



Mayor Jon Mitchell
State of the City Address
New Bedford High School
Wednesday, January 29, 2025
[remarks as prepared]

Thank you for that introduction, and many thanks to Mike O’Sullivan and the Chamber, as well as to all of today’s sponsors.

I want to acknowledge City Council President Burgo and the members of the council, school committee members, our state and federal legislative delegations, and District Attorney Quinn. I thank them for their partnership with my administration and the work they do for New Bedford every day. Many thanks also to Principal Joyce Cardoza for hosting us.

I am so pleased that my wife Ann could be with me on this occasion, especially at New Bedford High School. For the first time in ten years, none of our kids are in school here. As many of you can appreciate, an empty nest feels different, and we miss the busy-ness in the house and all the school activities. Because our work tends to fill the void they left behind, the two of us make sure we carve out time for one another. Today is one of those occasions. So we’re pleased that everyone here could join us on our lunch date.

Last January, across the street at Keith Middle School, I presented my inaugural address for the current term, and predicted it would be an eventful year on the national scene. And it certainly was. But through it all, we kept our focus on the tasks before us here in New Bedford. Despite all the sound and fury at the national level, we forged ahead.

I am proud to report to you that New Bedford today is stronger than it was a year ago. As you just saw in the video, and as you've seen with your own two eyes, there's a whole lot going on in our City.

For starters, we are rebuilding the Port of New Bedford at a blistering pace: North Terminal was completed, North Terminal II started construction, dozens of berths were dredged, municipal fishing piers underwent multi-million dollar renovations, and the New Bedford Marine Commerce Terminal was expanded. Ordinarily, the city would go years between major port projects like these. This was just last year.

Two economic anchors, New Bedford Research and Robotics and the National Offshore Wind Institute, opened their doors – again both just last year.

Meanwhile, not since the 1960s were there as many major transportation projects moving forward at once: the New Bedford-Fairhaven Bridge, the pedestrian bridge over JFK Boulevard, the new airport tower and terminal, the I-195 Viaduct, and intercity rail service between New Bedford and Boston.

More housing units were completed this year than any year in recent memory.

Parks, beaches and other outdoor spaces across the city were renovated, as millions were invested to resurface streets.

Crime continued to fall, schools are getting renovated, and the Feast was bigger than ever!

In the tumultuous year that just passed, we demonstrated again to ourselves that we can succeed when we keep our eye on the ball.

We need to keep doing that. The advantage we have at the local level is that we can operate atop a foundation of trust that has proven to be illusory at the national level in recent years.

At the local level, government officials, members of the press, and anyone with official or private authority must interact with everyone else. You can be more confident about whom you can trust when you can look them in the eye, or

if you know their friends and family, or where they live. The intimacy of interaction ensures greater accountability, but it also affords us the space to give the other guy the benefit of the doubt, rather than assuming the worst and reflexively criticizing.

My job is to get things done for you. That is my mission. That is my pledge. That is what you deserve. Our job together, as fellow citizens, is to continue the work of building the city we've envisioned:

a city that is the economic and cultural center of a distinct region;

a city with a competitive economy that offers opportunity for everyone who seeks it;

a city with a highly professional, caring, and efficient municipal government that commands the confidence of taxpayers; and

a city recognized for its physical beauty, cultural richness and the compassion of its residents, and where everyone feels like they belong.

Quality of Life

Our first line of effort is to nurture a high quality of life for our residents, both as an end in itself, and as a means of attracting investment. More often than not, a city's quality of life depends on how well city government does the job residents reasonably expect it to do.

Public Safety

A high quality of life starts with public safety. Like its counterparts in other cities, the primary challenge in our police department in recent years has been staffing shortages. We responded to this problem by offering a signing bonus for new officers, eliminating the employee residency requirement, raising compensation across the department to a more competitive level, and launching a recruiting campaign.

I am pleased to report that the number of police officers on the force is rebounding, and from a low of 199 officers last year to a projected 230 officers this spring, which is within striking distance of what we actually need. Building a modern police headquarters also will help with recruitment and retention, and we are about to hire a construction manager to move that project forward. It has been over a hundred years since the department had a purpose-built headquarters, and our officers need a facility that suits the demands of modern policing.

