

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY



Mayor Ras J. Baraka,

State of the City Address

Part I: Newark. And Proud of It.

Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

on Tuesday, October 26, 2021

Good evening to all. All that are here at NJPAC that have come out to be with us in person. Welcome to all that are watching us from the moonlight cinema in the comfort of their cars, and the many more of you watching us on cable or streaming virtually. There is so much to talk about, so much to cover that we have decided to do it in two parts. Tonight is Part One of a two-part presentation. As the state of our city, by the grace of God is moving forward, even in the most difficult of moments. To all of the dignitaries here elected and appointed, to our Governor Phil Murphy. Who is our Governor now and in November still will be if Newark has anything to do with it. To the Municipal Council that I am honored to serve with, to our Council President Luis Quintana. Thank you for your commitment and

love for our city and your unwavering journey to get us to the best place in history. To the people of this great city, this metropolis, the largest city in the state of New Jersey. Thank you for leading the way. Thank you for taking the risks, for being out front, to be willing to do what many just talk about, thank you for loving this city against great odds and those determined to minimize us. Thank you for your prayers, your struggle, for getting up every day and facing the difficulties that are thrown our way and still having a radical love for this place, our families, our city, and our journey. Which is why what former Mayor Ken Gibson said still remains true, “wherever American cities are going Newark will get there first!”

I was born and raised in Newark and I am proud of it. This is my city and I am proud of it. And there is so much for us to be proud of.

Of course, there is so much more for us to do and there are those who are more than willing to point it out for you. But tonight I’m following the advice of one of my seniors that I ran in to at the senior white affair at Mulberry Commons. She told me that I will have haters and those that love me. She said I am one of those that love you. But the key is not to keep giving the devil a platform. So tonight is our night Newark. This is our opportunity to go over some of the incredible things that are happening in our city and some of the challenges that we face down every day.

Today, this moment is like no other we have experienced. It’s easy to lose hope, to fall victim to confusion and be overwhelmed in crisis. To be subdued by the loud voices of

skeptics and those being pulled by fear. This is not a time to be shaken by algorithms on social media or the selfishness of the divisive. This is a time for solid leadership. A time for stable voices with a clear pathway in the most challenging of times. This is a time where our heart and our head have to come to an agreement. I know that the past 18 months felt like the sun refused to shine and all the lights went out, but I am so glad, so proud that here in Newark, we have learned to sing even in the darkest of hours, that we have learned to dance in the face of calamity. We know the truth is both tragic and triumphant. The tragedy of losing 700,000 people around the country and more than 1,000 in our city and the many more that are permanently sick. But we also know the beauty of our triumph, our endurance, our collective will to overcome and win! Our presence in this moment here at NJPAC over a year later at the State of the City, after shut-downs and curfews, death and despair, our students locked out of their classrooms, we are still here. We are still standing, we are still going.

In fact, some of our schools have been listed by US News and World Report as some of the best in the state, under the leadership of Superintendent Roger León. I just visited Mayor's Scholars students at NJIT and our future looks great. Our universities are back open. Our restaurants are not closing down; folks are not leaving our city.

In fact, we are still the biggest and the best city in the state. We moved from the 73rd most populous city in the nation to the 62nd most populous. Our city is growing. Our people are beginning to get back to work. Festivals, block parties, and parades are

coming back. Our lead service lines are almost completely gone. Buildings are still going up all over the city. We are taking care of our people with every resource we have at our disposal. In fact, development has never ceased. We never paused. We never quit. We never gave in. We never turned around. We kept going. We kept believing. We kept moving forward. And we are in a better place because of it. I am from Newark, and I am proud of it!

I am so glad that our blessings were buried deep in what others thought would be our demise. We led in Newark and are still leading. I know there are some that have been concerned about our forcefulness during the lockdown or insistence on vaccination for our workers and determination to follow the science. Here is why: African Americans are 110% more likely to get infected with COVID-19, 280% more likely to be hospitalized and 200% more likely to die. The Latinx community is 190% more likely to get infected, 280% more likely to be hospitalized and 230% more likely to die. More than 70 percent of our city's residents are renters. Many of us are living with multi-generational families or in low income housing situations that make it difficult to social distance. Only about half of our residents own a car. So many of us are crowded on public transportation. Many of us are essential workers or work at jobs that don't allow us to work from home, putting us at greater risk of infection. And the disparities in our access to healthcare and primary care physicians compounded the problem even more. In fact, Newark represented more than 1/3 of all the deaths in Essex County from COVID-19.

