

City of Taunton

Office of the Mayor

Thomas C. Hoye, Jr.
Mayor

Alyssa Haggerty
Chief of Staff

Gill E. Enos
Budget Director



141 Oak Street
Temporary City Hall
Taunton, MA 02780
Tel. (508) 821-1000
Fax (508) 821-1005

MAYOR THOMAS C. HOYE, JR.
STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS
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Good evening, and thank you for joining us at the 2016 Inaugural Ceremony.

The City of Taunton is known as a “City of Firsts”. Our own Liberty and Union Flag was the first raised in the colonies against British tyranny. We were the first town to be founded by a woman. Taunton was once the top producer of sterling silver in the United States. Taunton Iron Works was the first successful company of its kind in the country. Our rich history in the silver and textile industry certainly helped put Taunton on the map. Taunton’s history has been steep with tradition and pride. The pride in the footprint that our forefathers left us is still in existence today, and has bestowed upon us a solid foundation on which to build upon.

My friends, Taunton is a great city, and we are in the midst of writing our own living, breathing and successful chapter in our City’s history book. The plot of our story is filled with triumphs and challenges and highlights the strength, courage and resiliency of our people. The last ten years that have preceded us have been amongst the most difficult that our city has faced in its history. We have endured a downfall in the economy, an increase in unemployment, and at times a feeling of despair that affects many mid-sized cities like Taunton, but unlike other cities and towns we did not let the tough times define us and I am so proud to report that we are in the midst of a huge Renaissance here in the great City of Taunton.

Public-private partnerships are the cornerstone for our resurgence and we must continue to foster those positive relationships, which can further our evolution. I have said it numerous times and I will continue to say that the relationship between the City of Taunton, the Taunton Development Corporation and Mass Development has simply been a godsend to our City.

Property left to decay at the former Paul Dever School has been remediated and given a new and prosperous existence. New businesses including the Martignetti Companies, Sullivan Tire, Dennis Burke, and now the Boston Globe and others have helped lower the Myles Standish Industrial Park’s vacancy rate to less than five percent, which is remarkable and best

demonstrates our successful partnership. The Work Force Development and Life Sciences Centers are in the final stages of planning and should come online in the near future. This Park and the Liberty and Union Industrial Park give the City a solid tax base, one that is the envy of many cities and towns.

As I talk about economic development I am excited about the opportunity that Project First Light will give this City. This venture, which has been discussed for the better part of four years, is soon to begin construction. The partnership between the City of Taunton and the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe will offer hundreds of construction jobs and 2500 vital full and part time employment opportunities to this City and region, to assist those that may be unemployed or underemployed. The Intergovernmental Agreement with the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe calls for a new police substation, a new ladder truck, and critical upgrades to our East Taunton Fire Station. Project First Light will also fund each year on a recurring basis twenty new police officers and additional firefighters. The agreement will provide badly needed infrastructure upgrades to some of our intersections, streets, and water and sewer systems.

Make no mistake about it, the magnitude of the project brings with it enormous obligation. You have my promise, and I know that I can speak for everyone on this stage here tonight, that we will work tirelessly to assure our citizens that promises of infrastructure upgrades, public safety improvements and job creation opportunities are fulfilled and that this project will help our city prosper for years to come.

A new economic initiative that my office is spearheading is called "Transitioning Taunton". The objective of Transitioning Taunton is to bring the major economic stake holders in our community together to share ideas, strengthen relationships and to find common ground. The working group includes, but is not limited to; the Downtown Business Improvement District, Taunton Areas Chamber of Commerce, Taunton Development Corporation, Silver City Galleria Mall, the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe, Mass Development and elected leaders at the local, state and federal level.

This is the first time in Taunton's history that a working group of its kind has been created and it has already helped generate beneficial discussion amongst participants. In order for our City to continue on its path of economic growth we must not operate in silos, but work in cooperation for the greater good of our community.

As part of the efforts to reenergize, reinvigorate and engage our citizens we will open a rebranding campaign community contest. This contest will allow high school students, or any resident, that has interest to create a new slogan and artwork that best defines our City and our collective vision moving forward. In the future, the new design and slogan will appear on our website and in promotional material highlighting Taunton, as we further illustrate our community advancements.

Downtown initiatives focused on small business and mixed use development will be a focal point in my Administration as we forge ahead in 2016. Working with the Mayor's Office of Economic and Community Development Director Kevin Shea, and Assistant Director Michael Ferreira, we

have outlined a series of initiatives to be rolled out. For our historic downtown to once again become vibrant we have to change our philosophy of our Central Business District.