Despite the department's recent staffing challenges, there have been two improbable developments. The first is that crime in New Bedford continues to fall. In the last decade, violent crime is down 58%. Property crime has fallen 54%. There are many reasons for this progress, and some of it mirrors – though still exceeds – national trends. But it is fair to say it wouldn't have happened if our police officers, along with DA Quinn's office, weren't performing as well as they are.

The other major development to report is that Chief Oliveira continues to implement the reforms spelled out in the Jenson Hughes report two years ago. Comprehensive department reviews are almost always undertaken in the wake of a scandal or other crisis. And that's because reforming police departments tends to be difficult without a whole lot of external pressure. In the absence of that, and despite the evident success of declining crime rates, Chief Oliveira initiated the review. He did so for one reason: to make the department more effective still. And he's followed through with the recommendations, which have included the modernization of police policies, revamping training, restructuring senior leadership positions, adopting body worn cameras, and expanding the use of mental health clinicians, among many others.

Chief Oliveira is sowing the seeds to grow an organizational culture in the department that will make it effective in maintaining the safety of our residents, and commanding their trust, for years to come. I ask you to join me in saluting the chief for not resting on his laurels and doing what is necessary to set the department up for long-term success.

Of course, the police department doesn't work alone on the public safety front. I want to thank our fire fighters under Chief Scott Kruger, who also has implemented a series of reforms based on an outside expert review. In particular, our investments in fire prevention and education have helped reduce structure fires by 20% in the last two years. That translates directly into lives saved.

Meanwhile, Emergency Medical Services under Mike Thomas has reduced ambulance response times, and Emergency Management under Brian Nobrega has modernized the city's hurricane response plans.

Their work will continue to be complemented by the Neighborhood Task Force under John Flor and Lindsay Carter-Monteiro, and the efforts of Danny Romanowicz, Matt Silva and George Ostler and Christine Amaral, whose enforcement of the building and sanitation code has maintained accountability among absentee landlords.

The investments we've made in public safety are producing results. This includes investments in traditional equipment, but also upgrades in the way we manage data. Department heads have become more sophisticated in using data to understand how to achieve their annual goals, and the improved performance is becoming more evident.

How we manage data is now at the center of how we manage city government. With the help of Bloomberg Cities, we're in the midst of a multi-year effort to install new software across multiple departments that will make data far more accessible and easier to manage. We just hired the City's first Director of Data Management, Christina Cotsoridis, who helped launch the city's original performance management system. Her job is to help bring these systems online, enable department heads to make sound decisions based on their data, and ensure that the city is using artificial intelligence applications effectively and appropriately. And thanks to our work with Bloomberg and Johns Hopkins University, in the coming months, we will release the City's first data strategy, which will guide our work in this area for the next several years.

One might ask why does this effort around data matter? The answer is it will enable us to deliver better services and manage costs. As residents are able to see more clearly what they're getting for their tax dollars, our utilization of data will engender their confidence and trust.

Housing and Neighborhoods

A quality-of-life topic on everyone's minds of course is the rising cost of housing. It used to be only a big city issue, but since the pandemic, it has become an everywhere issue, including here in Greater New Bedford. Tenants are forking over a much larger share of their income to pay the rent than just a few years ago. Those looking to buy a home are finding fewer options at reasonable prices.

People are frustrated, and they look to government at all levels for answers. The City of New Bedford is doing its part. Consistent with the housing plan we released in 2023, we are removing the barriers to housing construction. Permitting processes have been streamlined and most of it is done on-line now. We've lifted the requirement that certain common types of housing construction be vetted by the planning board, which removes a time-consuming and sometimes uncertain step in the process. For the first time in decades, we overhauled the zoning "use table", making it much clearer which types of construction can go where. This is a big deal for housing developers.

