

## **2019 STATE OF THE TOWN ADDRESS**

### **INTRODUCTION – NEVER BEEN STRONGER**

Good evening honorable Town Council members, department heads, staff, and residents of the Town of East Haven both here tonight and watching at home. Welcome to East Haven High School.

I am here before you this evening, as required by our Town Charter, to present my record-breaking eighteenth “State of the Town” address as this community’s municipal CEO.

Over the past eighteen years, my team and I have led this community through unprecedented periods of economic and fiscal prosperity. Despite the State’s ongoing financial woes, we’ve fortified our pocketbooks and elevated our community to become a model of fiscal excellence for others across the State.

For young families and first-time homebuyers, we have become a haven of hope – a gateway to security, pride and prosperity that facilitates building a family and a better life. We’ve made tough, sometimes unpopular decisions – but those decisions have solidified our community as an affordable, welcoming alternative to other high-tax, low service towns whose fiscal policies discourage homeownership and advancement. For seniors, we’ve remained a safe harbor – one of the few places in this tax-happy state where our seniors can afford to age and remain in their homes, close to those they love the most. And for businesses, we have

become a sanctuary from high mill rates that hurt growth, kill jobs, and discourage investment.

I am more proud than ever to report that, in the eighteen years I've served as Mayor, the State of our Town has **never been stronger** than at this very moment.

*(Pause for possible applause)*

Although our fiscal accomplishments are impressive, I also recognize that being and remaining a community of choice means more than just balancing the budget and keeping taxes low. It also means that we must take concrete action, in our homes, in our schools, and in our government, to tackle and dismantle the cultural divisions of our day and to eliminate both hatred and intolerance. To remain a community of choice, we must actively **choose** to be tolerant – to make moral choices – and be role models for our children and grandchildren. **We must choose to care.**

These choices start right here, in this room – with all of the officials and community stakeholders who are expected to set an example for the rest of our community. We have put the Town's fiscal challenges squarely in our past, and so my call to action this evening is not a fiscal challenge. Rather, tonight I offer a social challenge – for us all to strive to inspire tolerance and respect through all that we do both personally and in our official capacities.

*(Pause for possible applause)*

## NEVER GIVE UP

In 1997, I was elected Mayor by an overwhelming majority – fueled by a referendum on regionalizing 911, anger over rising taxes, and frustration with an unresponsive administration that seemed incapable of addressing quality of life issues like Farm River flooding. Even with that overwhelming victory, success has not always come easy - it has required hard work, dedication, and tough decision-making. In leading this community off the State's distressed municipalities list, and in fighting for those fiscal and social initiatives closest to my heart over the past twenty-two (22) years, I've always circled back to a one, clear motto – **“never give up.”**

In less than a week, the Town will be delivering the deed to our former high school located at 200 Tyler Street to Boston-based “Winn Development,” which has agreed to invest over \$36 million dollars as part of a public-private partnership to renovate the front of the property as 70 units of age-restricted housing. In partnership with Winn, the Town will be redeveloping the rear of the property as a flagship community campus, with renovated pool facilities, a new gymnasium for Biddy Basketball, a 300-seat theater for the arts, and tens of thousands of square feet of flex space for Town groups. However, this plan and this partnership did not develop overnight. In fact, the road to restoring this iconic building has been marked by a number of political and administrative setbacks. However, my team and I “never gave up” on our dream of rehabilitating this historic building. Thanks to our persistence, our former high school will be made new once again – although its historic redevelopment will include retaining some its most iconic elements, including its chalkboards and lockers. The

portion of the building being returned to the tax rolls will generate \$8.2 million dollars in combined tax revenue and savings to the Town over the next 30 years, which the Town will leverage to perform its planned renovations to the rear of the property. Winn Development projects the housing portion of the property will be full and stabilized by the Summer of 2020, at which time the Town's redevelopment of the rear will be well underway. I want to thank the Town Council, the Blue Ribbon Commission, and my entire team for their hard work and dedication to bringing this project to fruition. We "never gave up" – and now future generations will have the privilege of making new memories in the building that means so much to so many of us.

### **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT/INFRASTRUCTURE**

In addition to Winn's \$36 million dollar investment in our former high school, the Town is poised to benefit from millions of dollars in grand list growth stemming from a host of economic development initiatives.

