

Malloy: City draws creative workers

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STAMFORD - A robust economy with recognition as an international financial capital and a rapidly growing job market; talented, creative people seeking homes; low crime; strong urban schools; and recreation space.

That was the picture Stamford Mayor Dannel Malloy outlined yesterday in the annual State of the City address sponsored by the Stamford Chamber of Commerce at the Stamford Marriott Hotel & Spa.

"We are going to head the state in every way you can measure," he told the audience.

Americans have a tendency to focus on the negatives, he said, and his presentation looked only in the other direction, highlighting accomplishments made since his election in 1995 and bright prospects for the future.

The city that was "a little worn, a little beat up" 13 years ago has seen investment in schools, a more than 60 percent drop in crime and a requirement that developers include or fund affordable housing, he said.

In looking forward, Malloy cited the work of author Richard Florida, whose latest book, "Who's Your City?," identifies Stamford as one of the best "medium-sized" regions in the country in which to live at almost any age.

Florida argues the economic health of a place is determined by what it can offer sought-after employees.

Diversity, an arts scene and various types of housing are among the metrics by which communities will increasingly be measured, Malloy said, since they appeal to employers looking to hire creative people.

"If you look at what he is saying, it is very much about what we have been doing the last 12, 13 years," Malloy said of Florida's work.

"Who's Your City?" ranked Stamford and its surrounding region as a "best buy" in its size category for recent college graduates - gay or straight. The book also included the region as among the ideal places for mid-career professionals, families with children, empty-nesters and retirees.

Malloy showed slides of construction and redevelopment projects in the works - the Mill River Corridor, Old Town Hall, a proposed light rail line, the Urban Transitway and Antares' massive South End project.

His presentation left Nona Snyder, development director with the Boys & Girls Club, feeling optimistic, she said.

"It seems like progress is being made," she said. "Which is encouraging for all of us who live and work here to know that money is still coming in."

A commercial real estate broker, John Hannigan of Choyce Peterson Inc., said he felt improvements to traffic flow around downtown are particularly important, because congestion can deter tenants from renting there.

The state needs to put money into improving the rail system and building more parking for commuters, he said. Enhancements to the Interstate 95 off- and on-ramps could help as well.

"With these improvements, one of the objections to being in downtown Stamford may be eliminated or lessened," he said.

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