This Spring, we will propose ordinances that will lower the minimum lot size and the number of parking spaces required in multi-family neighborhoods, making it easier still for developers to build apartments. I am grateful for the City Council's support for these initiatives, and for the painstaking efforts of Jen Carloni and her team in the Planning Department for putting them together.

Meanwhile, our housing director Josh Amaral and his team have recruited more developers, and judiciously used ARPA and other programs for the extra funding some developers need to make their projects viable. They've also pushed vacant properties back on the market.

These efforts are working. You've seen the construction out there. Still more apartments are in the pipeline. In the long run, the increase in supply will help put downward pressure on rents.

But it may not be enough because the rising cost of housing is not a problem New Bedford can solve on its own. There is a settled consensus now among economists that what's driving housing costs across America more than anything else is the inefficient use of land in suburban communities, whose zoning rules effectively allow only for single-family houses on relatively large tracts of land. This reduces the supply of places where people can live, and thereby raises the prevailing price of housing across regions.

As a recent study by MassINC confirmed, housing trends in Greater New Bedford reflect the same fundamental problem. Demand for housing in New Bedford is being driven by people moving here to find less expensive options. Most are from New Bedford's suburbs, Cape Cod and Northern Bristol County, where single family homes predominate. They are moving away from these places because they simply can't afford to buy a single-family home there, and they are crowding people here who have even less means.

For understandable reasons, suburbs in Greater New Bedford and beyond are not eager to loosen up their zoning requirements. But as I think most would agree, the solution is not for New Bedford to bear the entire burden of housing of everyone in the region who can't afford to live where they came from. Poverty in Greater New Bedford is already concentrated in the city proper, and among other implications, this has the effect of straining city services. Housing policies in the suburbs that exacerbate income segregation are neither in the interest of the city nor the region generally, nor is it good for the people who are forced to move away from places they cannot afford to live.

It may be that the state must assert more control over local zoning. The recently enacted MBTA Communities Act was a step in that general direction. I've personally never been a big fan of state measures that preempt local decision making, but there have been few signals from the towns that they intend to do their part.

Housing is a hot topic, and too often the discussion glazes over the underlying problem. My main purpose today is to reaffirm and make clear our approach. We will continue to maintain a leadership role in the region when it comes to removing impediments to new housing. And we are willing to provide the towns with technical expertise and other assistance, insofar as they are willing to act on it. At the same time, it would be irresponsible for us to allow New Bedford to be the default solution to a housing problem that extends far beyond New Bedford. I believe this balanced approach is consistent with the City's long-term interests, and we are committed to it.

Let me be clear also that we remain steadfast in our commitment to helping those who cannot find shelter, and will continue to lead the regional homeless services network, and relatedly, the Greater New Bedford Opioid Task Force, which is ably directed by Stephanie Sloan. And to the organizations who deliver basic social services to residents in need, I recognize we're entering uncertain times, and the populations who count on you are feeling even more anxious right now. I want you to know that the City will remain your steadfast partner.

Physical Condition and Appearance of the City

As our city continues to be built out, it will become more important to remain resolute in maintaining the standards of condition and appearance of our public spaces. Our residents deserve to live in a clean city with well-designed and visually appealing public spaces and reliable infrastructure. Last year we published a Standard of Appearance for the Public Realm, which has served as a foundation for our efforts to keep New Bedford looking great.

Streets are the public spaces people experience the most. For decades, the city did not systematically invest in them. Maintenance was often deferred, and because street surfaces can take years to deteriorate, no one noticed in the short run. But eventually, we all noticed that many streets had fallen into bad shape. The renewed efforts by private utilities to replace their pipelines actually made

things more difficult. Every time they dug up the road and patched it over, the city inevitably would be saddled with the additional costs of repaving it the right way.

So we've been doing something about it. We've increased the City's annual local commitment to road maintenance from zero to \$3 million. And we require private utilities to cover their work the right way. We're still playing catch up, but steadily, these measures are making a difference, and we need to stick with them.

