

Read Fall River Mayor Jasiel Correia's State of the City address

The full text of Mayor Jasiel Correia II's State of the City address, delivered March 1, 2017.

By Mayor Jasiel Correia II

State of the City Address

Mayor Jasiel Correia

March 1, 2017

Good evening. Good evening, everybody. What an exciting night! I am so happy to be with all of you here tonight.

Let me start by thanking all of our elected officials who are here tonight. I also want to thank every single city employee, from the mayor's office, to our chiefs, to our department heads, to every employee who delivers services to our citizens every day. You make our city work. Thank you. Please give them a huge round of applause.

And thank you to all board and commission members. And thank you to all of our citizens here tonight and watching at home. We do this for you.

It has been a little over a year since I took office as your mayor, the mayor of the great city of Fall River and in that short year we have accomplished so much. We have overcome challenges and charted a new course; a course that renews Fall River's central promise: the promise that you and your family can make it here!

And tonight, I am thrilled to report to the citizens and the business community of Fall River that the state of our city is strong.

Tonight, I will summarize our past challenges and successes and I will provide you with a plan and a vision of the future; a plan that is achievable and built on the new practices and policies we have implemented in the last year.

Over the short span of my first term in office, Fall River has certainly moved forward. Amazon has opened and today, because of the leadership of Hil Camara, Joe Vianna, Tom Pereira and the entire staff of BCTC and the Career Center, Amazon employs over 1,800 people.

Blount Seafood has expanded and South Coast Place, which will include Market Basket, a movie theater and twenty-one new stores has begun construction. Route 79 South has been completed and yes, for the first time in my lifetime, all six lanes of the Braga Bridge are open. This is just the beginning of our economic comeback!

While some of the aforementioned successes predate my administration, they are clearly community successes that we should all be proud of. Let me be clear. Upon taking office, we had significant challenges that had to be met with creativity, optimism and good old fashioned hard work.

Past Practices, Not Best Practices

Upon taking office in January of 2016, our city had been bruised by poor planning. Government had swelled and new fees were necessary just to keep city services operational. The city had entered into a number of poorly-negotiated contracts. Leaders had even stated that the city was on the brink of receivership. Our city was left with a mere \$500,000 in stabilization funds and a negative outlook by the credit agency, Moody's.

City properties had not been maintained. Past administrations rolled the dice on school funding and fiscal policies which, year after year, made our city councilors choose between layoffs to police officers, firefighters and teachers or create new fees and increase taxes to the maximum.

Additionally, the city has been burdened by the federally mandated CSO project that in total will cost taxpayers over \$300,000,000. And last but not most challenging was the negative reputation and slump that citizens and businesses so desperately desired to shake off.

Despite these challenges, our team – your team- and I got right to work. 2016's theme was "Back to Basics."

DCM Reorganization and Privatization of Trash

We started by reorganizing the Department of Community Maintenance, a department that had grown to encompass everything from trash collection to building maintenance – a model that diluted resources and efforts. Under the

reorganization, we privatized the collection of trash, not only saving taxpayers money but also relieving our DCM workers of this time consuming duty.

We split the department in two: Community Maintenance and Building and Grounds. These new departments actually yielded a reduction in staff but an increase in productivity and a priority of beautifying our city.

Best Fiscal Practices and Elimination of Trash Fee

Under the leadership of CFO Mary Sahady and City Administrator Cathy Ann Viveiros, working with City Auditor Krishan Gupta and the cooperation of every department head, we were able to implement zero-based budgeting practices for the first time. This process yielded approximately \$2.2 million in savings. In addition, we paid down our \$1.6 million Snow and Ice deficit, which was a multi-year carryover.

The combination of zero-based budgeting and privatization of trash collection led to the fulfillment of a campaign promise to eliminate the \$120 household fee, a promise I and many city councilors in this room made to our residents. We were one of the few, if not the only community in the Commonwealth to eliminate a fee and deliver savings to taxpayers without using any one-time funds. We did not replace this fee, we eliminated it, saving taxpayers \$37 million each and every ten years.

We should be proud that together we eliminated this fee and I can attest to you today that the Correia Administration will always explore every option to reduce or eliminate fees when possible.

These new fiscal policies allowed the city to begin re-fund its stabilization account. One year ago, the city had \$500,000 in stabilization funds while comparable cities had millions and I am proud to tell you that we have over \$4 million in stabilization with a plan to have \$10 million by 2021.

But don't just take my word for the improvement in fiscal policy. Just this past month, the credit and bond rating agency Moody's dropped their negative outlook on the City of Fall River, citing better fiscal policies, better leadership and redevelopment opportunity.

Public Safety as a Top Priority

The safety of every member of our community is a top priority of this administration. However, as any firefighter or police officer can tell any politician, action speaks much louder than words. I believe our administration and this council have taken more action to improve the staffing and equipment in all of our public safety departments than any other administration in the last decade.

