

Good morning, Happy New Year and welcome.

I would like to offer a special welcome to:

Senator Jennifer Flanagan. Senator Flanagan has been a consummate friend to the City. Her omnipresence throughout her district has endeared her to her constituents and fellow elected officials. She truly represents our interests on Beacon Hill and is not afraid to take on the role of David in any showdown with Goliath.

Senator Stephen Brewer, although the Senator does not represent the City, he has us surrounded and is always present for many of our events. Senator Brewer has been a family friend for years and is someone my father always told me was a good, honorable and decent man. This is something I have come to know on my own.

Representative Rich Bastien, although only a freshman, Representative Bastien has made his presence felt on Beacon Hill particularly in his engagements over higher education spending and a more equitable distribution of funding for our institutions of higher learning.

Working together this legislative delegation, along with many others, has succeeded in gaining the passage of Plan Design Authority for municipalities, a success that is estimated to save Cities and Towns in excess of \$100 million. I'm proud to say that Gardner was the first community in the Commonwealth to take advantage of this tool offered by the Legislature. We are estimated to save over \$800k over a 12 month period by utilizing Plan Design Authority.

Our delegation has also fought successfully for the remaining reimbursement of the funds expended on the Ice Storm of 2008 and a portion of our prison mitigation funding. Not all of it, but you have to start somewhere.

Thank you all for attending today and for your dedication and service to your respective communities.

We are also joined by some members of a very select group. In fact, President Lyndon Johnson once quipped about this group that "When the burdens of the Presidency seem unusually heavy, I always remind myself that it could be worse. I could be a Mayor."

The men who have known this burden and join us today are former Mayor's

Gerald E. St. Hilaire 1978-1981 and 2004-2007

Charles P. McKean 1982-1985

Alan L. Agnelli 1986-1987

Daniel P. Kelley 2000-2003

I would be remiss if I did not call your attention and direct thanks toward the Inaugural Committee of Councilor's Alice Anderson, Henry Ares, James Johnson and Immediate Past President Neil Janssens. Your planning has resulted in a beautiful ceremony.

Also, a heartfelt thank you and salute to the American Legion Post 129 Honor Guard for your service to our country and your assistance here today.

Assisting with today's ceremonies, Patrick McGonigal, Jessica Damour and Meghan Bliss. Thank you for lending your superb talents to make today's festivities a little brighter.

I would be negligent if I did not pay a special thank you to my wife, Shelly, for her love and support and allowing me the flexibility to have the greatest job in the world. Also here today are my son Justin, my mother Nancy, my in-laws George and Nancy. Thanks to you and my entire family for your continued encouragement and assistance.

Thank you to the First Estate. Pastor Cote and Father Fraini, thank you for your time and divine intervention in assisting with the weather today. It's greatly appreciated.

And finally a warm welcome to friends, family members and members of the general public joining us here today.

Today's Master of Ceremonies, Mike Richard, should be no stranger to any of us. Mike is a guidance counselor here at Gardner High School, the voice of all things Gardner and MC extraordinaire, a past recipient of the City's Citizen of the Year award, a very good softball pitcher, a local historian, a Gardner News columnist and an all around gentleman and nice guy.

When I asked Mike to be the Master of Ceremonies, he said yes even before he knew what the Master of Ceremonies had to do or when the event was. I am proud to know Mike and call him a friend. To me, Mike embodies what it means to be from the Greater Gardner area.

Congratulations to the returning members of the City Council and School Committee and welcome to new Councilors Karen Hardern and Christine Wilson, returning Councilor Kim Dembrosky and new School Committee member Melody Phelps. I look forward to working with all of you over the next two years.

During my tenure in office, I have maintained a yearbook of sorts with clippings detailing the various happenings and events that have taken place. I look back at these books often. I feel it's important to know where you've been in order to determine where you are going.

In looking back over the past two years we've had numerous accomplishments. We've worked with the private sector and our state partners to realize a new development and downtown Gateway enhancement project. Now a beautiful new professional building stands at 354 Main Street rather than a bleak and vacant warehouse. This project did not come easily

and disagreements were had along the way, but working together we persevered and the project was a success.

