

# City of New Haven

Toni N. Harp – Mayor



Good evening, everybody. Thank you very much for inviting me to be here and for making me feel so welcome. Thank you all for being here, and for your interest in the state of the city we share. It's my pleasure to join you in the Aldermanic Chamber for this special occasion – now for the fourth time.

Madam President, other leaders and members of the Board of Alders, members of New Haven's legislative delegation, other distinguished city residents, special guests, friends, and neighbors: I'm once again honored by this opportunity to share with you my assessment of the state of New Haven.

I would first, and once again acknowledge a woman's capable leadership of the city's legislative branch. Madam President, thank you for your steadfast, ongoing service to the city. I would also acknowledge the productive partnership my administration shares with *all* of you Alders. Together, without a doubt, we are moving New Haven forward.

So thank you *all* for this chance to share a few thoughts about New Haven in a world that has recently witnessed a sea change. Tonight, gauging the city at this point in time, I will describe how New Haven is *emergent* despite a dramatically altered political, social, and economic landscape.

At a time when the bedrock of the entire Republic is trembling, while the basic decency at the core of a society reliant upon the rule of law is shaken, when so many cherished American values, traditions, and *people* are being threatened, New Haven has *emerged* as a pillar of hope.

There is a beacon of stability emerging from the city we call home, providing sanctuary, not just for people, but for a time-honored sense of respect, acceptance, and dignity. In New Haven, a collective determination has emerged to continue providing for one another equal protection, and equal opportunity under the law.

Never more so than tonight, I am honored and blessed to be mayor of this great city. I am proud and grateful to lead a government and city staff that serves residents, businesses, colleges, universities, non-profit organizations, visitors, and others, regardless of skin tone, national heritage, cultural background, language spoken, economic standing, religious affiliation, or sexual preference.

A pervasive spirit of collaboration exists in New Haven that should make each of us proud. I'm grateful for the collective will that has recently emerged to stand up, united, in the face of those who would have us shrink away. We stand tall together, refusing to abandon all those targeted arbitrarily and randomly – but decidedly and with premeditation – by a new administration in Washington.

To paraphrase a declaration by Governor Malloy in his State of the *State* Address just a month ago: regardless of whether a family settled in New Haven 300 years ago or three days ago, it is welcome

# City of New Haven

Toni N. Harp – Mayor



here. People are welcome to contribute what they have to share, and in turn they are welcome to share in the bounty of this historic city.

In New Haven, elected officials, city workers, residents, volunteers, students, immigrants, and a host of other city partners make this a vibrant, attractive city. New Haven has emerged as an American microcosm – we’re making it work for *all* those who want to be here.

In fact, there’s science to underscore the close connection between the demographics of greater New Haven and those of the United States. Last spring you’ll recall, after analysis of U.S. Census data, it was publicized that in terms of age, educational attainment, race, and ethnicity, this region almost perfectly mirrors the composite demographics of the United States, more so in fact than any other region of the country.

As the economic, educational, cultural, and population center of this region, New Haven has literally emerged as the picture of America. The symmetry is not lost on me: how fitting that the place to emerge as a demographic postcard for this nation has also emerged as a portrait for what it means – for what it is – to be American.

Would that more of America would mirror more of the many good things to emerge from New Haven this past year.

As the first example of this, I would recap the kindness initiative launched here last fall, following the lead of other American cities: Louisville, Kentucky, and Anaheim, California, among them.

What those cities learned is this: beyond all of what government is called upon to do, the *manner* in which government conducts its business – and pursues its relationships – can be conducive to positive change as well. This style of leadership, provided by those of us who work in government, can lend itself to what I see as a higher purpose in government.

Officials from these other cities describe how their kindness campaigns decreased bullying and reduced crime in some categories. They reminded me that kindness shapes the world. It is the most powerful, least costly, and most underrated change agent. Every single act of kindness has the potential to create an unending, positive ripple effect.

New Haven emerged as a most-receptive place for this initiative. Food drives cropped up, coat drives sponsored by city departments had great success, and the front wall of City Hall itself was lit up with messages that read, ‘be kind’ and ‘a city that cares.’

# City of New Haven

Toni N. Harp – Mayor



Employees from the 911 call center, who routinely tackle some of the most heartbreaking and challenging situations imaginable, set up a hospitality table here at City Hall every Friday morning for two months, to welcome staff and visitors alike and shower them with kindness.

