



*The City of Fitchburg*

*Massachusetts*  
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

Stephen L. DiNatale

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### **2019 State of the City Address**

Good evening residents of Fitchburg, thank you for tuning into FATV - the best public access television there is. I am honored to stand before you as the Mayor and I am pleased to deliver the 147th State of the City Address.

Tonight is an evening of celebration – accomplishments of our department heads, staff, volunteers, and our boards and commissions. I am here to tell you this evening that these people are forming Fitchburg's path, changing negative narratives and creating the positive Fitchburg story. A story of new growth, forward-thinking initiatives, taking bold steps – defining our own identity. Our City has come a long way in one short year.

Demolition, infrastructure improvements, zoning changes, code enforcement and new growth are the result of departments working collaboratively with City stakeholders and organizations.

Property values are on a five year rise with a notable increase in investment in both commercial and residential sectors. Single family homes had an average sale of \$208,000 – a 12% increase from 2017, and an increase in listing price by 18%. We realized \$83 million dollars in new permitting from commercial and industrial investment. Twenty eight new homes were built in the last two years, and ten new commercial buildings in the last year. There has been over 350,000 square feet of redevelopment in large previously vacant and underutilized properties, and a 20% decrease of properties in a state of foreclosure. In 2015, 251 single family homes sold, however in 2018, 356 single family homes sold, this is a 42% increase. This my friends is not just a sign of an improving market, it is a sign of our City changing its approach to address our housing challenges, cleaning our neighborhoods, and having an aggressive stance on code enforcement.

Our Neighborhood Improvement Through Code Enforcement Task Force (NICE) has closed on 32 cases this past year. Twenty-two problem properties were addressed through code enforcement, five properties through the Attorney General's receivership program, and ten properties were taken through demolition, totaling more than half a million dollars. Continuing to utilize various tools in the municipal tool box, our City Treasurer auctioned nine properties that were taken through tax possession, and returned \$386,000 dollars to general fund.

Attacking housing challenges involves community stakeholders such as NewVue Communities, who worked with the City to create a Liabilities to Assets Corporation. A regional program – the first of its kind in the

Commonwealth – is a state supported pilot program to redevelop abandoned homes into homeownership opportunities. Through the support of the ReImagine Partnership, this recently created Corporation will serve as a new incentive for the City to improve neighborhood life, and will serve as a model for system changes across the Commonwealth.

Two years ago, Fitchburg experienced an extensive fire at the former B.F. Brown School. In 2018 the City advocated for a \$1.8 million dollar settlement agreement with our insurance company to reconstruct the roof and clean up the fire damage. Through the efforts of my administration, and with the assistance of City Council, the necessary funds were appropriated to NewVue Communities to return the building to a safe condition. I am pleased to report in January of 2019 the new roof was completed. Rising like a phoenix from the ashes, what was once the former B.F. Brown Building turned a new page and the creation of the Fitchburg Arts Community began. Let me remind you all, that these accomplishments are just the beginning steps of the Fitchburg Arts Community. More work still needs to be done. There is no power house better suited to get the job done than NewVue Communities, Fitchburg Art Museum, Fitchburg State University, and the City.

Fitchburg Arts Community building exemplifies an enterprise with a can-do attitude. In some respects, what once seemed like our vision burning before us, actually empowered us to come together and make a difference. It is not just one person, one office, or one organization. It takes a legion of people who pride themselves in their community, who believe in getting projects completed, and are creating the Fitchburg story.

Through these partnerships, Fitchburg was one of two communities in the Commonwealth to receive MassDevelopment’s highest, three year designation through the Transformative Development Initiative. This program aims to transform the downtown through supporting pipeline projects, stimulating private investment, and solidifying and identifying Fitchburg as a proud college City with an arts and cultural district. Through the efforts of a TDI Fellow, the City and private companies will have opportunities for real estate technical assistance, capital investment, and grant programs.

