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ALISON M. BOUCHARD
CITY CLERK

JOINT MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL AND SCHOOL COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, MARCH 8, 2022 AT 5:30 PM

CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER, ONE GOVERNMENT CENTER

AGENDA

**The purpose of the meeting is to allow the Mayor to deliver the
State of the City Address**



Alison M. Bouchard

ADA Coordinator: Gary P. Howayeck, Esq. 508-324-2650



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FALL RIVER SCHOOL COMMITTEE 2022 FEB 24 P 12:43

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FALL RIVER, MA

Mayor Paul Coogan
Chairman

Paul Hart
Vice-Chairman

Maria Pontes
Superintendent of Schools

Kevin Aguiar
Bobby Bailey
Mimi Larrivee
Shelli Pereira
Sara Rodrigues

Debra Cabral
Administrative Assistant

NOTICE

*Joint Meeting
of the City Council and School Committee*

Tuesday, March 8, 2022
5:30PM

City Council Chamber
One Government Center
Fall River, MA 02722

Agenda

- Roll Call
- Salute to the Flag
- The purpose of the meeting is to allow the Mayor to deliver the State of the City Address
- New Business: Topics for discussion that could not reasonably be anticipated by the Chairman forty-eight (48) hours prior to the meeting
- Adjourn

Debra Cabral
Administrative Assistant

ADA Coordinator: Gary Howayeck, Esq. 508-324-2650

MAYOR PAUL COOGAN
CITY OF FALL RIVER- STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS
MARCH 9, 2022, 5:30PM

Good evening. Honorable members of the council, school committee, members of our legislative delegation, it is an honor to be with you as I deliver the 2022 State of the City address.

Thank you to the residents who are joining us here today, or tuning in from home, as we celebrate an important day for Fall River.

This is the third time I have delivered my State of the City Address. Each one has been very different. My first address, planned for March 13th, 2020, was canceled due to the beginning of the pandemic. I recorded that speech in November, in my office, without spectators.

For my second State of the City address, last March, I was able to be in the Council Chambers but, still, no residents were present.

The timing of this speech feels more hopeful. While I learned a long time ago to never be too optimistic or speak too soon, it seems as though we are slowly returning to normal.

I am here in a moment of hope, as we look towards the future. I am here to tell you that despite all we have endured as a community, Fall River has never stopped growing and working towards its very full potential.

The last two years have shown the power of what can be accomplished when we work together.

I began my time in office over 2 years ago. I have been fortunate to work with a team who show up, work hard and stay focused on improving Fall River. Some of those people are in the room with me today. I'd like to recognize our City Council, our School Committee, our state delegation- Senator Michael Rodrigues and Representatives Carole Fiola, Alan Silvia and Paul Schmid- and, of course, our City employees.

While they are not here today, I must thank our advocates in Washington- Representatives Auchincloss and Keating and Senators Warren and Markey.

In the last year we have also said farewell to some key members of our team and welcomed in a new group of leaders. We have two new Chiefs- Fire Chief Roger St Martin and Interim Police Chief Paul Gauvin. We have brought on a new Superintendent who has served the Fall River Schools for years- Maria Pontes. We have recently brought in multiple new Department Heads and filled several vacancies. I welcome City Administrator Seth Aiken, City Planner Kaitlin Young, City Engineer Dan Aguiar and head of Human Resources Nick Macolini to their new roles.

When you combine these new faces and our existing leadership, there is a renewed energy, vision and focus in City government that is exciting and full of promise.

On a personal note, I want to thank all my supporters, my family and of course- my wife Judi- for all her love and support. She is my partner and I love her.

It takes all levels of government to get things done. The waterfront is the perfect example of public and private investment working in tandem. Progress on the waterfront is being made thanks to the collaboration of municipal, state and federal government agencies, along with a number of private developers.

In several years, Fall River's waterfront area will look and feel very different, and we are confident that it will become a major economic engine for our City. I must thank the Baker-Polito administration, who have been tremendous supporters of many of our waterfront revitalization projects.

Progress is well underway with the South Coast Rail, just drive down Davol St to watch the construction of the Depot and the layover station at Weaver's Cove. As of now, construction is on pace with its originally scheduled start date. By the end of 2023, we will begin to see trains to Boston coming in and out of our station.