Literally hundreds of city workers in more than a dozen city departments answered the call to provide a new brand of customer service, and New Haven emerged as a kinder, friendlier place to be.

Throughout New Haven's Community Services Administration, 'kind, compassionate, innovation' has emerged as their mantra while they work to address vexing, persistent challenges some residents face.

For example: last summer, New Haven hosted a Food Reclamation and Redistribution Summit, to better connect those with excess food with those whose food and nutrition needs go unmet.

Many of the more than 11 hundred food sellers in New Haven were surveyed to establish if and how wasted food could be put to better use. These private and institutionalized food providers worked with food banks and pantries, taxi companies, and volunteers to 'rescue' food that would otherwise have been thrown out.

The result: an increase of nearly 114,000 meals rescued last year – an increase of nearly 40 percent.

This effort to address food insecurity in New Haven is not limited to this food rescue initiative. Programs to provide summer meals program and supper at school sites also provided hundreds of thousands of additional meals last year.

And while its deeply troubling to know there is food insecurity in New Haven to this extent, it is heartening to know so many people in the city emerged to address the matter. Some 100 residents stepped up to serve on nine separate task forces to match the city's new initiatives – many of which were generated from the community to begin with.

CSA also launched New Haven's Financial Empowerment Center a few months ago, based on the report generated by the Financial Empowerment Commission established last March.

We are eager to help those in New Haven with limited means grow in their ability to manage their finances and make sound decisions regarding money. We know a secure financial future requires hands-on familiarity with the terms and the tools of routine banking, credit, and retail transactions.

The Financial Empowerment Center has emerged to address the matter, providing help at the city's Opportunity Center on Dixwell Avenue, and Web-based assistance besides. What we hope will emerge

# City of New Haven

Toni N. Harp – Mayor



from the FEC is increased financial stability and wherewithal among city residents, to further stabilize New Haven in a larger sense.

The Opportunity Center itself has emerged as a comprehensive, human services ecosystem, providing one-stop access to housing, employment, re-entry, and other social services.

As an example, New Haven's service to re-entering residents and their families now operates on parallel tracks, through Fresh Start offices at City Hall *and* through the Warren Kimbro Re-entry Project at the Opportunity Center. HOPEFEST 2016 personified this joint effort, offering help and hope to the 300 or so re-entering residents and family members who participated.

I want to emphasize how HOPEFEST was co-sponsored by a laudable cross section of community groups: Fresh Start's Faith-based Reentry Committee, the Cornell Scott Hill Health Center, Yale, the Greater New Haven Clergy Association, this board's Black and Latino Caucus, Project MORE, the local chapter of the NAACP, and the American Job Center.

Youth Services continues providing *national* leadership with its prototype Youth Stat, expanding the reach of that multi-agency outreach program to include trauma-informed assistance and support throughout the city's social services network – and school district – for at-risk youth.

Youth Service continues making progress toward The Escape as well: the safe, supervised drop-in center that'll open later this year near the Armory on Goffe Street.

New Haven continues to offer help and hope to senior citizens. The Elderly Services Department boasts renovations and refurbishing at all three senior centers, and continues to assist literally thousands of aging residents as needed, with rent rebate administration, tax relief assistance, and food and nutrition counseling.

CSA continues its collaboration with the state Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services as well, training scores of city staff and non-profit employees in the critical, emerging need for mental health first aid, triage, and treatment. Its staff also worked with the Health Department last year to start-up Camp Easy Breezy, to provide a summertime respite for the more than 3,000 New Haven kids diagnosed with asthma.

Next summer, enrollment for Camp Easy Breezy is expected to triple, providing patient support, continuity of care, and child-friendly asthma education while school is out.

# City of New Haven

Toni N. Harp – Mayor



Elsewhere in the Health Department, ongoing awareness and abatement efforts about lead poisoning continue to be effective, and a dramatic decline in the number of reported cases has emerged as a result: what were nearly 500 cases per year just 15 years ago was just 92 reported cases last year.

Moving from better physical health to sustained fiscal health, tonight I'm delighted to share additional evidence about how New Haven has emerged as the state's leading city in this regard. The city has now had three consecutive balanced budgets – each of the past two with no change in the mill rate. New Haven also has a modest Rainy Day Fund.

