FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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MAYOR BALLARD’S 2009 BUDGET ADDRESS TO THE CITY-COUNTY COUNCIL

Mr. President, and City-County Councilors, tonight I am here to present the 2009 budget for the City of Indianapolis. I am proud to say that it is a balanced budget and a transparent budget that allows taxpayers to see how their dollars are being spent. It is a responsible budget that underscores my commitment to steering Indianapolis along a path to long-term sustainability.

Part of putting us on the path to long-term sustainability was to cut millions of dollars from our budget. Although I consider this just a start, I am pleased tonight to report that we have done just that.

As many of you know, through our efforts at the statehouse, and with the help of members of the Indiana legislature from both sides of the aisle, approximately $30 million that was dedicated to the public safety pension has been cut from the operational budget and has been returned to Marion County taxpayers in the form of additional property tax relief. This budget also saves taxpayers $8 million in administrative costs and by paying our bills on time and avoiding the bad habit of borrowing money just to meet unfunded operational costs, we are saving taxpayers $5 million more dollars. This is great news for Marion County citizens, but I will not be satisfied until our government is operating as efficiently as possible; however, this budget serves as a great starting point.

It is time to get back to basics. The 2009 budget focuses on government’s core responsibilities, and it sets forth our plan to provide fundamental services without borrowing against the future. It also takes into account our long-term health by making purchases that will benefit Marion County taxpayers for years to come—for example, our plan to purchase hybrid automobiles. This will help us reduce fuel costs as well as protect our environment. We are also dramatically increasing the practice of crack sealing our roadways. This practice was previously reduced and there is a direct correlation between this vital piece of road maintenance and the number of potholes that appear on our streets.
This budget reflects our priorities and chief among government’s responsibilities are public safety, infrastructure, and economic development. The 2009 budget reflects these priorities, by providing suitable resources for public safety agencies; by planning for long-term infrastructure maintenance and improvements rather than temporary fixes; and by dedicating resources to continued economic development activities to make Indianapolis more attractive to businesses and to talented workers. Which is why this budget funds the Indianapolis arts community at $1 million dollars. During this process, there has been some information put out that I want to cut arts funding completely, and although this budget reduces their funding, we cannot eliminate funding for the arts. A vibrant arts community attracts businesses and talented individuals to Marion County, who make a vital difference in our quality of life.

Every plan includes assumptions, and this budget includes an assumption that I ask you and the citizens of Marion County to assist me in making a reality. In this budget, we have consolidated township assessors into the county assessor, for an estimated savings of $3 million dollars. I believe this consolidation is not only necessary, but is long overdue, and I ask all citizens to vote for the referendum to make this consolidation a reality.

Lastly, earlier this year, our state legislature passed much-needed property tax relief measures for Marion County homeowners. This was a positive step for our citizens, but one that also will have a dramatic impact on the city’s revenue structure. We are responding, as you will see in our budget approach, with responsible uses of resources and a resolve to create operational efficiencies in every department—moves that will allow us to provide better services to citizens while spending fewer of their tax dollars. But this will not be enough to ensure our sustainability in the future. The cold hard truth is that we cannot continue to operate government like we have. Over the next few months we will continue our dialogue with the public on the possibilities for our future. As many of you know, I spend a lot of time meeting with neighborhood groups and citizens through our Mayor’s Nights Out. We will continue to listen to our citizens’ concerns about government restructuring so that we can change the scope of government and leave Marion County’s financial situation heading in a positive direction for our children and our grandchildren.

This budget is a great start. We will spend less than we did last year, and that is a rarity in government.

I look forward to discussing this budget with you in the coming weeks, and I look forward to a prosperous future for Indianapolis.

Thank you.