**State of the City Address  
Mayor Robert J. Dolan  
January 8, 2018**

Ladies and Gentlemen, members of the School Committee and the Board of Aldermen, elected officials, and honored guests,

This is not a night of endings. It is the beginning of a new chapter in our community’s history. Those on the stage tonight are stewards of something bigger than any individual and I am thankful to have been chosen to be one of those stewards for the past 24 years. I am very proud of what we have accomplished. We have done incredible things, but tonight is not going to be a greatest hits album. It is going to be about the next chapter. Let there be no doubt about it: I will be the Mayor of this city, putting forward a progressive agenda that challenges every citizen to be great, until the day I walk out the door.

There is an incredible momentum in our community that must continue, and tonight I will set forward options for the next Mayor and the next Board of Aldermen that, coupled with their own ideas, will not only continue to move our city forward but propel us to even greater heights. There is so much more that needs to be done. There is so much that we are currently working on. And for me, that’s the hardest part about moving on.

I believe one of the greatest cultural changes we have made in this city during my tenure as Mayor is convincing Melrosians that it is important that we invest in ourselves. Benign neglect is not a civic virtue. It hurts our competitiveness, it hurts our values, and it hurts the next generation. This change in thought happened in 2003 with the passing of the debt exclusion for a new middle school and high school renovation. This community statement changed the culture of our community, gave hope to people with young children, and drew a line in the sand about what we wanted our community to become. The challenge of the next decade will be addressing public safety facility needs, upgrading our public library, restoring this great historic hall, and funding public education.

Over the past year, we have reviewed the needs of public safety buildings in the same manner in which we attacked the question of the middle school in 2002: By forming a professional committee made up of firefighters and police officers, public safety leadership from Melrose and other communities, individuals that have direct experience in building and construction, and senior City Hall staff. We have met for over a year, evaluating existing conditions and looking at every possible option. We have formulated and the committee has voted on a proposal to be submitted for consideration that addresses public safety facility needs for the next 100 years.

This plan, which tonight was submitted to the Board of Aldermen for consideration, restores our historic main fire station and changes its use to a new Melrose police station. It builds a new fire headquarters on the site of the current Highlands station, and it renovates the East Side firehouse. There are responsible efficiencies in this plan. It allows us to enhance our historic downtown, and we would dramatically improve parking by replacing the current police station with additional parking space. I ask every citizen to study this proposal over the coming year, talk to our police and fire leadership about public safety in the 21st century, learn about the emergency management demands that even a city like Melrose has to face in this new, more dangerous world, and think about the best way we as citizens can give our public safety departments the facilities they need in the 21st century. This is an important and worthy investment for the future of Melrose, an investment as important as a new school. I ask the Board of Aldermen to continue this process, to study the proposal, to pass the final recommendations of the committee, to put a debt exclusion on the ballot to pay for it, and to unanimously support this important endeavor for public safety in our city.

Over the next decade, the citizens of Melrose also have to confront the need for renovation and expansion of the Melrose Public Library and the restoration of this beautiful building, which has been the home of so many wonderful community events  over the past 100 years.

Free public education and a free public library are the foundations for advancement in this country. Those are the institutions that truly make America great, and both were founded in Boston. Providing access to information and education and books and technology to people of all incomes and backgrounds allows the American dream to continue to thrive. That is the foundation that makes America different from most other countries in the world. Great communities can be defined by the quality of their public schools and their public libraries and their commitment to historic preservation, remembering those who have gone before us, particularly our veterans. If the public safety plan passes, that in turn will lead to a real path to achieve the renovation and expansion of the library and the renovation of Memorial Hall in the coming decade. In the past year, under the guidance of the Library Board of Trustees, the Library Building Committee has completed a clear and responsible plan for expansion and renovation of the library. They have received the approvals from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for 40% funding in approximately 2022. That’s 40 cents reimbursement to the City of Melrose for every dollar spent on construction.

I would add that it is now time to get the wheels turning on the renovation of Memorial Hall. To begin the community dialogue, I will send an order to the Board of Aldermen this month to fund an architectural needs assessment of this treasured building.

We must continue to focus like a laser on the advancement and continuous improvement of Melrose High School, our flagship school. Under the leadership of Principal Jason Merrill, we have seen dramatic improvements in all areas. I am excited about the future of my alma mater and the high school my children will be attending in a few years. With that being said, I will put forward a funding order before the Board of Aldermen this month for the following projects to continue the renovation of Melrose High School and the campus. They include matching funds for a School Building Assistance proposal to replace the final section of the high school roof, to upgrade the original elevators at Melrose High School to ensure accessibility for all students and staff, and to upgrade one of our administration’s greatest achievements, the Melrose Center for the Performing Arts in the middle school, which is a major addition to the fine arts program at Melrose High School. This theater is continuously rented and used to benefit the entire community and after 10 years, new technology is now available to enhance the arts experience that we all enjoy in this beautiful performance space. It is important to note that we will make these advancements with no additional borrowing or bonding. Our artists, young and old, deserve this continued investment.