Many milestones have been reached with regard to the Mill Street Corridor. This corridor includes the former S. Bent Mill site and Garbose Metal site. Both of these properties are now under City control and multiple grants have been attained in order to complete the environmental contamination cleanup and demolition of numerous buildings. We've been able to combine federal, state, and local funding along with funding and assistance from the Gardner Redevelopment Authority to continue this project. This is due in no small part to the efforts of Rob Hubbard, Community Development Director, Jennifer Dymek, Grants Administrator, and Trevor Beauregard, Economic Development Coordinator. This is a long term investment for the City that may not bear fruit in the next year or even two years. However, the three to five year outlook for this site is positive and will reap the City many rewards.

We've continued moving the City in an affirmative technological direction by continuing our string of E-Government awards, utilizing social media to help spread news and realizing that we can do so much more with the appropriate technological assistance.

Over the past four years, our conservative financial efforts have come to bear an improved bond rating, the lowest annual and total debt payments in years, a healthy stabilization fund and the adequate funding of all of our budgeted expenditures.

We've made numerous capital investments within the City. We've purchased not one, but two new fire trucks, we've done renovations within the Fire Station to make the building more comfortable to work in, we've made the investments in the Senior Center so that we have a suitable place for our seniors to gather, we've refurbished City Hall and the Annex and many offices within these buildings, some of this work still continues today. Maintaining what we have is cheaper than replacing it.

Working tirelessly with Superintendent Carol Daring, Vice-Chairman Jim Boone and the entire School Committee we have been able to restore school bussing to all grades and we've undertaken what was estimated to be a \$3 million school roofing project. Not only have we completed this project, but we will have paid off this debt within one year!

We've also re-established the senior tax work-off program whereby senior citizens can get their real estate taxes reduced by offering their services to the City. The program is an easy win-win. The seniors are re-engaged in their community and receive a financial benefit for doing so and the City is the recipient of invaluable assistance on projects that would otherwise go undone.

When I first came to work for the City of Gardner in 2001, one of the first events I attended was an award ceremony for Heywood Wakefield Phase III. I was most excited to finally attend the various open houses and ribbon cutting ceremonies for this project a short while ago. This project has marvelously transformed this vacant industrial building into a showplace and a home to many.

The iconic symbol of Gardner, The Big Chair, was refurbished by our own locally owned Maki Building Center. This City takes pride in its rich history and the restoration of the Big Chair was long overdue. Our friends at Maki spent countless hours, a true labor of love, in restoring this symbol of Gardner. When we rededicated the Big Chair, we also tested it as Councilor Graves and I climbed it to make sure it would last another 30 years. It will.

We've also seen the expansion of Heywood Hospital as well as the arrival of its new CEO Win Brown. The completion of the City's Urban Renewal Plan and the completed restoration of the former Goodnow-Pearson Department Store into 28 luxury apartments.

Working together as Mayor, Councilors, School Committee members, Gardnerites and Greater Gardnerites, we threw a yearlong party celebrating the 225th Anniversary of the place we call home. 2010 was filled with festivals, a firemen's muster, walking tours of the City, a concert and fireworks display and culminated with a parade unlike the City has seen in at least 25 years when former Mayor Dan Kelley coordinated the City's 200th Anniversary celebration. The pride people felt to be a part of this process and enjoy all of the events was palpable.

We have much to be proud of and we can all point to many accomplishments because every single elected official in this City is pulling in the same direction. We all want Gardner to succeed. However, we sometimes disagree on which route to take to success, but in the end we always come together through the art of compromise and via public discussions to get the job done.

I keep a newspaper clipping with a quote from my father on my desk. It states "We've got to hear it all, from all sides. 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." If only a few on Capitol Hill would have such an understanding, Congresses approval rating might actually soar into double digits. In Gardner, we have these public discussions.

As an example, it was through one of these discussions with Marc Morgan, a candidate for the City Council, that I was challenged in my thinking. Every day for I don't know how many years I had driven by the railroad bridge by Hannaford Supermarket heading toward route 2. There was graffiti written across this bridge and in looking back now, I recall staring at it each time and thinking how terrible it looked. Mr. Morgan, during his campaign, stated that he was tired of looking at the same graffiti and would do something about it as it made the whole City look bad. It suddenly dawned on me, that I could do something about it. The next day I made a call to Pan Am railways, spoke with the President and coordinated an effort with our DPW and Pan Am to remove the graffiti.

