

2016 STATE OF THE TOWN ADDRESS

Good evening ladies and gentlemen, honorable members of the Legislative Town Council, residents of our great community, and guests. Welcome to East Haven High School.

By Charter, I am required to address the Town Council each year to speak about the state of our Town and to present my budget recommendations for the upcoming fiscal year. I address you tonight for the fifteenth time in my career as Mayor with sincere appreciation to the residents of this community who put their trust in my team and I for another two years with their resounding support this past November. I remain humbled and thankful for the opportunity to continue to serve the people and the community that I love.

The story of East Haven, especially since 2011, has been marked by shared struggle and resilience. With hard work, grounded in a commitment to respect for all individuals, we have put what the New Haven Register called "the dark days" in our Town's history squarely in the past and made real progress restoring accountability and public trust in both our government and our Police Department.

At the time same, we've pulled ourselves out of the ugly cycle of deficit-spending and ended our dependency on costly borrowing, breaking the bad fiscal habits of the past administration. In these short five years, we've transformed our community from one of the most indebted towns on the shoreline into a model of fiscal success for others to follow.

You can call it a "metamorphosis," or a "renaissance." In fact others, including the New Haven Register, have done so. I call it "pride." We have re-inspired pride in East Haven, both for those who call East Haven home and for others across the region, by re-committing to the principles of respect, fair play, and hard work that have always defined what it has meant to be from East Haven.

Over the past five years we've faced cultural struggles, tragic accidents, natural disasters, and unique fiscal challenges that would have sent any municipality spiraling into chaos. However, it is with great pride that I say that we have emerged from those "dark days" as a **STRONGER** community than we have ever been.

POLICE DEPARTMENT/DOJ/DIVERSITY

Looking ahead, December 21, 2016 will mark a historic day for the Town of East Haven. That date, which is only a mere nine months away, is the four-year anniversary and the anticipated termination date of the Police Department's agreement with the Department of Justice. Our police officers and leaders have worked tirelessly to comply with that agreement and their success has been recognized by leaders and law enforcement professionals across the country. On December 21, 2016, they will be able to pride themselves on one more achievement: **They will be the first police department in the nation to have satisfied their obligations under a DOJ consent decree BOTH on time and under-budget.**

While the cultural inequities and social dysfunction of the past certainly posed unique challenges for our police department, the greatest challenge still lies ahead. Looking past December, we must ready ourselves for independence from the stringent reporting and oversight requirements that we have abided by for the last four years. We must take steps to ensure that we preserve the accountability, transparency, and tolerance that we have worked so hard to restore within our Police Department so that future generations are never again faced with the challenges we've worked so hard to overcome. We have an abundance of talented professionals within our Police Department and I know they are prepared to take on the challenges of the future and to lead our department with pride for generations to come.

200 TYLER STREET

While we begin to ready our police department for a new era of self-sufficiency, another critical project sitting right in the heart of this community remains to be addressed. For nearly twenty years, four administrations and three mayors have struggled with implementing a meaningful new use for the old High School located at 200 Tyler Street. However, there can be no disagreement that the time has come to put an end to the partisan jockeying that has, for too long, inhibited the Town from revitalizing this precious and historic building.

In November, I appointed a Blue Ribbon Commission to hold public hearings, solicit public comment, and make a recommendation to me regarding the highest and best use for that property. Relying on that

recommendation, I recently requested an "8-24 Referral" from the Planning and Zoning Commission for a "mixed community use" for the building that calls for the rehabilitation of the pool and gymnasium facilities along with space for a host of other Town groups. I am pleased to announce that just one week ago, the Planning and Zoning Commission issued a favorable referral on my proposed plan, opening the door for the Town to begin negotiations with developers about a concrete re-use plan for the building.

As presented to the Planning and Zoning Commission, the present re-use plan would generate over \$400,000 dollars per year in new tax revenue – the equivalent of hiring NINE new teachers in our schools. On the same token, new tax revenue from the project could be diverted to fund other projects around Town or back to the taxpayers in the form of another modest tax decrease.

