



## **Mayor Daniel Rivera - Lawrence State of the City**

**February 2, 2016** - Good evening, I will be making some remarks about the State of our City, but I want to draw your attention to the PowerPoint presentation that we and the department head put together. It gives more details about the departments and activities city-wide over the last year and I encourage you to read it.

Council President, City Councilors, elected officials and fellow Lawrencians. I stand before you tonight to tell you that the State of our City is strong. It is strong today even though this year greeted us with seven feet of snow and multiple blizzards that cost us \$3M of our reserves to clean up. Strong in the face of two failed recall efforts. Strong even though Polartec and Showcase Cinemas, two businesses that were strong during my childhood, closed and are poised to leave the City.

You may then say, “Why would you say that the State of our City is strong?” It is strong because in light of all this and many other things, we are safer, stronger, better organized and frankly more stable than we have been in many years. Today no one asks, “Will Lawrence pass a budget on time?” “Will Lawrence’s budget be balanced?” “Can Lawrence make its payroll?” No one is asking that. The bond markets are looking at Lawrence more favorably. They do not wonder, “Will Lawrence be able to pay its debt?” Our politics are harsh and our opinions and emotions run high. But at the end of the day this community makes the right decisions. I am a product of those decisions. This council is a product of those decisions. No one can ask, “Are all Lawrence inspectors certified?” People are not asking these questions because for six years we have passed on time and balanced budgets. Because we have received three credit rating bumps in two years, because every inspector in the Lawrence Inspectional Services Department is certified by the State for their job. We are strong enough that a major Hollywood motion picture was shot here and gave the City much positive publicity and effect, and a \$330,000 boost in the economy isn’t bad either.

Tonight, I will be highlighting some of the city’s accomplishments with regards to our fiscal state, public safety, economic development and our public schools.

Fiscally, we are better off than we have ever been; receiving three credit rating increases in just two years with a positive outlook, two of those increases from different agencies in this last year alone. The most recent upgrade coming from S&P, moving the city from an A- rating to an A. Our free cash has a surplus of \$7M. Also, our tax lien collections are up and surpass prior years. These are past year delinquent taxes; we have collected \$950,000 in the first six months of FY16 vs. \$481,000 for the first six months of FY15, an increase of 100%. The past year, the City Council approved funding to hire outside counsel for the collection of back taxes through tax title. That effort was given strategically 500 Tax Title cases, and we have collected \$176,000 in the first 60 days alone.

In this New Year, not only will the budget be balanced for a seventh time, but it will also have its first Capital Improvement Plan in a generation. It will also have a plan for serious financial policies that will keep Lawrence out of financial problems regardless of who is our Mayor or who our City Councilors are. I want to thank our Finance Director Mark Ianello and his team for this.

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Two years ago, I ran on the pledge to make Lawrence safer. Today, the city is safer than it was in 2013. I know we will not totally be safe until we all feel safe, but we are heading in the right direction. In the two years that I have been Mayor, overall crime is down 17.3% and 13% of that decrease was just this past year. What does 17.3% decrease in crime look and feel like? There were 422 less crimes; overall that is 422 less victims. Almost 200 less people had their car stolen in that time, the lowest number stolen since 2009. There were 154 less robberies and residential burglaries. Residential burglaries are the lowest they have been in 12 years! Just in 2015 we had a 19% reduction in violent crime. Incidents of crime are going down and we are policing smarter and we have more feet on the street. Today, on average, we have 10-11 police officers on patrol per shift. That is up from the 6 we heard about in the time before my administration. Since we are making serious headway on crime, we are going to continue to invest in public safety and the FY17 budget that I will send you will have another 5 net new police officers. Once these men and women are on the street our administration will have hired 15 net new police officers to our police department. We are able to do this with the help of our State delegation, Senator Barbara L'Italien, Representative Marcos Devers, Representative Frank Moran and Representative Diana Dizoglio. Thank you for bringing the resources that allows us to get the staffing up to where it needs to be.

We have great police officers on our force and I am proud of our men and women who serve us on the Lawrence Police Department. As we grow the total number of police officers we must be careful not to put ourselves in the same situation as Ferguson, MO and Baltimore, MD, where the divide between who is policing the streets and those who depend on that service grows with a lack of trust, a lack of understanding and a lack of respect. To that end, the Human Resources Division of the Commonwealth, through Civil Service, has given us the ok to pick the next seven officers from a list made up of bilingual candidates. I want to thank our Personnel Director Frank Bonet for his help with this. As Chief Fitzpatrick says, this is not about quotas, this is about common sense. These are candidates that still have to pass a psychological exam, a physical aptitude test and a rigorous background check. The task of policing in modern urban America is not easy and diversifying the department is something that makes the police jobs safer and easier and the citizens can expect a better service. I do want to take the time to thank our new Chief of Police James Fitzpatrick, that you voted for unanimously. The reduction in crime, along with the move to bring balance to the hiring in the department is a testament to his leadership. The partnership that I have formed with Chief Fitzpatrick is crucial for the safety of the community.

We also hired, and you unanimously voted in a new Fire Chief in Brian Moriarty. Chief Moriarty has hit the ground running. Not only bringing leadership and experience to the department working with his men and women to fight many fires and capturing an arsonist, but Chief Moriarty also found a budget neutral way to open the Bailey Street Fire Station for the first time in five years. Thank you Chief Moriarty.

