

Groundwerx Opening Day Press Conference (Transcript)

1:30 p.m.

Monday, Jan. 28, 2008

Good afternoon, I'm CHUCK HAMMERS, President of San Jose Downtown Property Owners Association.

It's a big name, but from now on we're known as Groundwerx. It's a great day because Groundwerx is going to change downtown – dramatically. The property owners of downtown have joined together and basically self-taxed themselves to the tune of 4 to 7 cents per square foot. Doesn't sound like much but when you add it all up, it's \$1.6 million dollars a year. And what's that going to do? We're looking to triple the cleaning downtown. We've got these super high-tech machines back here, this is a scrubber and a green machine (refers to machines behind him), they're eco-friendly. See these granite pavers that were put down 20 years ago but you can't see the color in any more – we're going to make them sparkle. Our goal is to make downtown look like Disneyland. If a Starbucks cup or other trash hits the ground, we want someone to come by so that it's gone in no time.

This city has always been known as the safest big city in the United States. We want it now to be the safest, the cleanliest and the friendliest. So the other side of the coin for Groundwerx is the friendly part. We've got 10 ambassadors that are going to be out roaming around downtown. You'll be able to spot them – they'll be in bright green and bright orange. You'll spot them a block away, there they are (points to Groundwerx team), and their objective is to make this the most user-friendly place around. So when you come down, if you want to find whatever the hot nightclub is, or wherever the best steak is, the great place to park ... they'll be able to help.

Think about someone coming in and staying at the Fairmont for the first time. They walk out, they don't know where to go. These guys are going to have the insider knowledge to downtown. So when you see them out on the streets, say "hi." They've been trained to be super friendly.

We think this is going to make a huge difference downtown. It's going to make downtown a great place to live. See all these high-rise condos going up? It should help property values, it's going to help restaurants, it's going help retail downtown. We really believe that this is going to make a big change.

This change just couldn't be done through the property owners alone – we've had tremendous support from City Hall. Next up I'd like to introduce the mayor, Mayor Chuck Reed, who really championed this and we want to thank for helping make this happen.

MAYOR CHUCK REED

Chuck and I share a history as past presidents of the Downtown Association. We, along with many other people who are here have been working on this concept for a very long

time. That is, a public private partnership where we take \$1.6 million that the downtown business property owners have assessed themselves and put it on top of everything else we're doing downtown to make downtown safer, cleaner, friendlier and prettier.

Today, we're here with the Groundwerx crew. I've got my green hat. We're here with the Groundwerx crew because they're the meeters, the greeters, the cleaners – and the extra eyes on the street to make sure that we're cleaner, safer, friendlier and prettier.

So were looking forward to that. It's a chance for downtown to sparkle in ways that is hasn't for a long time in many areas. You'll see a transformation at street level so that people living downtown, working here and visiting here will enjoy what we have. We have many things to enjoy and we're going to make it better.

I want to thank the folks that are here – many who played a role in this: our City Manager Debra Figone, Redevelopment Executive Director Harry Mavrogenes, Scott Knies from the Downtown Association and many others that have worked on this kind of a project for a very long time. And with that, I'd like to give it back to Mr. pizza man himself, Chuck Hammers, and you can introduce the rest of the speakers.

CHUCK HAMMERS

Thank you Mayor Reed. Another leader at City hall who really helped champion this is downtown Council Member Sam Liccardo. We couldn't have done it without his support.

SAM LICCARDO, San Jose City Council Member, District 3

Thank you, Chuck, for all your leadership on this. This is a wonderful day for us. Certainly it says an awful lot about the commitment and the sense of pride that our property owners have in our downtown and how convinced they are in the vision that they have for what this downtown is becoming and what it can become. We're so grateful for their commitment and we know that the downtown can't help but succeed with this kind of commitment, this kind of shared vision. We know that they're taxing themselves to make this happen – and that requires a real commitment that we're very grateful for.

I want to tell you I'm really excited about this ambassador program. I think the cleaning stuff is great; and I want to see how you can get one of these machines in my back yard because it needs a lot of work. But the ambassador program is something that's exciting to me. The ability to bring people down here to give directions, to help people find a taxi, tell them what the bus routes are, to be able to explain how it is they can get from here to there. Maybe to walk someone to a car if it's particularly late at night. This is an incredibly important service for our downtown, not just making it clean but making it friendly. And it was a job that previously was performed by Pierluigi Oliverio in his free time and now we're actually paying people to do it. I think it's fantastic. They're going to be on foot, they're going to be on bike, they're going to be on Segways, it's going to be wonderful to see the presence of these folks in their distinguished uniforms and it's going to make a downtown we can all be proud of.

CHUCK HAMMERS

We were standing here waiting for the conference and someone came up to us and said, “how do I catch the 23 bus?” and Scott and I actually looked at each other (shrugs). One of the ambassadors jumped right in and said “go down to San Carlos Street and catch it there.” It was great to see an ambassador in action.

The Downtown Association has had tremendous support over the years from the Redevelopment Agency and Executive Director Harry Mavrogenes is next up.

HARRY MAVROGENES, Executive Director, San Jose Redevelopment Agency
I’m really happy to be here today. Partnership is what this is all about. I really want to thank the Downtown Association membership, who were critical for this to happen, and of course the support of our City Council, who were solidly behind this effort and are continuing to look for ways to making the downtown better. So, I’m really looking forward to this partnership, and seeing our streets cleaner and graffiti removed. Keep up the good work.

CHUCK HAMMERS

The actual nuts and bolts of putting this together, of getting an RFP out, of the legalities of city money coming in and all the other tremendously complicated aspects of putting together a public-private partnership like this takes a lot of perseverance. I want to introduce Debra Figone, the City Manager.

DEBRA FIGONE, City Manager, City of San Jose

I would also like to add my thanks to those involved, in particular recognize Jim Ortbal and Kevin O’Connor of the city staff for all their contributions to this wonderful partnership. As you heard, we get involved in the nuts and bolts and certainly we’ve come a long way with this project. A few years ago, we were struggling to find a way to keep the downtown clean. Because of the faith of the property owners and the Downtown Association in the city, you have agreed to bring money to the table to help us do our jobs better.

This is about enhanced cleaning and I think you will see a demonstration in a few moments of how the Groundwerx clean teams will deliver services in a very efficient manner by using high-tech equipment. That equipment will be green, it will be environmentally friendly and you’ll see some fabulous results. The devil is in the details but what will happen is sweeping and pressure-washing sidewalks, graffiti removal, ensuring that trash cans are empty and kept clean. You’ll eventually see flower pots and other amenities to beautify the downtown.

And again, you’ve heard of our ambassadors who will partner with our city staff to make sure that people know what they need to know about how to make their way through the downtown. So as we envision our future together, I do look forward to our part of the partnership and being as supportive as we can. Also, to see the day when our downtown neighbors will enjoy the wonderful, beautiful downtown that we will deliver to them.

CHUCK HAMMERS

I thank all of you for coming out today and let's fire up these Groundwerx machines and hit the ground sweeping!

###