In the months ahead, Sal Brancati, the Town's Economic Development Coordinator, will be negotiating with developers to craft a plan that best incorporates these ideas and the residents' vision for this building.

With the exception of the potential reorganization of our school system, the redevelopment of the 200 Tyler Street building is, without question, the most important capital development project this Town will undertake in the next ten years. As such, it is my promise to the residents that we will work tirelessly to ensure that any plan for that building is enacted in accordance with the Town's overall plan of development and, more importantly, with the will of the people.

I want to reassure residents that we remain committed to ensuring that this process precedes transparently. If and when the Town identifies a preferred developer, the residents will have a number of opportunities to review any development plan and provide their input before the Town Council.

TOWNWIDE IMPROVEMENTS

While developing a general re-use plan for 200 Tyler Street has been a priority, we have also completed a number of exciting improvements across Town in the past year.

Early in 2015, I commissioned our Town Council leaders to address the parking, safety, and congestion problems at the beach that residents had been complaining about for years. Following my push, the Town Council and the Board of Police Commissioners formed a joint task force to walk the area, meet with residents, and draft modifications to the parking plan along our shore. As a result, new “no parking” zones were enacted along the south side of Cosey Beach Avenue and in other places. At the same time, parking was expanded along a few spots on the north side of Cosey Beach Avenue. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the Town Council adopted revised parking regulations that now include hefty fines for violators. Only a few weeks into last year’s summer season, the Police Department had written so many parking tickets that they temporarily ran out of ticket books. Violators finally got the message.

In addition to revising our parking regulations, we also took steps to beautify our shoreline last year by removing the old “Page” link fence and replacing it with a beautiful stone accent wall measuring 470 feet long. In constructing the wall, Town officials surveyed residents living along the shore to get input on the wall’s color and height to ensure that it would accent their homes.

Additionally, just nine months ago, the Town opened a new police substation at East Farms Village on Messina Drive as part of an effort to improve its ties to the community. I am pleased to report that this new substation has helped increase public safety, promote efficiency, and allowed our officers to be more accessible to residents on a daily basis. In addition, the Town was able to negotiate its lease for the substation space at no costs to the taxpayers. Perhaps best of all, our seniors feel safer living at Messina Drive.

Moving off the streets into the world of cyberspace, last year the Town spent months redesigning its website. The project, which involved migrating 500 individual web pages and over 1,500 PDF files to the new site, culminated in the Town's July launch of its new, streamlined, and ADA compliant Town website. In addition to hosting information about each Town Department and important news about Town events, this new “citizen service portal” contains a “How do I?” section and also allows residents to sign up for “E-Alerts.” Since the site was designed to be mobile-device friendly, residents can access the site on their phones and tablets as well. In conjunction with the launch of the website, Town Council members were also provided with new Chromebooks and official Town e-mail addresses to

facilitate better communication with residents. If you have not seen the new site or wish to contact your local Town Council representatives, I encourage you to visit “www.townofeasthaven.org” to explore all that our new site has to offer.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In addition to a number of Town-wide improvements, the Town also saw a substantial increase in economic development in the past year thanks to the efforts of the Town’s economic development coordinator Sal Brancati.

At present, the Town is working with the “East Haven Veterinarian Hospital and Pet Center” to open a pet hospital in the Home Depot Shopping Plaza. In addition to medical care, the facility will offer daycare, training, and rental supplies.

On the medical forefront, the Town also helped to relocate the “Fair Haven Community Health Clinic,” an early childhood medical facility, to the Stop and Shop Plaza. The facility, which is presently under construction, will offer primary medical care and is set to open in the next few weeks.

Additionally, this past year, the Town Council approved a plan for Elks Lodge #0025, presently located on State Street in New Haven, to relocate to the old “Apizza Grande” building on Coe Avenue. Although the final contract has not been negotiated yet, the Town anticipates selling the property in the coming weeks and that the lodge may open by the fall of this year. And for those of you who miss the actual “Apizza Grande,” we

also have good news. The original “Apizza Grande” is actually slated to re-open a 7,500 square foot restaurant just up the road at 400 Coe Avenue within the next couple of months.