We've also invested tens of millions of dollars to make sure that the city's drinking water is safe and affordable. We're on track to replace the City's remaining lead service lines in the next four years, well ahead of the schedule established by EPA regulations. In 2023, the City began work on some \$46 million in wastewater projects, and an additional \$96 million will begin this year, which help us reduce stormwater discharges into Buzzards Bay and make our city more resilient to flooding. A city's infrastructure is a vast machine, and Jamie Ponte and his team at DPI do a terrific job in keeping it running smoothly.

Well-kept parks are essential to neighborhood well-being. That's why we've been investing heavily in them, too. The list is long, but it includes the construction of the City's first regulation size soccer field at Dias Field, extensive stormwater improvements at Buttonwood and Brooklawn Parks, a complete redesign of Ashley Park, and the reconstruction of the West Beach Bath House. And again – that was just this past year.

We also just planted our 5,000th street tree in the past decade. We've embraced the idea that planting street trees is one of the most cost-effective ways to elevate neighborhood quality of life as trees help cool houses, slow cars, clean the air, beautify neighborhoods, and raise property values. We hired experts to catalogue our trees, and draft a comprehensive maintenance plan, which we will soon publish. It will include an interactive map available on the City's website that will allow you to look at information about each of the 12,000 street trees in the city – which is pretty cool.

A City that looks great is one that proclaims for everyone that it cares about itself. City government has a foundational role to play in maintaining the spaces we all share, but each of us can help.

To make it easier for residents to contribute, we will be rolling out a new mobile app called NBConnected, which will expand services available at residents' finger tips. It'll also allow you to pay certain bills online, apply for permits, and pay for parking. You'll still be welcome to visit us at City Hall, but you'll be able to do much of your business with city government in the palm of your hand.

Finances

None of what City government does is possible if we can't pay our bills. We are proud that we achieved and maintained the highest bond rating in the City's history, but money remains tight. We've made cuts, and City government is smaller and more efficient than it was ten years ago, but it's not enough to close the gap in the long run.

The drivers of our budget are the rising cost of employee pensions and healthcare, and minimum school spending requirements. All of them are largely driven by state policy mandates, and are projected to rise over the next several years.

Meanwhile, the amount of state aid for municipal services and road reconstruction has not rebounded from their inflation-adjusted levels before the 2008 financial crisis. In fact, if the level of general purpose state aid had kept up with inflation since then, it would have had an enormously positive impact on the City's finances.

Until the state changes those policies, our finances remain in an ever-tightening vice. The cuts made during the last two budget seasons leave little wiggle room in the budget. I have asked Bob Ekstrom, our highly experienced CFO, to come up with ideas to reduce spending. He has been able to help manage our way to a balanced budget, but it has not been easy. There are steps we're taking.

First, as I noted earlier, our city government is becoming even more efficient because we are more sophisticated in using data. The recent investments in new software and rearrangements to staffing will make city government far more cost-effective in the long run.

Second, opportunities to grow the city's tax base are materializing. This includes the zoning changes I mentioned, which will allow for more housing construction. The development of the Advanced Manufacturing Campus on Hathway Road likewise will open up significant opportunities for commercial development. We also spent millions of ARPA dollars to rehabilitate vacant properties so we can get back on the tax rolls.

These efforts will help, and I am committed to working with the Council to find still more opportunities to relieve pressure on the city's finances. For starters, I will resubmit to the council a proposal to adopt a state law that allows a neutral arbitrator to resolve disagreements over health insurance between employee unions and the City. It is a fair measure to promote accountability, and it has been adopted by nearly every city and town in Southeastern Massachusetts.

The Council has rejected the measure before, but the reality is that health care is a \$50 million item in our budget and getting bigger fast. I urge the Council to give this proposal a thorough airing this time, so that everyone can understand that we can get a better handle on the long-term cost of healthcare without compromising the quality of coverage our employees enjoy.

Schools

Central to our city's quality of life is our ability to offer our city's children pathways to opportunity through our public schools.

The New Bedford Public Schools are in a very different place than when the state placed the district under monitoring in 2011. In the last decade, there have been fundamental changes in the way it does business. It has become clearer in its purpose, transparent in its use of public funds, more accountable to parents, and focused on what matters, which is teaching and learning in every classroom.

