

## **2018 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.

It is with great humility that I stand before you this evening for the seventeenth time in my career as Mayor. I owe this honor to so many people, but especially to the residents of this great community - who continue to entrust this progressive, proven team with the awesome responsibility of keeping East Haven a prosperous, safe, and vibrant place to live, work, and raise a family.

Six years ago, my team and I resumed office only to be immediately confronted with a daunting array of unmet fiscal and cultural challenges unlike any this community had faced in its modern history. At the time, the Town was teetering on the brink of insolvency with \$48.1 million dollars in high interest debt and only \$200,000 dollars in our rainy day fund. Just prior to my re-election, three deficits had sent the Town's rainy day fund plummeting into a \$5.1 million dollar hole, earning the Town two bond rating reductions and prompting the prior administration to enact a crippling 17% tax increase – the highest in the Town's modern history.

In the weeks after my inauguration, the "DOJ" lodged civil allegations against our Police Department, leading to the arrest of four police officers and, after a year of negotiating, the signing of a settlement agreement

between the Town and the “DOJ” to enact lasting, meaningful reforms intended to restore accountability and public trust in our Department.

Since those turbulent initial months, we’ve met and addressed each and every one the challenges we’ve faced – far too many to recount tonight, but all of which have been the subjects of my speeches before you over the past six years.

As I reflect on some of those challenges, I am overwhelmed by the good will and hard work that have defined our community’s journey. Thanks to our collective efforts, we enjoy a healthy rainy day fund surplus of \$5.4 million dollars, record-low debt, an “A+” bond rating, and a mill rate that has remained low and stable, even while others in the region have skyrocketed as much as 38%. Having satisfied every obligation of our agreement with the Department Justice on time and under budget (something no jurisdiction in the country has ever accomplished), we now boast one of the most respected, progressive Police Departments in the country. Because of the favorable fiscal climate in Town, property values are on the rise and businesses continue to flock to Town to make East Haven their home.

Together, we have have ushered in an era of unprecedented fiscal prosperity, social harmony, and opportunity for our community. I am proud to stand before you tonight and say that we are a stronger community than we have ever been... **and we are staring into a future that has never been brighter.**

## **A BRIGHT FUTURE**

Earlier this afternoon, the “Connecticut Housing and Finance Authority” held its vote on the granting of 9% tax credits to a number of companies, including Boston-based Winn Development’s project at 200 Tyler Street. We’ve been advised that the Governor will announce the results Monday and we will defer to the Governor in doing so. As I’ve stated in the past, these much-needed credits will facilitate the historic redevelopment of the former High School into both age-restricted housing and a flagship community center, which is slated to include a new gym, pool, 300-seat theater, and thousands of square feet of flex space for use by local groups.

This past fall, after years of waiting, the Town constructed and opened a brand new Skate Park at the Joseph Melillo Middle School Complex. The park, which is a one-of-a-kind and custom designed, was financed entirely through State grant funds and with no impact on local taxes. Just a half mile away, only a few weeks later, the Town broke ground on the long-anticipated Phase 3A of “Downtown Revitalization,” a project that will extend new sidewalks, streetscapes, lighting, and handicapped improvements from the center of Town all the way to the New Haven line, creating a new, inviting gateway into our central business community.

And speaking of a bright future – following approvals by the Town’s Planning and Zoning Commission and Town Council, the Town has negotiated a deal with “Greenskies Energy” to construct a 1-megawatt solar farm on the Town’s former landfill. The energy generated by the solar farm, which can be expanded to 5-megawatts, is expected to net the Town

\$20,000 dollars per year initially and, in the long term, could help save tens of thousands of dollars on the Town's future energy bills.

### **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT/INFRASTRUCTURE**

Thanks to the favorable fiscal climate we've created in Town and, perhaps just as importantly, because of the creative efforts of our Economic Development Coordinator Sal Brancati, businesses like Greenskies are flocking to Town and those that presently call East Haven "home" are expanding at a feverish pace.