Fitchburg also designated two Opportunity Zones as part of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017, the Opportunity Zone program provides federal tax incentives to anyone looking to invest in approved designated zones. These zones place Fitchburg in the spotlight of redevelopment. Private developers leverage these public tax credits for private investment creating a catalyst for job creation and economic activity.

When I first became Mayor, the City became a member of the Baker – Polito Community Compact, which opened the door for state grant opportunities. We applied and received funding to assist with developing a strategic economic development plan. This past year, after many months of work by residents, business leaders, staff, and elected officials developed a vision for the economic future of our City, with goals and action steps to make that vision a reality.

This vision focuses on encouraging the expansion of family friendly venues, highlights our outdoor recreational and cultural activities and embraces Fitchburg as a University City. This plan is a blue print on how to improve Fitchburg, including making zoning changes. For this reason, I am proud to announce that the City will be putting out a request for proposal for a consulting firm to address our full zoning code regulations. Zoning is one of the best ways for a municipality to approach deregulation of use, changing the permitting process, uniquely implementing new urban-planning ideas, and incorporating standards and procedures for our regulatory boards and commissions.

The power of zoning can be most recently seen in the past year. Because of the dedicated work of our Planning Board and City Solicitors office, Fitchburg was a leading community in the Commonwealth in developing zoning changes for non-medical marijuana uses in our City. This singular change brought in new commercial revenues, job growth, and as mentioned earlier, over \$83 million dollars' worth of new permitting. Also, we made it easier for the restaurant industry to have outdoor seating adjacent to their establishments, where customers can enjoy the ambiance of outdoor dining. These examples only reinforce the need to review our zoning code as a whole, make changes suggested in our economic strategic plan, and create a road map for new commercial development.

Other measures the City has taken this year to help assist businesses is by conducting joint inspections prior to a business taking ownership of a new building. The Building Department, Health Department, Fire, and Community Development collectively visit buildings with respective developers and review the challenges, upgrades, and positive influences a building may have prior to the business pulling permits and investing into a particular space. This preventative measure helps a new business owner understand the permitting process, requirements the buildings must have, and ensures the developer is fully educated before making a financial decision. To this end, the Community Development Department has also implemented a business permitting exit survey. Collecting this survey feedback will help the City recognize areas to improve and changes in approach. It will assist our code enforcement departments to become more responsive to the needs of businesses and create a desirable place for companies to locate.

Within the past few months, our Community Development Department has created an Economic Development Task Force. This task force, made up of department heads, will meet monthly to review projects in the pipeline, have strategy discussions, and have development reviews of large projects prior to their submission for permits. These crucial meetings will help the City streamline information about large projects, understand and help developers make changes to their project before applying for permits, and embark on new strategies related to economic development.

This year we saw the completion of several new commercial buildings. In fact twenty-four businesses opened this past year. In 2016, the City negotiated a Tax Incremented Financing project for 93 Nockege Street, which was redeveloped by Francesco Collengelo and Elite Construction. This \$9.6 million dollar project revamped approximately 140,000 square feet of the former Sanitoy building. This once vacant building now has a breath of new life with interior and exterior improvements. The facility now houses four state offices, as well as Foam Tech and the Montachusett Opportunity Council.

A very proud moment this year was John Zarrella's ribbon cutting of his newly constructed building and headquarters for his local business, Research Results. With staff located across ten different states, and clients throughout the country, John's original building on Main Street became too small for his expanding company. When searching for a new location, he could have chosen anywhere to relocate his business. However, John has built his business in Fitchburg for over thirty years, and he truly believes that Research Results has been successful BECAUSE they are located in Fitchburg. This was no ordinary ribbon cutting, it was a day of immense pride, adding to the Fitchburg story of a family and business ever committed to this community.

Another example of local people doing extraordinary things is Dawn Akar – Ayala of The Finicky Fork Catering Company. As a start-up business looking to display her unique catering sensibilities, she found a home through the Fitchburg Community Kitchen at Rollstone Congregational Church. With years' of experience she combines excellence in her creative food choices and exceptional presentations. Welcome to Fitchburg Dawn, we are pleased to host your tasteful business!

