

2019 State of the City Address
Mayor Thomas C. Hoye, Jr.
January 22, 2019

Senator Pacheco, Council President Postell, Members of the Municipal Council--- tonight is an exciting night as it is with honor that I deliver the State of the City Address.

The City of Taunton has improved drastically in the last seven years, and we continue to grow and progress. Being the Mayor of this great city comes with its challenges, yet it is the most fulfilling job that a person could ask for.

This evening I am thrilled to report that the state of our city is strong. Our economic climate has continued to improve, allowing us greater flexibility in improving our infrastructure as well as our workforce. We are one of the oldest cities in the country and the largest land wise in the Commonwealth, yet despite our large size we have attacked our infrastructure needs aggressively and will continue to do so.

Our unemployment rate through October of 2018 sits at 3%, which is down a half percent from the same time period last year.

We have much here in our great city to be thankful for, but still so much to do. We are a safer, cleaner, economically and fiscally stronger city than we have been in many, many years. My administration and I are excited with our direction and will continue to work towards future growth and improvement.

Our Public Safety Departments have enjoyed historic staffing levels over the last several years. This past year Taunton was ranked the 6th Safest City in Massachusetts by SafeHome.org. This ranking is a testament of the hard work of our Police Department, led by Chief Ed Walsh. The Department's acceptance of modern best practices in policing has led to a safer city, resulting in a more respectful community.

Our Fire Department under Chief Bradshaw continues to embark in aggressive training, which has made the Department one of the best in the state. Our combined 911 dispatch has been a success, streamlining communications and improving public safety city-wide. We will continue to augment both of these great departments as we can and strategically plan for capital improvements in our Public Safety Buildings.

Our level of preparedness for emergencies of all kinds improves each year. Here in Taunton we have seen weather patterns change and are dealing with ferocity in storms like never before. These weather events can cause major power outages and property damage. To help prepare us for future weather events TEMA Director, Rick Ferreira, is expanding our emergency preparedness plan. We will be participating in the Municipal Vulnerability Program through the Baker/Polito Administration to help protect our residents, resources and infrastructure against climate change. This program will greatly improve our preparedness and resiliency and allow us to identify strengths and areas we need to improve upon.

Our roads have seen drastic improvement over the last year, and our city streets were being paved right up until Christmas. This year we were able to pave 8.2 miles of roads. That's the equivalent to the distance between Segregansett Country Club at the Dighton line, to Taunton Youth Soccer Complex in East Taunton. This brings our total over the last 3 years to over 22 miles. These totals do not reflect the recent paving of downtown, which looks better than it has in decades.

I am committed to continued paving and betterment of our City Streets. Tonight, I will ask the Municipal Council to approve a transfer of \$1 million dollars from free cash to streets and roads so that we may continue our efforts in improving our roads and sidewalks. This is the largest onetime cash infusion into our roads in our city's history.

When I took office I made the promise to address our roads and it is a promise that continues forward to this day. The city committed \$210,000 in CDBG funds for engineering work related to infrastructure and road improvements in the Whittenton area. The engineering is the first phase in a long-term plan to improve the commercial and residential corridor along Bay Street and adjacent roadways. The City plans to seek a future MassWorks grant to assist with the construction phase of the project. This is a great example of leveraging available funds so that we may be eligible for state and federal dollars to fund the lion's share of these projects.

Our city has expended over 2 million dollars to reengineer the layout of Broadway. This work has allowed us to qualify for TIP funding, which has made over 12 million dollars in federal money available for us to pave Broadway over the next 2 years. We are also on track to pave County Street from the McCarthy Bridge to Harts Four Corners. The improvement of our streets and ADA improvements in our sidewalks have been remarkable and I commend Commissioner Cornaglia and his team for these vast improvements.

Having a city that is safe, transportable and clean is important to all of us. Over the past few years we have seen our roads improve and witnessed a city that is much cleaner. I recently met with two out of town seniors who traveled to Taunton for the first time in many years. Their initial reaction was of praise, they were in astonishment of the clean state of our roadways. You would have never heard that a decade ago. The hiring of trash enforcement officers and supporting staff to clean troubled areas has paid dividends. These actions, along with consistent street sweeping, has led to a much cleaner city.