Beyond that, Grand List figures certified just the other day suggest growth of nearly eight-and-a-half percent in aggregate property value, to underscore what the local real estate market and other measures of economic growth have been suggesting: that New Haven is enjoying an upswing in economic activity, investment, and commercial growth.

Last year's revaluation revealed that the Personal Property Grand List grew by 3.3 percent, and that approximately 300 new business property accounts were opened.

Results also show a 22 percent increase in the city's tax *exempt* property, worth \$956 million, suggesting the city is eligible for additional reimbursement through the state's Payments in Lieu of Taxes program.

In terms of accountability to property owners, more than 900 valuations were appealed informally with the revaluation company, and about 300 reductions were granted. The next opportunity owners have to contest results is with the city's Board of Assessment Appeals – its filing deadline is February 17.

There are additional reasons to be optimistic about results of this revaluation. Deferred assessments of several large development projects will soon be phased out, perhaps adding as much as \$13 million to the 2017 Grand List and perhaps an additional \$70 million in 2018.

Tonight I'm also pleased to report how property owners can feel safer and more secure about their investment this year, with *bona fide* statistics to back it up.

New technology, coupled with New Haven's steadfast commitment to community policing, is at the heart of continuing public safety progress at the New Haven Police Department. In this, New Haven has emerged as a *national* leader in crime prevention and law enforcement.

Again, with thanks to the alders, there are dozens of new police department patrol cars now on duty on city streets. New Haven also tripled the coverage provided by acoustic surveillance technology built into ShotSpotter; now nearly one-third of the city is patrolled by this technology.

# City of New Haven

Toni N. Harp – Mayor



The information generated by this system provides details about gunfire with remarkable speed and accuracy. This gives responding officers and detectives instant momentum in their investigation; the head start helps them track down the guns used and the people who fired them.

ShotSpotter provides a high-tech complement to New Haven's existing reliance upon old-fashioned, tried-and-true, boots-on-the-ground community-based policing. This underscores our collective resolve in New Haven to engage everything and everybody in nonstop efforts to protect all those who live, work, study, and visit here.

The results of this comprehensive approach are steady – and positive. Year-end statistics showcase continuing, declining violent crime rates in New Haven.

Figures in the 'shots fired' category reflect a 62% decrease over the past six years; they also reflect a 50.4% decrease in the number of non-fatal shooting victims over that same period. The number of homicides dropped 59.4% since 2011 – 13.3% in 2016 alone.

The NHPD reports decreases of more than 20 percent in burglaries and robberies in 2016 as well.

News from *fire* headquarters is comparably upbeat, despite sadness last week after an off-duty firefighter was killed in a car accident. I know we all send condolences to each firefighter who knew him; the department lost a trusted colleague, friend, and public safety professional in that accident.

That tragedy notwithstanding, and with great thanks to the Board of Alders for support of new command in the department, critical performance indicators show emergent efficiencies in fire protection. Overtime expenses continue to shrink, the number of sick days used continues to shrink, and testing is underway *this month* to fill lingering vacancies in the higher ranks so these positive trends can continue.

A new class at the fire training school is anticipated later this year to replenish firefighter ranks.

To go along with this type of personnel development, I thank the Board of Alders for its support of nuts 'n' bolts infrastructure improvements in New Haven, too. With this collaborative commitment, New Haven has emerged as a city given to new equipment, new technology, and a renewed sense of civic pride in all it has to offer.

This winter the city is once again prepared to battle fierce seasonal storms with new equipment in public works that will not only clear the snow – even from narrow and dead-end streets – but pick it up and carry it away as well.

This year, efficiency seems to be the watchword *throughout* the Departments of Public Works.



# City of New Haven

Toni N. Harp – Mayor



*In-house* paving, maintenance, and construction work, coordinated with parks ‘n’ rec, engineering, and transportation, traffic, and parking, are yielding substantial cost savings, and a second shift in DPW’s Fleet Maintenance Division improves service, limits equipment downtime, and reduces overtime costs.

The city completed reconstruction of the Temple Street and George Street bridges, and will soon rehabilitate two *moveable* bridges: the Chapel Street and Grand Avenue bridges. This past year more than 100 sidewalks were repaved citywide and traffic calming measures were installed in many locations, including Whalley Avenue, the Temple and Wall Street intersection, and others.