Thanks to retired Sergeant Michael Hoar and a generous donation by Mechanics Cooperative Bank, soon every officer will be outfitted with their own life saving tourniquet. We have ten new police cars and two new animal control vehicles on order. Fifty new radios and Tasers – and I commit to you tonight that we are exploring the possibility of installing new camera systems throughout the city to help investigate crime.

We are so fortunate to have had the best police chief in the state, Chief Dan Racine, and we wish him well in his retirement. And these new initiatives will continue to be carried out under Acting Chief Al Dupere.

We in Fall River are certainly not immune to crime. As a city we encounter challenges all urban communities face. However, there is no question that we have one of the best police forces in the state, one of the few that is both state and nationally accredited.

In 2017, we are committed to continuing to provide our officers with new tools to better do their job and increase the number of police officers to better fight crime.

The fire department has seen an unprecedented amount of support, so much so that I think that the members are pleasantly surprised. First and foremost, Chief Lynch is already proving to be one of the best fire chiefs in the entire state. Chief, your commitment to this department is not only honorable but something that gives me strength and security every day. It is an honor to work with you.

In addition to Chief Lynch, we have committed many new resources to our fire department. I want to publicly thank union president Jason Burns, Councilor Joe Camara, Councilor Steve Long and councilor Pam Laliberte-Lebeau for their constant support and advocacy for fully upgrading our fire department. In the last year and into 2017, we were able to purchase, through grants and bonds and thanks to the Fall River Community Development Agency, the following:

68 new SCBA units, or breathing apparatus

104 sets of new fire protective gear

3 stations have been outfitted with gear washers and driers with 3 more coming online in 2017

The first-ever full-fledged fire and rescue boat for our expanding waterfront

1 new engine ordered in April, being delivered in early spring

3 new engines: 1 heavy rescue, 1 platform ladder truck and 1 command unit

1 fleet maintenance vehicle

2 new ambulances

A 5th medical rescue was put into service

6 electric vehicles along with charging stations for EMS and fire prevention inspectors

A new state of the art radio fire alarm system for all city buildings, installed by August

In addition to this much needed equipment, we sustainably absorbed all ten SAFER Grant firefighters and, pending contract negotiations, we will have the opportunity, for the first time in many years, to bring manpower from 175 to 180 firefighters.

All these improvements to our police and fire departments are a foundation for the future which will ultimately produce a safer city, leading to more economic development opportunities.

Economic Development

We have seen the advantages and disadvantages of being a hardworking mill town. The City of Fall River has enjoyed the many riches a textile capital can afford, but reality hit this community quick and hard several decades ago. We lost more than just jobs when the vast majority of textile-related industry left Fall River to go overseas. We lost our way and nearly our identity. However, the consistency of the Fall River Office of Economic Development, led by its board of directors, cultivated new industry, leading to the replacement and creation of thousands of jobs over the last thirty years.

I want you to know that my administration, in partnership with FROED, the Governor's Office, our state delegation, educational institutions like BCC and UMass, Workforce Development, nonprofits the Chamber of Commerce and our School Committee and City Council are committed to a new era of economic development opportunities for all residents and businesses.

This means working on filling up our Biotechnology and Life Sciences Park while also filling vacant storefronts with exciting new businesses like the Pink Bean and Juice'd and Dunny's and Java House and so many others.

It means working to upgrade the facades of commercial properties and recognizing homeowners for keeping their properties in great shape. It means helping big businesses with TIFs for accountable job creation but also looking at ways to help provide tax breaks to small businesses in the Flint and on Main Street for creating jobs as well.

Economic development in 2017 and beyond means continuing to upgrade our streets and sidewalks. And when I say upgrade, I really mean upgrade! As many of you know, thanks to city council support, we are able to commit almost \$10 million to our Streetscapes program. I want to again thank the Council, especially councilors Steve Camara, Joe Camara and Steve Long for their vision and support.

This means that under the leadership of City Planner Bill Kenney and City Engineer J. R. Frey, you will see totally new, beautiful streets and sidewalks in many of our numerous downtowns: East Main Street, North and South Main Streets, Bedford Street, Purchase and Bank Streets, Columbia Square and many more will be completely upgraded with better parking, better lighting, benches and trees, street art and much more.

And today we commit to proposing two or more streets to match our Chapter 90 street funding each year over the next five years. This will create a more ADA compliant, accessible and beautiful city for everyone to enjoy. That's where your tax dollars will be going to – our streets and quality of life. Not bags and not trash.

Even with all these great economic development initiatives, there is one economic development issue that trumps all. And ever improving education, multi-discipline system, combined with a new Durfee High School is the top priority of this administration. Today I announce an initiative called Education for All. Education for All will continue the commitment we have made in 2016, a commitment that recognizes that education is the key to our city's future but also that education does not have to be a one size fits all solution. Education for All will focus on educating youth and adults in the traditional ways in classrooms as well as utilizing on the job training.