Throughout my tenure as Mayor, we have enjoyed tremendous success marketing our Town's major thoroughfares, including Frontage Road. In my first ten years as Mayor, my team and I facilitated the development of Carmax, Home Depot, Dave McDermott Chevrolet, TJ Maxx, XPect Discounts, and Chilis – all on Frontage Road, which brought new life to the vacant storefronts left when Toys 'R Us, Bradlees, K-Mart, and Child World closed their doors. When I resumed office in 2011, we picked up right where we left off – recruiting Hobby Lobby, Job Lot, Home Goods, and the Shore Haven Veterinarian Hospital to re-fill vacant storefronts on Frontage

Road. In addition to these wonderful additions to our already-growing grand list, I am proud to announce that Hilton will soon be tearing down the current “Quality Inn” on Frontage Road to construct a brand new, four-story hotel to service East Haven and the entire shoreline. Not only will this development significantly grow our grand list, it will dramatically upgrade the types of accommodations available to travelers looking to visit and stay in our community.

Residential development across Town also continues to flourish, with both single-family and age-restricted housing popping up at a record-setting pace. Quality, beautiful subdivisions are currently nearing completion on Letis Court and Sharon Drive, built by “J.J. Russo and Sons” and “Ralph and Antonio Mauro” – veterans of the construction industry who build with quality and pride. On Hemingway Avenue, a combination of age-restricted housing and medical retail development is set to be constructed on the former “Sorvillo” property across from the Corner Stop Deli. Down the street, on Coe Avenue, “A&G Construction,” another trusted local developer, is exploring plans to construct age-restricted condominiums just steps to East Haven’s pristine beach. And less than a mile from our town beach, on the site of the former Beachhead Restaurant, the “Lobster Shack” (formerly of Branford) is in the process of opening a new, flagship restaurant that will complement the already-fantastic fare offered by the “Sandpiper” and which will attract scores of visitors to our Town and to our shoreline.

Moving forward, we will continue strategically investing in our infrastructure to complement, facilitate, and encourage private development in our

community. Next month, Town officials will appear before the Town Council with representatives from “Honeywell” seeking approval for \$6.5 million dollars in energy efficiency upgrades to Town and Board of Education facilities which will be financed entirely by the savings to be generated by the improvements. Unlike the solar panels currently sitting on so many Town buildings that will never return a net savings to the Town, “Honeywell” is guaranteeing the Town’s energy efficiency savings – which means that if we miss our savings target, Honeywell will cut a check for the difference to the Town. The arrangement, as it will be presented, will allow the Town to make millions of dollars of improvements to Town facilities with absolutely zero cost to taxpayers or impact on our bond rating. These improvements will complement the Town’s planned development of a solar farm on the site of the former landfill, which is projected to reduce the Town’s energy costs by 25% to 30%.

In addition to these progressive energy initiatives, the Town is also investing in traditional brick and mortar programs as well. Over the next 18 months, the Town is poised to undertake a \$1.5 million dollar project to raise Coe Avenue to alleviate flooding at its intersection with Short Beach Road, a multi-million dollar project to install sidewalks for the length of North High Street, and Phase 3B of West End Revitalization – which will extend new sidewalks, street lights, and streetscapes along Main Street from Pardee Place to approximately Charter Oak Avenue.

Although we continue to foster investment in our community, we remain mindful that development should always respect residents' quality of life concerns. For that reason, and on behalf of all of the residents who live in

and around Dodge Avenue, my team and I continue to oppose efforts to relocate the Tweed Airport terminal to East Haven - a measure we see as both unfair and illogical.

## EDUCATION

Although we have invested \$12.7 million dollars into physical infrastructure since 2012 (including \$1.8 million for new roads and sidewalks alone), we have invested more than \$17.5 million dollars in new funding into our Board of Education during my tenure as Mayor – and for good reason: our children are the future of this great community.

Our students are tremendous, young ambassadors for our community across our State and country and I'd ask you all to pause with me for a moment to give them a round of applause.

Although a number of our students make headlines each month, I want to recognize one in particular. Mackenzie Helms, acknowledged since last year as an anchor of our State-Championship Girl's Basketball Team, was recognized this year as the Gatorade State Player of the Year – the first time an East Haven athlete has been recognized with this honor. Mackenzie's talent has earned her a scholarship and admission to the University of Nebraska, where she will fine tune her talents and continue to represent East Haven with distinction and class. I want to wish Mackenzie and the entire girls basketball program congratulations on two years of stellar achievements.

*(Pause for possible applause)*

## **WORK OF INDIVIDUAL DEPARTMENT HEADS**

Each year, in addition to discussing all of the advancements our community is making, I take time to recognize our Town employees and department heads, who serve as tremendous resources for our residents. As always, I want to touch briefly on a few highlights from some of our departments over the past year.

