

Reverend Clergy, Lieutenant Governor Polito, Congresswoman Tsongas, Governor's Councilor Caissie, Sheriff Evangelidis, District Attorney Early, Senator Tran, Representative Zlotnik, Mayors Agnelli and Kelley, President Vanderhooven, U-Mass Amherst Provost McCarthy, former Senator Brewer, friends..

Good morning, Happy New Year and welcome.

I would like to welcome members of the classes of 2018 and 2023 to today's festivities. Thank you to the students, Superintendent Pelligrino, Principal Bolger, Vice-Principal Gelinas, Dean of Students Devito and Mrs. Poulin for allowing us to be a part of your school day.

Thank you to my family here today, particularly my wife Shelly. Over the past eleven years she has supported me in six campaigns for Mayor, countless night meetings and far too many early morning meetings. Since taking office we have not only made a crazy schedule work, but we added our son's crazy sports schedule to the mix just to try and make it more difficult. Thank you Shelly and Justin for your love and support.

A special thank you to the Gardner American Legion Post 129 Color Guard, the Gardner High School Select Choir, Gardner Middle School Bobcat Chorus, Reverend Hinds, Pastor Lundrigan, Reverend Cote, our bagpiper Mary Tierney, our soloist Joanne Landry and the Inaugural Committee of Councilor Ronald Cormier, City Clerk Alan Agnelli, Michael Nicholson and Rachel Stephano for your support of, and work towards, today's exercises.

Congratulations to the returning members of the City Council and School Committee and welcome to the new City Councilors. We have much work to do, but our work is made easier when we are all pulling in the same direction toward a common goal.

I am honored to have as today's Master of Ceremonies, Superintendent Mark Pelligrino. Many of you may be wondering why I would have someone that went to one of those other U-masses as the Master of Ceremonies. I know Representative Zlotnik certainly is. I'm honored to have Mark with us today in spite of his poor choice of U-Mass campuses. Mark has spent the past 20+ years in education. He has spent time in other school districts, at Gardner Middle School and Gardner High School and now as our Superintendent.

When I began thinking about my remarks for today, many of my thoughts wandered toward the steps we have been taking on the educational front. Of course, leading that charge is our Superintendent. A man that has an unrivaled passion for his work and for the Gardner Public School system.

Superintendent, I know you don't hear it enough, but thank you. Thank you for your tenacity, perseverance, infectious attitude and unwavering dedication to our school system.

Thank you also to Congresswoman Tsongas for attending today and her well-timed remarks. The Congresswoman had our fine City thrust upon her during redistricting several years ago. She didn't ignore us because we were some 40 plus miles from the heart of her district. She immediately came out to get to know me and the City of Gardner. She has made countless visits and has never allowed Gardner to take a back seat to any other community in her district. While we may not always agree on various political issues, we have always been able to work together for our constituents. I respect

Congresswoman Tsongas and have truly enjoyed working with her. I thank you for your service and dedication, but I will remind you that we still have some 365 days or so to keep working together.

We are also fortunate enough to be joined by Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito. The Lieutenant Governor is also no stranger to the City. It was only a couple of weeks ago that she came out to visit us, along with Senator Tran, at New England Wooden Ware. In fact, the Lieutenant Governor is a more frequent visitor than many of you may know. Not only is her name on the back of a downtown Gardner sign, no, not graffiti, we had a sign signing party a couple years ago for a local business and the Lieutenant Governor signed the sign, but when I went to introduce the Lieutenant Governor to the business owner, the owner replied "Oh, I know Karyn, she shops here all the time." When she's not in Gardner, chances are she is visiting one of the other 351 communities in the state. She has been a friend, an ally, a sounding board and a tenacious advocate for cities and towns in Massachusetts.

With the Baker – Polito administration in the corner office on Beacon Hill, we have been able to accomplish a lot over the past 3 years. From the vast "weed whacking" of the Municipal Modernization bill to the Community Compact grants to the Mass Works projects that have assisted us in implementing our Urban Renewal Plan to making sure all of the Cabinet Secretaries are responsive, not to just the City of Gardner's needs, but every community in our Commonwealth. It has been simply a pleasure to work with you and the Governor, because you both understand local government and have served in local government. Thank you for attending today and making this event even more special.

I've said it a thousand times, Gardner is a great place to live and do business because we are small enough that we have a small town feel and way about ourselves, yet we are large enough to have all the amenities of large city.

These amenities include a skating rink, a local daily newspaper, a hospital, a college, miles of bike path, an eight (8) screen movie theatre, a radio station, a skate park and a brewery/restaurant, just to name a few. Sometimes we have to stop and look around in order to remember how fortunate we are to live in this community.

Two years ago I spoke of the progress on Main Street and said we need to turn the corner onto Parker Street and begin the same work. Today, we are turning that corner and making a difference. But don't take my word for it, last week a front page article in The Gardner News had interviews with multiple downtown businesses. Each of them mentioned the difference the City is making in downtown and that they could see the positive effects on their own businesses.

