

STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

February 26, 2013

As I come into my fourth year in office, I am here tonight to give you my thoughts relative to our fine City for this year to come.

Over the past several cycles, we faced many fiscal challenges as we tried to strengthen our financial position. We have had modest success however we have a long way to go in working towards balanced budgets and strong reserves. Despite the economy, we have positioned ourselves well for many good things to come.

We continue to spend many hours managing projects such as the Airport, the Hadley Bridge WILL be completed this year, privatization of Heritage State Park, partnership with MCLA on the Mohawk, a new solar project, Conte School renovation, Super Walmart, Crane expansion and other projects that are in the works.

There are two very important numbers that I continue to focus on and that I think are critical to our success, those numbers are...one and zero. The number "one" relates to our census. The City has seen declining population for more years than any of us care to remember. I think it will be a great day, when we see our population trend begin to tick upward.....even if only by "1". "Zero" is indicative of a balanced budget.....something that we have not had for many years. When we are able to set a budget and pay for it strictly from revenues....without utilization of reserves that will also be a very good day.

This year, as we build the budget, we are putting together a comprehensive capital plan outlining the short, mid and long term needs of the City. This list will include everything from vehicles to building infrastructure to our water and sewer systems. I am certain this document will bring to light the many capital and infrastructure issues facing the City and the reason why we all have to work together to begin to address what are truly overwhelming needs.

Public Safety will continue to be a priority as the City continues to deal with crime issues that are pervasive in more urban communities, not least of which are the problems caused by addiction. Over the past few weeks, there have been several major arrests in the City primarily people moving drugs here from outside of the City. We are very much aware of the problem(s) and our Police Department continues to work with Berkshire County Drug Task Force.

Additionally, there are several groups actively meeting to help bring awareness to addiction and the mental health issues that many times are the underlying factor. I sit on two committees, one that is working to bring awareness to Adolescents with Serious Emotional Disturbances and the other is working with a group to find solutions to the serious abuse of prescription medications. The problems we see stem from much larger social issues that are plaguing not just this City but communities everywhere. The disease of addiction and resulting crime is prevalent at all socio-economic levels.

The past two years have seen significant growth of new businesses and business expansions...24 small businesses have either opened or expanded filling vacant store fronts and creating jobs and opportunity. I thank all of these entrepreneurs who have invested in our community.

With this growth and expansion in the small business community we will be working with the newly formed North Adams Chamber of Commerce to help facilitate the growth and development of our business community. We will work to further define the role of our Director of Culture and Tourism to be certain that community events grow but more importantly that North Adams is promoted as widely as possible as a destination in Berkshire County. Additionally I am working on a partnership with the Franklin County CDC to bring their small business loan program here to North Adams and northern Berkshire. This program could prove invaluable to small businesses looking for low cost capital.

My efforts to privatize Heritage State Park will continue as the fastest moving most actively supported public/private project currently underway in the City. With some \$880,000 committed to the park from a MassWorks infrastructure grant coupled with blossoming discussions with the private sector, I am more convinced than ever that the re-birth of the park is right in front of us. With the support of Department of Housing & Economic Development, Department of Conservation and Recreation, the Department of Transportation and the private sector, I am confident that this project will succeed. HSP has become the north side visitor's center for Mt. Greylock and the bike trail from Adams to HSP is well on its way.

I am thrilled with our most recent announcement of the "Hoosic Valley Service" that will connect North Adams and Adams with tourist train trips as soon as spring of 2014. This collaborative effort between the City, Town of Adams, Berkshire Scenic Rail Museum, MADOT, DCR, with support of the Governor, holds significant economic, social and cultural promise and further enhances the excitement of the re-birth of HSP. As MA DOT Rail works to acquire the rail and put back the last mile of track, we will be working with BSRM to further plan what programming will look like for the tourist train.

I continue to work with our community partner MCLA, on a sustainable project that will breathe life into the Mohawk Theater. With continued engagement, additional application for credits, looking to the state and federal governments for additional funding, I am very hopeful that we will be able to announce a solution. While I am disappointed that this project has not moved faster than I had hoped, there are many moving parts and we need to do this right. MCLA as a partner guarantees a project with long term sustainability providing daily use, revenue, management, programming and other attributes that will assure success. I am very much hoping to utilize cash realized from the privatization of HSP to further advance this project.

We are 18 or so months into our Master Planning process “Vision 2030”. This process through the efforts and ideas of many is creating the roadmap that will allow the City to move forward. The plan addresses many issues concerning development, environment, neighborhoods, education, culture, recreation, healthy living and other topics vital to a healthy community. Our plan is unique to the City but we have aligned it with the larger county-wide master planning process currently being developed by Berkshire Regional Planning. We will continue to have community visioning sessions and discussions to fine tune the effort before adopting the final version.

I am very excited to be a part of the Partnership for North Adams, a “think tank” of sorts that has been established to look at different sectors of our economy and develop ideas and solutions for growth and development. The Partnership consists of a group of residents from Northern Berkshire who represent virtually every major economic sector and I am confident much good will come from these efforts.

We will continue the important work to bring the City into compliance with the ADA requirements identified by the DOJ audit last year. We are poised to begin work at the Mary Spitzer Center and the Joe Wolfe Field complex this year. This work will begin through a small borrowing and utilization of CDBG funding. We will continue to use CDBG funding over the next several cycles to complete our ADA work. This will all culminate with a study and hopefully a solution to our Public Safety building.

Super WalMart will be opening soon providing 100 or so new jobs, 40 of which will be full time positions.

As exciting, North Adams has officially become the headquarters for Crane’s Fine Printing Division. In doing this, they have consolidated several of their business units into the North Adams plant and are

finalizing the acquisition of a company the William Arthur Stationary located in West Kennebunk, Maine. This acquisition will prompt \$5 million dollars in plant and technology investment, create 75 new manufacturing jobs in North Adams assuring an employment level of 280 positions as early as this fall. I will be bringing a Special Tax Agreement to Council at the next meeting to help facilitate this great opportunity.

I will continue to build our budget in the same open, transparent and TEAM oriented fashion as I have since taking office. Containing costs will be our biggest challenge as labor, utilities, pensions and capital expenses rise. We are currently working with our unions on health insurance reform that could save the City and employees money on premium costs.

We are moving forward with a new solar project and pricing and terms are being negotiated at this time. When we have a solid power purchase agreement in place, I will come to Council with a comprehensive presentation of the project by the developers. This project is really gaining momentum and I remain hopeful that the City will see the resulting savings in the FY2015 budget.

I will continue to move forward with the Conte School project, one that has been fully endorsed and approved by the Mass School Building Authority our School Building Committee, our School Committee and this Council. We have done considerable financial analysis to support our assumptions of affordability. My administration has worked to be certain that the debt incurred by this project can fit within the current budget without the need for a tax override or a debt exclusion provision.

The Conte School renovation is worthy of overwhelming community support as are those who are appointed and elected that have been charged to make this decision. I will not let this project slip away.

I have very much appreciated the support of this council, the School Committee, our School Building Committee, the commitment of all of our boards and commissions, the guidance of my neighboring town leaders, our local delegation, the wonderful employees of our City and school system, and I am very thankful for the patience and support of the people of this great city.

There is an old saying “The wheels of government grind slowly” and THAT THEY DO! But with continued support and patience, we will continue to grow and make “our” City, nestled here in the palm of God’s hand, a place of pride for all of us.

Thank you