We have seen many community wins around education this past year. We took a fiscally challenged system and exceeded net school spending by over \$1 million at the beginning of the year. We erased a \$1.5 million NSS shortfall.

We hired a new superintendent, Dr. Matthew Malone, who is here tonight. And he is so focused on improving the culture of our system. Thank you, Superintendent, it has been a pleasure getting to know you. I believe in your leadership and your commitment to our students.

I am happy to announce to you today that the superintendent has agreed, after seeing the savings the city realized, to implement zero-based budgeting in the school department in his upcoming budget.

We successfully guided a compromise between the Atlantis Charter School and the neighborhood and continued our commitment to the Chamber of Commerce-sponsored EDup program.

Diman has seen an unprecedented amount of growth; applications are through the roof. Under the leadership of the newly appointed superintendent, Tom Aubin, I know there will be even greater growth.

We funded and facilitated a relationship with the Resiliency Preparatory Academy and People, Inc, a partnership that yielded a community center to train students that may have otherwise failed and instead now have an opportunity at a successful career.

I want you to leave here knowing that education for all, child and adult, will be part of our future foundation. Whether it's a new Durfee High School or job training programs or vocational programs, every citizen will have an opportunity and a chance to make it here.

Relationships are Key

In order to continue all this progress, we need a network of relationships, both public and private, through which we can make our needs felt and our views heard. I have established those relationships and will continue to strengthen them at every opportunity. We now have a strong working relationship with our local legislative delegation: Senator Mike Rodrigues, Representatives Alan Silvia, Carole Fiola and Paul Schmid are in constant contact with me and I want to thank them for being our voice on Beacon Hill. We have equally built a relationship with our Congressional delegation.

As I look around this room tonight, I see many elected officials. To them and especially to our city councilors I say, we are in this together. While we may disagree at times, we must not disagree all the time. We owe it to the people of Fall River to engage in reasoned discourse about matters of public trust and not engage in purely personal or political opposition.

To this end, I affirm my sincere desire to cooperate with all elected officials and most of all with the City Council. My door is always open to you. Please participate with me in a constructive manner to advance the interests of the city and its people. I will make a genuine effort to build trust and be more inclusive.

Perhaps most importantly, I have a positive and productive relationship with Governor Baker and Lt. Governor Polito. I have met with them many times both in Boston and here in Fall River. I have proudly shown them Fall River and have convinced them of our value to the state. They now view Fall River as an economic driver and an asset. We definitely have their attention. As a result, we have received numerous grants, including \$3.8 million for our waterfront alone as well as my appointment to the state's Economic Seaport Council, signifying the governor's trust and belief in our city.

It's not an accident that this has happened. I will always show Fall River in the best possible light and it is paying off. Again, the results have been swift and dramatic. We will continue our revitalization of the waterfront through innovative investments and through our close relationship with our delegation and the governor. And with the private sector, with businesses like the Borden Light Marine and Mike Lund and the Cove Restaurant and Peter Cabral and with Commonwealth Landing.

We have always been a community of neighborhoods. I am happy to tell you today that neighborhoods – your neighborhood – is a priority. Everyone deserves a clean and safe neighborhood. Together with our incredible network of neighborhood associations and our amazing community outreach coordinator, Monica Sousa, we will strengthen our community while capitalizing on the unique elements each neighborhood has to offer.

We will tell our story through our marketing and branding campaign. Fall River is the place to be. You truly can make it here. And the world is already starting to get the message. Investors from outside and inside the city are hearing the word and are responding.

Fall River is no longer looking for handouts. We are presenting ourselves for what we are. We are becoming an investment opportunity. Whether it's state government, private businesses, Boston, Providence or Cape Cod, the word is out. Our waterfront is second to none. Our transportation infrastructure is good and getting better. We have the manufacturing space and we have the workforce. Ask Kathryn Hilderbrand of Good Clothing Company or Michael Benevides from Portugalia Marketplace. They will tell you that their businesses are booming. Ask

Rob Mellion from the Chamber of Commerce and Joanne Sbrega of the Children's Museum. They will tell you that people are coming to Fall River.

A stable city also requires checkups – checkups that modernize city laws and city operations. I am so pleased to have in our presence, chair of the Charter Commission, Mike Miozza. Together he and the Charter Commission have crafted changes to our city charter that all voters will have an opportunity to weigh in on. It's been a long road but I admire their commitment to this very important cause. Please give the Charter Commission a round of applause.

Fall River has always been mindful of the sacrifices that our veterans have made. They are very much a part of the fabric of our community. I have proposed a new monument to our beloved veterans: a replica of the Vietnam memorial in Washington, D.C. to be erected at Bicentennial Park. Using private donations and all available grants, we can augment our wonderful tribute to all veterans and make a spectacular additions to the monuments already present there.