The very definition of a true grass roots business began several years ago in Phoenix Arizona. From the West to the East our very own Eirean Bradley, the Grand Barista of Coffee Goodness at Strong Style Coffee, brought his dream to operate and own his coffee shop in our City. Showcasing the artwork of what it takes to brew a great cup of coffee, Eirean and his partner, Kim, have created an environment of culture, art, and community right in our downtown!

There are two areas of Fitchburg that are becoming ripe for redevelopment, and has been recognized by the States Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development as models of how to prepare sites for industrial redevelopment. The Lagoon site in West Fitchburg, and the sandpit site in the eastern section of the City, collectively represent one hundred acres of development potential. We will be wrapping up development studies for both sites, and craft plans for larger commercial growth over the next year.

Finally, our Community Development Department will be announcing a new incentive for business owners over the next few months. Administered through MassDevelopment, Property Assessed Clean Energy, also known as PACE, is a tax based financing mechanism that enables low-cost, long-term funding for energy improvements for commercial and industrial buildings. This financing mechanism will entice commercial and industrial stakeholders to take on energy consumption improvement measures to their building, at an affordable rate. This program will enable capital improvements to area businesses, reduces their operating costs, entice job creation, and will generate a positive impact on environmental benefits for our City.

Fiscal year 2020 will be the second year of non-medical marijuana use operating in the Commonwealth. This new industry is predicted to generate \$1 billion dollars over the next year. The City of Fitchburg is the leading community in the Commonwealth on zoning, host agreements, and harnessing the economic power of this new industry. However, responsibility comes with this new industry. Our Solicitors office continues to diligently review our host agreements to ensure they are compliant with regulations set forth by the State's Cannabis Control Commission.

Also, we have worked collectively with our Human Rights Commission to meet the goals of the Cannabis Control Commission's social equity program to support disparities and needs identified throughout the Commonwealth and improve the quality of life for these effected groups of people.

The lion's share of the cannabis business within the City is cultivation and processing facilities. There are eight cultivation facilities and five retail facilities, with two retail permits co-located in cultivation buildings.

While all marijuana businesses have a level of impact on our community, which are addressed through our host agreements, it is imperative to understand that the cultivation and processing facilities are the majority of the marijuana businesses. They are a larger economic engine than that of retail. These cultivation and processing facilities are revitalizing vacant buildings with a private investment \$10 - \$20 million dollars and are adding significantly to our overall tax base. Furthermore, each facility provides twenty to forty jobs, increasing opportunity and improving the quality of life for our workforce. For this reason, my administration was deliberate in advancing zoning so that the City can capture this growth. However, we must proceed cautiously with respect to the retail use of marijuana. My administration had submitted a zoning ordinance to the City Council taking a conservative approach with limited zoning and only four retail permits, the minimum allowable by state law. The Council, by unanimous vote in its final reading, and comments through the public hearing process - indicated the will of the City and approved eight new retail permits, and a broadened zoning map. I must emphasize that there

are several concerns for our public safety officials on the implementation and regulation of the retail use of Marijuana.

This spring the Cannabis Control Commission has indicated they will be approving regulations on marijuana use at bars or cafes. My administration will continue to proceed with the utmost caution, particularly with regards to social consumption. We will be pursuing conservative changes in our zoning code, until we fully understand the facts and how it will effect public safety.

Our Fitchburg Police Department along with District Attorney Joe Early, and the Massachusetts State Police initiated Operation Zero Tolerance. This illegal drug enforcement operation focuses on drug trafficking and distribution of narcotics. With nearly thirty-two arrests, the Fitchburg Police Department sent the message to the public that enticing, trafficking, and dealing drugs is unacceptable in our City and will not be tolerated. Overall, the Drug Enforcement Unit made 48 arrests last year, seized over 3,000 grams of heroin and over 200 grams of cocaine.

