good Morning! I want to thank the Orange Chamber of Commerce for inviting me to address you this morning. This is my first address to the Chamber since my election as Mayor. I hope that you will invite me back frequently to update you on what's happening in Orange and to discuss how our city can do more to help the business community.

I took office on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008. In my campaign for Mayor, I had promised to restore trust in the integrity and competence of government; make streets and homes safer; and make Orange more attractive to tax-paying businesses.

I found very quickly that my job also included keeping Orange afloat during the worst economy since the great depression. When I took office, it was already clear that the real estate bubble had burst. Ten weeks later, it was clear that more than just the housing market had collapsed.

In my campaign, I said that Orange can be the next "happening" city, the next Hoboken or Montclair. Now, my job is to keep that vision of a prosperous future alive while dealing with the growing foreclosures, vacant storefronts, increased crime and diminished revenues that a bad economy can create.

Attracting new development, bringing in new businesses, helping existing businesses to thrive, and revitalizing our business districts are the highest priorities of my administration. In the long run, this is the most important way to hold down property taxes and make it possible for people to continue to live in Orange.

Step one is to assure the safety and security of Orange. You can't retain businesses and residents or attract new businesses and shoppers if people don't feel safe.

So, we immediately began transforming the Police Department from top to bottom. I appointed a new police director, John Rappaport, and we launched an unprecedented crackdown on street crime, gang violence, drug sales, and quality of life crimes. Arrests for major crimes soared. We carried out busts of big time drug dealers for heroin and cocaine. Street corners were cleared of loitering gang members.

As a result, there was a 11% decrease in crime in the last six months of 2008 and more than 900 arrests. A total of more than 1100 arrests since I took office. We're taking guns off the street at an extremely high rate. For some periods we've taken guns off the streets at the rate of 1 every 3 days.

We've increased police visibility in our shopping areas. We created Operation Park and Walk, where officers park their cars and walk patrols along Main Street and other major shopping areas. Our top police brass now walk through our retail areas and drop into stores. We will be establishing new Special Officers, a lower salaried position, to supplement our regular police and increase visibility in our commercial corridors.

We've built a strong partnership with state, county and federal police agencies and restored their confidence in the Orange Police. This has made possible joint investigations and arrests and enabled us to aggressively seek public and private grants to fund our police programs.

In the midst of this recession, we're going far beyond simply making our retail districts safer. We're also focusing on keeping stores alive in these hard economic times and making them more attractive to shoppers. Last month, we completed the revitalization study and comprehensive plan for our shopping areas.

The study, known as Community Insights, gathered information about shopping in Orange from city officials, planning and zoning documents, Chamber of Commerce members, other merchants, property owners, residents, shoppers themselves, and visitors. The goal is to develop a strategy for economic growth unique to Orange.

The revitalization study was conducted for us by the JGSC Group. We took the information from the interviews and shoppers' survey, which many of you helped distribute, and combined it with other economic data. We used this to determine how to strengthen existing businesses, identify stores and restaurants to recruit to Orange, and ascertain the changes, events and activities that shoppers want. The study helped us understand who does and doesn't visit our shopping districts, what stores and activities they visit, and why.

With completion of the study, we can now implement a plan to energize economic growth. In the next phase, we'll focus on making our business districts even safer, making business structures more attractive, retaining and strengthening businesses, recruiting new stores, making zoning more business-friendly, launching an exciting and innovative co-op destination marketing program and implementing other ways to attract shoppers and visitors to Orange.

Two days from now, on the evening of March 12<sup>th</sup>, I'll be holding a public forum on the revitalization study. You'll see an exciting presentation of the study's results and recommendations. After the presentation, Valerie Jackson, Director of Planning and Development, Christopher Mobley, Deputy Director, and JGSC officials will answer your questions.

If you can't make it, you can watch on Channel 35, our municipal cable channel. You'll also be able to watch on our redesigned city website when we add our new streaming video feature in about three weeks.

The revitalization plan is one of the important projects made possible by our Urban Economic Zone. I am proud of our UEZ Team, Valerie Jackson, Chris Mobley and their staff and the progress they've made since July to expand the UEZ membership so that we can do more to help businesses in these difficult times.

In July there were 58 businesses in the UEZ. Today there are 67, an increase of 9 businesses, or 16%. My goal is to increase the number of UEZ businesses by at least 50% this year. In July, the UEZ had \$900,000 to work with. Today we have \$1,600,000, an increase of 77%. That's because our UEZ team has worked so hard to sign up new members.

Our strategy for recruiting new businesses to the UEZ consists of:

- Identifying and soliciting large businesses that generate significant tax revenue;
- Inviting all new businesses to become part of UEZ;
- Marketing the program and incentives to small businesses throughout Orange;
- Advertising and highlighting UEZ businesses and owners in the news media; and
- Educating businesses about UEZ through Public Forums.

This additional revenue we're generating in the UEZ allows us to develop new projects, including:

- Retail Support Plan– to help businesses increase sales, promote the UEZ, and recruit new businesses;
- Street Decorations including banners and holiday lights;
- A Camera surveillance system;
- A Business Loan Program to help struggling businesses;
- Business Development Seminars – to help owners expand their businesses while attracting new businesses to the UEZ Program; as well as
- The traditional UEZ projects such as Litter Collection and Police protection.

These are challenging times. In government and in business we must do more with less, and the UEZ program has been a big help for Orange in dealing with the economic crisis. If you are not a member of the UEZ program, I encourage you to sign up to ensure that tax dollars spent in Orange are used to benefit Orange.

While the recession is reducing the revenue we need to provide the services of city government, the federal economic recovery program should provide Orange the opportunity to move forward with needed projects that we haven't been able to fund in our budget.

Orange was among the first municipalities in New Jersey to seek federal stimulus funds.

In early December, we put together a list of infrastructure projects for funding. Our wish list was one of the most comprehensive in the state. We looked for projects that would create jobs and were ready to move forward quickly.

The projects we identified total in excess of \$100 million dollars and include general infrastructure, energy infrastructure, transit infrastructure, and school improvements. They would create over 1000 jobs.

The largest project on the list is the \$50 million dollar installation of solar panels in at the Orange Reservoir and Codey Arena in West Orange which would generate long term revenues from the sale of electricity. We want to use stimulus money to make city-owned buildings more energy efficient, generating long term budget savings;

Other high priority projects in our recovery package requests include financing to replace the bond financing we approved for the construction of the Chestnut Street Pump Station which is necessary to enable new development, demolition of two public housing complexes, a city-wide security camera monitoring system to supplement the one funded by the UEZ, rehabilitation of our historic Public Library, and improvements to the Highland Avenue Train Station.

Valerie Jackson helped us compile the list, and my chief of Staff, Tai Cooper is working with our Senators, the Congressional delegation and the Governor to secure the funding. I met this past week with Governor Corzine and enlisted his help to get us the stimulus money as fast as possible.

I've reviewed with you just some of what my administration, together with the business community, is doing to transform Orange. We are proving that despite the world's worst financial crisis since the great depression, Orange can live up to its potential.

I came into office confident that Orange has the location, public transportation, housing stock, and human talent not just to survive, but to thrive. Now, we are showing how it can be done. We have set for ourselves

an ambitious agenda and we are carrying it out. We are working together to make a difference. And we are getting results.

I am certain that we (City Officials, the business community, Chamber of Commerce, Orange Main Street and residents) can work together to make Orange thrive economically, provide a good return on your investment in this City and improve the quality of life for our residents.

Thank you and God bless.