Making sure crime was going down and people were safe was just a portion of what we have focused on in the last year. Our administration has been hard at work on Economic Development. In 2015, the city saw record private investment with over \$84M worth of permits pulled up from \$51M in 2014. This is a clear sign that private developers and businesses see opportunity in the city. Also, four mills saw major redevelopment. New Balance invested over \$3M to rehab their entire, mostly vacant 4<sup>th</sup> floor, to additional office and production space that will make New Balance's investment in our City since I have

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been Mayor close to \$7.5M. We also saw Phase 2 of LoftFive50 completed, adding over 60 units of new housing at the end of Broadway. Pacific Mills has been transformed into 81 units of loft-style market rate apartments with more to come. I can't forget about all of the work being done by Sal Lupoli and his team at the Riverwalk Complex, continuing to grow jobs and getting the balance of the housing currently at Monarch on the Merrimack back on track. Lastly, the Duck Mill will soon see 71 units of additional housing and will be online this year, thanks to the work of Lawrence Community Works.

Our administration has also been hard at work leveraging State and Federal funding to support development activity. Over the last two years, the city was awarded close to \$16M in development dollars that have allowed us to make infrastructure improvements that supports both private investment and improves traffic flow, while making our streets safer from the Riverwalk to La Fruteria parking area near the Manchester Street Park. We also secured a \$175k grant to fund a first in a generation Urban Renewal Plan that will guide our decision making and uncover the future development opportunities in our city. This will help Lawrence to not only make good planning and development decisions; it will help us fend off bad developers who may prey on our city. Lawrence General Hospital, the city's largest employer, continues to be a world class health care facility. They are expanding operations and adding a new surgical wing worth over \$50M, providing the patient population of our City and this region with access to high quality care. We have begun moving the needle on sites that have long been seen as impossible to redevelop, like the Merrimack Paper site where we were able to work with the EPA to fund a \$2M cleanup of asbestos and other hazardous material. Today, for the first time in a generation, the city and not some unknown third party, has control of the Tomarbello site on Marston Street. This is clearly the first step of many to redevelop what is today a large eyesore and problem for the neighborhood. I want to thank our City Planner Theresa Park and her Planning and Development staff for all of their hard work. As we move forward in the redevelopment of that site and others like it, we will apply three guiding principles of our Economic Development strategy: Will it grow jobs for people in Lawrence? Will it negatively affect the neighborhood around the site? Will it improve the brand or the general perception of the city? If any development does not support those three principles, we will not support it.

Our schools continue to improve under the leadership of Superintendent Jeff Riley, Frank McLaughlin of the teachers union, teachers, parents and students. They have improved so much so that the New York Times wrote an editorial, an EDITORIAL, not a news story, about our schools. The editorial used the progress in Lawrence Public Schools as a model for fixing public school problems nationally. The progress at the schools can also be seen in the 4 new schools receiving Level 1 status, bringing the total city-wide to 7 Level 1 schools. The graduation rate has increased five straight years and our dropout rate is at its lowest since the state began tracking. We also saw the first steps in high school redesign, including the Ninth Grade Academy and the city's first ever accelerated studies program, Abbott Lawrence Academy. The schools are performing so well that they were also mentioned in Governor Baker's State of the Commonwealth address. I want to reiterate something that I have said to you many times. We will need to build new schools and you will have before you this year or early next year a plan to help finance new school construction and current school rehabilitation. Make no mistake, we will need to do that together, and we will need to do it soon.

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Now, much has been said about lawsuits against the city and me personally. All I want to say to you is that we are trying to reform this City's Government. We are constantly changing or addressing the mistakes of the past. These are all fights that we must have for the betterment of our city. We must fight them because not to is to concede our fiduciary and legal responsibility. Be clear, we will not win all those fights, but I will say that since I have been Mayor we have won a majority of claims brought against us. When we have lost, we have gotten into agreements that mitigate the losses and have the best result for the city. We were elected to implement these reforms and we will continue to fight these fights because it's one of the ways we will make Lawrence better.

Last year I spoke about another thing that we have to tend to in order to ensure our city remains strong; Lawrence's reputation. Even with the black mark that 2 recalls have brought to our community, with your help, we have been able to change how we feel about ourselves, how our neighbors feel about us and how our State and Federal leaders feel about us. We continue to have countless positive news articles in our local daily and weekly papers. We have had many positive stories in Boston print media, not to mention the numerous positive television stories about the progress we are making here including a visit from Fox 25's Zip Trip. The people of Lawrence have begun to also believe that we can be, and that if we work hard together we will be, a better Lawrence.

State leaders now think of Lawrence as a place to showcase their agendas and programs. Governor Baker, Senate President Rosenberg and Speaker DeLeo, US Senators Elizabeth Warren and Ed Markey and our very own Congresswoman Niki Tsongas are all anxious to help us overcome our problems. Our neighboring communities are partnering with us transportation, economic development and fighting crime. I will say again; today, people are talking about Lawrence. From Boston to Washington, from Andover to Haverhill, Lowell to Newburyport, people are talking about Lawrence. Not in those hushed, shameful, negative tones from the past. No. Today, when they talk about Lawrence they are talking about how something good is happening in Lawrence, and how possibilities abound in Lawrence. I don't want you to think for one minute that I am taking credit for all of that, for all that we have done in this last year. This is the work of our staff and department heads. Today we continue to support all the great things happening in our city for years, and we have opened up our doors and welcomed people in to see for themselves.

In the end, know that our strength does not come from the absence of challenges and problems, but from the ability to weather those problems and continue to make our city better. For all of the above and for all the work of this City Council, our School Committee, our State Representative and Senator, the volunteer members of our boards and commissions and of course the hard work of the people of Lawrence, the hope we had two years ago continues to materialize in a list of accomplishments we can all be proud of. A list of accomplishments that will let others begin to see that the state of our city is strong and that we, this council and I, and our school committee, and everyone that has a role to play will ensure it remains strong for many years to come. God Bless us and God Bless the City of Lawrence. Thank You