

## **Mayor Terry Bellamy Inaugural Speech**

Tuesday, December 6, 2005

Asheville City Hall, North Carolina

MAYOR BELLAMY: I want to congratulate our new members of council and welcome them to this body. The first meeting as a new council is always an important time for individual council members and the community. During this time that new members begin settling in and all of us bring a renewed vision for what we can accomplish for and with the public, I have tremendous hope and optimism that, whatever our individual differences, this Council will be one that works together in harmony. If you will indulge the Mayor a few moments, I would like to share a few thoughts of my own about the work on this council over the next few years.

Asheville is a great city. It is a city known across America and around the world for its outstanding quality of life and natural beauty. Since the railroads opened our city up to the outside world in the 1880's, we have been blessed with a dynamic mix of people - pioneers, European settlers, strong African-American settlers. Wealthy newcomers drawn by our beauty. Asheville is home to scientists, inventors, writers, teachers, doctors, police officers, waitresses, childcare workers, individuals and families all who are proud to be able to say, "This is where we live!"

Asheville is a diverse community, poised for growth and for a very bright future. Our problems and our opportunities are varied and complex.

Over the past several years, city council has not done all it should to reflect the pressing needs and interests of our diverse community. In fact, we have often failed our most vulnerable citizens. Previously, council has spent a great deal of time looking on zoning and property issues presented to us as a body. During the sessions, public comment and developer input was allowed and sought.

But the life of a great city demands more. We have outgrown the simple times when City Council members would personally and at great length debate the type of siding a developer would put on a duplex and deliberate over city council agendas that resemble planning and zoning commission agendas, rather than the broad spectrum of issues facing a city the size of Asheville.

Asheville faces many pressing problems and opportunities. Our great city's land use policies must be transformed to meet the needs of our changing community; our cities infrastructure must be rebuilt; we have hundreds of children living in violent and unsafe surroundings, needing protection now. We stand at a crossroads economically, with much to be done if we are to create high-quality jobs to attract and keep families in our community. These issues must come to the forefront now. We must dramatically expand the vision and work of this council.

In 2006, we need to review our vision for Asheville's land use plan, development standards, and annexation policies. We have issues with Staples, Greenlife, and a Kenilworth development that clearly indicate that we have major issues that are not being addressed by our current policies and standards. We need a system that promotes clear regulations for developers that are efficient as well as effective. We have to support dialogue between developers and neighborhood residents - especially when the ultimate result is a better development that meets the needs of the community today and in the future.

Sidewalks, street repairs, garbage pick up, police protection, less or no panhandling, traffic calming and pedestrian safety – basic city services need to be top priority for this council. While it may have been on the radar screen for some, it must be top agenda item for all of the council. Our statutory authority requires the city to oversee and maintain streets and sidewalks within our city – and by listening to many citizens during the campaign, that is one area that they would like to see improved. We need to look at our sidewalk policy to see if we are really addressing the needs of the community in the most effective manner. Do we have sidewalks where people need them the most? How can we better utilize funds for sidewalks? These are questions I would like this council to address regarding sidewalks and begin to ask additional questions surrounding other basic services in order to ensure that we have the best policies for the citizens of Asheville.

Over the past four years, over one billion dollars has been added to the tax base. This is one of the main reasons that Asheville's unemployment rate is among the lowest in the state. However, this is problem when a full-time employee working 40 or more hours a week cannot afford to live in the community he or she is helping to make prosperous. Asheville city council must begin to look at ways we can be a player in helping with creating an environment where people live and work in the community. The first couple of steps that this council can take is to begin to embrace the HUB project, the new regional economic development plan, and see what part we can undertake to assist in developing a stronger and more inclusive economy. The second step we need to take is creating an affordable housing plan that gives clear direction for the inclusion of more housing for our low to moderate income individuals and families.

During affordable housing discussions, we often hear about the need for homeownership within the community – but when that conversation is framed, we forget that we have an aging housing stock and we must invest in preserving that housing stock for those who are unable financially to do so alone. Additionally, we have to create a plan that includes rental housing. It is unfortunate that one of the best tools that the city council has to put toward developing affordable housing – the City of Asheville's Housing Trust Fund – has more regulations that impair the utilization of the fund. The fund has nearly one million dollars, and last year very few developers took advantage of the tool because of the layers of government that kill or prolong most deals.

Another key issue is our water utility. One mandate I heard clearly during the five months of campaigning is that the public is important in the conversations surrounding water. As your mayor, I commit to greater involvement in developing the future of our utility. It is a utility that needs a great amount of investment. The past council has heard the great demands that are needed in order to bring the utility up to satisfactory level of maintenance and operation. This is unacceptable situation. I believe that the public needs to be clearly informed about the policy choices prior to council crossroads decision about rates and whether or not to stay a city department. As your mayor, before entertaining and creating a plan, I will urge council to hold special meetings to hear and inform you.

In closing, in order to achieve the aforementioned agenda, I need the support of the council, community, county officials and state officials. It is my goal to actively partnerships and relationships for the best of the entire community. God bless Asheville and every where else.

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