Working together to improve our community we removed blighted and vacant buildings along Parker Street, namely the old theatre. We have also purchased two adjacent buildings on Parker Street, thanks in large part to the Baker-Polito administration. We are now reviewing proposals from developers that have the wherewithal and vision to redevelop this portion of downtown. Diagonally across the street, the Maki building, across from the Gardner Ale House, will be demolished in the next month or so. This will again, clear the way for additional downtown redevelopment.

Progress begets progress and success feeds success. We are progressing and we are succeeding!

Our progress and success continue as Gardner is home to industry leaders such as ACT Fastening Solutions who completed a 50,000 sq ft manufacturing expansion with a ribbon cutting by Governor Baker and added dozens of new jobs.

We have sold the last large parcel in the Summit Industrial Park to a business that will be building a new 60,000+ sq ft facility on the land. We are now working with MassDevelopment on siting a third Industrial/Business Park.

A new project at the intersection of routes 2A and 68 has finally been announced and it includes a new restaurant. The 99's Restaurant and Pub will be building in Gardner along with some other, soon to be named, businesses.

These are the types of success we need to build off of, and continue to work toward. When individuals are willing to invest in our City, we must be willing to work with them because they have 350 other communities to choose from. We need to make their choice, Gardner.

Two years ago I mentioned that we had finally completed a renovation of all of our playgrounds. Now, I can finally mention the completion of our skatepark.

I visit Jackson playground often and I can tell you that it is tremendously satisfying to sit on the wall near the skatepark and watch the 20-30 people of all ages and skill level using the skatepark, and to see just behind that on the new basketball court 2 or 3 pickup games going on and to look just beyond that at the new playground and see many young families enjoying the park.

These projects don't happen by accident. They are the result of a coordinated effort of our Community Development and Planning team and Department of Public Works, working with our state partners and the private sector to make these dreams a reality. We are all pulling together to achieve a common goal.

On the educational front, for the first time in the City's history we exceeded mandated Net School Spending in 2017 and 2018. This is a trend I intend to continue. If we want our City to grow and develop, if we want our property values to increase, if we want Gardner to be the community of choice in north central Massachusetts, it starts with the appropriate funding of our educational system.

Over the past six (6) years, we have invested over \$12 million in the infrastructure of our school buildings. We have taken care of the deferred maintenance issues of our education facilities. We have also been accepted into the MSBA's New School Building program and we are rapidly working our way toward a new elementary school for the City. To put this in a bit of perspective, it was just three (3) short years ago that we utilized three (3) different buildings totaling 280 years in collective age for our elementary schools and not one of them was built as an elementary school.

This is a project that is long overdue for the City.

It is also our intention to have Watkins Field completely renovated by the start of the next school year. Currently, plans and specifications are being drawn up for bidding that include a new turf field and

track, bleachers, concession stand, team rooms and bathrooms. This will be a facility our students and our City can be proud of.

On the public safety front, we began an ambulance service within our Fire Department about 9 months ago. The idea was not to raise revenue, the idea was to supplement our public safety personnel with little to no cost to the taxpayers. We have done this with very little capital outlay. If we wish to see this successful endeavor continue, let's remove the roadblocks and supply our first responders with the equipment they need to be successful.

Again, working with our state partners at E-911, we will finally achieve a combined police and fire dispatch center this year. This is a common sense approach that will allow us to respond to emergencies with the needed personnel in a timely manner.

I've mentioned growth and additional business in Gardner, but part of our duty is to maintain a balance between growth and conservation. We recently received word that we will be able to successfully conserve some 300 acres of land in West Gardner via a grant from our partners at the Executive Office Environmental Affairs. This adds to the almost 33% of land in the City that is protected Open Space.

We were able to achieve Municipal Aggregation with our resident's electricity bills saving our constituents over \$750,000 over the next two (2) years.

We took electrical boxes that were necessary eyesores around the City and made them into works of art by having students from Mount Wachusett Community College paint them.

We took a chance by organizing our first ever Food Truck Festival and had thousands of visitors descend upon the downtown for a few hours of food, drink and shopping.

Not every idea, plan, thought or effort will prove successful. But that is no reason not to try something new.

Just over two years ago we were finally able to invest the funds from the sale of the Norman Rockwell painting and were able to supplement the schools with almost \$50,000 last year and the announcement will come shortly that this year another supplement to our schools will surpass last year's numbers.

Selling a painting and creating an educational gift fund was a crazy idea, however, it worked and will continue to work for the Gardner Public Schools for the rest of our lifetimes.

We have an Administration that understands local government and is ready and willing to work with us. We have an Administration that is working to grow Local Aid at the same rate as the Commonwealth's revenue growth and working to increase Chapter 90 funding.

Let's work together, local, state and federal governments to achieve our goals of a stronger City, state and country.

To quote a great statesman, "I don't know it all, you don't know it all, but together, through public discussion, we can have a better idea of what is best for all of us."

In the coming days, weeks, months and years ahead, I truly look forward to working, together, with all of you, to having public discussions, and to continually improve our City.

Thank you.