Parks ‘n’ rec facilities stand to benefit from so much in-house work and productivity, too. There’s an improved entrance to Lighthouse Point Park, bright, new lighting on the New Haven Green and new Wi-Fi service on the Green as well. That’ll be welcome this summer, when the city shows off a new, modular stage for even more events while limiting stage rental expenses.

There are also plans in place for a new Ralph Walker skating rink, a rebuilt Fort Hale Pier, and safety upgrades at playgrounds citywide.

What’s more, Phase II of the Cherry Ann Park was completed last year with new recreational options and expanded access to the natural habitat. In fact, Cherry Ann Park recently earned an award that comes with an annual grant, to help ensure continuing progress on that site.

Parks ‘n’ rec programming is also stride-for-stride with the priorities of city residents. The ninth annual Rock to Rock bike ride is just a couple months away. This popular event, to coincide with Earth Day in April, unites thousands of riders and raises money for more than 20 local environmental organizations.

This summer the city’s third annual Movies in the Park series will continue, and coincidentally, voting to determine which movies will be shown begins today. Those who are interested should be sure to vote for their favorite movies.

Moving indoors from the city’s parks, strategic investment in New Haven Public Schools has helped New Haven continue its emergence as a public education leader. The new Engineering and Science University Magnet School, ESUMS, is about to open its new building on the University of New Haven campus. And again, with great thanks to the Board of Alders, plans for a New Strong School on the SCSU campus – with its built-in bioscience career ladder – are advancing steadily.

These ‘bricks ‘n’ mortar’ improvements echo steady progress *inside* New Haven Public Schools, with three goals in mind: eliminating the achievement gap, improving graduation rates, and enhancing college preparedness.

# City of New Haven

Toni N. Harp – Mayor



To meet these goals, the district's School Change initiative uses four pillars to support effective learning: comprehensive educational opportunities, fully involving students, faculty and staff, providing specialty schools, and increasingly important wraparound services.

The district's comprehensive reading improvement plan, informed by the 15 months-old Reading Commission, assures intervention for all students who aren't reading at grade level. The district also set up Saturday Academies in low-performing schools and extended day programs as well, each focused on mentoring and providing emotional support to accompany academic studies.

As a result, enrollment is increasing, attendance is improving, and student engagement is on the rise, while the number of suspensions, expulsions, and school-based arrests continue to drop precipitously.

In terms of student engagement, there can be no better gauge by which to measure it than through attendance; New Haven Public Schools is reporting that chronic absenteeism has been reduced in literally every single grade, K through 12.

Concurrent with better attendance is the availability of a more comprehensive curriculum and a wider range of advanced placement courses. There are now 23 subjects in which students can take an AP class and receive college credit; the number of AP exams taken to receive that credit also increased this past year.

Test scores received last spring show marked improvement districtwide in both math and English Language Arts, and those figures accompany steadily increasing graduation rates, college enrollment numbers, and college persistence percentages. In fact, over the past six years, four-year graduation rates have climbed nearly 14 percent, to a figure approaching 80 percent.

New Haven is emergent as a desirable place for public school students to be prepared for college, career, and life. And to be honest, the timing couldn't be more crucial. We have an *obligation* to help young people learn so they can separate facts from alternative facts, truth from bluster, and public service from public spectacle.

Tonight I will issue this reminder. For New Haven to continue its positive education trends, as it must, we must remain devoted to emergent strategies in place to address the achievement gap, the digital divide, and all other artificial barriers that prevent its public school students from realizing their full academic and educational potential.



# City of New Haven

Toni N. Harp – Mayor



Students currently enrolled in New Haven Public Schools will soon be called upon, as part of tomorrow's workforce, to participate fully in the data driven, information rich, technology driven economy emerging in New Haven, throughout Connecticut, across the nation, and around the world.

In New Haven's public library system – what I consider a *de facto* extension of public schools – the city's commitment continues to pay dividends. Beyond its mission to provide access to information and knowledge, and beyond its promotion of literacy, the library helps shrink the digital divide, provides stimulating programs and exhibits to stimulate discussion and debate, and perhaps most importantly, helps foster of love of reading to facilitate lifelong learning.

In just the fourth quarter of last year, expanded library hours resulted in 16,000 additional patron visits; all told some 550,000 visits were recorded in city libraries last year.

