



The City of Fitchburg

Massachusetts
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Mayor Stephen L. DiNatale
STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

Good evening Honorable members of the Fitchburg City Council, Fitchburg School Committee, Department Heads, Commissioners, honored guests, family and friends and most importantly Fitchburg residents, welcome. I am honored to stand before you as Mayor of the City of Fitchburg, and I am pleased to deliver the 145th State of the City Address.

At this time last year, I made a promise that the City of Fitchburg would become stronger, healthier and a more prosperous community, to become more economically competitive, and to recognize and promote our creative economy. Within a short twelve months, I am proud to report that the City has welcomed 25 new businesses into our community, five of which are on Main Street, we have removed urban blight, we have cultivated strong ties with our local artists and we have seen a reduction in our crime rate. Yes my friends, Fitchburg is on the rise!

For the first time in our city's history, with the help of the Fitchburg Redevelopment Authority, the city appropriated roughly \$858,000 dollars towards the much needed demolition of eight buildings. The NICE Task Force, (Neighborhood Improvement through Code Enforcement) is a collaborative committee with various departments working together to bring code enforcement, and if necessary, legal action to abandoned and blighted properties that have adversely impacted our neighborhoods. More than 75 cases have been brought to Housing Court, and have produced over 30 receivership appointments. Our Treasury Department, in conjunction with NICE has taken many properties to Land Court for tax foreclosure, and returned several to the tax rolls through public auction. Students at the Harvard School of Government's Innovation Field Lab have assisted us by developing a software program called City Nexus, creating better efficiency when retrieving data on problem properties.

It is important for everyone living and working in Fitchburg to work together to fight the war on urban blight, to be proud of our homes and businesses, and to respect our neighbors and the environment. Let this be a message to all Fitchburg residents, especially to those absentee landlords, tenants and large corporate banks, that it is not okay to neglect your property, or allow someone else to destroy it. I will continue to instruct our city

departments to bring any action necessary to improve our neighborhoods, and hold all offenders accountable for their property.

My fellow citizens, the City of Fitchburg deserves better, and more importantly, you deserve better.

Regarding finances for fiscal year, 2017, with the help and guidance from our City Council, we quickly passed a fiscally conservative budget. The City's general operating budget of \$113 million dollars, confirms the strong working partnerships among our municipal departments, and our ongoing determination to provide Fitchburg residents with the best possible services. I am proud to state that for the first time in many years, this budget met our Fitchburg Public School Systems net school spending requirement. The city's budget will continue to make our public school system our top priority.

The City has added five critical positions to our workforce: three Police Officers, administrative support in Human Resources, a Business Manager shared within our Public Works Department and we have contracted for interpretation services to better assist our constituents. In addition, our stabilization account has a healthy balance of \$5.4 million dollars. My commitment is to continue to appropriate available funds into this crucial reserve account in order to protect the city from unforeseen emergencies. The FY17 budget also included more upfront funding for veterans services, snow and ice removal and additional funds to support tourism efforts.

Let this not deemphasize the importance of the City paying down our unfunded liabilities such as our health insurance and retirement fund. Just this year we've been able to commit \$300,000 dollars to this account and, when possible, we will continue to add available resources. This represents the largest appropriation to date towards this unfunded liability. By pushing economic development in the city, coupled with formalized financial management policies, we will be able to reduce our debts and achieve a higher bond rating than our current Standard and Poor's AA rating.

A year ago my essential pledge to the residents of Fitchburg was a renewed focus on the city's economic development efforts. For Fitchburg to thrive again, we must capitalize on sustainable development opportunities. For this reason, I supported creating an overlay district in West Fitchburg. I feel certain, one of my proudest accomplishments will include the \$12 million dollar soccer complex that is slated to begin construction this spring. "Game On Fitchburg" is estimated to bring in \$250,000 dollars in taxes annually. This will add an amenity to Northern Worcester County like no other. The increase to the city's commercial tax base will lessen the burden born collectively by our residents who currently make up 72% of our tax base. Game On Fitchburg will have ten outdoor soccer fields, four indoor fields, courts, a restaurant, and a bar. This will rejuvenate our West Fitchburg corridor, bringing added tourism into our city, and bring outside dollars into this community.

With collaboration from our Community Development Office, Fitchburg Redevelopment Authority, and the North Central Mass Development Corporation, I'm proud to tell you that River Styx Brewing will start their business right in our hometown. Focused on quality beer and a friendly atmosphere, we can all expect to see their beer taps flowing this summer.

Our rail access has improved with the completion of the Wachusett station project, the city has seen over \$200 million dollars of state and federal funding invested into the Fitchburg Commuter Rail Line.