Because of that, we set up 20 testing sites and pop-up sites all over the city and in every ward. We provided more than 350,000 tests and brought turnaround time for results down from a week to 24 to 48 hours. We put eight permanent and more than 520 pop-up vaccine sites in the city and vaccinated over 177,000 residents. More than 1,950 residents without addresses and 220 homebound seniors have also been vaccinated. That means more than 65% of all people 12 and up are fully vaccinated and 77% have received at least one shot. We immediately began to employ contact tracers and our work became a model for the state. We passed out PPE on the corners in every ward, delivered them to senior sites and never let up in encouraging our people to wear masks. We kept in contact with local businesses, corporations, the Housing Authority, Newark Public Schools, and NJ Transit to make sure everyone was on the same page and was executing our COVID-19 safety strategies throughout the city.

Because of all of this, our seven-day test positivity rate is at 1.89% and our three-day is 1.58%.

We distributed more than 8 million meals with the help of Roger León and NPS, Hello Fresh, and many of you volunteering to take care of your neighbors. We also worked to keep our residents without addresses safe during this time. We opened up two hotels to support individuals sheltering in place and those that tested positive for COVID-19.

95% of our unsheltered population was given shelter and their test positivity rate remained about 2%. In the middle of the pandemic, we opened Robert Treat Hotel to support 149 families

and opened Newark Hope Village, an innovative and beautiful concept that provided residency for 24 individuals that are now on the pathway to permanent housing.

We have transitioned 59 previously unsheltered individuals and families into permanent housing using Newark Housing Authority mainstream vouchers. Two unsheltered families were moved into Boulevard West Apartments and four unsheltered families into the new Somerset Brownstones.

With our Emergency Rental Assistance Program, we have already helped almost 2,000 families stay in their homes by granting them up to 15 months of rental assistance and we aim to help at least 6,000 using \$14 million secured from the Biden Administration.

We supported and continue to support our small businesses by providing them loans of up to \$15,000. In our first three rounds, we have distributed more than \$3.2 million and in the fourth round, we will distribute an additional \$2 million more.

We also helped parents who were essential workers that needed to drop their kids off for virtual learning or parents that just needed help by creating remote learning centers so that they didn't have to worry about their children's level of engagement in the NPS virtual learning program.

We also knew that our seniors were a very vulnerable population and had been desperately impacted by the pandemic. So we put in strict standards and completed over 60,000 wellness checks. We also provided seniors with Chromebooks to stay linked to family and friends, avoid isolation, and access essential services.

We did not miss a beat. We began virtual court sessions and even conducted 223 virtual weddings. We charged forward with our Newark Counts Campaign for the Census and we all know the outcome of that. We put up an interactive COVID-19 Dashboard so that residents can have one location to view COVID-19 data on their own. And this summer we had more activities than we ever had to bring our city Back Together Again. From pools to senior centers, professional wrestling matches on South Orange Avenue to Occupy the Block youth tour with DJ Lil' Man. We expanded the summer employment for youth and mentorship programs. From the Office of Violence Prevention programming to club music festivals at Military Park.

We expanded arts and murals throughout the city and used it as an opportunity to put revenue in local artists' hands while promoting the beauty and talent of our city. This pandemic is not over yet and scientists, doctors and the medical community are forecasting a difficult winter season. I believe if we continue to do what we have been doing and urging more and more of us to get vaccinated, wearing your masks, and getting tested, we will make it through this winter. I am incredibly proud of all the things we accomplished during this time, I can't speak for what was going on in other cities, in other states around the country, but I am from Newark and I am proud of it!

As we do everything we can to close out our consent decree with the Department of Justice and create an environment where we can see reductions in crime and violence, while upholding the humanity of our residents and respecting their constitutional

rights, there is so much more to do. I am proud of the progress our police division has made and how the overwhelming majority of them deal with the difficult challenges they face. As we continue to push for a Civilian Complaint Review Board in our city with subpoena power, we are also making sure we have the best trained and the most prepared officers in the state, that love this city and the people in it. We stood up an Office of Violence Prevention and Trauma Recovery and expanded the work we have been doing with community-based organizations. This is a long way from 2014. I am proud that when there was trouble at Barringer High School, the Office of Violence Prevention, Newark Community Street Team and Brick City Peace Collective came together along with NPD and secured the community. The Office of Violence Prevention went back to the school to ensure that our intervention was consistent and long lasting.

I am proud that we are moving our violence prevention team into the old First Precinct and that we are preparing for another class of 150 police officers. I was extremely proud when we graduated the latest class of officers because for the first time in the history of the city, we also graduated social workers on the same stage. Many people are talking about what needs to be done, here we are getting it done!