As incredible as things are going here in our city, like all places we have some challenges ahead. The two major tasks in front of us are the future of our city-owned nursing home, and the eminent closure of our city-owned landfill.

For decades the Taunton Nursing Home has provided top notch care for its residents, which has continued to the present day. That fact has never been in dispute, but also not in dispute are the millions of dollars in operating losses the nursing home has compiled over the last several years. This dramatic loss in revenue combined with the continued low census and the capital needs of the building, which have not yet been discussed let alone assessed, indicate it is time that Taunton follows suit with the other 349 cities and towns in the Commonwealth and withdraw from the nursing home business. Is it a difficult decision? Of course it is, but this city

has a history of deferring difficult decisions and we cannot continue to keep deferring this one. Our city cannot continue to divert taxpayer money on a venture that is intended to be self-sufficient. This is not a new issue. It was the number one topic in our Mayor and Council races twenty years ago. For 20 years this has been discussed and the time for action is now.

For the past several decades our city has enjoyed the benefits of the city owned landfill. Our city's second hefty task at hand is to determine, "What is the most cost effective means of trash disposal for our residents?" Our landfill has certainly served us well; the benefit to the city has been roughly \$80 million dollars since 1996. However, MassDEP has not permitted a landfill in the Commonwealth since the mid 1970's, and has also not created a clear path to the many trash to energy technologies that exist. This leaves cities and towns to pay a much higher disposal fee than in other parts of the country. Tonight, I speak for everyone in this room saying we will work together to bring the most cost effective disposal to Taunton and its residents. We have hired GBB management consultants to assist us and provide an unbiased look into our options. Right now we are working on three concurrent tracks: extend the life of the landfill, short term transfer and disposal, and a long term regional conversion technology project with host community revenue. I would like to thank our State Senator Marc Pacheco for his help in assisting us in bringing MassDEP and some new emerging technologies to the table and I know Senator we can count on your continued assistance.

Our schools continue to perform well as we remain focused on providing our kids a sound 21st century education. The methods of education continue to evolve, but the mission does not. I am grateful that Governor Baker mentioned the need to change the Educational Foundation Funding for the Commonwealth as the system is outdated and needs to be tweaked to meet today's needs. I am confident in our newly appointed Superintendent of Schools, John Cabral, our administrators, teachers and School Committee to lead our district and continue to deliver the first rate education our families deserve. I am proud that the official ground breaking of the new Mulcahey and Hopewell School will take place in the next few months.

Technological advances have become commonplace over the last several years here in the city. Accela Permitting Platform has been rolled out complete Accela Citizens Access Portal, which gives contractors the ability to apply for and search for permits, within the database. The platform includes web interfaces and mobile apps that are designed to enable and improve core processes for city, which will in turn improve workflow and the service for contractors and citizens alike. Each week since its inception more and more contractors have signed on.

Citizens will also see a change in our website in the upcoming months as the city converts from its current platform to Civic Ready. Civic Ready is an immediate multi-channel communication solution that allows you to reach your citizens, visitors and employees, no matter where they are in our community. This platform is not only more user friendly, but it will allow communication, including emergency notification, over a much wider spectrum using just a single interface. This program will be major asset for our city and most importantly our residents. Civic Ready should be rolled out by this coming summer. I would be remiss in not thanking Paul Arikian for his leadership in bringing these improved systems to Taunton.

Our historic downtown has continued to shine over the past year. Paving is complete and new flags are lining our streets. We have seen new restaurants open their doors including the Pearl and Liberty and Union Alehouse, as well as the District Center for the Arts, which has given the city a perfect Performing Arts Venue that is sure to attract major acts to the area and enhance downtown arts and entertainment. Kudos to Alex Stylos and Sherwood Builders for the amazing job they did in restoring this former courthouse. It is new faces like Alex, Ryan Jones, and Chris Coute, combined with some of Downtown's longest stakeholders like Jose Bejarano, Lou Pacheco and Jay Dorsey, working with our city departments and the Business Improvement District, who are *proving* Downtown Taunton is making a comeback and here to stay.

