

Stepping Up for the Northeast!

BECAUSE EVERY NEIGHBORHOOD COUNTS

JIM BOWERS

Candidate

Northeast City Council District

Introduction

For many residents Rochester is wonderful place to live, work, and raise a family. These Rochestarians are fortunate to be stable economically and otherwise, allowing them to tap into, take advantage of, and celebrate the array of choices the city has to offer, including:

- ◆ Unique and varied neighborhoods
- ◆ Cultural, sports, and entertainment venues
- ◆ High-tech and professional employment opportunities
- ◆ Distinct shopping
- ◆ High quality and often historic residential housing

Many more Rochestarians live and work in “other Rochesters,” characterized by less than ideal conditions. Coerced by concentrated poverty, limited education, and economic and racial/ethnic segregation, residents of these other Rochesters work hard and honestly, often in low-paying service jobs, yet often subsist at or below the poverty level. These Rochestarians face an array of challenges including:

- ◆ Living in and being surrounded by inadequate housing and abandoned, boarded up buildings
- ◆ Confronting high levels of violent crime on a daily basis
- ◆ Contending with drug houses, open-air drug markets, and street corner prostitution
- ◆ Often being forced to send their children walking through “urban war zones” in order to get to school.

The neighborhoods that comprise the Northeast City Council District capture and reflect these very different yet real Rochesters. Undoubtedly, there is much to celebrate in the Northeast, including:

- ◆ Rich racial and ethnic diversity including African Americans, Latinos, and residents of German, Polish, and Italian heritage
- ◆ The location of national and international companies such as Hickey-Freeman and Bausch and Lomb
- ◆ Local neighborhood businesses such as Hartmann’s Old World Sausage, Burgos Income Tax , Lisa’s Fine Jewelry, Mama Rosa’s Italian Restaurant, Central Park Café, and Gitano’s Frozen Ice
- ◆ Dedicated neighborhood organizations such as Group 14621, NorthEast Neighborhood Alliance (NENA), North East Block Club Alliance (NEBCA), Coalition of North East Associations (CONEA), and Marketview Heights Association
- ◆ An equal array of smaller block clubs including the Mead Street Block Club, the Dunnester Block Club, the Alphonse-Bernard Block Club, and the Springfield-Willmont Block Club
- ◆ A major-chain grocery store in the Tops Plaza located on Upper Falls Boulevard
- ◆ The Rochester Public Market and The Vineyard urban farm

At the same time, many neighborhoods and residents in the Northeast City Council District face serious and real challenges, underscoring the economic, social, and opportunity inequalities of the other Rochesters. These neighborhoods suffer:

- ◆ A disproportionate share of police and fire calls
- ◆ Excessive violent crime including murder
- ◆ Ongoing drug trafficking and gang activities
- ◆ An excessive number of vacant, boarded-up and dilapidated houses and other properties, many of which are City owned

For example, neighborhood leaders and residents recognize Treyer Street as “Heroin Central.” Remington Street has over 20 boarded up and vacant properties many of which are now City owned.

While the worst of such activity is concentrated into well defined and known high-risk areas, “creep” is occurring into other neighborhoods once considered stable and safe. Residents in the Northland-Lyceum neighborhood report recent changes that include increased vandalism and property crimes, the appearance of gang-like activities, and shots fired. These reported changes appear to have developed particularly after the closing of the Goodman Section Police Substation. In addition, nearly all neighborhoods in the Northeast District now have documented gang problems, seen in the explosion of gang related graffiti through the City’s Northeast.

While Rochester may be a single legal entity with a common history, the troubles found within the neighborhoods of City's Northeast highlight that Rochester is divided socially, economically, culturally, and politically. Rallying cries claiming there to be but "One Rochester," regardless of how well intended, cannot deny this reality. Symbolism cannot mask that Rochester's assets and advantages are not accessible to all.

Nor does it appear that city government decision making is conducted regularly to maximize the value-added for the persons who reside, work, and run local businesses in the City. Instead, deficient attention to the well being of all city residents and neighborhoods is reflected in the City's flirtation with buying Midtown Plaza, the ill-conceived decisions lifting the cap on the number of vacant properties a single purchaser can buy at City auctions, and public comments of a high level city official writing off the entire 14621 area as unsuitable for new market rate housing. It would appear as if City leaders have forgotten that *every neighborhood counts*. Acting and believing so contributes to the continued damaging divisions to Rochester, divisions that keep us from being truly one city.

"One Rochester" remains a dream that must be brought into reality. It remains an ideal *in need of New Urban Leadership and a New Urban Revival*. We cannot truly claim that there is "One Rochester" until we have achieved the following for all city neighborhoods and those who live, work, and own businesses in them:

- ◆ Neighborhoods that are all places of choice
- ◆ Affordable and well-maintained housing opportunities
- ◆ A solid foundation of homeownership
- ◆ Thriving business districts
- ◆ Safe and secure places to live, work, and play
- ◆ Civically engaged and empowered residents who celebrate their rich diversity.