I am asking the leaders of our City to join me in supporting these initiatives so that we may assist the property owners and potential new business owners and entrepreneurs. These initiatives include:

1. Rent Rebate Program – This pilot program for Downtown will provide rental assistance as an incentive for small businesses locating into vacant storefronts and upper floor spaces, within the boundaries of the BID District. The program will provide new business commercial rent subsidies for a two year period.
2. Proposed Downtown Zoning Changes – Several zoning changes in the Central Business District are being recommended to help spur the use of vacant storefronts and upper floors. Many of the downtown buildings were built prior to zoning regulations making it difficult for today’s occupants to meet them. Recommended changes include special permit approval by the Planning Board to better coordinate the overall development of Downtown. Smaller mixed use projects that include up to three dwelling units could potentially be a by right use. Parking space requirements, which often stifle many projects before they even start, will be re-examined and potentially reduced for all uses.
3. Redevelopment of the First District Courthouse/Highest and Best Use Study - The City, with financial assistance from Mass Development, has applied for Technical Assistance from the Urban Land Institute to help determine the best use for the vacant First District Courthouse. The ULI panel will also assist with providing a strategy for developing the building. A panel of experts in the urban redevelopment field will visit the City shortly. The City of Taunton needs a Downtown meeting and entertainment venue, and with a suitable plan in place the First District Courthouse could be that venue.
4. Urban Agenda Economic Development Grant -- The City has applied to the state for an Urban Agenda grant for planning and technical assistance with Downtown. With the grant, the City will be able to hire experts to help craft a Downtown redevelopment plan and facilitate its implementation using a market-based approach to Downtown revitalization.
5. Taunton Business Loan Program – The City of Taunton’s Business Loan Program will be provided in conjunction with the SEED Corp. The loan program is intended to assist start-up businesses as well as existing businesses with favorable fixed interest rates and 90%-100% financing. Eligible Taunton businesses must be for-profit and meet loan requirements. Special emphasis will be placed on Downtown businesses.

I look forward to discussing all of the economic development incentives in greater detail in the near future, and I humbly ask for everyone to bring their ideas forward, so that we may strengthen the heart of our City.

I cannot mention Downtown without mentioning City Hall. In 2016 the Municipal Council, together with me, must make a decision to determine the future of this iconic building. Now that the Star Theater has been razed we must come together and move this project forward. Taunton

deserves a building that we can all be proud of, and it is incumbent upon us as elected leaders to make it reality.

As I promised when I took office four years ago we have continued our efforts with respect to abandoned, blighted and dangerous properties. 52 Washington Street, the one-time home of Iwanicki Furniture and later Noah's Ark Tabernacle, had long been abandoned and had fallen into a state of disrepair. The Law Department and Building Inspector, along with other City officials, worked together to remedy this property. This effort included obtaining warrants from the District Court, inspections of the property, the ordering of corrective action, and, finally, the demolition of the two structures that were on the property. We will continue to work with the Attorney General's office and all other appropriate state and local authorities to continue to beautify our City and neighborhoods, as we have for the last four years

Recently, the City of Taunton has also reached an agreement with the US Army Reserve to purchase for \$500,000 the blighted former Elizabeth Pole School. The Army Reserve will consolidate three centers and bring them to the new facility on County Street, with the majority of the activity being on weekends. The Reserve Center will provide increased commerce for area restaurants and stores, while not adding unwanted weekday traffic to an already busy intersection. The consolidation by the Army Reserve will render the Eldridge Street facility surplus, and with the help of our Federal partners become available for our City, which could be an ideal location for several city functions or programs in the near future. I would like to thank our State Senator Marc Pacheco for his assistance in helping make this a reality.

Our Schools continue to perform well, our dropout rates have declined and graduation rates have risen. More of our graduates are moving on to higher education than ever before.

I cannot say enough about the wonderful educators here in our City that meet the daily demands of our children. Being a teacher or school administrator is not an easy job as the stresses on our students, for a myriad of reasons, have increased and the teacher, at times, may be the only stabilizing person in a child's life. Reading, writing and arithmetic have been slogan of schools forever but, just as important are the physical, social and emotional needs of our children that have to be met. We can never lose sight of that, despite the pressure placed upon our children by standardized testing.

The District has been accepted into the MSBA rapid repair program for the Bennett and Martin Schools and we are exploring the potential to replace the Mulcahey and Hopewell Schools. To Dr. Hackett and my colleagues on the School Committee, let's continue the great work and continue to make our District even stronger.

One of the things I've always admired about Taunton is how resilient its people are. Over the last two years we've worked hard to combat opiate overdoses in the City of Taunton. I've spoken publicly dozens of times and expressed how proud I am of our community for working together to come up with strategies and solutions to this problem that has affected every city and town. Our efforts have certainly been recognized at the state and federal levels of government. The Taunton Opiate Task Force is now part of a regional coordinated effort to prevent and reduce substance abuse. The coalition has grown to 88 Key-stake holders in the community and

has been working closely with the Mass Department of Public Health and the Bureau of Substance Abuse Services.