We will soon see the elimination of the elevated route 79 highway along Davol St. This project will improve pedestrian and vehicle access to the existing waterfront attractions while creating a new waterfront boulevard. This project will open up 1.1 million square feet- for the development of market rate housing, retail, office and restaurants. It will be advertised for bid early this Fall, construction will begin in 2023 and be completed in late 2025 or early 2026.

Our RDA has also been hard at work overseeing the construction of the City Pier. Construction on the Pier is well under way, and it will be a fantastic green space for sunset concerts, food truck festivals and family recreation. The Pier is set to open late this summer.

These investments are being reflected in the private sector. Properties along Davol St are being transformed into mixed use housing and retail developments. The Route 79 project alone is expected to bring in over \$1 billion of investment. It is hard not to get excited about the future of our waterfront.

My goal moving into this next term is to continue the development of the waterfront and to improve parking access, which is critical to the area's growth. We are in the early stages of a plan to relocate the State's salt sheds from under the Braga bridge to the US Bedding facility (formerly Sam's Club) on Brayton Ave. I must thank Jake Auchincloss for his support on this, as he's been advocating for funding for this project in DC.

Our waterfront is not only a magnet for tourism and new development, it is also soon to be the site of a bustling new industry in Fall River. In December, Mayflower Wind was awarded a 400 megawatt power purchase agreement by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, allowing them to build an Operations & Maintenance Base at the former Borden– Remington Complex. With this comes tremendous investment in training, education and long-term job growth in a new economic sector.

While many think that Fall River has an industrial **PAST**, we also have a strong industrial **PRESENT and future**. Industrial Park is near capacity, hosting a well-rounded group of tenants ranging from textile manufacturing to pharmaceutical development to cold storage for seafood.

Covid changed the way people purchase goods. More online shopping means more distribution facilities. The demand for industrial property has dramatically increased, leaving our remaining parcels in the technology park in high demand. We are taking advantage of this unique moment in time and can expect several exciting, new tenants in the technology park in the coming years– bringing more high paying jobs with them.

On a smaller scale, exciting franchises, entrepreneurs and private investors are choosing Fall River. We are working with a developer to transform the vacant Bank St armory into an events center. After sitting unoccupied for 23 years, the former BCC building on Durfee St will soon be rebranded as the Creative Class building- a mixed use project with both market rate housing and affordable artists lofts. Similar developments can be found along South Main St, Fourth St and 3rd Street, including the Women's Garment Workers Union building right across the street from us today.

These are just a few examples of a wide scale revitalization that is happening in our downtown, where historic, long-abandoned properties are being redeveloped for mixed-use housing and retail. This will bring in a much needed influx of new and old residents with more spending power- which is key to the strength of our small businesses. In the coming years, residents should expect new life being breathed into our Main St and surrounding areas.

Residents and investors alike are transforming our housing stock- from projects as small as single family homes to renovations of our largest mills. Since my time in office began, the City has generated well over \$1 million in revenue from building permits— and our inventory of abandoned properties has been significantly reduced.

This is all symbolic of one major fact- Fall River is poised for a great economic future. I have to thank the amazing group of local business leaders and developers who are behind many of these projects. **As mayor, I will continue to do all I can to bring new and existing business owners and investors to the table so that we can continue this momentum. Another goal of ours is to translate more of this success into the Flint and Pleasant Street area. As we know, the Pleasant Street corridor struggles with a high number of vacant and blighted storefronts.**

Under the guidance of the Redevelopment Authority, we recently began work on an Urban Renewal Plan for the Flint, which will allow us to make consistent, long-term plans. We began this process last month by assembling a group of stakeholders including neighborhood leaders, area business owners, local developers and City officials. We are working with Emily Ennis, who worked with the City on our two previous Urban Renewal Plans, and her team of consultants to identify strategies to stabilize and improve the neighborhood.

Whether it is downtown, the Flint or the waterfront, we are constantly working as a City to make sure that small business owners, developers and entrepreneurs know we are “Open for Business”.

Part of our growth and economic development means making major infrastructure improvements that have been put off for far too long.