The past year also saw exciting growth in our Industrial Park, which is slated to be entirely full in the coming months. Next week, the Town Council is set to approve the sale of land abutting the Industrial Park to accommodate the relocation of “Augliera Moving and Storage” to 158 Commerce Street. This relocation, while bringing a tremendous new business to East Haven, is also estimated to bring in \$60,000 dollars in new yearly tax revenue. At the same time, the 84 Group Empire and Mercantile Company, which imports and distributes moving supplies for large retailers, is also anticipated to open soon at 133 Commerce Street.

Finally, as part of the Town’s efforts to continue “going green,” the Town is presently in negotiations to lease land abutting the Industrial Park for a 4-Megawatt Solar Farm. If it comes to fruition, this solar farm will not only bring in a host of new tax revenue, but it will also save the Town approximately 20% on its monthly energy bills.

EDUCATION

While business continues to flourish here in East Haven, our students, faculty, and staff up at the Board of Education also continue to make headlines.

Early last year, the “School-Based Health Center” opened at Momauguin School. In addition to vaccinations and dental check-ups, the center is geared toward providing mental and behavioral health services. This new program is funded by state and federal grants and has zero cost to the taxpayers. Best of all, while the center accepts health insurance, there are no co-pays or deductibles and those who are uninsured are still treated.

Over the last twelve months, the school district also implemented a number of improvements to enhance teaching and learning. Specifically, the district introduced a new teacher evaluation system, implemented new strategies in literacy, and expanded preschool programming. Throughout the last year, the district also continued its “one-to-one” Chromebook initiative, which aims to provide each student in grades three through nine with a Chromebook.

Finally, last year, the Board of Education held focus groups across Town to solicit input from parents about the improvements they felt were most needed in our schools. Following those meetings, the Board of Education has begun to move forward with a district-wide school facilities plan that will modernize our schools and reduce operational costs. Although the Board’s plan has yet to proceed to the Board of Finance or Town Council, we are all eager to see it unfold.

SPECIAL RECOGNITION/RESIDENTS

At this time one year ago, we were tuning in each week to American Idol to watch East Haven native Nick Fradiani mesmerize America with his

incredible vocal talent. As you all certainly know, Nick not only won the entire 2015 Idol Competition, he has recently gone on to launch his first hit single “Get You Home.” Congratulations to Nick and the entire Fradiani family – you’ve made East Haven proud.

While Nick Fradiani made headlines on national television, our High School Girls Softball Team was making waves right here at home. With a 4-2 victory over Fitch last June, our High School Girl’s Softball Team took home the 2015 CIAC Class L State Championship – the first state title for girl’s softball since 1984. East Haven went into that tournament as the “10 seed,” but we came out in dramatic fashion as champions. Once again, congratulations to our girls softball team and to Coach Crisafi.

Moving on... Our Town employees and department heads have worked hard throughout the past year to continue to offer exceptional services and resources to our residents. As always, I want to touch briefly on a few highlights from each department over the past year.

WORK OF DEPARTMENT HEADS/CURRENT PEOPLE

Town Clerk – Stacy Gravino

The Town Clerk’s office, headed by Stacy Gravino, has continued to make capital upgrades, most of which have been completed with grants and at no cost to the taxpayers. In the past year, Stacy’s office upgraded its computer system to improve customer service, negotiated with “Municode” to publish the Town’s codes and regulations right on the Town’s website,

and upgraded both the dog licensing and birth certificate computer programs. Additionally, the Town Clerk's office received capitol improvement monies to begin back-scanning land records from 2004 to 1977.

Assessor – Michael Milici

The Assessor's office, which is headed by Michael Milici, is now in the middle of the State mandated town wide revaluation. This is a "statistical" revaluation in which house-to-house inspections are not required. Only sold, new, and improved properties will be visited and new values will be effective for the October 1, 2016 grand list.