Our Downtown events continue to shine here in the Silver City. Our signature "Lights On" celebration drew over ten thousand visitors this year. That is ten thousand people that visited our historic downtown and see what Taunton is all about. This event has grown into a must do for people throughout our entire region, topping the lists of Christmas festivals and magical celebrations across New England. I am so proud of this event and the beautiful display we commit to as a city each year.

As the Mayor of this City I knew we needed to play a major role implementing programs and practices to help transition the Downtown. In 2015 we developed the Rent Rebate program to do just that. The Rent Rebate program has attracted 13 new businesses to Downtown. The program was highlighted in Governor Baker's FY19 Economic Development Bill. I have been invited to speak about the program at a National Mayors Conference in Washington, DC, which I will do this coming weekend. The City of Taunton was selected as the recipient of the *Innovators Award* by the Mass Municipal Association's for this program's overwhelming success. What started as a concept here in Taunton is now being commended and imitated in other cities and towns across the Commonwealth, and being discussed throughout the entire nation. Other communities have seen the success of this program, and are following our lead. I thank MOCD's Kevin Shea and Mike Ferreira for their great work in getting this great program off the ground.

This last year we were successful in having the downtown area designated as an Opportunity Zone. Opportunity Zones were created as part of the Federal Tax Cut and Jobs Act of 2017. The legislation allows for the favorable treatment of capital gains for investments in targeted areas such as the downtown. We are aware we still have some hurdles downtown. We are looking to improve parking and pedestrian safety. We are in discussion with the intent to purchase property adjacent to Galligans Court, which will provide well-lit parking options as well as a major opportunity for a mixed use investment. Additionally, the City is reviewing the Master Plan recommendation of changing the downtown traffic pattern at the Taunton Green to improve this high traffic area and provide additional plaza space for downtown. This is a critical investment that needs to be made to create a safer environment and a true pedestrian-friendly downtown.

In the upcoming months we will also be working with the BID and business owners to create incubator space for entrepreneurs who have great ideas and dreams, but lack the capital to get started. The idea is to create opportunity to bring these ideas to reality in some of our vacant storefronts. This outside the box thinking will provide a crucial opportunity for aspiring business owners that did not exist in the past.

Our city hall project, once just a dream, will soon become a reality as we should break ground by the end of the month and be open for business by the end of 2020. This long awaited project is a critical piece to the puzzle in our strategy to optimize economic and community development in downtown Taunton.

The renaissance of our city parks has been exciting. Hopewell Park received a new playground this year, and the splash pad has been an extremely popular addition. The renovated basketball courts were overdue and are now enjoyed throughout the spring and summer. SummerFest camp held at Hopewell is better than ever with a waiting list of children enjoying the park as well as some great field trips. The new Patriots Playground installed at the Weir Riverfront has provided a great outlet for the children of the area. In the near future we hope to provide a splash pad as well as new fencing and improved walkways to improve upon the recreational opportunities in the Weir. It is great to see an abandoned industrial site come back to life as a recreational stronghold. I thank Marilyn Greene for her many years of great leadership over the past decade plus.

The Taunton River Trail continues to evolve and I thank the Pathway Committee and Chairman Philip Duarte for their doggedness in bringing this project closer to reality. The initial design was reviewed by the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA) in early November 2018, and funding for design was secured shortly thereafter. In this phase, the section of the Trail from Weir Village Riverfront Park on West Water Street to a temporary trail connection along Cleary Flood Drive, west to Route 138/Somerset Avenue will be designed and constructed. Future phases of the trail would extend south of Cleary Flood Drive and create a trail terminus along the railroad at Railroad Avenue. In addition to anticipated EEA grant funds, the City has applied for an Eastern Federal Lands Access Program grant to help with Trail costs.

Our Myles Standish Park has continued to thrive. Phases 4 and 5 are nearing completion, which would complete the park build out. If construction remains on schedule two major businesses should open their doors in 2019.

We will soon welcome the NN Inc., an aerospace and Defense Company and a manufacturer of high precision metal, plastic compounds and assemblies. NN Inc. will bring several hundred new jobs to the region, along with an economic multiplier as it will do business with some already established businesses in the area.