We have made huge investments into streets and sidewalks and will continue to do so. Major roadways like Robeson, President Ave, Stafford Road and Broadway have been transformed. However, we have a long way to go. **Presentable streets, free of litter and potholes, have been and will continue to be a top priority.**

We will be repairing a number of streets through a major Water Department project that we funded through ARPA. Through an initial investment of over \$8 million, the Water Department will replace 17,000 ft of water main and dozens of lead services, before reconstructing the affected streets and sidewalks.

In all corners of Fall River, our parks and recreational areas have seen massive improvements. We have repaired sidewalks at North and Kennedy. New playgrounds have been opened at Desmarais Park and the Paul Poulos Park on Aetna St.

Through grant funding, we are beginning renovations to the Kathy Assad Tot lot off Pleasant St and making major repairs to North Park. Plans are underway to repair the tennis courts at Kennedy Park, and **my goal is to complete other projects at Kennedy- including a splash pad and renovations to the skating rink, which we brought back to life during the coldest days of this winter. Residents of all ages deserve safe, respectable spaces where they can get active and enjoy themselves.**

Today, I am pleased to announce two more allocations from our ARPA Advisory Panel that will benefit our parks. First, we will be dedicating \$60,000 over the next two years to begin the Kennedy Park Renovation Project. Second, we will be allocating \$44,000 to carry out renovations to the Skate parks at Lafayette, Abbot Court and North Park. These facilities are overdue for repair and we are excited to make them usable to residents again.

Of course, infrastructure and economic development mean nothing if our residents' needs are not met. That is why I am proud to work with our outstanding Public Safety team, including Fire Chief Roger St Martin and Acting Police Chief Paul Gauvin, to make continued investments into our emergency services. Despite national trends of staffing shortages and high crime rates, Fall River has seen a decrease in many areas of crime. **I will continue to do all I can to ensure our first responders have the tools required to meet our community's needs. Specifically, we plan to soon boost our inventory of fire trucks with new pieces through grant funding, and we will continue to strategize the use of ARPA funds to invest in our Police, Fire and Emergency Services departments.**

We have worked with Police, Fire and EMS and a number of service providers to take a well-rounded approach to addiction and homelessness. We have a full-time street outreach worker embedded in the Police Department, and all Fire stations are "Safe Stations", where those battling addiction can go to get the help they need.

Going into this next term, as we grapple with the impact of the pandemic on mental health, addiction and homelessness, we will continue to work together as a community and pursue innovative solutions. Fall River is also now leading this fight on a national scale through a Federal "SAMSHA" grant. This \$2 Million grant has allowed us to expand the work of our outreach workers while providing crucial training on mental health and narcotic use to Police, Fire and EMS in Fall River and surrounding communities. We will soon have 3 more outreach workers in the Police Department to address these issues.

Another priority of mine has been, and will continue to be, expanding resources for our veteran population. Over the last two years, we have made substantial investments in housing and job training programs for veterans. We must continue to support our veteran community. One of the highlights of my first term was the dedication of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall. I must commend the Committee who made the park and wall come to life. This project was the perfect example of a collaborative effort that brought something truly remarkable to Fall River.

Another key to strengthening our community has been working with a diverse group of citizens and organizations to bring positive events and activities back to our City. I am so proud of how the community came together in 2021 to provide residents with accessible events and programs- including free youth sports leagues, drive-in movies and live music in our parks. **I look forward to bringing these events back, expanding them, adding new ones and finding other ways to improve quality of life in our neighborhoods. We recently purchased a "Book Mobile", a mobile library which will bring books and programming directly to senior living facilities, neighborhood parks and more.**

A few minutes ago, I mentioned two new ARPA allocations related to the parks. Last week we also approved another ARPA project related to recreation and support for our youth.

We will be investing in a pilot program to place a social worker at the Fall River Boys & Girls Club to work with children and their families, and to help them access the support and services they need. As our youth emerge from the pandemic, it is more important than ever to have positive outlets in our community.

Of course, that work is done first in our schools. I am proud of the Fall River Public Schools community for their response to the pandemic. Their work expanded from just teaching to also ensuring that students had the resources they needed to succeed, like

computers, wifi or even meals. I want to take a moment to thank the City's educators for all they have done for our students and families.