All over the country, violent crime is on the rise. It's almost higher than it's ever been since they began recording violent crime. We missed that in Newark in 2020 but experienced an uptick this summer and are moving to make sure that we reverse this trend and continue on the pathway back down. But even

with the uptick we are still at a 50-year low in overall crime. A 53 percent drop in homicides since 2013. Our officers are working and now they have help from the community in the form of the Office of Violence Prevention. We have created a pathway to ensure that public safety involves all of us.

As I begin to talk about our efforts around housing, I want to first thank Khabirah Myers, who is a one-woman force of nature in our Office of Tenant and Legal Services. We provide free legal services to tenants that are facing eviction. Since its creation, we have helped nearly 3,000 people stay in their homes. And as the pandemic hit us these service became that much more important. And will be even more so as we begin to come out of this moratorium on evictions.

All over the state, there has been a cry for more housing and specifically more affordable housing. The CLiME report in Newark said that we are short some 16,000 units. With our inclusionary zoning ordinance, developers must set aside 20% of their units for affordable housing or pay into our Affordable Housing Trust Fund and must give priority to Newark residents.

In 2020 and 2021, in the middle of this pandemic, we created 3,569 units of housing and of those, 1,512 are set aside for affordable housing. That's more than 42% of the units created. We are also enforcing our rent control ordinances by making landlords register their units which will keep housing affordable. We also used American Rescue Plan dollars to set aside \$20 million to build units that are 30% of the Area Median Income or families of four that make about \$34,000 a year.

We are also making a push to turn Newark residents into homeowners. Our Live Newark program gives residents a forgivable \$10,000 loan towards closing costs and \$20,000 towards the renovation. So far, we have given out 80 closing cost grants and 66 for home repairs. We have the first and only land bank in the entire state of New Jersey to put land back in the hands of our residents. So far, 85 properties have been transferred to the land bank and on their way into the hands of residents. Part of this program is our Section 8 Home Ownership Program. We have already completed three homes and put families in them and are in the process of preparing four more homes. These are families that were once renting using housing vouchers that are now homeowners using that same voucher and about \$600,000 was given to local MWBE contractors to rebuild these homes. And if you haven't heard, our 40 acres and a mule investment fund for Black and brown businesses just received a substantial partnership investment from the National Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) of \$25 million. Why is this necessary? Because New Jersey has one of the largest wealth gaps in the country.

It is important to also layout while we are talking about inequity, the national push since the COVID-19 pandemic began to close the gap of access to fiber and broadband services. In Newark, we have provided more than 5,000 residents with free internet, including 1,000 in low-income housing. And we are in the process of expanding this fiber network to our schools, so they may have faster and more efficient service. We finally created our first, shared bike and scooter program in our city, to give our

residents more transportation options at affordable levels. And along with a coalition of leaders and technical experts, we announced the launch of the Resilient Northeastern New Jersey initiative. This joint effort between the NJ Department of Environmental Protection, Jersey City, Hoboken, Ironbound Community Corp., Bayonne, Hudson County HOPES Community Action Partnership, supported by a team of consultants at Arcadis, will identify and implement flood risk reduction strategies for the Northeastern New Jersey region to improve long term environmental and economic resilience.

In terms of public space, to make our city cleaner, we have hired more workers to increase our efforts, from local job recruitment fairs to targeting communities that are underrepresented in our Department of Public Works. We partnered with former Gov. Jim McGreevey to tighten up our re-entry program. We installed GPS systems on all of our sanitation trucks to monitor efficiency. We saw that during the pandemic, outdoor greenspace became increasingly important, and we created a parks foundation to improve and manage programming at our five downtown parks. And the Trust for Public Land listed Newark 42nd, above Jersey City, in its top 100 park score rankings. Citing the city for having parks within a 10-minute walk for more than 90 percent of the residents. And we are well underway with our renovation of the JFK Recreation Center that will include a three-lane track, a fitness center, and a boxing gym. And we heard from our community. So while the rest of the country were just removing their controversial statues, we created a process to deliver a new monument and redesign of

Washington Park that honors our shared history of abolition, by creating a new interactive monument of Harriet Tubman. I don't know about you but I am from Newark and I am proud of it

And in the middle of the pandemic not only did we maintain our WIC service to women and families, we expanded it by adding nutritional counseling and food assistance remotely. And we continued to battle homelessness. We are working to create a division out of the Mayor's Office that will deal with homelessness which will be led by Sakinah Hoyte. With the help of Bridges, we provided services to more 2,000 people. And provided 82,000 bed nights and transitioned 155 unsheltered individuals to permanent housing.