After years of due diligence, the Town is set to convey the former "Apizza Grande" at 620 Coe Avenue to Town Fair Tire. The sale, which is scheduled to take place on or before May 2<sup>nd</sup>, will bring a new automotive research and retail facility to Coe Avenue to complement the new, "Standard Oil" gas station and convenience store opening up in the former footprint of Durso's Garage. Around the corner, a gleaming, new self-storage facility has popped up on formerly blighted and under-utilized property on Short Beach Road and, just a few miles away, Town Fair Tire is also slated to purchase from the Town a ten acre parcel of land adjacent to Commerce Street that will facilitate the movement of over 200 storage trailers from West Haven to East Haven and the eventual construction, within two years, of 20,000 square feet of new commercial space on the existing Town Fair Tire property.

While businesses are investing in East Haven, builders are also investing as well. Off Laurel Street, "Sharon Drive Estates, LLC" is building a thirteen-lot subdivision of quality-built colonials and ranches on generous

lots. North of Route 80, approvals have been granted for a 5-lot residential subdivision off Warner Road. At the intersection of Hemingway and Dodge Avenues, approvals are in place to construct a mixed-use complex to include senior housing and small retail facilities. And along the shore, the Trolley Square Apartments are being completely renovated, turning once blighted buildings into quality, new housing in our prime shoreline district.

Private investment in East Haven is certainly flourishing – but we are also investing in ourselves at the largest and fastest pace in decades.

Since 2011, we've bonded and allocated over \$9.6 million dollars in capital monies for infrastructure improvements, new roads and sidewalks (to the tune of \$1.3 million), vehicles, and new machinery across Town. This past year, the Town utilized a \$100,000 dollar grant to install new fencing at Memorial Field, obtained a brand new, 36,000 pound "2017 Freightliner plow" to supplement our existing Public Works fleet, and allocated almost \$270,000 dollars for new radios and vehicles for our Police Department. By December 31<sup>st</sup> of this year, the Town is also slated to undertake and complete a \$1.2 million dollar safety project that will raise Coe Avenue to alleviate flooding during severe weather events.

Looking ahead, the Town has advertised and sought competitive bids for the sale of both the former D.C. Moore School and the Reggie Hatch Community Center on Route 80. Although the Town has not yet awarded bids, we are eagerly anticipating the future redevelopment of these parcels and the tax revenue we can expect to realize from their being put back into private, productive use.

## EDUCATION

While public and private investment in our community continues to make for great news, our students, faculty, and staff here at the Board of Education also continue to make headlines.

Newly appointed Superintendent Erica Forti reports that the school system recently hosted the regional “Unified Sports Tournament.” For those unfamiliar with the concept, “Unified Sports” joins people with and without intellectual disabilities on the same team with the understanding that training together and playing together helps form friendships and broaden understandings.

Earlier this year, East Haven senior Kylie Schlottman became the Yellow Jackets all-time leading scorer in girls basketball, passing the great Sue Crisafi, whose scoring mark stood for 38 years. And in case you were living under a rock, Kylie recently led our High School Girl’s Basketball Team on its “run to the sun” and took home the CIAC State Championship trophy. Congratulations to Athletic Director Anthony Verderame, Coach Anthony Russell, and the ENTIRE girl’s basketball team.

Our Middle School, alongside some other CT schools, also received some nice press recently for their participation in a fundraiser that supports drilling for water wells in rural parts of South Sudan. At the same time, our “Future Health Professional” students recently attended the 2018 HOSA Conference and took home two gold, three silver, and two bronze medals.

## [#NICKSTRONG](#)

Although our students made headlines this past year with their academic, athletic, and extracurricular achievements, I am most proud of our students for a movement they started this past Fall – a movement that can't be measured by test scores or rewarded with a State championship trophy.

For those unfamiliar, Nick Vessichio was badly injured this past July in a freak accident when a tree fell on him while mowing the lawn. While Nick battled courageously in the intensive care unit and hospital for months, our community and especially our students rallied around both he and his family, refusing to let the fun-loving junior be forgotten. At football games, cheers of “nickstrong” bellowed endlessly from the student section in support of Nick and his family while students sporting “nickstrong” t-shirts ran raffles and collected donations.

Since the Fall, the outpouring of support for Nick has continued in force, with hundreds of people stepping up to make donations and provide services to help Nick and his family retrofit and remodel their home. East Haven senior Adam Perrotti said it best in October when he told NBC Connecticut that “NickStrong... is the whole community, the whole school coming together.” Although it arose from the very worst of circumstances, the “#nickstrong” movement represents the very best of what it means to be a part of East Haven.