We began this school year on a high note, with the opening of the new, state of the art Durfee. **Now, our focus must be on addressing the educational and social-emotional needs of our students after a challenging few years. We must continue our focus on strengthening and standardizing our curriculum so that it matches the high quality of our buildings and facilities.**

Additional funding through the Student opportunity Act gives us an unprecedented opportunity to invest in more counselors, teachers, support staff and resources for our students. Beyond Fall River Public Schools, Diman is also taking the first steps to pursue a new facility to better prepare our vocational workforce.

I am honored to serve Fall River at this truly pivotal time in our history. We now have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to address major quality of life issues through ARPA funding. Upon learning of the funding, we assembled an advisory panel made up of community members, business leaders, non-profits and City officials. We held public forums, where residents provided thoughtful input on how to utilize ARPA money.

In late October, we announced our first round of ARPA allocations.

We invested in the massive water main replacement project that I discussed earlier. We also allocated nearly half a million dollars to the Police Department for increased manpower and new equipment- including 50 security cameras, 20 radar speed displays and five new police cruisers. We also provided funding for the Fall River Holiday Parade to mitigate their fundraising challenges and ensure that the parade, which draws many people to the area, could continue in 2021.

A few months ago, we announced the second round of allocations.

As with the first round of funding, we made significant investments to public safety. We are investing nearly \$300,000 into a new ambulance for our EMS department. Nearly \$600,000 is going to our police department for crime prevention training and equipment. A significant piece of funding will go towards much needed computer and printer systems within police cruisers.

Another major project will be a \$4 million investment to complete the next phase of the Alfred J Lima Queuechan Rail Trail project. This project will expand the trail, which has

become a hub for walkers, bikers and families looking for outdoor recreation. With ARPA funding, we have the perfect opportunity to invest in one-time projects that will benefit residents for decades to come. Another project through our Planning Department will be a rehabilitation of the Jerry Lawton Plaza on South Main street, which will impact downtown development and improve walkability in the area.

Last but certainly not least, we rolled out a Small Business Grant Assistance program, providing over three and a quarter million dollars to Fall River's small businesses financially impacted by COVID-19. Small businesses are the backbone of our community, and this grant program gives us another tool to help them withstand the economic strain of the pandemic.

ARPA aside, Fall River is in a very strong financial position. As I mentioned, the pace of investment and development in Fall River was moving quickly before the pandemic, and it hardly slowed during it. With or without this added federal funding, we have been on track for a solid economic future.

We currently have over \$7.1 million in our stabilization fund and over \$1.6 million in our surplus revenue, or "free cash" account. Our Moodys credit rating is A3. Our enhanced rating backed by the Commonwealth is Aa2.

We predict that revenue and credit ratings will remain at this level for the foreseeable future. This is due to the careful planning and hard work of our finance team over the last several years.

Looking to the future, I look forward to working closely with the City Council, and the School Committee, to ensure that we shape a solid City budget for Fiscal Year 2023. Our unified goal will be to craft a budget that provides residents the services they deserve and adequately funds our public safety. As we face national trends of inflation and shortages, it is also our obligation to keep the burden of rising costs off of our residents as best we can— so that hard working families can continue to thrive in Fall River.

I will finish this speech with this final message.

Fall River still has a whole host of serious challenges, and we will continue to work hard every single day- and often on nights or weekends- to fix them.

However, the State of the City is very, very strong. We are poised for a renaissance. New businesses, industries and investors are choosing Fall River to put down their

roots— bringing well paying jobs that will sustain our residents for years to come. Our streets and recreational spaces are, one by one, being improved so that we may all live in a City we are proud of. Our recovery from decades of economic trouble and the impact of the pandemic is happening before our very eyes. I urge you all to trust in a bright tomorrow for Fall River and to treat others with dignity and respect.

As we go forward, I once again promise that I will continue to work hard, act out of my deep love for this City and commit my administration to integrity and transparency. I am truly honored to lead the City of Fall River at this historic point in time.

I look forward to another year of growth and progress in Fall River. Good night and God bless the City of Fall River.