Like virtually every school district, we hit a wall during the pandemic. And the reality is that it has taken us longer than we anticipated to regain the momentum we had beforehand because the learning loss, student anxiety, and chronic absenteeism – all problems faced by schools across the country – have

been more acute here. Graduation rates have remained far higher than they were ten years ago, but student academic growth needs to accelerate.

Superintendent O’Leary is very clear about this, and doesn’t allow anyone to use the pandemic as a handy excuse. He knows we owe our students more than that. He along with Deputy Superintendent Darcy Aungst have put classroom instruction at the forefront of their efforts, and there is a heightened level of accountability across the system. The School Committee’s Academic Achievement Subcommittee back-stops this work by creating a public forum in which principals are expected to account for the results in their schools.

Although schools are gaining traction at different rates, some are really shining. Six months ago, a leading national think tank, Education Reform Now, surveyed America’s schools to discover why some were driving academic achievement despite significant challenges. Out of thousands of schools in Massachusetts, the study identified six that were exceeding expectations in both English and Math; two of those six were in New Bedford, the Taylor and Brooks Elementary Schools, which are led by two exceptional principals, Dr. Rafaela DeFiguerido Spence and Jen Medeiros. They are proof positive that strong principal leadership matters.

Progress across the board will depend in part on reducing the number of students who are chronically absent. Principals have been bending over backwards to make schools a welcoming place, and the school department has been going directly to homes to help families overcome barriers to school attendance. It’s made a difference; all of the City’s elementary schools are on track this year to return to pre-pandemic rates of attendance.

But there’s still work to be done in the higher grades. When you get right down to it, it’s the parents’ job to ensure their kids are in school. So to the parents of chronically absent students, do your child a favor: don’t accept their excuses to skip school. I’m not discounting the anxiety that many children are experiencing these days. It’s a real thing, but more often than not, the best way to deal with school anxiety is to show up.

One more good reason to go to school is that the school buildings themselves look better than they have in a long time. Because we made a decision to use federal relief funds primarily to fix up school facilities, and because the school district has vastly improved its capacity to manage capital projects, there is more construction in the district now than in the last fifty years. Nearly every school in the district older than twenty years has undergone or will soon undergo a major facility renovation.

Most of them are internal, such as heating systems and roofs, some are more conspicuous. For instance, last Spring we opened the new state-of-the-art field hockey and lacrosse field (just outside that door), and we built new handicap accessible playgrounds at three elementary schools. This year, we will break ground on the new Congdon-Devalles Elementary School, open the new central kitchen and school-based health center, and begin the feasibility work for a new elementary school in the North End to replace the Ashley and Swift schools.

I wish to note that we are proud of the work being done at the city's two major public high schools. Over at Voc-Tech, under Mike Watson's steady hand, we've seen continued growth in test scores, and key investments in the school's physical plant. The place looks great, and it is well-suited for the important work of preparing students for the evolving needs of the region's employers. This includes cutting-edge disciplines such as robotics, where Voc-Tech excels. You've no doubt heard of the success Voc-Tech has had in sports in recent years, but you also need to know that its students have been placing at the top of national robotics competitions.

Here at New Bedford High School, we've seen tremendous success recently in the admission of students to America's most competitive colleges. The passing rate on Advanced Placement tests remains strong, and the participation rate in advanced courses is the highest it has ever been. There is a commitment to academic rigor here. As parents of three recent NBHS graduates, Ann and I are pleased to share with you our observation that NBHS prepared our daughters well for the demands of college coursework.

As mayor, I want to thank the teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals for their commitment to activating the potential of every student in New Bedford.

Economic Competitiveness

No city can sustain itself in the long run if it isn't economically competitive. We in Greater New Bedford are competing in a global economy for investment and jobs, and if we don't compete effectively, they will go elsewhere, as our city has come to realize the hard way over the years.

The work of economic development tends to be more challenging for cities like ours that are not part of a major metropolitan area, where the lion's share of capital in America has gravitated in the last few decades. We don't have the luxury of simply plodding along and reacting to development proposals as they come in the door, like manna from Heaven. In contrast, we've had to hustle.