My administration is in the final stages of making a decision regarding a medical marijuana facility in our community, on Route 99. During the summer, we formed an advisory committee that includes representatives from the Health Department, Planning, public safety, and my office. The committee performed a very thorough review of 9 companies who submitted applications. The result will be a first for our community that we expect will bring in up to half a million dollars a year of new revenue to the city. My advice to city officials is to use this additional revenue to close the structural deficit of the Melrose Public Schools. This was a main issue in the override debate and the issue remains unsolved with no solutions offered. It continues to be an ongoing risk to our financial progress. Any additional revenue should also be used to confront in a real and direct way substance abuse in our community, additional school adjustment counselors, and training police officers and firefighters to deal with the challenges of legalized marijuana in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

This month we are prepared to seek a feasibility study for turf installation and renovation of the West Knoll athletic complex. This proposal would turf the West Knoll facility for soccer, lacrosse, field hockey, the marching band, and other recreational opportunities. With this feasibility study we have an opportunity to immediately engage the Conservation Commission, the Park Commission and other constituencies about the benefits and potential challenges of this proposal. The goal could be to use Mount Hood revenue through special legislation, as was used for Morelli Field, Fred Green Field, and Pine Banks, to fund the project. The recreational opportunities and facilities in the City of Melrose are second to none. That work must continue.

There are so many other great opportunities at our fingertips…

* Potential approval of the Complete Streets program that will improve pedestrian and bicycle access throughout the city;
* Moving forward on the FEMA flood plain reduction petition, which is the culmination of a decade of infrastructure improvements. We have petitioned the federal government to reduce the flood plain in and around Ell Pond in order to reduce the need for flood insurance for countless residents who we feel are unfairly charged exorbitant rates when we feel the problem has been solved;
* Investing the recently received $217,000 in Green Community Grants to build upon the achievements of the Energy Commission and our Energy Manager, Martha Grover;
* The unveiling of our new city and school websites, which will dramatically improve online city services;
* Potentially, bringing a shared bike program and ZipCar to Melrose;
* Finally passing the Demolition Delay ordinance to protect our city’s heritage and livability;
* Submittal of the improvements to Upham Street to the state TIP public works program for funding;
* Seeing through the important private investments in commercial properties at Moynihan Plaza and the Coffee, Tea, and Me building;

And taking a new look at the number one topic of calls to the Melrose Police Department, speeding and reckless driving, which affects how children play and how parents feel about where they live. We have to take a serious look at enforcement, and even consider the use of speed cameras at some intersections where lives are at absolutely at risk.

Melrose is a great city with a bright future. The only limits on how great the city can become are the limits we put on ourselves. Some of that is making sure we have enough money for schools and city operations, but more importantly, the limits we put on ourselves through our thought and action. Tonight, as a gift to advance our community, my campaign committee has purchased 2,000 of these magnets that say “Melrose: One Community Open to All,” with our newly designed logo. They will be available to you tonight. I ask those who take them not to put them on their refrigerator or in a drawer, never to be seen again. I ask this because their message is far too valuable. Put them on your car and show the world what kind of a community Melrose is. This is the motto of our City. Yes, we have had successes in living up to this ideal, and we have had failures, and we will have more successes and more failures. But look how far we have come. This city elected Lizbeth DeSelm two years ago. She was elected because of her commitment to our community and her vision for our schools and she is one of the few transgender elected officials in this country. She is a national trailblazer. This city elected Patrick Guerriero, a wildly popular mayor and state representative who later became a true civil rights leader across this country in the area of same-sex marriage. His courage was built in this community. He is a national trailblazer. This year, the city of Melrose elected Manisha Bewtra, the first citizen of color to be elected in this city’s history. She is a trailblazer in Melrose. And the residents of 106 Walton Park for the past 35 years have still not lost an election in Melrose, as Jennifer Razi-Thomas takes her seat on the School Committee. Andrea, her wife, told me and a group of Melrose residents last week that she and Jennifer moved to Melrose because she saw the bumper sticker on a car that said “Melrose: One Community Open to All.” They, too, are trailblazers. Tonight on this stage we have the most women ever elected in the City of Melrose. Mary Livermore would be proud.

Anything is possible in this community—anything—and that includes me, a ten-or eleven-year-old student at the Roosevelt School who held a sign for Mayor James E. Milano and heard him speak, and from that point forward wanted to someday be Mayor of Melrose. During my first campaign, my father walked one side of the street and me and a few friends walked on the other, handing out flyers. The citizens of Melrose took a chance on a young man who wanted to lead this city, and I won that election by one vote. Anything is possible in the City of Melrose, and whatever I have contributed to this city, the people of Melrose have given me and my family far more.

I have ended every major speech for 16 years with the phase “Let us make history together.”  As I end my time in office, we have made history, but as I said before, this is not an end. This is the beginning of an exciting new chapter. So I say to those on the stage tonight, and everyone in the audience, “Let us continue to make history together.”