The men and women in blue, have made great advances this year in the reduction of crime. Burglary has decreased by a staggering 32% from 2017, and nearly 50% from a three year average. This is the lowest number of burglaries our City has experienced in fifteen years. Overall the Uniform Crime Report Part I crime decreased 26% from 2017, and 36% from a three year average. Fifteen grants were awarded to the Fitchburg Police Department this past year, with over \$900,000 in funding. These awards have been used for training, advocacy, and enforcement.

In September of 2018 I appointed a new grant funded Substance Abuse Prevention Coordinator, working under the Board of Health. This new position, works in coordination with the Fitchburg Police Department and examines substance abuse with a different lens, other than just enforcement. The Substance Abuse Coordinator is charged with working in the community, educating, and training our citizens. Opioid abuse is not just an issue in Fitchburg, it has reached epidemic proportions across our country. In the past year, our City has seen a small reduction in overall overdoses. However, allow me to make it clear, just one overdose is too many. We must continue to fight for the day that not one person will die from an opioid overdose.

Our Board of Health is making headway on important legislation that will authorize the Town of Westminster to acquire land for the Fitchburg/Westminster Landfill expansion project. This bill is critical to the long-term fiscal health of not only the City of Fitchburg but the entire region, as there will be a disposal crisis in 2020 with only two landfills remaining in Massachusetts. Without this expansion, our landfill will reach capacity in 2024, along with tripling our disposal costs and losing nearly \$3 million dollars annually in host benefits.

Most notably, our Health Department has instituted stronger enforcement of our municipal trash and recycling collection at curbside, with efforts to reduce litter and educate residents about recycling contamination. One of the best ways to be informed of refuse and recycling matters is through the City's ReCollect application downloadable through your phone, computer, or tablet.

For the first time since 1964 when George Bourque was Mayor, the City will be replacing two fire engines. One engine fully funded through available funds and insurance claims, and the second engine funded by a FEMA grant with a small match through the City. These vehicles will bring our fire apparatus into compliance with the National Fire Protection Standards, for the first time in several decades.

Through the efforts of our Fire Suppression Personnel, Fire Prevention Division, and Training Division, we have once again reduced the number of large loss fires over the past year. For the first time in five years, there was not one fatality due to fire. With expanded fire code enforcement, training, and on duty staffing the number of emergency fire and medical calls for service also reduced for the first time in five years.

Armed with shovels, plows, and heavy equipment our Department of Public Works has been working around the clock to repair roads, bridges, dams, and more. With nearly seventy-three bridges, it is critical that all our bridges remain safe and open to the public. This past year, repairs were completed to the Oak Hill Road Bridge - these measures will allow us to keep the bridge open until a full replacement is made by MassDOT. Utilizing grant funding from the state's Small Bridge Program, repairs were also made to the Ashburnham Street Bridge. DPW will continue to work closely with MassDOT on the replacement of several bridges throughout the City. Construction on the Westminster Street Bridge is expected to start in 2019, and Circle, River, and Water Street bridges are scheduled for replacement in the next few years.

Three miles of roads were paved in 2018. While most of the City's paving is funded through Chapter 90 state aid, DPW is proactively seeking to secure funding from other sources. Last year paving was supplemented by utilizing contributions from entities that excavated our streets for utility projects – including Water, Wastewater, and Util. In addition our partners with MassDOT paved areas of the Water Street Bridge and Fifth Mass. Turnpike, at no cost to the City. Furthermore, with the assistance of the Baker-Polito administration, we were awarded an additional \$224,000 dollars towards Chapter 90 funding, totaling approximately \$1.3 million dollars.

An effective pavement program has to include preservation in addition to new paving. This will extend the life of existing paving so that streets do not need to be repaired as frequently. In addition to the DPW's crack sealing program, Fitchburg is the first city in this part of the region to do micro-surfacing. A process we used on the 2.2 mile stretch on Rindge Road. This will help continue to protect the base layer of pavement adding to the longevity of the road.