But determination alone isn't enough. You need a clear and sound strategy. Ours has been grounded in a well-established economic development theory, pioneered most notably by Professor Michael Porter of the Harvard Business School, who emphasized that regional economic development efforts "must embrace the pursuit of competitive advantage and specialization, rather than attempt to imitate exactly what is present in other locations. This requires building on local differences and sources of uniqueness where possible, turning them into strengths."

When it comes to strengthening our economy, we don't chase fads or gimmicks. We build on what we already do well. While we gladly respond to the needs of any business that seeks our help, our emphasis has been on those sectors that have developed around locational advantages. As the song goes, we accentuate the positive.

In New Bedford, more than anything else, that means our maritime economy. The Port of New Bedford generates over \$11 billion in annual economic output and supports over 6,700 jobs. Its success is predicated on a set of geographic, workforce, and infrastructure advantages.

Our work has been to build on this foundation by enhancing these advantages so businesses can continue to innovate, invest and grow. The results have been considerable. In the last decade, over \$1.2 billion of new port infrastructure construction and dredging has been completed or is about to be underway – and I want to thank our state and federal delegation for supporting the availability of funds in a number of those projects. The port also has launched the first major American offshore wind project; new maritime businesses have set up shop while countless others have grown; and the port continues to be America’s leader in fishing and seafood processing.

We’ve helped establish new institutions to promote maritime competitiveness and innovation, including the New Bedford Ocean Cluster, The Quest, New Bedford Research and Robotics, the National Offshore Wind Institute, the National Coalition of Fishing Communities, and soon the MassCEC’s Ocean Energy Innovation Center, while the New Bedford Port Authority has strengthened its capacity to manage the operation and development of the Port.

Looking ahead I see more opportunity. New Bedford is no longer a one industry port. Although commercial fishing remains our primary industry, our work in the years ahead must be aimed at enabling every maritime industry to thrive here, including fishing, offshore wind, marine technology, construction and logistics, cruise lines, cargo, aquaculture, recreational boating, and tourism.

I also note that the continued development of our maritime sector can be facilitated by the progress of the offshore wind industry. Despite recent federal policy changes, the industry is here to stay in the U.S. Energy demand is growing, especially in the new A.I. era. Our country will need to utilize every new megawatt it can generate.

Wind projects must of course be properly sited, so as to avoid sensitive fishing areas, such as those along the Mid-Atlantic. We look forward to discussions with the new administration in Washington about how the industry can continue to be built responsibly. One project that is moving forward despite countless hurdles is Vineyard Wind, which continues to contribute to New

Bedford's economy. I wish to salute the Vineyard Wind team, along with Klaus Møeller and Alicia Barton from Vineyard Offshore, for their partnership.

Off the Waterfront

Our effort to support a vibrant, diversified and competitive economy of course is hardly limited to the waterfront.

As many of you here can attest, Greater New Bedford has sizeable and successful manufacturing, cultural, health care and other sectors. In general, they are all on solid financial ground, benefitting in part from the health of the national economy.

I believe there are more opportunities for New Bedford's manufacturing sector. The reshoring of factories to the United States appears to be continuing. With the prospect of an Advanced Manufacturing Campus on Hathway Road (and I want to thank the Council for their support of that important project), with new training programs at Voc-Tech, the reinstatement of the New Bedford Redevelopment Authority, and improvements in infrastructure across the city, we are in a better position to expand manufacturing than in a long time. To capture this moment, I am announcing that the New Bedford Economic Development Council, under the skillful leadership of Derek Santos, will develop a road map for manufacturing growth. We in New Bedford have a long, rich history of making things, and that we will continue to do.

One of the main reasons why New Bedford is the coolest place in America is our arts and cultural sector. It is a sizeable facet of our economy, generating over \$300 million annually. And it's an exciting time right now. The Zeiterion Performing Arts Center is undergoing a \$35 million expansion and will be back open looking better than ever by this time next year. The Whaling Museum likewise is building a new \$30 million facility to expand its arts exhibits, while the Art Museum will be expanding to the second floor of its building, ultimately doubling its exhibit space.