These are the discussions I enjoy. They challenge what we sometimes take for granted. I took it as a personal challenge to change something that I think everyone in Gardner disliked.

In keeping with trains, President Dwight D. Eisenhower once stated that “Neither a wise man nor a brave man lies down on the tracks of history to wait for the train of the future to run over him.”

With this in mind, I choose not to let the City of Gardner lie upon the tracks of history, rather let us embrace our past and prepare for the future. We are the masters of our own destinies and must plan, prepare and welcome changes that make us stronger. We cannot have our vision clouded by a two year election cycle. If this City is to continue to make great strides, we must look beyond the next election and to the next generation.

The City Charter was drafted over 90 years ago with only minor revisions since. A critical self evaluation of our organizational structure and chartered powers should be undertaken. This will make us stronger as a community and better prepared to deal with the increasingly complex world of today. Later this week I will be meeting with the Deputy Director of the UMass Boston Collins Center for Public Management. The Collins Center has become the foremost authority on Charter reviews. I will report to each of you the outcome of this meeting and the next steps along this journey.

Gateway Cities. This administration has concocted another level of bureaucracy that assists some communities through various opportunities, grants and technical assistance while ignoring others, like Gardner. A multitude of letters pointing out the hypocrisy of Gateway Cities have been delivered to all levels of Governor Patrick’s administration. We must keep reminding this administration that they work for all of us, not just those they arbitrarily choose.

We have started the journey toward reducing our carbon footprint by becoming a Green Community. We must continue our march toward energy independence by harvesting the power of the sun and wind via solar fields and wind turbines. The groundwork has been laid, the studies have been performed but changes will need to be made to our ordinances to allow some of this to happen. Working with the City Council, I am hopeful that we will break ground on at least one of these projects, if not both, within the next two years.

Heywood Wakefield Phase IV will be looking to partner with the City in order to be redeveloped. We will be challenged in the way we look at situations and problems and must not be afraid to change the way we’ve always done things. Creative solutions never come from one mind, but are always an amalgam of thoughts and ideas.

We’ve made great strides in refurbishing our schools. Working with Superintendent Daring and the school committee we must make sure that moving forward our schools have the necessary and adequate funding, structures and tools in order to prepare the children of Gardner for higher educational institutions and a global market place.

Working once again with our Community Development & Planning Department, Municipal Grounds Department & various other groups, we will initiate a major overhaul of the Greenwood Playground. It is also my hope to once again work with the School Department in order to upgrade the playground at Waterford Street School. Both of these facilities make

sense for improvements. Greenwood Playground is used by the Little League and has families visiting the field all the time, and Waterford Street School has a built in audience with the school children already using the facilities daily.

But I don't want to stop there. We have a multitude of playgrounds and parks throughout the City. We need to make a concerted effort to improve and maintain what we have. We also need to plant a few trees. Monument Park, for instance, was decimated after the Ice Storm of 2008. We need to begin to plant new trees now so that they will be able to bear the beautiful Memorial Lights within the next 10-20 years.

We will also be embarking upon the construction of a new police station. The current facility is inadequate for today's policing needs. The time has come to support those that protect us. An adequate Police Station is something this City has lacked for far too long.

I grew up in Gardner only really knowing our current facility. I accepted it because I didn't know anything else. Policing has changed over the years as well as the technology, equipment and facilities. We have been planning for this station for several years and have had input from professionals, City officials, and the general public. In 2-3 years time, this City will have that adequate facility.

Together, we will continue to work with all of our elected officials from the local, state and federal levels of government as well as all of the citizens of this great City in order to have that public discussion my father wished for. When we disagree, and we will disagree, it is not because one of us is evil or attempting to scam the City, it is simply a difference of opinion that if given the opportunity, we can work to resolve, but this must be a conversation and not just ill-conceived commentary.

I've been fortunate to have this position for four years. There is not a day that goes by that I am not grateful and humbled to hold this position. I am energized and excited to tackle the daily challenges of the next two years.

We've proven that we can accomplish remarkable things, even in a time of fiscal limits and pressures. Gardner is a great city, and we all have ideas on how to make it even greater. Let's have these conversations and discussions and work together for a better Gardner.

Thank you.