## **WORK OF INDIVIDUAL DEPARTMENT HEADS**

Moving on... Our Town employees and department heads are tremendous resources for our residents and they work tirelessly year after year to offer exceptional services to our residents. As always, I want to touch briefly on a few highlights and accomplishments from some of our departments over the past year.

### **Town Clerk – Stacy Gravino**

Stacy Gravino, our Town Clerk, reports that her office was recently able to complete a “Vital Record Restoration/Preservation” project which began in 2011 and which has allowed all vital records from 1906 to 1980 to be preserved for the future. She also reports that she has applied for 2019 capital monies to film and print the remaining oversized land record books into smaller, user friendly books so all land record documents from 1745 to the present will be available in the Town Clerk's Office for use.

### **Assessor – Michael Milici**

Mike Milici, our Town Assessor, reports that his office has begun the process of digitizing older field cards and grand list abstracts as a space saving measure in cooperation with the State Library. He reports that the process will continue annually to increase access to the information while at the same time, maximizing use of filing space. He also reports that his office has continued the project of correcting all wrongfully numbered addresses on homes in town in conjunction with the Building Department and in accordance with our Town ordinance requiring all homes to have a proper address. As I've noted in the past, proper addressing may seem

trivial – but especially for our emergency responders, it can save precious seconds, which in turn, can save lives.

### **Senior Center – Jan Lougal**

Our Senior Center Director, Jan Lougal, indicates that our Senior Center got a face-lift this past January. The center was refurnished with new tables and chairs, along with the lounge, which also received newly donated couches and tables. Overall, Jan reports that as a result of these improvements, the center is now a more comfortable, inviting, and social environment for our seniors.

Jan also reports that the center has expanded its lunch program and continues to offer quality, wholesome programming including Tai-Chi-Quan classes twice a week, aerobics class, line dancing, and the “55-Alive” safe driving classes. Jan reports that the center has begun to offer even more trips and seminars and that plans are in the works to get a new mini-bus this year and, potentially, a new Bingo board and machine in the following year.

### **Social Services & Youth Services – Bob Petrucelli**

Bob Petrucelli heads both our “Social Services” and “Youth Services” departments and helps residents of all ages on a daily basis to connect them with local and regional resources.

Bob notes that this past year, his office processed 525 applications through the CT Energy Assistance Program, bringing over \$425,000 dollars in heating assistance to income-eligible East Haven residents. In addition, he

reports that his office also processed 515 applications through the CT Renters Rebate program, netting over \$275,000 dollars in rebates to East Haven renters who are at least 65 years old or fully disabled.

In his work with the Youth Services Department, Bob coordinated the participation of twenty-five (25) Middle School students in the "Annual Leadership Program," which is designed to motivate and inspire teens to be great role models and leaders. Bob also reports that he also helped direct the Town's "Teen Center," through which over 400 East Haven youths socialize and participate in a number of activities.

### **Recreation – Lou Pane**

Our Recreation Director is Lou Pane and he reports that, in addition to the construction of the new skate park and outdoor basketball court, his department continues to offer a diverse array of seasonal sports and recreation activities to all age groups. Mr. Pane also reports that his department recently installed all new, high-energy and high efficiency lighting at the East Haven Ice Rink as part of a project completed in conjunction with United Illuminating Company. He also reports that his department also just signed a deal with the UI to install outside lighting at the ice rink and upgraded lighting at the town pool as part of similar projects aimed at reducing energy usage and saving our taxpayers money.

### **Tax Collector – Lucille Huelin**

Lucille Huelin is our tax collector and this past year marked her first full year of service, having succeeded our long-time Tax Collector Lisa Basilicato. Lucille reports that her office recently completed the renovation

of its money vault to provide for new, fire resistant shelving and storage along with a new fireproof safe.

Lucille also reports that, over the past year, her office continued cracking down on tax scofflaws, especially delinquent motor vehicle accounts. By issuing personal property warrants and getting the accounts in the hands of State marshals, the department was able to collect an additional \$250,000 dollars.

Finally, Lucille reports that her office is currently planning computer software and equipment upgrades and looking into allowing wire transfers of tax payments for large companies, all of which would improve the efficiency of the office and facilitate speedier payment and collection of real estate taxes.