The Zoo, the Rotch-Jones-Duff House, the James Arnold Mansion and the Madeiran Heritage Museum all recently completed major renovations. With the guidance of our creative strategist Margo Saulnier, we've invested over a million dollars in the last two years in seed funding for independent artists of every kind.

I hasten to note that many of these investments were made possible by funding from the American Rescue Plan Act. Our main goal with ARPA funds was to encourage private investors for housing and other projects to compete for funding by ponying up their own funds, and to use ARPA dollars to match grants from the federal and state governments. That way, we could turn our allotment of ARPA funds into a much larger infusion into our local economy.

Now that the ARPA funds are fully committed, I'm proud to say that all together our \$82 million ARPA allotment will have leveraged an additional \$270 million in outside funding. I am grateful for the work of our federal delegation which made the funding possible, and for the work of our City team, most especially Christina Connelly, Jessica Bailey and Kate Miller for their skillful management of the funds.

I also appreciate what's happening in our health sector, which is a major, though less heralded facet of our regional economy. We have many important players, and much has happened in the last year. Hawthorn Medical under J.P. Tracey's leadership is now on more solid ground after the breakup of Steward Healthcare, and under Cheryl Bartlett, the Greater New Bedford Health Center is expanding its important role as a leading provider of primary care services. I want to give a special shout out to Dave McCreedy, who as CEO of Southcoast Health, has steered Greater New Bedford's leading healthcare provider and largest employer, to greater stability and a more promising future. Dave, we're all glad you're at the helm.

The New Bedford Regeneration Committee, led by Tony Sapienza and Maureen Armstrong, working with my administration, is now developing a overarching economic development strategy this year that touches on all of these sectors. It will also address the other key elements of a thriving regional economy: namely the needs to support small business activation and growth,

strengthen anchor institutions and recruit new ones, and continue to build up the downtown, the region's economic and cultural epicenter. This plan will point the way forward for our economy for the next decade.

Connection to Place

Effective government is necessary, but not nearly enough for a city to thrive. A city sustains itself in the long run through the combined works of its people. Government is often the vessel of collective effort, but not always. The most successful cities are the ones in which private actors – residents, businesses, and associations – find ways to contribute directly to the greater good, through their time, talent or treasure, not to serve themselves, but simply to make their city a better place.

For everyone who professes a love of New Bedford – and if you are here or listening today, you surely are in the club – there are many sources of inspiration in plain sight.

It's the neighborhood groups that come together to work on the most local of issues; it's the groups that organize turkey drives at Thanksgiving; it's those who are raising their hand to support funding for the Herman Melville statue; it's all the volunteers who show up at house fires to assist displaced families; and it's the youth sports league coaches who stick with the program long after their own kids age out. There are many more examples. Whether it's out of pride, generosity, duty or love, or all of the above, when people step up, and government plays a complementary role, great things can happen.

I want to pay tribute today to one of New Bedford's most successful examples of civic initiative.

This year marks twenty years that the volunteers at Operation Clean Sweep have been making our city cleaner and brighter. One Saturday morning a month from April to September, they mobilize a team to fan out across a section of the city to pick up litter.

One might ask, who in their right mind would decide to squander a beautiful Saturday in the summer to go pick up garbage? They don't get paid; they're not trying to impress anyone; and they don't let themselves say, let someone else do it. They take it upon themselves to get up and do it because they love New Bedford. Over the last twenty years, Operation Clean Sweep has logged some 31,000 volunteer hours, and removed 249,000 pounds of litter from city streets and public spaces. That's trash none of us have to look at any more.

I want to thank the founder of Operation Clean Sweep, Lynn Coish, and the current president, Russ Wotton, for setting a sterling example of how love of place can translate directly into tangible benefits for everyone. You have honored us by your works.

Lynn, Russ and the volunteers remind us all that when you love where you live, and act on that love, you can make it an even better place, and improve yourself in some small way, too.

Thank you, and God Bless the City of New Bedford.