

State of the City Speech
Ellen Dickson, Mayor
January 4, 2012

First, I want to thank my children and Chip for their constant love and support. I would also like to thank so many of my friends for their tremendous support - many of them are here tonight.

Next, I want to thank the citizens of Summit for giving me the opportunity to serve this city that means so much to me. It is my family's home. It is where our children built their foundation, graduated from Summit High School and went on to become productive and caring young adults. I want the group of people fondly calling Summit home to continue to grow.

Then there are the people I had the good fortune to call fellow Common Council members – thank you so much. Early on, some taught me the ropes. We always shared our opinions. The discussions were sometimes spirited, but they always were had in the spirit of what was believed to be best for Summit. All I worked with were tireless volunteers.

Finally, I want to thank the employees of the City of Summit and let you know how much I look forward to working with you.

There were many changes during Jordan's tenure as Mayor, but one of the constants was Summit remained a wonderful community. I will do what I can to further strengthen Summit's foundation, so that Summit can remain that wonderful community.

As Mayor I will focus on maintaining a strong sense of community by reaching out to all groups and to be inclusive and respectful while doing my best to understand the evolving needs of the many constituents. I invite all citizens to become involved in the conversations and ask to be considered for current and future appointments. I have the time. I want to hear from you.

There are lots of ways to listen and discuss and I intend to use multiple means of communications. How many times did you hear of a great concert or other event and thought “If only I had known!”? There are many more ways we communicate and I intend to use many of them to stay well connected including the City’s website and the Mayor’s website – www.ellendickson.com. Part of my regular communications at Council meetings will include updates on key issues and matters before the Board of Education and Union County. Combined they consume about \$0.75 of every Summit property tax dollar.

That communication is also meant to help establish Summit as a trendsetting city. Summit received the “Silver Sustainability” award and I would like to see Summit go for the gold and leverage the Historic Downtown designation. Some ways we can do this include:

Establish a *Think Local First Committee* to help build on the successful marketing program.

Re-form the *Technology Committee* and task it with doing things like creating a “Summit app” that would provide a more responsive source of

communication during times of emergency as well as focusing on the best ways of getting wi-fi for Downtown and helping develop a more complete understanding the best security options for Downtown and Summit's citizens.

Yet, we need to do even more with technology. Technology is causing industries to change and adapt. Government is not immune to these pressures. Many municipalities have been slow to adapt the latest technologies, which could improve efficiency, productivity and safety. We are fortunate to have Beth Kinney.

Some of our weaknesses were revealed most recently by the two storms that hit our community this past year. Because of the power outages, residents found it hard to get up to date information. Our major utility was too slow to communicate, and information was hard to get to residents. Many felt left in the dark, in so many ways. You should know the City workers are to be commended for their hard work during those difficult times.

We must do what we can to not let it happen again. It is not enough to say it couldn't be helped, or it was a freak storm.

Those two crises revealed another interesting fact, and an opportunity. Although the storms left many without television or home internet access, cellular service and mobile internet services remained largely intact. I think we can build on this insight. Mobile technology is a big part of the future, and we need to use it to our advantage. As Mayor, I want to explore the viability of the development of a Summit mobile application for all mobile

devices which will provide a stream of continuous updates on government activities, events, and announcements, during times of crisis and otherwise. These applications will not only permit City government to communicate with its residents, it should also provide a way for residents to communicate back - about events and conditions we need to know about. Wouldn't it be great if every resident were able to let us know the best method of contact in an emergency to reach them; whether it is texting, Code Red, a knock on the door, or some other method?

Next, we must continue to make sure our neighborhoods are safe and our downtown viable. We can use technology to help support the people who keep Summit safe. Summit is the only city in New Jersey with fully accredited Police and Fire Departments. The Police Department has a new Chief and two new Captains. Chief Weck intends to shift resources in line with risk assessments of downtown and our neighborhoods; the application of technology should help this effort. He has already stepped up the frequency of patrols downtown and I expect there will be an increased focus on pedestrian safety. Summit also has a volunteer First Aid Squad that will be celebrating its 50-year anniversary in July. They took 2,000 calls last year – at no charge, and their new President is John Christmann, a long time volunteer. I know our Police and Fire Departments will continue to maintain the highest level of professionalism. I look forward to working with all who work so hard to insure the safety of Summit's citizens and visitors.

Keeping people safe is a big part of our quality of life. Another part is having a robust downtown. Let's try and make it a destination while also promoting downtown Summit's Historic District designation. We should

develop some of our resources like creating walking trails along the Passaic River. I intend to work with Anton Evers and the Briant Park Olmstead Conservancy to beautify the Park. Other initiatives include establishing a Gateway III along River Rd., the future home of Equinox and possibly other commercial development. Additionally, we may want to consider the extension of SDI to the south side of Broad St.

As for our schools, I hope to be an advocate for the best affordable education for Summit. I think our system should excel and lead by adopting best practices in preparing our children for an increasingly interconnected world where their options are opened up for life ... and where they will always be proud of their hometown and want to return to Summit.

We must also be mindful that this is a time of greater economic uncertainty. For many of our citizens, there are many new pressures and demands. So, we should strive to foster a more productive government; a government that adjusts to better meet the needs of its citizens; and that provides public services at an even better return to the taxpayers who do place their trust in their government and its employees.

There are some other initiatives I would like to highlight. They are parking and embracing Summit's history. On parking, I feel we need to make some strategic decisions to accommodate an increasingly active downtown that becomes more and more of a destination location due to Summit's smart investment and management of our business district. This process should start with the recently established Committee that will propose a set of possible solutions to be considered. That Committee's term will sunset in

one year.

Quoting from Edmund Raftis's 1996 book "Summit, New Jersey" – "Predicted changes do not come easily to Summit. If anything marks the character of Summit residents, it is the watchful eye of proposed changes. In 1905, the Summit Herald observed, "No public improvement has every been attempted in Summit, no matter how small, without opposition and criticism.'" No reason to not keep trying!

Before Summit was Summit, a beacon was raised to warn George Washington's troops of a British advance.

According to the Raftis's book, "Three generals (Greene, Lafayette, and von Steuben) were with Washington on the Heights above Springfield. They stayed here along with Colonel Alexander Hamilton for about two weeks in June 1780. Working with our Historical Society, and the Historical Commission, I would like to see us leverage our historic downtown designation and look into developing a heritage trail to highlight Summit's rich history.

One of the major responsibilities of the Mayor is making good appointments and I am fortunate to have had so many people come forward and volunteer.

A few recent appointments include:

Mary Ogden

Deb McCann

Anjali McCormack

Susan Hairston

Greg Mays and
Wellington Smith

Many other Summit residents volunteer a great deal of time to support other community activities. Let us continue to harness the considerable energy and intelligence of the people of Summit.

As for the State of the City of Summit, I would like to paraphrase something President Franklin Roosevelt from his message to Congress on January 7, 1943 –

“The state of this City is good
the heart of this City is Sound
the spirit of this City is strong
the faith of this City is eternal.”

I would like to close with a quote from Goethe that Minister Vanessa Southern shared with me –

“Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it.
Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.”

It is time to begin again.