To accomplish these goals and to make the Northeast City Council District fully a part of "One Rochester" a *new leader stepping up for the City's Northeast* is needed. This *stepping up* must embrace the twin elements of New Urban Leadership and New Urban Revival that puts residents, locally owned city businesses, and others who contribute daily to the city's pulse first. With your support and vote, I will be that new leader *stepping up for the City's Northeast*. I am prepared to *step up for you because every neighborhoods count!*

New Urban Leadership

New Urban Leadership is my blueprint for how, as your district councilperson, I intend to serve you. It consists of four equal parts--listening, responding, following, and leading. Specifically, New Urban Leadership:

1. Is a resident-centered commitment to representation that obligates me as your district councilperson to emphasize the desires, needs, and views of neighborhood residents, business owners, and other in-district constituencies first
2. Requires me to serve and put the best interests of the district community – our neighborhoods, neighbors and businesses – first; not serve the interests of political party, political bosses, or other outside special interests
3. Mandates that I work to minimize negative impacts to the district's residents, businesses, and community organizations in situations such as fiscal crises where City interests may need to prevail
4. Demands I be an ombudsman and champion for district residents, businesses, and community organizations rather than outside interests
5. Necessitates that I be a mediator, conciliator, and problem solver for and among the district's neighborhood, business, and community groups
6. Obligates me to be present and accessible to all district residents, local business owners (including those for whom English is a second language), and community organizations

7. Mandates that I remain dedicated to New Urban Leadership and serve in office only so long as I am effective in this role

In keeping with New Urban Leadership I will:

1. Appoint a Northeast District Advisory Committee to further learn and effectively represent your interests that will consist of neighborhood residents, business owners, landlords, and community group members
2. Use the Advisory Committee to build bridges and reconcile differences among the various stakeholders throughout the Northeast District
3. Be a district ombudsman for you with City Hall
4. Hold weekly office hours directly in the district where either my council staff assistant or I will be available to listen to and discuss your issues and concerns
5. Regularly walk the district neighborhoods with residents, business owners, and community organization representatives
6. Put forth a serious effort to recruit and hire a multi-lingual council staff assistant
7. Make an effort to become conversationally bi-lingual before the completion of my first term
8. Be accessible and have a presence at as many neighborhood meetings and events as scheduling permits.

A New Urban Revival

New Urban Revival is my blueprint for urban revitalization emphasizing that city residents and locally owned and operated businesses in particular must be the chief beneficiaries of economic and community development initiatives. Specifically, New Urban Revival:

1. Is a resident-centered commitment and approach to urban revitalization
2. Is committed to improving the quality of city life and opportunities for the poor, working-poor, working class, and middle class that are the foundation for residential growth and stability
3. Accepts that Rochester's vitality depends upon the well-being and revitalizations of all of its unique neighborhoods
4. Views downtown Rochester as a neighborhood of no greater or lesser importance or value than other neighborhoods
5. Requires that downtown and neighborhood development be of equal importance and treated as equal components of urban revitalization
6. Recognizes that all neighborhoods must be accessible, affordable, and desirable choices for all residents to live, work, and play
7. Embraces that all neighborhoods have their own unique combinations of assets and strengths that must be celebrated and built upon, including cultural and ethnic diversity, unique residential choices, and economic opportunities
8. Understands that complete urban revitalization includes ensuring public safety, providing high quality public schools, and having civically engaged and empowered residents
9. Assesses all urban revitalizations projects first and primarily in terms of the value-added in improving the overall quality of city life and opportunities for poor, working-poor, working class, middle class city residents, and proprietors of locally owned and operated businesses

In keeping with New Urban Revival I will:

1. Advocate for an aggressive housing rehabilitation program that includes:
 - no cost ownership transfer of City-owned properties to both non-profit and for-profit organizations with a proven track record and a plan for housing rehabilitation
 - increased funding and an aggressive time-table for demolition of abandoned City-owned properties that cannot be rehabbed
 - cooperation and collaboration with neighborhood associations and others to develop programs to increase home-ownership
 - a homestead program that reduces or eliminates property taxes for up to a ten year period for homebuyers in targeted city neighborhoods in need of revitalization
2. Support and advocate for development programs aimed at:
 - the creation, expansion, and retention of neighborhood owned and operated businesses
 - advancing neighborhood entrepreneurialism and growth in the “secondary economy” among residents
 - recruiting national and regional corporations with a proven track record of locating in and committing to neighborhood business districts
3. Work deliberately to move forward long delayed development projects in the Northeast District such as La Marketa and to retain the community's visions for those projects
4. Vote for only neighborhood, downtown, and city-wide economic development projects that can be demonstrated to:
 - be fiscally responsible
 - add value to the quality of life and opportunities for the poor, working-poor, working class, and middle class
5. Advocate for a *community service commitment* provision in City development contracts and agreements specifying that developers and contractors seeking City investments in their projects agree to carry out City specified urban revitalization projects in targeted neighborhoods such as rehabbing designated City-owned houses and commercial properties as a condition for receiving city investment
6. Push for vigorous oversight and review urban revitalization projects and other programs to assure their fiscal integrity and resident-centered focus
7. Support the abolition of City sectors and a redesign of the Neighbors Building Neighborhood process with a more democratic and uniform governing structure organized around recognized neighborhood boundaries
8. Advocate and support an aggressive and nondiscriminatory public safety and crime prevention program that includes:
 - a city-wide non-criminalizing curfew for residents under the age of 18 with access to relevant social services if picked-up by the police
 - a strong anti-loitering ordinance
 - civilian neighborhood auxiliary police and PAC-TAC on Wheels
 - an expansion of foot patrols and beat-cops in designated areas
 - a return to police substations or mini-substations
 - a patrol car take home program for police officers who reside in the City