### **Animal Control – Owen Little**

Owen Little, who works tirelessly down at our Animal Shelter, is our head Animal Control Officer. Owen reports that this past year, the shelter applied for and received a generous \$20,000 dollar grant from the Animal Humane Society, half of which will be used directly for animal care and half of which has been used for capital upgrades including a new water heater which will permit more frequent cleaning of animal kennels along with ductless heat and air conditioning.

Owen also reports that the Shelter held an open house this past summer to showcase all of the improvements at the Shelter, including its new pavilion, and to celebrate passing the \$225,000 dollar fundraising mark (over the

past ten years). The newly opened “Shore Haven Animal Hospital” on Frontage Road supplied food and beverages and celebrated along with Shelter volunteers.

### **Planning and Zoning – Chris Soto**

Chris Soto is our Zoning Officer, and another transplant from New Haven city government to East Haven, who continues to work incredibly hard for our community.

Chris reports that, over the past eighteen months, his department has processed over 310 zoning permit applications for everything from small decks and additions to full tenant fit-outs of commercial spaces. The department has generated over \$8,100 in permit fees within this time frame. Chris also reports that his department has also processed over 22 applications for initial or modified site plans, generating over \$4,000 dollars in additional revenue. He indicates that many of these site plans have been applications for businesses to occupy vacant commercial or industrial spaces. Finally, Chris reports that his department continues to enforce the Town’s Anti-Blight and Zoning Regulations and that, since March of 2017, over 350 orders have been issued for violations ranging from overgrown grass, to excessive trash and debris, and even unpermitted structures.

### **Building Department – Jim Bassett**

Jim Bassett, who works closely with our zoning department, heads our Building Department. Jim indicates that during 2017, the East Haven Building Department issued 1,100 building and mechanical permits with a construction value of \$14.3 million dollars. Jim reports that revenue from

these permits for the Town has totaled \$248,000 dollars. Jim also reports that the Building Department has also performed just over 1000 inspections over the past year.

### **Public Services/Engineering – Kevin White and Bob Parente**

Town Engineer Kevin White and Superintendent of Operations Bob Parente head up our Public Service and Engineering Departments, both of which had incredibly busy years.

In addition to supervising and performing over \$550,000 dollars in street and sidewalk improvements as part of last year's capital improvement program, Kevin and Bob have begun upgrading the department's equipment. In addition to the new winter plow truck I discussed earlier, Bob and Kevin have administered and allocated over \$607,000 dollars in capital monies over the past two capital programs to purchase new equipment including new gas pumps, a new "sand pro" machine, and new lawn mowers.

At the same time, the Public Works Department has begun removing and renovating the bleachers at the Middle School – a project which is being undertaken in-house, saving taxpayer dollars.

Finally, since 2011, the Public Works and Engineering offices have also maintained and renewed our permits to clean debris along and in the Farm River. As a result of our vigilant efforts, and with the help of the Town Council, the Town accepted new FEMA flood zone maps in May of 2017, leading to a major reduction in riverside flood zone numbers and making

over 600 residents eligible for flood insurance rate reductions and, in many cases, the complete elimination of flood insurance.

### **Counseling and Community Services – Beth Trotta**

This past year, the Counseling and Community Services department, led by Beth Trotta, was re-licensed by the CT Department of Public Health for another 3 years with no errors in any client service areas. Beth reports that, despite continuing cuts to mental health funding by the State, the Clinic continues to function with absolutely no waiting list and that people who call for services are scheduled into a weekly orientation group and have an intake within 2 weeks of the orientation. Finally, Beth reports that her staff has continued participating on the Town's Juvenile Review Board (JRB), which serves as a diversionary program to keep at-risk Town youths out of the court system

### **Police – Chief Ed Lennon**

Earlier in my speech, I highlighted the sustained success our Police Department has enjoyed over the past four years and how I proud I am of our department for meeting and exceeding every requirement of its agreement with the Department of Justice on time and under budget.

Although the period of "official" DOJ oversight has ended, our personnel have not abandoned their commitment to staying on the forefront of the policing industry – and others are taking note. This past year, the "International Association of Chiefs of Police" recognized Chief Ed Lennon as one of the "Top 40 Under 40" police chiefs in the country. Also this past year, Lieutenant David Emerman, who served as the Town's DOJ

coordination officer following Chief Lennon's promotion, was also recognized by the U.S. Attorney's Office with its "Award for Community Policing" and Lieutenant Pat Tracy graduated from the FBI Academy.