### **Town Clerk – Stacy Gravino**

Stacy Gravino, our Town Clerk, reports that her office recently revamped its entire lower level vault and installed modern, functional shelving to keep the vault more organized and accessible. She also reports that her office completed the filming and printing of all of the oversized land record books previously housed in the lower vault and which dated back to 1745. Finally, she reports that her office has begun a four-year project to restore and repair the vital records index books which have fallen into disrepair – a project being undertaken with State Library grant money, and at no cost to the taxpayers.

### **Assessor – Michael Milici**

Mike Milici, our Town Assessor, reports that his office has made progress 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 each year to increase access to the information while at the same time, maximizing use of filing space. He also reports that his office, in conjunction with the Building Department, continues correcting all wrongfully numbered addresses on homes in town 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 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 new types of health screenings and provide seminars on “future planning” and “elder care.” As promised last year, with capital monies allocated by my office, we put a brand new “senior bus” into service for our friends at the senior center. Over the next few months, with those same capital monies, our senior center will also be receiving a brand new bingo machine to replace the antiquated equipment which has been used at the center for decades.

### **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 \$455,000 dollars in heating assistance to eligible East Haven residents – up \$30,000 dollars from last year. In addition, he reports that his office also processed 500

applications through the CT Renters Rebate program, netting over \$255,000 dollars in rebates to qualifying East Haven renters.

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 over the past year, his office coordinated eight (8) events and five (5) coffee house gatherings through the Teen Center which were attended by over 450 teens.

### **Recreation – Lou Pane**

Our Recreation Director, Lou Pane, reports that both the new skate park and outdoor basketball court, which were completed entirely with State grant monies and at no cost to the taxpayers, continue to be favorite hangouts for our teens and residents. These new facilities have been fantastic additions to the diverse array of seasonal sports and recreation activities Lou's department organizes all year round. Lou also reports that, for the third year in a row, our ice rink returned a profit to the Town and that we are the ONLY rink in the State currently turning over a profit. This past year and with great success, the department also operated an outdoor rink for the time in the Town's history. Finally, Lou notes that his department is now running a brand new "Learn to Swim" Program, with all proceeds going to the Town's general fund.

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

Lucille Huelin is our tax collector and she reports that her office has continued cracking down on delinquent taxpayers, especially delinquent motor vehicle and personal property accounts. She indicates her office has teamed up with local State marshals and a specialty collection firm to vigorously pursue delinquent business 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 completed a number of capital upgrades to its facilities including: (1) a 24ft X 48ft pavilion at the cost of \$36,000; (2) a new furnace; (3) a new, on-demand hot water heater; and (4) two new ductless heat and air conditioning units. Owen reports that the local Boy Scouts donated and installed new sound systems for the kennel areas and that, thanks to Public Works, the property now enjoys a new drainage system and parking lot. Best of all, Owen reports that all of this work was funded through fundraisers and donations, with no costs to the taxpayers!

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

Chris Soto is our Zoning Officer, and he continues to work incredibly hard for our community enforcing both our zoning and our blight regulations.

Chris reports that, over the past fifteen months, his department has processed over 390 zoning permit applications for everything from small decks and additions to full tenant fit-outs of commercial spaces – up significantly over the preceding 15-month period. Chris also reports that, in

conjunction with our Town Attorney, his department continues to enforce the Town's Anti-Blight and Zoning Regulations and that, in 2019 alone, the Town has collected over \$40,000 dollars from blight liens and enforcement actions.

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

Jim Bassett heads up our Building Department and reports that during 2018, the East Haven Building Department issued 1,280 building and mechanical permits with a construction value of \$19.2 million dollars – up by 180 permits and \$5 million dollars from 2017. He indicates that revenue from these permits for the Town has totaled \$325,000 dollars – also up \$77,000 over the preceding year. Town records indicate Jim has been very busy with inspection work as well. In fact, he has performed just over 1,100 inspections over the past year.

I continually talk about the fact that businesses are flocking to and investing in our community. We see it in our grand list and we see it through our economic development initiatives. But the ***real proof*** is in our zoning and building departments – where applications, permits, and revenues are all dramatically up over past years. Our administration's fiscal and economic development strategies have clearly translated into real, measurable growth for our community - for 18 of the last 22 years, and especially in recent years.