In the past year, the Assessor's Office, in conjunction with the Building Department, initiated a project to identify all of the incorrectly numbered addresses on homes in town. The ultimate goal of the project is to correct any mis-numbered homes to ensure compliance with the Town's ordinance requiring all homes to have a proper address. While this project may seem trivial, it will actual increase public safety considerably by helping emergency responders correctly identify homes and respond to homes with more accuracy. After all, when seconds count, our emergency responders need to be able to identify homes accurately and quickly.

Senior Center – Jan Jougal

Our Senior Center, headed by Jan Lougal, enjoyed another busy year. This past year, the Senior Center received a new Flat-Screen HDTV from

the Mayor's Office and new tables and chairs, donated by the wonderful people over at the Village at Mariner's Point.

As usual, this past year, seniors enjoyed the daily lunch program, aerobics, line dancing, knitting, card games, monthly movies, and many day/overnight trips. Additionally, the Center continued to offer a variety of educational and health programs.

Social Services/Youth Services– Bob Petrucelli

Bob Petrucelli is the head of both our “Social Services” and “Youth Services” programs here in Town, both of which had incredibly busy years.

Last year, through the “CT Renters Rebate Program,” Bob’s office processed 570 applications netting Town residents over \$280,000 in rental rebates. For those who may not be familiar with this program, it provides an annual rebate check to East Haven renters who are 65 years of age or older or fully disabled. Additionally, through the CT Energy Assistance Program, Bob’s office processed 535 applications netting income-eligible residents over \$390,000 in assistance.

This past year, the Youth Services Department partnered with the East Haven Police Department to divert 20 East Haven youth offenders from the Juvenile Court system through the Juvenile Review Board Program.

Tax Collector – Lisa Basilicato

Moving on... This past year the tax department, thanks to the efforts of Lisa Basilicato, enjoyed another strong tax collection year. Lisa indicates that the Town has already reached the budgeted collection goal of 98% for the present fiscal year and that her department is working hard in conjunction with the Town Attorney to continue pursuing delinquent taxpayers.

In Addition, Lisa reports that while the Town's website presently allows residents to view and pay taxes online with any major credit card, debit card, or by E-Check, the tax office will soon be capable of accepting credit and debit cards right in the office.

Animal Control – Owen Little

During the past year, the Animal Shelter obtained body cameras for both animal control officers. These cameras, which are the same as those utilized by our Police Officers, will protect our officers and ensure that they continue to conduct themselves with a high degree of professionalism.

In addition, last year, the Shelter instituted a monthly fundraiser program in conjunction with "Lucky Dog Grooming." Each second Sunday of every month, residents can bring their dogs and cats to the animal shelter and get their nails clipped for a donation of \$10.00. The Animal Shelter receives 100% of the proceeds from this great program.

Also, Owen reports that the shelter was recently able to purchase a 24ft X 48ft prefabricated pavilion to be installed at the Animal Shelter by Public Works and funded entirely through donations made to the shelter. Owen reports that the pavilion is intended to be an inviting place for people to visit and meet with animals that are up for adoption, especially during inclement weather. The pavilion will also be used to host the shelter's rabies clinics and as a supplemental area to train animals.

Planning and Zoning – Chris Soto

Throughout the past year, the Planning and Zoning Department, led by Chris Soto, processed over 240 zoning permit applications for everything from small decks and additions to large commercial spaces. Chris reports that the department has generated over \$7,200 in permit fees within this time frame. Over that same timeframe, his department has processed over 16 applications for initial or modified site plans, many of which have been applications for businesses to occupy vacant commercial or industrial space.

Also, Chris reports that his department has been working diligently to enforce the Town's Anti-Blight Regulations over the past year. Efforts have included cracking down on homeowners and businesses who store junked vehicles on residential properties. Chris indicates that in the last 9 months, his department has resolved 38 blight actions and that it continues to work on several others.