Chief Lennon advises me that, in addition to these monumental achievements, our department has been busy in a number of other areas as well.

Chief Lennon notes that we are currently going through the "CALEA" national accreditation process - a process that will further validate and help fine-tune the department's policies and procedures. He notes that his department has had several notable incidents in which de-escalation training and body worn cameras have demonstrated our officers operating at the highest of professional standards.

Finally, Chief Lennon also reports that his department has continued its partnership with the Town's youth and the schools with programs such as the "Cadet Program," which allows high school students to earn class credits and get hands-on training on in-house policing operations. Just this week, the Department announced its formation of an all-volunteer "Police Athletic League," which is a 501(c)(3) charitable corporation aimed at offering wholesome sports programming to local youth in a safe, constructive environment.

### **Fire – Chief Matt Marcarelli**

Last year, Chief Doug Jackson retired from the East Haven Fire Department after a long, accomplished career. Following his retirement,

several talented applicants applied to succeed Chief Jackson and, after extensive interviews, I appointed former Acting New Haven Fire Chief Matt Marcarelli to take over the leadership of our Fire Department. And in just over half of a year, Chief Marcarelli has compiled quite the list of accomplishments.

Soon after his appointment, Chief Maracrelli implemented an expedited hiring process for firefighters and paramedics to reduce overtime, saving approximately \$120,000 dollars in training costs. Since that initiative, the Town has hired and trained six new firefighter-paramedics.

On top of investing in personnel, Chief Marcarelli has been working to upgrade our Department's equipment. Recently, he applied for and received an equipment grant for carbon monoxide meters for all fire apparatus, both career and volunteer. Under his leadership, the Department has replaced three (3) sets of "Jaws of Life," replaced 22 portable radios to the tune of \$130,000 dollars, installed a new generator at Station 4, replaced twenty-seven (27) sets of protective fire clothing, and replaced Engine 1 at headquarters with a state-of-the-art, fully-equipped rescue engine. The Chief reports that, looking ahead, the Department is finalizing plans to replace Engine 7 on Short Beach Road and is awaiting a decision on a \$500,000 dollar federal grant application to replace firefighter breathing apparatus.

Most recently, Chief Marcarelli announced, in conjunction with my office, that the Town has begun providing lifesaving paramedic service out of Engine Company 4 in Momauguin, which has now joined "Rescue 1" from

Headquarters and "Squad 5" as paramedic units. As a result of this service expansion, the entire Town will now have "Advanced Life Support" coverage.

### **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 **May 3, 2018**.

The Pause for the Pledge of Allegiance is **June 12, 2018**.

The VVA Chapter 484 Fireworks and Beach Party is scheduled for **June 30, 2018** with a rain date of **July 2, 2018**.

Senior Day will be held **August 18, 2018** on the Town Green.

And the 27<sup>th</sup> Annual East Haven Fall Festival will be held on September 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> on the Town Green along with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual "East Haven Community Classic Road Race" on September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2018. This year's featured Saturday night act brings back nationally renowned singer and performer "Tony Orlando."

## CONCLUSION

Tonight, I've spent a great deal of time detailing this administration's accomplishments and highlighting the hard work of our dedicated department heads and town employees. I've talked a great deal about the excitement of today and about how, thanks to this administration's hard work over 16 of the last 20 years, our community has become a decidedly more prosperous and desirable place to live, work, and raise a family.

However, as proud as I am about our accomplishments to-date, I cannot help but be more excited about the "promise of tomorrow" – about the amazing opportunities for success that lay just over the horizon.

As we look ahead, I know that if we wish realize the promise that tomorrow offers, we cannot relent in our hard work today. We have an awesome responsibility to continue making sound fiscal decisions, especially in light of the State's ongoing budget crisis and the continuing challenges it poses for towns across the State. And in this era of ever-increasing social unrest, we have an even greater responsibility to practice compassion, tolerance, and kindness in all that we do. Tonight, I want to reaffirm for everyone in attendance and for our residents at home – **we are up to these challenges. We will not let you down.** And we will continue fighting to keep East Haven a community of pride... a community of prosperity... a community of tolerance... and a community of choice.

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