

2018 OCT 19 P 3:56

CITY OF MOUNT VERNON, NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

RICHARD THOMAS  
MAYOR

October 19, 2018

City Council  
City Hall  
One Roosevelt Square  
Mount Vernon, NY 10550

FILED  
CITY CLERK  
MOUNT VERNON, NY  
2018 OCT 19 P 4:33

**RE: REQUEST TO INVEST IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF MOUNT VERNON:  
BUILDINGS DEPARTMENT**

Dear Council President Copeland and Members of the City Council,

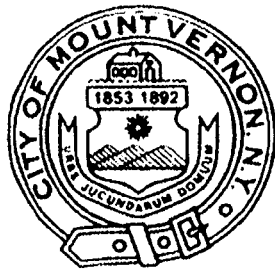
I am delighted to hear that you are impressed with the work of Building Commissioner Dan Jones and that you were pleasantly surprised to see he has a detailed implementation plan to digitize the department over the next 12 months. (See Attachment 1) The effort to change the culture of the Buildings Department, as well as City Hall, for good continues. Commissioner Jones' recent presentation to your honorable body is an example of the type of strategic investments we are looking to make across departments. We are hopeful you will support the Buildings Department requests in the 2019 budget and we look forward to future dialogue with you.

In this letter, we hope to supplement Commissioner Jones' presentation with additional background that your body may find helpful when determining future funding levels for this critical department. In the interim, we are specifically requesting that the City Council support the Thomas Administration's request to the International Code Council (ICC) for a specific Evaluation Service (ES) called an "International Accreditation Service" (IAS) study. The cost will be provided by the I.C.C. and we anticipate funding it via A.3620.405 (Department of Buildings – Contracted Outside Service).

**BACKGROUND**  
**THE BUILDING DEPARTMENT WENT FROM LOSS LEADER TO ECONOMIC GROWTH**  
**ENGINE (2016-2018)**

A study by State Comptroller Tom DiNapoli revealed that the Buildings Department was losing hundreds of thousands of dollars a year in revenue because of its mismanagement and antiquated systems.<sup>1</sup> We took these findings by the state seriously. We made a proactive decision to implement

<sup>1</sup>Report from the Office of New York State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli, "City of Mount Vernon: Building Department Fees and Fines" July 2014. Available online: <https://www.osc.state.ny.us/localgov/audits/cities/2014/mountvernon.pdf>



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corrective action internally and alerted outside agencies as well to ensure that any possible whiff of past corruption was dealt with immediately.

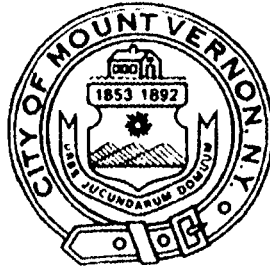
In addition, the Industrial Development Agency decided to take every measure possible to grow our local tax base, protect taxpayers, and make sure Mount Vernon remains competitive economically. This effort was aided by the World Economic Forum, Mercy College, and the New York University Stern School of Business, which provided their expertise pro-bono. (See Attachment 2) Your honorable body may also recall that both Microsoft and IBM visited City Hall and offered to assist in our effort to digitize operations at an affordable fee. (See Attachment 3) In fact, the previous City Council and Comptroller supported the Administration's relentless pursuit of the best for our residents with various technology bonds in the amount of \$5 million in July 2017.

**CURRENT NEEDS**  
**REQUEST FOR SUPPORT FOR BUILDING DEPARTMENT ACCREDITATION BY ICC**  
**(2018 – FORWARD)**

Despite tremendous obstacles, our change management plan has had a successful impact and is continuing to work. **This year, the economy has grown by 11 percent, home values are up approximately 10 percent, and crime is down 31 percent.**<sup>2</sup> Moreover, revenue for the Building Department has radically increased and the backlog has been drastically reduced. **To make it perform even better, we are officially requesting that you support the administration's request to the International Code Council (ICC) for a specific Evaluation Service (ES) called an "International Accreditation Service" (IAS) study.** It will help our Buildings Department achieve accreditation and operate at a higher level ethically, legally, and technically. Benefits of accreditation include:

- Set standards of excellence.
- Professional distinction among industry and government peers.
- Documented proof from an independent, internationally recognized accreditation body that the department is operating effectively, maintaining high standards, and can offer enhanced personal and property protection to the people of Mount Vernon.
- Stronger code enforcement and revenue generation opportunities.

<sup>2</sup> Press Release, Office of the New York State Comptroller Tom DiNapoli "DiNapoli: Strong Growth for Local Sales Tax Collections Halfway Into 2018", August 1, 2018. Available online: <https://www.osc.state.ny.us/press/releases/aug18/080118.htm>



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- The potential to receive lower insurance premiums based on fewer claims against the City.

**CATEGORICALLY SUPPORT THE 2019 BUDGET TO BUILD A BETTER TOMORROW  
FOR MOUNT VERNON**

We know that the school district has forecasted tax increases on the horizon and the costly situation with the sewers is NOT a myth. It's time to move forward - against these and other challenges - together. Mount Vernon residents deserve a government that works for them: not against them. Is the measurable progress perfect? No. Has it been easy? Certainly not. Are the positive changes real? Unequivocally. Are they sustainable? Absolutely. Can we work together to make it even better? I believe so.

It is my sincere hope that Commissioner Jones' presentation on tangible results, the strategic vision, and the revenue generation direction of the Department of Buildings will encourage you to support our requests in the 2019 Budget Proposal.

I am available to talk to you about any concerns or questions. Please contact Briana Fisher in my office to schedule an appointment, or I will ask her to contact you directly. I look forward to meeting with you soon.

Respectfully,

Richard Thomas  
Mayor