Building Department – Jim Bassett

Our Building Department, led by Jim Bassett, shares an office with the Zoning Department and works hard to ensure that all building projects in Town are up to the prevailing codes. In addition to everything reported by the zoning department, our building official reports that in calendar year 2015, the Town issued 1,146 (up from 980 permits in 2014) for \$16.3 million dollars in construction work. According to Jim, in 2015, the Town saw 20 new homes built and saw 124 homes invest in solar panels.

Public Services/Engineering – Kevin White and Bob Parente

Our Engineering and Public Works departments, headed by Kevin White and Bobby Parente, had an incredibly busy year. Last year, their department repaved 13 roads and replaced broken catch-basins on roads across Town. Using Town-resources, as opposed to outside contractors, the Town reconstructed and repaved Hampton and Pequot Roads and performed minor drainage improvements, repaved 500 feet of Proto Drive, performed work on Barberry Road, and performed leveling work on Rock Road, Kenneth Street, Roma Street, and Thompson Street.

As many of you know, the area around Kimberly Avenue and Forbes Place has always been prone to flooding. As a result, last year the Town performed drainage improvements and installed all new underground piping along the length of Kimberly Avenue. In addition, the State is currently reviewing a traffic project for the Forbes /Kimberly intersection

that would further address the traffic flow problems at this historically busy intersection.

Insofar as upcoming and ongoing capital improvement projects, Kevin reports that the North High Street Sidewalk Project continues to progress. The scope of the project has been refined after three public hearings and a tentative timeline for construction has been established. In addition, the Engineering Department has continued to maintain the permits necessary to perform yearly cleanout of debris from the Farm River to help prevent flooding in a number of areas across Town.

Counseling and Community Services – Beth Trotta

The Counseling and Community Services program, headed by Beth Trotta of BHCare, Inc. continued to offer quality mental and behavioral health counseling services thanks to the expansion of management services by BH Care. This past year, the center implemented a new electronic health record system to assist with billing and patient privacy. Beth also reports that thanks to the hard work of several new doctors working at the center, wait times for aid continue to remain low.

Library - Bruce George

One of East Haven's greatest resources and most prized treasures is our Library, which is headed by Bruce George.

Recently, the Library upgraded to a fiber optic cable internet connection, which will provide better and more reliable internet connection speeds for the Library's public access computer network and Public Wi-Fi network.

Bruce also reports that Sarah Mallory, the Library's part-time specialist and Teen Advisory Group Librarian, authored and received a "Teen Top Ten Grant" from the "Young Adult Library Services Association" for the Library's Teen Advisory Group. The Library's Teen Advisory Group is one of only 15 groups from across the country to be awarded this grant. The duration of the grant is 2 years. During this time, the Teen Advisory Group will be reviewing teen books prior to their publication release date to provide feedback to publishers.

Finally, Bruce reports that January 2016 monthly programming for children is up 58% over last January and was up 15.6% for February over the previous year.

Recreation Department – Lou Pane

Our Recreation Department, headed by Lou Pane, continues to offer a number of youth and adult programs each and every year. This year, the Department will be offering many programs, including Beach Yoga, Beach Zumba, Beach Aerobics, and Beach Volleyball along with a number of youth activity camps with art, sports, and recreational themes.

The Recreation Department also reports that Ice Rink is on track to generate a profit to the town for the 4th consecutive year. Countless

teams, including those in Town, use our rink and Lou has done a tremendous job of making sure that the rink pays for itself and generates a profit.

Police Department – Chief Brent Larrabee

While I highlighted the incredible progress our Police Department has made in the past three years earlier in my speech, I do want to highlight some of their achievements from the past year.

This past year, the Town entertained a visit from Attorney General Loretta Lynch who praised the department's reform efforts and identified East Haven as a "model" for the nation. Shortly after, Chief Larrabee, Deputy Lennon, Father Tom Sievel, and myself attended a Community Policing Forum at the White House with twenty other municipal delegations from across the country to discuss East Haven's reform story and best practices for community policing. Our East Haven delegation brought a unique perspective to the event and our police executives and I both shared and gained valuable advice on implementing best practices on a variety of law enforcement topics.

