

The State of our city, 2014

The Road Ahead

Thank you for coming. We are joined today by some members of our legislative team—State Senator Kathleen O’Connor Ives, State Representative Diana Dizoglio, State Representative Linda Dean Campbell, State Representative Leonard Mirra, and from United States Senator Edward Markey’s office, Kate Machet, thank you for coming here tonight. Representative Dempsey is unable to attend tonight as he is in budget meetings.

Tonight is a special night, because tonight we tell you about the progress we have made in the past decade and about where we are going in the next decade. They say a picture is worth a thousand words, so let’s start by looking at some pictures of the progress we have made and what the future might look like.

SLIDE SHOW--

The Downtown Success Story

As you saw, we started in the old shoe factory district, with buildings that had been abandoned for decades.

We applied for and received nearly \$2 million in Brownfield’s money to cleanup these sites. We rezoned to make it easier to develop residential housing. Then we worked with our Federal

and State legislative delegation for infrastructure investment to bring in money for a new boardwalk and a new parking garage.

The 5th Avenue Shoe Factory became the Cordovan. The Hamel Leather Factory became Hamel Mills lofts. Tonight we have \$150 million in new investment in our downtown, a new parking garage, a new boardwalk and 850 new residents.

Tonight, we can see the fruits our labor and we see the road ahead.

The Road Ahead

Haverhill Music and Surplus Office

That road ahead starts along Washington Street where the old Haverhill Music Building is ready to break ground this spring.

The road ahead takes us across the street to Washington Street, to the abandoned Surplus Office Supply Building, where the upper floors had been mostly vacant for eight decades. Tonight, that building is being redeveloped into 19 upscale units, with retail on the first floor. The developer, Dan Tragworth, is with us tonight – thank you for coming.

Merrimack Street—Harbor Place

The road ahead takes us next to Merrimack Street.

A year ago, we were informed of a great new project on Merrimack Street that would put the site of the old Woolworth

building back to productive use for the first time in forty two (42) years. We rezoned Merrimack Street to encourage density and projects that connected to the waterfront. Now let me make it clear, we didn't make that project happen, the development team, Rep. Dempsey and Chancellor Meehan did. We just wanted to be sure we didn't stop it from happening and we made it easy so we rezoned.

But for this project to happen, it needed private sector investment and public infrastructure dollars.

Public infrastructure investment was necessary because the old Woolworth building didn't have a single parking space. The only place that parking could be built was underneath, but it wasn't economically feasible for the private sector to build it. Public infrastructure dollars were needed to build parking and a public boardwalk.

That infrastructure investment came in the form of three Mass works grants, for a total of over \$10 million; it came in the form of our investment as a city in \$6 million to fix the floodwall. Those investments allow the project to build up to the height of the flood wall and put 150 parking spaces underneath, and for the first time in seventy five years, allow the public to see the Merrimack river from Merrimack street.

This \$10 million in infrastructure investment did not happen by accident. It happened because Haverhill has the Chairman

of the Ways and Means Committee and I want to publicly thank him tonight, Rep. Brian Dempsey.

The next steps on Merrimack St.

But even this was not enough. For this project millions of dollars in private sector money was and is required. That private investment came as a result of a partnership between the Greater Haverhill Foundation and a group called the Planning Office of Urban Affairs. The Planning Office had invested in Haverhill earlier, liked the ease of permitting we had set up, and came back for more. Representatives of the both groups are here this evening welcome.

When Harbor Place is completed, it has all the potential to be one of the greatest projects in the history of our city. But there are still hurdles to overcome to make this great project a reality. We will all do our part to get us to the next step.

The road ahead: across the River

The rail trail

The road ahead starts with Harbor Place, but it cannot end there. Already, this project has people talking about doing more. Once again, public investment in the infrastructure helps to make this possible.

Along the Bradford side of the river, that infrastructure investment means our rail trail.

Two years ago we started an unfinished walkway along the water. Our goal over the next few years is to finish construction of that phase of the rail trail and start on the next phase to bring this trail all the way to new playground we put in next to the Yacht Club.

There is more to do, but working together our vision is that someday along the river on both sides, the public will be able to walk along and have a vista of our greatest asset, the Merrimack River.

That vista has to be on both sides of the Merrimack.

On the Haverhill side, last year, we started opening up the view of the waterfront. This year we'll give our citizens the best view of the Merrimack we've had in decades. But our vision is much bigger. Our vision is that someday the entrance way along Water Street, the Water St. Greenway Project, will be part of that emerald necklace along the Merrimack.

Rezoning—Bradford

The road ahead takes us next back to the river in Bradford, to a series of abandoned factory buildings whose names have all been forgotten; Ornstein, Paperboard, and Hoyt and Worthen.

Earlier this year the Council joined me in a comprehensive rezoning along the waterfront. Our hope and vision was that this rezoning would lead to people redeveloping those

abandoned sites just as a decade ago rezoning helped entice people to develop the old shoe factories downtown.

Tonight I would like to introduce to you Niskanen Development Team and Util Architecture and Planning who will introduce a proposal to develop the Railroad Street lofts along the river in Bradford.