This year, as part of its ongoing collaboration with New Haven Public Schools, the library is pledged to achieve universal distribution of library cards to all NHPS students. The library also collaborates with the Community Services Administration and its partners: the regular presence of outreach workers helps match disadvantaged patrons with appropriate social services, so they can continue to avail themselves of all the library has to offer.

Another time-honored, stabilizing factor in New Haven has been its devotion to arts and culture, helping this city continue its emergence as an international destination in the global, creativity economy.

Tonight, in this august chamber I like to think we're joined by the spirit of Helen Eugenia Hagan, born in 1891 and educated in New Haven public schools. Helen emerged to become the first African-American woman to graduate from Yale's School of Music in 1912.

A New Haven prodigy who demonstrated her musical gifts at the historic Dixwell Avenue Congregational Church, the oldest African-American church in America, Helen's career as a pianist, music educator and composer was jolted but never stymied by the forces of segregation and resentment.

Helen entertained segregated troops in Europe during World War 1 and went on to establish a world-class music department at a historically Black college in Tennessee.

Tonight we feel the presence of Helen and all the idealistic and talented dreamers this city promotes like few other cities in America. From the entrepreneur to the bio-medical researcher; from the potter to the abstract expressionist; from the place-maker to the deal-maker and from the DREAMER who envisions a modern-day municipality with global assets – 2016 brought a resurgence in the time-honored belief that New Haven is much stronger with public-private partnerships.

# City of New Haven

Toni N. Harp – Mayor



By way of example, this year the city's Cultural Affairs Commission, one of the first municipal arts advisory boards in the United States, with support from the Board of Alders, launched a revitalized Mayor's Community Arts Vitality Grant Program.

I'm delighted by the response from neighborhood arts organizations that, working as partners and teams submitted a record 73 applications. The need for this type of empowerment funding is greater now than ever.

New Haven remains the cultural centerpiece of the state and continues to promote opportunity and civic amenities to achieve a next generation of stakeholders and future leaders. On April 24<sup>th</sup> the city will celebrate its 379<sup>th</sup> birthday, with plans to Salute the Humanities with a look-back 50 years at the "lessons" learned in urban planning advanced by this "model" city.

New Haven's ambitious schedule of concerts, theatrical productions, and other special events blends the unique features of each to create the city's well-deserved reputation as a regional destination, which in turn continues to attract the businesses, builders, and investors who seek burgeoning economic activity.

A steadily improving, welcoming climate in New Haven have helped the city emerge as a destination for new, annual events like the New Haven Grand Prix, the food truck festival and dragon boat races, joining iconic, annual features like the International Festival of Arts and Ideas and the Connecticut Open tennis tournament.

The city's economic development efforts mirror an irrepressible movement in this direction. A new awareness about civic pride has recently emerged in the form of a New Haven trademark, of sorts. This year's 'Made in New Haven' promotion uses a simple slogan to deliver a powerful message, namely, that this city is the hometown of innovation, craftsmanship, and pride in ownership.

Any number of high-quality products that are 'Made in New Haven' now boast the homegrown badge, and tell the story of this city's heritage wherever they are marketed and sold.

In terms of real estate improvements, New Haven continues to attract new residents, and those who would build apartments to house them. In the past three years, 840 new residential units have come online, with more than twice that number still in the planning, design, and permitting pipeline.

The city's commitment to affordable housing is keeping pace – its partnership with the housing authority and Elm City Communities has never been stronger. New and renovated units are also coming online and are in staggered stages of development in housing authority properties citywide.

# City of New Haven

Toni N. Harp – Mayor



Along these lines, LCI now has an assigned Neighborhood Specialist in each district citywide, ready to provide assistance and guidance toward financial support for housing acquisition, emergency repairs, energy efficiency improvements, and other quality of life matters.

No one has to take my word for how this helps. Listen to these excerpts from a resident's letter recently received at LCI:

"I would like to thank the city... for providing the funding through 'RE: New Haven,' which allowed me to accomplish my goal of owning a home! I am a lifelong resident... so it was important to me to purchase a multifamily home through the Down Payment and Closing Assistance Program. I was also able to make energy efficient improvements with the help of the Energy Efficient Rehabilitation Program, which is helping me save money."