In 2019, DPW will invest in the Street Scan Program. A valuable tool for the City, as Street Scan will traverse our streets and will automatically scan pavement conditions. Our Engineering Division has been doing this visually via site visits, which is a labor intensive process. This program will help assist our DPW in prioritizing paving, identify streets that are in need of micro-surfacing, and help understand which roads are best suited for crack sealing.

The EPA MS4 Storm water permit has continued to be a challenge for the City. As an unfunded mandate from the Federal Government, we have been meeting compliance for this permit through available funds at a cost of \$400,000 dollars. Funding for permit compliance through available funds is not appropriate, as it is now a reoccurring cost and should be part of the general fund. In preparation for the fiscal year 2020 budget, the city will make efforts to make part, if not all, of the funding mandated for compliance as part of the general fund. This is a preventative measure from creating a new enterprise fund or fee to be charged to the residents, as suggested by the EPA. However, with rising costs in contracts, insurance, and capital spending this may prove to be a difficult line item to fully fund.

While there are many aspects of the program that are excessively bureaucratic, the City does recognize the importance of controlled storm-water runoff. In 2018 DPW completed storm-water projects on Kimball Street, Cleghorn Street, Elm at Academy Street, and the Seneca Street area. In addition to being environmentally sound, these projects will prevent flooding during heavy rain and icing problems in the winter.

Owning more dams than any other municipality in the state, except Worcester, has been a capital challenge. In April of 2018 McTaggarts Dam, a dam inherited by the City, was deemed unsafe by the Office of Dam Safety. While I was serving as State Representative, I was able to secure an earmark for \$375,000 in a bond bill for McTaggarts Dam. As Mayor, when the Dam was deemed unsafe, the state released these funds. DPW has hired a dam consultant, who will be conducting tests and evaluating the options so that the City can make an informed decision on the fate of the dam. Once this is decided, the remaining funds will be used to complete the engineering and design so that permitting phases can begin.

Finally in 2018, the City was fortunate to be awarded \$100,000 from the state's Recreational Trails Program and \$13,000 from the Community Foundation for the Rock Walk on Rollstone Hill. This is truly a grass roots effort, as resident Peter Capodagli conceived of the idea and has led hundreds of people on his popular Rock Walks, bringing people to downtown Fitchburg and allowing them the opportunity to enjoy the spectacular views of Fitchburg from Rollstone Hill. This year the DPW will start construction, making the existing trails more accessible for a wider range of people.

The light is almost at the end of the tunnel for our Wastewater Department, and their Secondary System upgrade permit at the East Wastewater treatment plant, which began in March of 2017. Expecting to be completed October of 2019, this upgrade will improve the performance capabilities of the plant, and will help the City achieve permit compliance. Preliminary performance of the upgraded system is yielding great results with added benefits to the Nashua River. I have also informed Mayor Dean Mazarella that as part of the upgrade, the current blue painted Fitchburg East Treatment plant, uniquely located on the Leominster boarder will be painted red and grey by the end of 2019.

Our Water Division will be harnessing renewable energy this coming year with MassDEP's Clean Energy Results Program. This grant, totaling \$200,000 dollars, will allow the Water Division to place an inline turbine at the Narrows Road pressure Reducing Valve Station. This turbine will result in the generation of electricity from the energy that is currently expended through the pressure reducing valves at this station, providing the City with renewable energy and improve energy efficiency.

Last year, our Water Division met all federal and state water drinking standards. Moreover, 259 acres of land were preserved and protected from future development within the watershed to the City's drinking water supply reservoirs. This year, residents can expect to see their water meters replaced. This will empower customers to closely monitor their usage and be notified of any leaks.

After more than thirteen years of dedicated public service, Andre Ravenelle, Fitchburg's Superintendent of Public Schools retired. Thank you Andre and best of luck in your future endeavors.

Assistant Superintendent Bob Jokela was selected by a Search Committee and approved by the School Committee to fill the vacant seat. He will officially be Superintendent of our schools on July 1, 2019. I look forward to working with Superintendent Jokela for many years, and the City provides a warm welcome and great support in your new leadership role.