Some of the initiatives we are currently working on, or have currently implemented in our City as the result of this partnership include:

1. The promotion of prescription drug drop boxes located in the Police Department, and cluster-wide prescription drug take backs.
2. The collaboration with Boston University School of Medicine to provide Scope of Pain trainings to prescribers to aide them in safely and effectively managing patients with chronic pain, and when appropriate with opioid analgesics. We are also working with BU to schedule special trainings for dentists and emergency department personnel in the City.
3. The coalition is working with the our schools, in the region, to educate parents, coaches and student athletes about the dangers young athletes may face in abusing prescription drugs that may be prescribed due to a sports injury.
4. We are coordinating efforts between the Bureau of Substance Abuse Services and the School Department to implement a pilot program to update and augment the drug prevention curriculum in our school district.
5. We are working closely with the area hospitals to develop informational packets to be distributed in emergency departments, and health care settings to assist patients and families to navigate treatment options.
6. The task force is working with our Police Department and has implemented an outreach initiative designed to connect with individuals and families involved in overdose incidences. The program will utilize the talents of volunteers from law enforcement, substance use professionals, educators, faith based community members and recovery advocates on site at locations where the overdoses have occurred.

We have not for a minute lost sight of this crisis and will continue to stay focused and remain tenacious in combatting this epidemic and its devastating consequences. There is still so much work to be done and we must continue to fight so this disease does not continue to ravage individuals and families.

To all involved with our task force, thank you, and we look forward to better days ahead.

My message to individuals and families affected is do not give up hope.

In 2015 we repaired more roads and sidewalks than ever before and we hope to continue the progress in the New Year. Commissioner Fred Cornaglia and his team will continue to update the roadway management plan to ensure that our streets in need of repair and ADA issues are addressed.

We will continue to work with Governor Baker and our legislative delegation to maximize our Chapter 90 funds from the Commonwealth and continue to make our own investment as well. Taunton will work with GATRA to access federal and state funds to improve our pathways to public transportation in our city. Much needed upgrades to Hart's Four Corners and Gordon

Owen Riverway intersections will begin in the near future. I am proud of the progress we have made, but there is still a long way to go.

Our Public Safety Departments have continued to evolve in the last four years.

The Taunton Police Department has done a great job and is truly one of the best in the region. Police officers are under the microscope every second of every day, which makes an extremely stressful profession even more difficult. We are proud of the work they do, but I along with my partners on the Municipal Council am cognizant of the fact that the department needs more help. Last year was the first time in a long time we hired new patrolmen. We must continue that trend to make our community a safe place to work, visit and most importantly live.

We are also proud of our firefighters who continue to raise the bar of professional standards, in the Taunton Fire Department, through training and education. They answer calls with proficiency and compassion.

Both departments have been intimately involved in providing care and comfort during the opioid epidemic, and we are grateful for all of their efforts.

As a community we have grown, but like all communities Taunton has difficult issues that we must continue to navigate.

We need to take a long term look at the Taunton Nursing Home operations to determine what is the best long term option for the Taunton Nursing Home and the community? We need to answer that important question soon and in the short term look to ensure that the facility is operating efficiently and provides the highest level of care possible for the residents.

Recently, the Municipal Council approved the concept of our landfill expanding vertically. We now must work with our local Board of Health and MassDEP for appropriate approvals, which will save our tax payers millions of dollars over the next several years. This is only a short term solution and we must work towards finding a long term disposal option for the future. Our Waste Water Treatment Plant is also mandated for an upgrade, and we continue to negotiate with the United States EPA to expand and improve the facility.

Personally, I have many people to thank for our achievements over the last four years.

First and foremost, thank you to my family; my wife Stephanie, and my children Sophia, Tommy and Lilah. Being the Mayor's wife and children is not always easy. Their patience and understanding make it possible for me to continue to devote the time and energy to this job and community I care so deeply about. Thank you and I love you.

To my parents, in-laws and extended family, thank you, as we could not do this without you.

To my office, Chief of Staff, Alyssa Haggerty, who is literally at times my right hand, thank you for all that you do. You have truly become a leader and a bright young star in our community. Also Mimi Punda and Gill Enos, thank you for everything that you do each day.

Our Law Department logs countless hours as they are involved in almost every facet of this City. Jason Buffington and Dan de Abreau you both need special mention as you go above and beyond for the citizens of our community each and every day.

To all of our Department Heads and employees thank you for all that you do for our residents. As all of our employees know being a public servant can be both rewarding and challenging, and often as we know, within the course of a single day.

To my colleagues on the Municipal Council, thank you for tremendous efforts and energy you all bring as well as your ideas and advice. Without the consolidated efforts of everyone our City would not have improved as much as it has, especially in terms of technology and systems, which consecutively improves customer service. We look forward to a new user-friendly website in the first quarter of 2016, which will provide an improved platform for residents to gather information and do business online, and on any device, through its responsive design.

As Mayor I am pleased with the progress we have made and for our future outlook, but I am not satisfied as I believe we can do even better. We need to continue with our economic growth and provide job opportunities for our residents.

Taunton can build upon the momentum of our highly successful community events like *Lights On* and *Family 4th Night*. We need to increase community pride, self-esteem, and self-investment in this City, which is our City.

When someone asks, “why Taunton?” we must respond, “why *not* Taunton?”

The infrastructure is in place to make Taunton not only one of the most successful cities in the region, but the Commonwealth.

Let’s be bold, let’s think outside the box, and let’s think big.

Taunton can be as great as we want it to be.

I for one am excited about our future. I ask you all to join me in making 2016 Taunton’s most successful year ever.

My friends it is time to write our own history!

Thank you and God Bless the City of Taunton!