- a *safe passage guarantee* in targeted city designated public safety zones funded by the City, providing school transportation program to all children who attend a city school 1.49 miles or less from their home and who are ineligible for to be transported to school under current Rochester City School District 1.5 mile or more policy
9. Advocate and promote quality public education including:
- a supporting role for City in the Rochester Children Zone
 - a review and re-examination of the City's current lead paint policy to see if and how it needs to be strengthened
 - secure funding of Rochester City Schools
 - aggressive yet balanced fiscal oversight of the Rochester City School District's budget and bonding requests
 - opposition to mayoral take-over of City Schools
 - a collaborative partnership with the Rochester City School Board focused on advancing student achievement and high school graduation

A Proven Record of Independence, Leadership, and Responsiveness

I am free to commit myself to you, our neighborhoods, and the interests of the Northeast District because I am *not tied to any political boss*, forced to defend a failed status quo agenda, or motivated by political ambition. I am committed only to the ideal of public service and a continued desire to help and serve you and our community. In my previous elected public service as a member of the Rochester City School Board and as a neighborhood advocate in the Northland-Lyceum area, I have established *a strong and proven record of experience, independence, leadership, and responsiveness*.

My record includes:

1. Fiscal responsibility serving three years as the Chair of the Rochester Board of Education Finance Committee working tirelessly to make the RCSD more fiscally accountable and responsible
2. Adding value to peoples lives through various roles as a teacher, elected official, and personal coach
3. Political independence demonstrated throughout my term on the City School Board and in my challenges to professional full-time politicians and bureaucrats who put other interests above the educational needs of our children
4. Responsiveness to constituents including many of you who sought my assistance when I was on the City School Board in helping your children get into a preferred school, special program, or the text books they needed
5. Supporting unions, union causes, and working families
6. Understanding urban issues as demonstrated in my teaching, research, and participation in urban affairs
7. Goal-oriented political and policy advising to a number of elected and civic leaders
8. Candor and straight talk aimed at getting to the truth of an issue as evidenced in my public statements and questioning while on the City School Board and my commentaries and analysis in public discussions and media appearances
9. Civic leadership recognized in several awards received from such groups as Junior Achievement, the Monroe County Democratic Party, and the GAGV

In addition to my public record, like you, *I am invested in the Northeast City Council District*. It has been my home for nearly 20 years. *I moved and have stayed here by choice rather than for political expediency and political ambition*. In living the urban experience for nearly two decades I understand both the advantages of city living and the challenges that neighborhoods can face.

I am:

1. A nearly 20 year continuous resident of the Northland-Lyceum Neighborhood
2. A husband of 21 years to my wife Jan
3. A father to our son Dale who is a 2007 graduate of the School of the Arts
4. In a multi-cultural family
5. A dedicated neighborhood leader who co-founded the North Edge Community Organization and the Springfield-Willmont Block Club and who continues to assist neighborhood businesses and property owners
6. An engaged member of the 21st Legislative District Committee
7. A former member of the Rochester City School Board (2002-2005)
8. A former member of Mayor Bill Johnson's City-wide Stewardship Council
9. A past participant in Neighbors Building Neighborhoods (Sector 8)

Conclusion

The neighborhoods of the Northeast City Council District embody both the strengths and challenges of city living that Rochester residents and neighborhood business owners experience on a daily basis. In recent years, this district has not had someone on City Council regularly *stepping up for it*. *This must change and change now!* The revitalization of the Northeast demands it. The Northeast needs a district council member *stepping up for it* in a way that puts residents and local businesses first and recognizes that *every neighborhood counts*. I am prepared and want to be that councilman. I am *stepping up for the Northeast because every neighborhood counts* and I am committed to seeing that they do. However to do so, I need your help and support to become the next city councilman for this district. I am asking for your vote in the Democratic Party Primary on September 18, 2007 and again in the November 6, 2007 General Election.

Together we can bring about a revival in the neighborhoods of the Northeast City Council District and make them part of the reality of One Rochester. Only when every neighbor does count, here in the Northeast District and city-wide, will we come closer to the dream and ideal of **One City, One Rochester**.

Thank you.