Last year, the City began efforts to replace Longsjo roof. In 2017 this much needed repair was not approved for the Massachusetts School Building Authority's accelerated repair program. In 2018 I submitted a \$2 million dollar loan order to the Council to repair the roof, and also committed an additional \$367,000 dollars to make additional

repairs to the gutter system and upgrades to the fire suppression system. This project, in its entirety has experienced major delays during construction, as this past summer and fall we received record rain fall – pushing construction well into the winter. Currently sixty percent of the work is complete, and construction will resume when warm weather returns. Not only will the roof be replaced, the old Fitchburg High Copula, a significant architectural aspect of our City will be repaired and relit – so that all residents and visitors can once again see the beacon of light on top of Academy Street Hill. This is yet another example of our ever growing Fitchburg story.

I have committed thousands of dollars towards capital improvements in our schools. In 2018 I submitted an order to Council for an additional \$100,000 dollars for replacement of the Longsjo school vacuum pump and upgrades to the audio visual equipment in the high school. Finally, just a few weeks ago, \$200,000 dollars from available funds were appropriated for water pipe replacement in South Street School, new water pressure tanks in the high school, and new exterior doors at Longsjo and Crocker schools.

Our school department has an operating budget of \$75.4 million dollars. This consists of \$52.3 million dollars of Chapter 70 aid from the state and \$23 million dollars from the City. This does not include the nearly \$2.7 million dollars of capital spending I committed to the schools in the last two years. I am also proud to report that the City has once again exceeded its net school spending requirement.

Last month our School Department hosted a public education funding forum with area school districts. This forum discussed the importance of updating the Foundation Budget and bringing more Chapter 70 dollars to our schools. Governor Baker’s recently released budget proposal which includes a \$200 million dollar increase to Chapter 70 funding. This is an excellent first step toward providing critical additional funding to our schools.

Moving forward with the Crocker School project, the City is in the midst of a feasibility study with the Massachusetts School Building Authority. When completed, this will provide us with a clear understanding of whether Crocker will become a K-4 or K-8 school. Utilizing MSBA is an important tool that allows the City to leverage state resources to build or renovate our schools with an 80% reimbursement rate. Once the feasibility study is reviewed by the School Committee, a recommendation will be made to the City of how to proceed with implementing the results of the study. The School Department will have approximately four more years until a new building will be realized.

This month our School Committee has submitted applications to MSBA for their accelerated repair program. The application focuses on roof replacement at South Street, Goodrich, and the high school. The Committee will also be applying for replacement of the boilers in the South Street School. Similar to the Crocker School project, this is another example of the City leveraging state funding to help pay for nearly 80% of project costs, leaving 20% for the City to fund. We hope to hear we will be invited to participate in any of the above projects, by the end of 2019.

Let us not forget about our dedicated teachers, administrators, and support staff who have been inspiring our students to work hard, make a difference in our community, and become problem solvers. This past year, through the Early Literacy Initiative, “Fitchburg Flourishes”, 100% of preschoolers participated in the digital literacy program FootSteps to Brilliance. Reading over three million words and thousands of books in just one year, Fitchburg Public School students are breaking regional reading records!

To our Veterans and Gold Star Families, the City of Fitchburg thanks you for the sacrifices you have made to our country. With the help of Operation Service, Friends of the Fitchburg Veterans, and local volunteers & business

owners, our City had the opportunity of seeing the Traveling Wall That Heals, located in our beautiful Crocker Field. Our Veteran's Office also honored Fitchburg Korean War Veterans by presenting the Korean Peace Medal during our annual Veterans Day Ceremony. Not only as a community are we recognizing the importance of those who served in the armed forces, we are honoring and preserving the legacy of service and educating all generations about the impact our veterans have on our community.

After appropriating \$130,000 dollar to our Senior Center, a new ventilation system was installed in the basement which will provide fresh air into occupied spaces. Last week, I submitted a money order of \$35,000 dollars to address water penetration issues in the foundation, along with repairs to a supporting beam. With nearly thirty hall rentals last year, our Senior Center will continue to be an integral part of our downtown, serving as a hub for community engagement.