With a federal and state investment of \$15 million dollars our Fitchburg Municipal Airport terminal has been replaced with a newly constructed Administration Building. We will continue to see improvements at the airport with the scheduled realignment and extension of the runway, which will allow us to accommodate larger commercial aircraft. Our City accomplishments this year have put Fitchburg on the precipice of revitalization. Tourism is the 3rd largest industry in the commonwealth, and we are seeing this city grow into a destination, with artists, aviators, sports enthusiasts and investors.

Fitchburg has signed a Community Compact with the Baker-Polito Administration, strengthening our partnership with the state, making Fitchburg eligible for additional grant funding and providing assistance with implementing best practices in economic development and transportation.

We have adopted a complete streets policy and have been awarded funding by the Mass Dept. of Transportation Complete Streets Program. With this grant we will evaluate safety gaps in our travel mode needs such as; walking, biking, transit and vehicles.

With the assistance from Reimagine North of Main, Fitchburg State University, and the Fitchburg Plan, the city won a competitive Smart Growth America technical assistance award. This year we will receive hands-on guidance from national experts using Smart Growth principals. This award will help us facilitate solutions to local development challenges from technicians using a data-driven approach.

Last week, our city was designated a “Green Community.” With the help of a Technical Assistance Grant, the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission and the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources did a remarkable job accumulating data for this lengthy and detailed application. Designation as a Green Community brings the city a \$300,000 dollar grant to help us make mechanical infrastructure energy improvements in our municipal and school buildings.

In the next year, because of the activity in our economic development sector, our city solicitor has negotiated four host agreements with medical marijuana cultivators. This agreement will generate roughly 150 jobs to our constituents, and add an estimated \$7 million dollars to our local pay roll. This agreement brings an investment of \$20 million dollars into the revitalization of old vacant mill buildings, and to our knowledge, the city of Fitchburg has negotiated the most lucrative cultivation host agreements throughout the Commonwealth. Annually our agreements will bring the city \$1 million dollars in revenue, this is in addition to property taxes. These monies will be earmarked to combat blight and other economic conditions throughout our city. I have personally met with each medical marijuana cultivation company and I am honored to say that they are extremely professional, and have established excellent working relationships with our municipal departments.

With the rise in commercial business activity, for the first time in several years, we have seen a 4% growth in our single family housing market, adding \$760,000 dollars in tax revenue to the city. Demand of single family homes and developers willing to invest significantly in Fitchburg will continue.

Fitchburg Public School System has much to look forward to in 2017. School administrators continue working on facility upgrades, particularly energy efficiency improvements. The school department has contracted for two solar array projects to be installed at Reingold School and Memorial Middle School. In Fiscal year 18, the school department will save \$78,000 dollars with the solar panel installations. New technology, one to one devices are in the hands of our students at the high school, and we have added an additional 375 technology devices to our school district. The department has added four new life science classrooms in our middle and high schools, expanded the Massachusetts Math Science Initiative, and implemented a new reading, writing, and math curriculum.

With support of the Fitchburg Education Foundation, and several philanthropic partners, Fitchburg Public Schools is implementing an early childhood literacy initiative to improve our students' reading and comprehension skills. They have begun to roll out a web based application, Footsteps 2 Brilliance, providing every family residing in Fitchburg with a child in pre-school through Grade 2 with a free license to the web based application to help them learn language skills at a time and place most convenient to them on a cell phone, tablet, or mobile device. I am proud to announce, for the 3rd year in a row, Fitchburg High School was named one of the most challenging high schools by the Washington Post, and has been named to the College

Board Advanced Placement Honor Roll. Of course, it must be said that this would not be possible without the help of our administrators, teachers, para-professionals and parents in school support services.

Our Public Works Department continues to work on several challenging projects to meet the needs of our community. This year, Fitchburg received \$1.1 million dollars in Chapter 90 funds, only allowing us to pave three to five miles of our roads. These state funds are an integral part of maintaining and enhancing our community's infrastructure. DPW crews work diligently to maintain sidewalks, storm drains and curb cuts on roughly 182 miles of public roads. I will work with the Baker – Polito Administration, and our state and federal elected officials to increase transportation funding for critical infrastructure projects on our roads and bridges.

This year, road improvement projects will include; the South Street safe routes to school project, the Summer St. John Fitch Hwy reconstruction project, a roundabout at the intersection of Electric Avenue and Rollstone Road, and the completion of our Mass Works Grant along the River Street corridor.

The street light LED conversion project was successfully completed this year. Our city is now saving 42% on our electrical costs, or an estimated \$206,000 dollars in savings. These lights are networked into our computer allowing the city to track their status and provide more timely repairs.