I hope many of you participated in our first Newark Restaurant week that included some 66 different eateries and restaurants; or benefited from our fiber launch for small businesses reaching some 30,000 people; or knew of our \$2 million infrastructure fund that helped local black and brown businesses participate in the lead line replacement program by providing them with up-front capital.

We had a record year for our youth employment program by raising \$2 million to keep our children working throughout the pandemic. We also launched one of the nation's largest guaranteed income pilot programs by providing unconditional cash payments to over 400 Newark residents. That is just some of the things we have been able to accomplish during this pandemic.

As we continue to lift and to move forward, we will continue with our efforts around coordinated public safety that will involve the community. We will continue to attack crime through innovative approaches, which includes growing the Office of Violence Prevention. Expanding safe passageway to school in every ward and in multiple neighborhoods. We will continue to support those that need rental assistance and provide a fourth round of \$2 million for business recovery.

And very soon I will hold the last lead service line in my hand announcing that we have finally completed the unbelievable task of replacing every single line. I am proud to say that we are substantially close to that now. That which people meant to destroy us has lifted us to national prominence. We have become a national model on how to get this done. Something that we were told was impossible that would take us 10 years, we managed to get done in less than three. Thank God he kept us. We will never be able to thank County Executive Joe DiVincenzo and Governor Murphy enough for assisting us in making this happen. They were critical in helping me make my word my bond, when I said I didn't put the lead service lines there, but I am definitely going to take them out.

I think the city owes a huge debt of gratitude to Water and Sewer Utilities Director, Kareem Adeem. Newark born and Newark raised, a man who found his way through difficult moments and found his blessings in the middle of peril. The New York Times tried to vilify him and belittle him, but he led us through one of the city's most important impactful and largest infrastructure projects that it has ever seen.

Our economic recovery plan will continue to focus on equitable growth. It is a map for a more equitable and stronger, more prosperous city, with significant investment from the federal government. Using these funds, we will continue to attract businesses which will bring back customers to create thriving commercial corridors, ensuring Newarkers are connected to good job opportunities. We are going to advance the Hire.Buy.Live initiative, which facilitated more than 2,000 Newarkers getting jobs at our anchor institutions. We announced this year our city's housing and development goals, which includes funding the creation or preservation of 6,600 units of affordable housing, with a priority on Newark families that are at or below 30% of AMI. We will support 1,500 new and 200 existing low- and moderate-income homeowners. We will convey more property to the land bank suitable for residential development with at least 30% of units developed for residents at or below 80% of the AMI. As I mentioned earlier, we are investing \$20 million of ARP dollars for families that need it most and with the help from Senator Booker, we may receive more dollars in that pot to go even further. We are going forward with Kawaida Towers with full affordability at various levels, right here in downtown Newark, the only project of this kind.

And as we continue to develop we must do it with our entire community in mind. Our new master plan, Newark 360, is on its way. We will host community meetings in various neighborhoods and make sure we focus on health, equity, and

resilience. We will have comprehensive engagement with community and stakeholders.

But we also have some major projects underway already. Forward bound Doremus will aim to balance the needs of industry, the environment, and the community, while positioning the city for improved economic and environmental resilience. Fairmont Commons is the conversion of 42 vacant lots into predominantly affordable housing, with \$60 million of investment in the area.

The Dayton Street redevelopment is a plan to replace the vacant and blighted housing project and property in that neighborhood into a thriving community that includes new residential units, commercial spaces, along with the opportunity for TV and film production facilities.

The State Local Finance Board just approved a \$110 million bond for our Mulberry Commons pedestrian bridge that will connect a walking bridge to the Prudential Center arena, Penn Station, and the Ironbound neighborhood. This project will address major transportation needs of our city, connect neighborhoods, and spark hundreds of millions of dollars of development, which will create hundreds of jobs and give us the 24-hour downtown we all have been waiting for.

We will continue forward with our Newark Community Museum of Social Justice that will serve as the headquarters for the Office of Violence Prevention, and will also tell the story of decades of struggle in our city from the perspective of

community organizations and agencies that pushed our city to be more democratic.

We are also building Ridgewood Park that will be geared toward the autistic community. We are expanding our fleet of garbage trucks to include electric vehicles as we continue to make our fleet more sustainable while providing better service at the same time. We are working on a community dashboard with Rutgers that will mitigate conflicts across projects in the city. It will provide us and the community with real visual data on the many services and projects across the city that are happening on a daily basis, so you will not only know, but become engaged regularly on how your city grows and represents you while addressing issues at the same time.