The city is making it easier for developers to promote sustainability in other areas: the permitting process has been streamlined to accommodate more than 600 solar-power installations. And New Haven recently joined the [Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy](#), concurrent with a public process to draft a new Climate and Resiliency Framework.

Extensive studies of the effects of increased rainfall on the downtown drainage system and higher tides along Long Wharf, including I-95 and the railyard, are complete. Residents are starting to see green infrastructure such as rain gardens and bioswales all around the City. These projects are completed in partnership with Yale's Urban Resources Initiative, and provide green job training to ex-offenders working with EMERGE.

Similarly, we are bringing old and new concepts of infrastructure together along the coast, looking at 'living shorelines' to protect New Haven's waterfront while providing habitat and natural beauty as well.

In another large-scale, environmental project, after insisting on a \$30 million fund to clean up the site of the former English Station power plant, the city is making steady progress toward use of those funds. A completion date in 2019 is now envisioned for the cleanup of that signature waterfront property and all of its locked-up potential.

The District, a project to repurpose a former CT Transit bus depot, will transform that old bus barn into a technology and incubator hub, and is perhaps the best example of the creative economy taking root in this city. Once again, collaboration has been the key: among city departments, the State of Connecticut, and private sector interests and investors.

# City of New Haven

Toni N. Harp – Mayor



As an aside, I think what I appreciate most about this development initiative is how it marries so many vitally important elements. It includes brownfields reclamation, embracing technology and the need to encourage entrepreneurship, along with a recreational and environmental component – direct access to the Mill River and the Mill River Trail, so New Haven doesn't lose sight of its natural heritage.

Other imminent construction projects also signal bright prospects for a vibrant New Haven going forward. Now-familiar parking lots in the Hill section of town, near Yale-New Haven Hospital, will soon be transformed into new buildings for labs, stores, and apartments, the result of the Alders' help with a complex Development and Land Disposition Agreement.

This project aligns with other aspects of the Downtown Crossing project: a federal grant is in place for a Temple Street extension over the connector, and talks continue with the state about parking and other improvements near Union Station.

Another undeveloped parcel just north of here, bordered by Orange, Audubon, State, and Grove streets, will also be improved to meet the needs of an emergent city. Along Dixwell Avenue there is addition by subtraction to boast: recent demolition of the former Q House now clears the way for the next generation 'Q' – with a public library, health center, and other amenities for a first-rate community center.

At Long Wharf, residents and visitors alike can't ignore accelerated efforts to improve the area – what many consider the city's 'front door.' An overhaul of the food truck 'paradise,' new shoreline bike trails, a new info center, a new boathouse already under construction, and new potential for the former Gateway College and Regional Water Authority buildings will help this prime real estate realize its vast potential.

All these plans, and the prospects for investment and increased economic activity are consistent with what has been a priority since I first took office: job creation and connecting city residents with those jobs.

With that in mind, I'm pleased with the partnership we have with the Board of Alders, Yale, and more than 60 major employers, now manifest in New Haven Works. Its job training and apprenticeship programs have helped place over 900 people in new jobs, with an attainable goal of 1,000 new job placements. This is not to suggest our work in this arena is complete, merely to demonstrate the good progress we're making.

Over the past twelve months New Haven has emerged as a city moving forward – a destination for all those who want to enhance its potential with theirs. This is a growing, vibrant, promising place with something for everyone and a built-in chance to succeed, just as it has been throughout its 400-year history.

# City of New Haven

Toni N. Harp – Mayor



As I mentioned earlier, New Haven has and will retain qualities for which it has ‘sanctuary’ status. For as long as I’m mayor, New Haven will be a welcoming, accepting place for new residents – for those moving into town from nearby, and for dispirited foreign refugees fleeing unspeakable heartache.

It is my hope New Haven remains a sanctuary and refuge for them, and for the robust dialogue, disagreements, collaboration, cooperation, innovation, and civic pride that makes this city so attractive to them and to so many others.

As I look around Connecticut, as I look around New England, and frankly, as I look across America, there isn’t a city I prefer; there isn’t a city where I’d rather be mayor, and there isn’t a group of people I’d rather serve as a public official.

There’s no question in my mind but that New Haven has emerged as a model American city, not because it’s perfect, and not because there are no challenges ahead, but because of its determination to continue working together to overcome those challenges and make this a better, and better, and better place to be.

May God *continue* to bless this great city and all those in it. Thank you very much.

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