In 2018, with the assistance of the Library Services and Technology Act grant program, the Fitchburg Public Library was able to deliver e-cards to all Fitchburg High School students. These cards will allow them to access ebooks and audiobooks, as well as several databases through the library's website. With more than 125,000 items checked out, wifi accessed ten thousand times, and public computers utilized thirty-one thousand times, our library reaches 460 people a day and brings literacy to thousands of people every year. It is important to note that the Library utilizes seventeen volunteers last year who helped with programming, shelving books, and creating a friendly atmosphere. A special thank you to the library staff and volunteers!

The Fitchburg Airport is a regional asset, bringing millions of dollars to our local economy. Since 2008, the City has been working on significant land use issues. This year, our Solicitor's Office, with the support of the Airport Commission, took on a corrective action plan to be compliant with MassDOT and the Federal Aviation Administration. In one year, our legal department closed out the report and satisfactorily completed the corrective plan. The FAA commended the City, recognizing our documents as a model for airport leases throughout the New England Region. The resolve of these land use issues will ensure that the airport will continue to receive federal dollars for future improvements.

Once again, with the support of the Baker – Politio Administration, the Fitchburg Airport received a \$640,000 dollar MassDOT Aeronautics Division grant. This grant, with a \$160,000 dollar municipal match, will help install a self-service fuel tank and dispensing system. These new fuel tanks will provide 24 hour fueling service, self-sufficiency, and new revenues to help address the airport's needs.

Operation Pride, is the new message of the Fitchburg Housing Authority. After a five year state mandate, the Fitchburg Housing Authority Board of Directors removed the FHA from joint management with the Leominster Housing Authority. This change will provide local control so that we may deliver proper housing to eligible families, veterans, the disabled and seniors. With a new Executive Director, the FHA will be able to focus on pooling resources together, address facility upgrades, and put a new face to Fitchburg's public housing.

Exactly a year ago last week, I submitted to Council a money order for \$1 million dollars from available funds, and a loan order for \$22.5 million dollars to fully fund the renovations of Fitchburg City Hall. I would like to thank the City Councilors and advocates for supporting this project. With their approval, the City of Fitchburg made history and one of the largest commitments to ourselves - the return of Fitchburg's municipal government to 718 Main Street.

Within one year, our City Hall Building Committee has worked diligently to make this project a reality. Colliers International was hired as our Owners Project Manager, ICON Architecture was selected as the design firm, and BOND was chosen as the contractor. Construction documents are well underway, and are expected to be completed by early spring. As a City Hall for All concept, residents can expect selective interior demolition to begin in late March, with construction slated to start this summer. Overall project completion is scheduled for fall of 2020. I want to take a moment to personally thank the City Councilors, Building Committee, and the Fitchburg residents for supporting this project and bringing it to fruition.

There are so many people each and every day that help make Fitchburg a great place to live. I want to thank our City staff, volunteers, boards and commissions, and Fitchburg stake holders for their efforts and dedication to our City.

I would like to thank my family for their continued support and confidence in me: my wife Joanne, my children Marcus and Alexandra, their spouses Sara and Michael, and to my three beautiful grandchildren, John, Rena, and Sofia. And a very special thank you to my Chief of Staff A.J. Tourigny and my Administrative Aide, Joan David. Let there be no mistake – the headlines of Fitchburg are changing. We can no longer dwell on the past, there is only one direction this administration is headed –it is towards continued growth, positive impact, and bold decisions.

I am reminded of the references to “A shining City upon a Hill.” These words have been spoken by Presidents John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan and Barrack Obama. We are that City on the hill, a great City that shall build upon its past accomplishments, with a forward eye to what we will achieve in the future. People of Fitchburg, join me in this journey, a mission that will surely result in a better life for us all. Take a radical step and make a commitment to the positive Fitchburg story.

Be bold, be decisive, and be proud.

Thank you, God Bless this Nation, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and God Bless the Great City of Fitchburg.

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