Maxon Motors is also nearing completion on an \$11 million dollar, state-of-the-art facility that will add more than 100 new employees. We are grateful to the Baker/Polito Administration for their assistance in helping us secure a \$2.4 million MassWorks Grant for infrastructure and road improvements on Robert Treat Paine Drive. The grant will support a \$200 million dollar expansion of the Waters Corporation and improve access and safety for a number of adjacent businesses and employees. The Myles Standish Park is the largest and most successful in the New England and we are grateful for the work that has been put in historically by the TDC, our Legislative Delegation and local officials to make it a success.

The Silver City Galleria Mall has seen better days, but ownership is committed to seeing the property thrive once again. Tri Com is in constant contact with the city and is reviewing mixed

use development concepts that would be viable. Recent zoning changes should assist the property on its path to financial stability and our city will assist them in any way possible as their success only supports us. Its location lends itself to housing, small business and light industrial development. Our area is in great need of market rate housing to help support the almost 10 thousand people that work in our Industrial Parks. Large scale market rate housing development is going on in towns that border us and it is time that our City follows suit as we continue to create new employment opportunity. The Galleria Mall is a perfect place to get started.

Our Senior Center will continue to offer top notch programs and services to our residents. In addition to the exercise classes and benefit counseling and services currently offered our Human Service Department will roll out this year 'Dementia Friendly Taunton' and a six session mental health program called 'Wisdom Wednesdays'. The purpose of Dementia Friendly Taunton is to educate Taunton businesses and organizations on how to respectfully address the needs of those with dementia. 'Wisdoms Wednesdays' will include a Guest Speaker on health topics, brunch and socialization opportunities for our seniors. Anne Bisson and her team do a tremendous job and also continue to lead our efforts to curb homelessness here and our City, and do so by being pro-active in going out with teams into the community and not letting people come to them. Our City will continue to attack homelessness and the Opiate Crisis head on and will do so by providing compassion, education and opportunity for those that seek it.

Taunton continues to be a City on the rise. Our infrastructure continues to improve, as has our public safety, schools and job market. Our improvement did not happen by mistake, but is the result of our Department Heads and employees taking pride in our city and working together to make Taunton the special place that it is. This year my administration worked together with all of our city unions to save our tax payers \$2.6 million dollars a year in health insurance costs.

To continue to take note of our employees ideas my office and the Office of Human Resources will be developing a Municipal Employee Leadership Committee which will bring together municipal leaders who during a trial series to develop ideas to foster innovation and collaboration, to identify strategies to incentivize municipal cost saving strategies, and help develop training and educational opportunities.

This year we plan to re-enact the Mayor's Youth Leadership Council to encourage, empower and engage the youth of our community. Our kids have a powerful voice and its time we give them the platform to use it.

I would like to thank my team for their continued efforts in improving our city and the sometimes impossible task of making me look good. Alyssa, Mimi, Gil, Jason and Dan, thank you for all that you do. You all go above and beyond and I am forever grateful for each of you. To my wife Stephanie, thank you for your support in allowing me the flexibility to continue to do this job that I love. To my children, Sophia, Tommy and Lilah, thanks for understanding when Dad gets home late. To my colleagues in government, thank you for your support. We are all in this together. We may not agree 100% of the time, but we owe it to the people that we serve to put any differences aside for the betterment of all. Let us be an example to Washington, that simply working together does work.

In the words of Wall Street Banker and veteran of the CIA Glenn Carle, "Leadership is about collegiality, openness, empathy, and ability to thrive in ambiguity, where there is no clear answer, and having to make clear decisions because they must be made, which sometimes seems like an impossible task, but that's the job."

In our own roles in local government the answers are not always written on the wall, but our job is to make the hard decisions. These decisions will have a lasting and positive impact on our community for generations to come. The easy answer is not always the right answer. May we all be collegial, open and empathetic. That my friends is our duty as elected leaders. I have always promised to listen, learn and lead and I will not waver from that promise. Our collective success will lead to our cities success.

Thank you and God bless you all and God Bless the Great City of Taunton.

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