It's a truly exciting project that I completely support and will be able to make further announcements about as it progresses. It will be something that every resident of the city can truly be proud of. In addition, we continue to secure funding for the remodeling of our veterans center on Pine Street. I want to thank Ray Hague and the many volunteers who do their part in giving back to our veterans. Some of my proudest moments as mayor have been honoring these outstanding individuals and their families.

I want everyone to know that we have accomplished so much together and we will continue this great progress. We have many priorities ranging from economic development to public safety to fiscal management. As you heard tonight, we totally improved some of these and strengthened all of government to serve our citizens. As we continue to make progress in all of these areas, there are three that have risen to the top and will be addressed:

1. Education, we must create a solid foundation for all citizens to receive the education they want, in the classroom or on the job. We are committed to a new Durfee High School.

2. Drug abuse, is a very important issue to me, a national disease that has crippled and ruined the lives of many. I want everyone's help to tackle the issue of drug abuse. We will work together to address homelessness and mental health in the coming months. The fight to impact substance abuse in this community has already begun. There are challenging problems and I would be lying if I told you I have the answer.

- And 3. Fiscal policy, the elimination of the \$120 fee was just the beginning. We will continue to manage the city's finances, your tax dollars, more wisely. We'll find new revenue, solar, billboard, transfer station for recyclables, etc. And as a result, we will eliminate the PAYT program. We are already working on a plan that eliminates the bags for good.

My grandmother is here tonight and she along with my grandfather and their three children including my mother, made it to this country in 1977 from the Azores. A year before the Blizzard of 1978, they settled into a three decker on William St. Their story is a common story of achieving the American Dream right here in Fall River. Both my grandparents started their lives working in factories. My grandmother sewed sleeves onto jackets and later became a teaching assistant and eventually a teacher at Talbot Middle School.

My parents' story is similar, both of my parents were born outside of this country and fate would lead them to meet in Fall River at Bristol Community College. Shortly after graduating, they married and moved into that same three decker on William St. My parents welcomed me into their lives in 1991 and our entire family welcomed the first generation of family to be born in the United States of America and in just 1 generation their son, the son of immigrants, the son of Portuguese and Cape Verdean descent, became the Mayor of their city. My grandparents' and parents' story is Fall River's story; one of hard work, determination, love and hope and prosperity.

Fall River has always promised its residents an opportunity, a chance at success and happiness whether it was the boom of the textile industry in which Fall River led the industrial revolution, to the modern Fall River whose generations of people built a city on a hill always reaching for the sky. When we look to our past as Fall Riverites, we have much to be proud of.

Tonight, we look not just forward but, like the many smokestacks and steeples that define our cityscape we look upward, reaching to new heights and even greater PROGRESS.

Tonight we forge new relationships and invest in our city.

Tonight we renew the commitment our parents and grandparents made to us.

Tonight and together we build a greater, stronger Fall River for the next generation.

With more hard work. With innovative thinking. By furthering those governmental relationships. By refusing to sell ourselves short and by believing in ourselves we

will succeed.

No one else can do this but us. If we do not believe in ourselves, no one else will. We all know that there is a sense of negativity in our community. I see it, I hear it and I read it. But make no mistake – I do not accept it.

We must be positive in our outlook, for we have every reason to do so. We must work diligently, intelligently and optimistically. Our success itself will silence the critics. I promise you – we will succeed.

Just look at what we have accomplished in just 12 months:

We delivered on campaign promises

We privatized trash collection

We implemented zero based budgeting

We went from \$500k to \$4million in stabilization money

We met NSS

We fully upgraded our public safety departments

We eliminated the sanitation enterprise account

We eliminated the \$120 household fee

We have secured millions in new grant funding for a host of economic development opportunities

We re-branded the city and announced to the world that you can make it here - whether it's a tourism destination like the battleship, or the Historical Society you can make it here, or a product like leather jackets made at Vanson Leathers or shirts made for the Olympics by New England Shirt you can make your products here. Or if you're like my grandparents and moved here to make something of yourself, you and your family can make it here.

There is any doubt the city has progressed over the last 12 months and I am excited about the future of our amazing beautiful city. This is just the beginning, there is so much more to come.

These last twelve months have been the best of my life. I am constantly encouraged by the spirit of this city. I pledge to continue to devote all my energies to making Fall River great. But I have not done it alone and cannot do it alone. I need your support, your help and your cooperation. Whatever we do, we do together.

Join me in the coming months and years ahead to move this city not only forward but upward to greatness, with confidence and purpose.

Can we do it? Of course we can. We will do it. Of course we will. All we need is courage, cooperation willingness and perhaps a little help from God.

God bless you all and God bless Fall River.