### **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 \$450,000 dollars in street and sidewalk improvements as part of last year's capital improvement program, Kevin and Bob have secured \$200,000 dollars in additional capital funding for town-wide roof repairs, landfill improvements, and upgrades to the Town's GIS Mapping system.

Finally, since 2011, the Public Works and Engineering offices have also maintained and renewed our permits to clean debris along the Farm River. As a result of our efforts, the Town accepted new FEMA flood zone maps, helping over 600 residents remain 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, received a MAJOR facelift with renovations financed, once again, through the Town's aggressive \$3.3 million dollar 2018 capital program. Renovations to the center included new paint, flooring, furniture, and carpeting. Thanks to these renovations, the center has become a cleaner, more welcoming facility for all of its clients.

Additionally, 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 have an intake within a

week of their orientation. Finally, Beth reports that her staff has continued participating in the Police Department'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**

Chief Ed Lennon leads our Police Department which, thanks to all of our officers' efforts, continues to be recognized as one of the best, small departments in the country.

The Chief reports that, this past year, we successfully completed the stringent initial phases of our Department accreditation with the "Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies" (CALEA). The Chief expects to be granted full national accreditation following our final presentation at the annual CALEA conference in May of this year.

Chief Lennon also reports that the "EHPD," "EHFD" and "Public Safety Command Center" have teamed up to completely modernize the Town's radio system. He reports that "Phase 1" is nearing completion, which will lay the infrastructure foundation for "Phase II", which includes the installation and deployment of state-of-the-art technology and radio equipment. Upon completion, this project will significantly improve the quality and reliability of radio communications across Town, which will help ensure the safety of all of our emergency responders and ultimately the citizens of East Haven.

Finally, the Chief reports that our youth and outreach programs, including our Police Athletic League (PAL), the high school cadet program, and our college internship program, continue to flourish and function as excellent bridges between our department and the community.

### **Fire – Chief Matt Marcarelli**

In 2018, Chief Matt Marcarelli completed his first full year of service with the Town of East Haven as our Fire Chief following the retirement of former Chief Doug Jackson.

Chief Marcarelli reports that the Fire Department responded to 5,397 calls for service in 2018, 4,330 of which were medical calls. According to the Chief, the department expanded its services and began dispatching lifesaving paramedic service out of Engine Company 4 in Momauguin, allowing us to respond more efficiently and effectively to medical calls on our shoreline.

The Chief also reports that in 2018, our fire personnel responded to forty-eight (48) fires ranging in size and scope from building fires to brush and wildlife fires.

According to the Chief, last year he applied for and received an equipment grant for carbon monoxide meters for all fire apparatus, both career and volunteer. He also indicates that in 2018, he secured a grant for \$328,000 dollars to upgrade department equipment, including 41 new, self-contained breathing apparatus units and a new air compressor. All 41 units include new masks, backpacks, and two spare cylinders for each firefighter.

Since arriving in East Haven, Chief Marcarelli has made personnel safety a priority and I am pleased to see our personnel are more safe than ever.

### **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 2, 2019**.

The Pause for the Pledge of Allegiance is **June 14, 2019**.

The VVA Chapter 484 Fireworks and Beach Party is scheduled for **June 29, 2019** with a rain date of **July 1, 2019**.

Senior Day will be held **August 24, 2019** on the Town Green.

And the 27<sup>th</sup> Annual East Haven Fall Festival will be held on September 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> on the Town Green along with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual "East Haven Community Classic Road Race" on September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019.



## **CONCLUSION - "A HAVEN OF HOPE"**

I began tonight with the message that East Haven has become a "Haven of Hope" - a gateway to prosperity for new families looking to write their own version of the 'American Dream;' a community of safety and security for seniors looking to spend their golden years with those they love; and a community of opportunity for entrepreneurs looking for a business-friendly home in which to grow and prosper.

Throughout my time as Mayor, we have planted seeds of hope, which I am proud to see are now blooming into incredible opportunities for all of our residents and for future generations. However, between 2007 and 2011 during my absence from office, we witnessed how easily the seeds of hope can be trampled; how good fortune can be squandered; how fragile success and stability can truly be. I returned to office in 2011 to bring "hope" back to East Haven - to right our Town's fiscal ship and to renew pride in our community, which I have always regarded as the shining star of our shoreline.

With our community shining more brightly than ever, and with the prospects for an even better 'tomorrow' firmly within our reach, I conclude tonight hopeful and committed to ensuring our community continues to grow, thrive, and prosper for years to come.

God bless you all, God bless this incredible community, and God bless this wonderful country.