This new project is the first to take advantage of those new zoning laws; they will not be the last. We already have new interest along both sides of the river including the old Ornstein site. Later this week, I will issue a new RFP for that site to make certain we get the best value for our taxpayers.

Why this is Relevant

What the new revenue has done

These new developments bring us new tax dollars. The new development downtown has brought in a total of over \$772,000 in new tax dollars over the years, and have brought in new restaurants that have brought in a total of over \$2 million in new meals tax revenues. Those new revenues, combined with the State assistance Rep. Dempsey and our delegation has brought us to deal with the Hale debt, combined with the sacrifices of our employees have made have allowed us to improve the services we deliver to our citizens in their neighborhoods.

Police

In those neighborhoods, our first job is to keep you safe. Last year, our budget added four new police officers and we filled two vacancies for a total of six new hires. We have those six new police officers here this evening, and I would like to welcome them: Officers Jared Weisenborn, Cory Baldera, Gillian Brignac, Branden Sheehy, Brittany Birch and Tiffany Maldonado. Welcome!

Later this spring or summer, I will swear in eleven (11) new officers to bring us up to our highest number of patrolmen in years. And when I introduce my budget later this spring, we'll do even more.

But just adding police isn't enough. We also have to use them in the most efficient way possible. This year, we'll be the first city in New England to use new predictive analysis software, to help us predict where and when crime is most likely to occur so that we can put these new officers to work where they are needed most, on bicycles, and on foot patrols continue to keep you safe.

DPW

Keeping our city safe is our top neighborhood priority, but not our only one. We also have to keep our neighborhoods clean. Last year, we patched more potholes and swept more streets than ever before. This year, we'll add a new street sweeper

and just today, I signed the order to buy a new pothole patching machine called a hotbox to fix potholes in every neighborhood.

Inspectional Services

Keeping a city clean is a partnership. We'll do our part. But part of what we do is to make certain that everyone plays by the rules.

New Director

To help us do our part, we have re-organized inspectional services department. For the first time in over a decade, we have a director of inspectional services whose only job is inspectional services. He has joined us this evening—please welcome our new director, Richard Macdonald.

We've also obtained a State grant to hire a new vacant property manager to tackle those abandoned buildings that can run down and entire neighborhood. He is with us tonight also; please welcome our new vacant property manager, Pedro Soto. Today, we have registered 139 vacant properties, brought in over \$44,000 in registration fees, three have been demolished, eight have been put into receivership and 107 properties have been inspected and repairs have been made. Now, our newly reorganized inspectional department has a new task—restart your code team so that we have a coordinated attack with the police on blight in our city.

Taxes and taxpayers

Keeping every neighborhood safe and clean is a challenge, but there is another challenge-- do it in such a way that we keep our city affordable. Last year, we were able to tax below the levy limit for the first time in thirteen (13) years. We hope to be able to do that again this year and set a trend.

Schools

All of this—a stable tax rate, new growth and development, a new rail trail, new police and a clean city are important. But if we want the road ahead to be bright for the generations that will follow us, if we want to be a **great** city, then there is one more task, our most important task of them all: improve our schools.

Now, make no mistake about it, we've made progress. The high school we saw a decade ago, the high school with leaky roofs, broken bathrooms, the high school with science labs that hadn't worked in a decade, the high school that was on accreditation probation and on the verge of becoming only the second high school in the entire state to lose its accreditation, that high school is gone. It's been replaced by in the same building by a new, fully accredited modern high tech high school of tomorrow.

The high school is our flagship school but we haven't stopped there. Today we have all day kindergarten, our MCAS scores

are up, our graduation rate is up, our dropout rate is down, but make no mistake about it, there is more to do and we intend to do it.

Past of what we need to do is to provide our children with a good, clean and safe learning environment.

To make that happen, a decade and a half ago, we redid the Nettle School and provided the children of Riverside with a brand new school.

Last year, we spent \$6 million, with the help of the State's green schools initiative, to replace boilers in the Walnut Square and Consentino Schools, replace windows in the Consentino and Whittier schools, replace roofs in the Tilton and Walnut Square schools. Last year, with city and school money, we finished our high school project with a million dollar technology update make us the high tech high school of tomorrow.

But there was one school we couldn't fix. That school is the Hunking School. The best and most economical way to upgrade that school is to replace it.

The only way to pay for this is what is what I call a debt extension.

A little over two decades ago, the voters of Haverhill approved a debt exclusion to build four (4) new elementary schools. That

debt exclusion increased taxes on average by \$70 per year for residential taxpayers.

Now, that debt exclusion is set to expire. We are not going to ask you to pay more on your taxes for a new Hunking School. We are going to ask **you** to allow us to keep that \$70, and reinvest it in a new Hunking school.

Over the next few months, the parents will be before you and will make their case to you. All I ask tonight is that you listen to them and give them a fair hearing. I believe that if you do, you will conclude, as I have, that extending that earlier debt exclusion will improve our property values and is the best path for our city. The decision and the road ahead is in your hands.

Conclusion

Over the next few months and few years, we will all make decisions about the type of city that we want for our future. Together, we will shape the road ahead.

I cannot tell you with certainty every twist and turn that the road will take; but I can tell you with certainty tonight, the road ahead looks bright. Tonight I can report to you that the State of our city is strong.

Thank you for coming here this evening.