Our Wastewater Department has assessed approximately 90% of the city's sewer system and will work on the onerous sewer separation project which is scheduled to continue at Beech and Hazel Street. Our Water Division has created a new Capital Improvement Plan that will replace and upgrade a minimum of two miles of water mains per year, which will increase our water quality and fire protection.

Working with the school department, the board of health received a \$60,000 dollar grant to implement a recycling program within our schools, which has increased recycling by four tons in only a short three months. Furthermore, as of tonight, constituents can download from the city's webpage or app store, the new and free Recollect App. This app will provide residents with a trash and recycling calendar, push notifications of collection days, and provide information about municipal curbside pickup and landfill drop off program.

Our hardworking Fitchburg Police Department logged well over 60,000 calls in 2016 for service and the preliminary statistics reveal that Crime was down 20% from 2015 and the lowest figure in our region. The Drug Suppression Unit continues to work diligently throughout the city to remove both illegal narcotics and firearms. In 2016 the department was awarded thirteen grants. One grant, in particular, with the help of Representative Tsongas, was a highly competitive federal grant to hire two police officers whose efforts will be focused on Community Policing in our downtown area. This grant exemplifies Chief Martineau's willingness to work with our community members and continue to make Fitchburg a great place to live, work, and play.

In 2016 the Fitchburg Fire Department continued to provide excellent Fire/EMS/Emergency Management Services to the citizens of Fitchburg and other surrounding communities. A new \$480,000 dollar pumper truck was purchased with city funds and is assigned to the "South End" of the city at the Summer Street Fire Station. Also, the Fire Department was awarded a federal grant to purchase Rescue 1, a new state of the art rescue truck that serves as a regional technical rescue vehicle for our surrounding communities.

The City has hired a new Chief Procurement Officer, and with her guidance we have become more efficient with implementing procurement procedures within all departments. Our new Food Inspector will work to modernize our ordinances to permit food truck businesses. This will offer many exciting cultural and varied outdoor dining options for our residents.

Our Main Street has most recently seen a facelift with the implementation of a more civilized one lane Main Street. This incorporates a steadier traffic pattern, bike lane, and pedestrian friendly crosswalks. With the help

from our partners at ReImagine North of Main and Fitchburg State University we were able to incorporate a new window project bringing professional artistic designs to lackluster windows downtown.

Investment on Main Street not only includes five new businesses, Fitchburg State has committed to rehabilitate the old Theatre Block. This will be a three phase process starting with classroom spaces on the second floor, renovation of the commercial store fronts, and finally reclamation of the theatre itself. It is important to recognize FSU's investment in this city, their commitment will continue to strengthen and anchor the university to our Main Street, and pave the way for theatre productions and entrepreneurs to build their dreams.

Five years ago, as a temporary solution due to the structural conditions of old City Hall, municipal offices were forced to relocate to various facilities throughout the city. This past year, under my instruction, all departments worked collaboratively to remove the remaining stored documents at old City Hall. Furthermore, contents were auctioned to the public with most being preserved by the Fitchburg Historical Society. We have completed a hazardous material inspection in the facility and we are conducting a feasibility study. The findings from these reports will help us determine our next course of action. It is my promise to you while Mayor, in some form or another, Fitchburg City Hall will return to 718 Main Street.

Working together, with your support, we will continue to produce the best civic events in North Central Mass, from our renowned Longsjo Cycling Classic to our 4th of July celebrations to our Artsmith Festival and our Beer Fest. Suffice to say, there is a great deal going on, and together we have captured that positive momentum!

Tonight my friends, you can see that the city has been working tirelessly on your behalf, this is possible because of our dedicated Department Heads and their committed staffs. Let us also recognize our boards and commissions, as well as our volunteer groups for their devoted time and effort. Please join me in giving them a round of applause.

I want to give a sincere thank you to my family, my son Marcus and his wife Sara and my grandson John. My daughter Alexandra and her husband Michael, and my loving wife Joanne, for their undying support and pride in this city and in me. Also, I would be remiss if I did not give a special thank you to my staff.

It's amazing, so much has changed, yet our commitment to this city remains the same. One hundred years ago, Mayor Frank H. Foss stood before the city council to offer his inaugural address, he stated; "we are again standing at the threshold of a new year and again we assume the responsibility of the government of our city, we should approach this responsibility in no narrow partisan sense, but with the high resolve to conduct the affairs of our city in a clean, honest, efficient and broad minded manner."

My Fellow residents let us do exactly that! Let us keep united and moving forward, with your continued help Fitchburg will push on to a better and more prosperous City.

As I said before, and I'll say it again, "let's do what needs to be done and do it well!"

Thank you.....God Bless this Nation.....This Commonwealth
And God Bless the Great City of Fitchburg!

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