Folks, I am so happy to see you, so proud of where we are and what we are accomplishing together. Especially in the middle of this storm. If you Google riding in a storm, it will tell you to stay in the car, don't get out, turn on your hazard lights and wait it out. And that's what most of us tend to do, not just in storms but in our lives as well. We cannot argue that we are definitely in some kind of storm now. And I know many of you believe that it's almost over which makes it more dangerous because your guard is down and you don't realize that people can drown in shallow waters too. You won't wear your mask, not getting tested as much. You feel like the major protests are over and the issues of inequity are going to go away. That things will be back to normal. But I'm here to tell you that many people have drowned in shallow waters.

I heard this story once of a woman that happened to come upon a storm. She had a destination that was waiting on her but she drove right in to a storm, and this was a terrible storm. Rain was coming down so hard you could barely see. You could hear the wind against the car doors. She turned her windshield wipers on as high as they could go. She looked to her left and her right and there were lines of cars parked on the side of the road with their hazard lights on and their wipers going, just like it instructed people to do on Google. She almost stopped to join them but she remembered she had somewhere to be. An appointment that was set for her. Her destiny was in her destination so she kept going. She looked forward, slowed down a bit but kept driving. About 100 yards or so, from where the cars were parked, the sun was trying to come out. The wind had dissipated and the rain had calmed significantly. And she thought to herself wow if only those cars would have driven just another 100 yards they would be out of that storm. That they didn't even have that far to go. But it's just when we get to the edge that we give up. When we finally make it to shallow water our will escapes us. We stop working as hard and we drown. Or as many of us do we pull over and park in the middle of the storm. We live in storms and they paralyze us. We come up with all kind of excuses why we shouldn't move forward. We quote Google and other social media experts we don't even know. We come up with theories that justify not going forward. Our fears make us stay and reason with the way things are. Some of us even get so used to rain and the clouds and thunder, anyone that tries to show us a pathway out of it, we vilify them and accuse them of giving people too much hope. But not that woman. She knew that her blessings

were on the other side of that storm and in order to get to it, she had to get through it. I am telling you tonight Newark, our destiny is on the other side of this storm. The place we seek is but yards away.

I know because I know a little something about being caught in the middle of a storm. Trapped in its crosshairs, the winds beating against my front door. I've been battle tested. I've been places where I've grown weary and doubtful. But I kept going. I kept moving forward until I realized that the way through was also the way out.

We have an opportunity now to not just get through the storm but to get to a better place than we were before the storm came. We know what to do to beat the storm of COVID-19. We have slowed down deaths in our city precipitously and the infection rate from over 60% to below 2%. Wear our masks. Protect the most vulnerable, get tested, and yes get vaccinated. We know what to do to deal with the storm of inequity in healthcare, we can't just make better emergency rooms. We have to give people access to wellness, universal healthcare, clinics, primary care physicians, and access to good food and healthy communities. We know that housing must be addressed not just to get people to agree to build affordable housing in their cities, but for the federal and state governments to step in with tax credits, pilots or direct cash. We know that people are not coming back to work because their salaries are inadequate and as millionaires and billionaires have gotten richer in this storm, many of us can't afford to shelter our families. We know that the wealth gap in this country is shameful and rooted in deep racism, but we

also know the NJ wealth gap is the worst. It's not enough to study why this exists – we know why. We have to begin to fix it and reparations must be in the discussion or there can't be one. These are storms that we are all in. And it will take all of us to get out of them.

But Newark, there will always be storms for us. There are natural ones that will come because of where we are and who we are. But there are also people right now as sure as we are sitting here that are somewhere concocting new storms to put us in. They are creating an atmosphere in hopes that the next storm will be greater than before, and are hoping that finally this storm will wipe us out. But the good news is we were built for storms! There is no storm they can create that we haven't already seen. NO amount of chaos or despair they can muster up that we haven't already been through. We were born in the middle of storms sometimes not knowing if we would even make it to the next day. Our roadmap has always been found in the deepest part of storms. So when storms come, there is no place I would rather be right now than right here with you. If anybody knows the way out, we do! I am from Newark and I am proud of it. No storm can defeat us. We have a promissory note. A destination that we have reach. No matter how many people they send in here to fan the flames of division, we hold the line and we march around those walls seven times with nothing but a horn in our hand and watch them come tumbling down. Keep your head up Newark. We win at the end of this story. I am from Newark and I am proud of it. I am from Newark and I am proud of it. I am from Newark and I am proud of it. I am from Newark and I am proud of it!