Additionally, this past April, the Police Department's "Citizens' Police Academy" graduated its first class and is slated to host a second semester beginning April 6, 2016. At the same time, the department began a "Cadet Program," where local students can enroll and get hands-on training on in-house policing operations. At present, the department has three cadets enrolled, all of whom are doing tremendously well.

Throughout the past year, the Police Department continued to diversify its ranks through a series of historic promotions and new hires. It is clear that our efforts to diversify our force have brought a multitude of new perspectives to the department which have fundamentally improved the quality of police service and way our officers interact with members of the community.

In addition, early last year, the Town officially restored the K-9 unit, following a temporary suspension of the program during the Town's early efforts to comply with the DOJ's consent decree. "Max" along with his handler John Finnimore graduated from their joint training class in July. Since graduating they have teamed up in a number of investigations to aid our officers.

Finally, Lt. Murgio and Father Sievel (one of the department's chaplains) were recently accepted into the University of New Haven's "Transforming Youth Justice: A Leadership Development Program." The program is entirely grant funded and provides valuable training with respect to strategies for effective youth policing.

Fire Department – Chief Doug Jackson

The East Haven Fire Department, led by Chief Jackson, responded to a record 6,700 calls for service during 2015. Chief Jackson reports that last year, the department also maintained all of its training initiatives and its ISO Class 3 Rating (Insurance Safety Office) through our training and equipment maintenance programs. The Chief indicates that our medical

response firefighters also maintained their Paramedic and EMT licensing through rigorous continuing certification classes and testing.

Chief Jackson indicates that last year, the department members proudly recorded 2 CPR saves in addition to one additional save of a fire victim from the second floor of a dwelling who was in respiratory arrest and who was revived on scene prior to his transport for further treatment.

Additionally, in the past year, the department was able to make great strides with a town funded capital project that replaced the department's paramedic monitor/defibrillators with new technology based units utilized by the Advanced Life Support Paramedics.

Last year, the Fire Department continued its training and cooperation with the US Coast Guard and entered into an agreement with them in which our department will be utilized in Search and Rescue Operations in our area and be equipped with additional life saving and response equipment as part of the package.

FINANCES

While our department heads reported a host of accomplishments in the last year, our Finance Director helped guide our Town another budget surplus. Although I will give a complete report regarding the Town's financial situation shortly, I am proud to confirm that the Town produced a surplus of over \$1.29 million dollars in the last fiscal year, bringing the Town's fund balance to over \$3.85 million dollars – its highest level since 2008.

IMPORTANT DATES

Before I conclude, I'd like to remind everyone of the dates of some of the great upcoming events scheduled across Town.

The National Day of Prayer is Thursday, May 5th.

The Pause for the Pledge of Allegiance is Tuesday, June 14th.

The VVA Chapter 484 Fireworks and Beach Party is scheduled for Saturday, June 25th with a rain date of Monday, June 27th. The feature act is going to be "The Idol Kings" with a tribute to America Rock Band "Journey."

Senior Day will be held Saturday, August 20th on the Town Green.

And the 25th Annual East Haven Fall Festival will be held on September 9th, 10th, and 11th on the Town Green and will feature the nationally renowned act "The Spinners."

CONCLUSION

I want to conclude my fifteenth State of the Town Address the way I began – by thanking all of the residents for the opportunity to continue to lead this great community.

The next chapter of East Haven's rich and colorful history remains to be written and it will be defined by the decisions we make as we confront the fiscal and social challenges on the horizon. As we forge ahead to face those challenges, especially in this divided and sometimes hostile political era, we must do so through collaboration, cooperation, and compromise. Working together, we have restored pride to East Haven and I know that with continued hard work **AND** teamwork, we will remain a community of pride and a community of choice for years to come.

Thank you all, God Bless our Community, and God Bless our great Country.