

City of New Haven

Toni N. Harp – Mayor



Good evening, everybody. Thank you very much.

Let me first acknowledge New Haven history being made at this very moment. For the first time in our town's storied, glorious history, a State of the City address is being delivered while a *woman* is at the helm of the city's legislative branch.

I think that's wonderful.

With that as a backdrop, President Walker, 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 grateful for this opportunity to share with you this assessment of the state of our city.

I'm so pleased to be together with you here in New Haven's aldermanic chambers. Thank you for this chance to boast a little about New Haven, underscore great progress underway about which we can all be proud, and yes, share with you some of the challenging work we have ahead of us, still.

Make no mistake: I am honored and blessed to be mayor of this great city – now for the start of a second term. I am proud and grateful to lead a government and city staff that serves residents, businesses, colleges, universities, non-profit organizations, and others, day after day.

In New Haven, elected officials, city workers, and the city's many, many partners make a great team – I'm glad to be part of it.

Tonight, in my assessment of the city at this point in time I want to share what I think is an apt description: New Haven is in a state of *transformation*. We are a city in transition, we are a city being transformed, and we are in turn transforming the lives and experiences of all those engaged with us.

I like to think this transformation was set in motion two years ago when my administration got to work and set out to transform New Haven. I believe changed behavior yields a new way of thinking: we've set out to transform New Haven and in so doing, prompt new ideas *about* New Haven.

This cycle, once established, will build upon itself.

To illustrate a most-recent sign of this we can look back just ten days, when the forecast for three-to-six inches of snow became a 10 to 14 inch snowfall instead. I think you'll agree: New Haven has been transformed from a city that might've been crippled by that surprise to one with an organized, coordinated, effective winter weather response.

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This did not happen by accident, but rather, as a result of foresight and careful planning. Beginning in the heat of last summer, when snow was the *last* thing on anyone’s mind, a snow *plan* was systematically devised – over the ensuing weeks and months – to include input from every city department involved.

Alder Sal DeCola, as chairman of the subcommittee of cognizance, took part in all these meetings as well, so my team could work in tandem with our legislative partners on this plan.

I’m grateful to all of them, the emergency response planners, to employees in the public works, parks and rec, livable city, police, and fire departments – and to all those with whom the city has storm response partnerships – for their work to keep New Haven running smoothly when we hit a rough patch of winter weather.

We are a city in transformation.

Let me give you another example, this time in terms of city finances. Again, I think you’ll agree: the city’s fiscal position provides the bedrock upon which *every* other initiative depends. With a solid financial foundation all plans are possible and the city only stands to grow and prosper.

Two years ago, when my administration got to work, \$14 million dollars of debt, a negative outlook and downgrades from all three bond rating agencies, and no rainy day fund characterized city finances. Tonight, we are a city transformed: the debt is eliminated, the past two fiscal years were finished in the black, the city has been upgraded by all 3 bond ratings, and there is a rainy fund of \$1.6 million.

Another way to illustrate finances transformed is to look at police department and fire department overtime, two crippling liabilities we inherited two years ago. Tonight I report to you, since the start of the current fiscal year seven months ago, an 18 percent reduction in police department overtime, and a 56 percent reduction in fire department overtime.

We are a city transformed.

Now please don’t anyone think reduced overtime costs signal a lapse in public safety preparedness and response. The New Haven Police Department continues to track major crime reductions throughout the city using a strategic combination of old school, boots-on-the-ground hard work, coupled with new-school technology.

A continuing commitment to weekly dissection of comprehensive statistics – ‘compstat’ – along with new tools like shot spotter and body cameras makes ours a tech-savvy, modern law enforcement agency that is the envy of many other cities.

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Beyond that, a new class of recruits is enrolled at the police academy as we speak. Its members will, upon graduation, spend a full year patrolling their beat on foot, getting to know the city and getting to know city residents. There is no substitute for this type of policing: person-to-person, eye-to-eye contact is how we build trust and mutual respect in New Haven.

The police department is also engaged in new programming: a pilot program downtown called New Haven Courts is working to hold those charged with quality-of-life crimes accountable through community service. And the Washington-based Police Foundation was so impressed by the foot patrol policy and initiative, as covered by the Wall Street Journal, it will conduct a series of case studies later this spring in New Haven, as well as in Cambridge, Kalamazoo, Portland, and Seattle.

I believe we are a city transformed when New Haven is in step with those cities in the eyes of national leaders.

In the fire department, again, a measured combination of old-fashioned elbow grease complements a steady infusion of new technology to make the city's fire operations increasingly effective and efficient. Major interior work and fire station upgrades only begin to describe the facelift in this department.

To begin with, about 120 new firefighters are now taking shifts citywide, with plans for another class at the fire training school later this year. This infusion of new talent and energy allows for testing and promotion of new officers to fill depleted ranks at those levels of command.

And this year the city's new fire marshal is using new computers to help with investigations and to maintain compliance with filing requirements. In a celebrated innovation, the fire marshal is now working with the city's building official to streamline inspections and permitting from each.

All of this contributed to the welcome news received just last week that New Haven is now an ISO Class One city, which is to say its fire protection services and emergency communications are *first* class. Going forward, this will translate to significant property insurance savings citywide for both residential and commercial owners.

As I mentioned, emergency communications factors prominently in this new rating. Transformation of the city's 911 center includes new computer software and a new telephone switching system, concurrent with extensive training and cross-training of call takers and dispatchers. Across-the-board, New Haven's public safety network is better prepared for any eventuality.

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Moving now from the city's good care of those in crisis or emergency situations to the city's compassion for the disadvantaged, disabled, or even destitute, the Community Services Administration is transforming New Haven to improve the quality of life for all those it encounters.

I would first mention – proudly – the fortified reputation New Haven earns as a welcoming home to immigrants from anywhere on earth who seek the freedoms and promises of an American way of life. I dare say no one in this room can deny lineage from some other nation or some other continent. Who then among us can in good conscience deny recent arrivals a warm welcome and a chance to become acclimated here?

New Haven is also a leader in its work to welcome home and reintegrate former prison inmates who often need housing, counseling, job training, and other opportunities. The city's re-entry efforts have been rewarded with federal grants – twice – and this rejuvenated city program is transforming lives – once characterized by anti-social behavior – to stable, well-supported, productive ones.

For all who would benefit from access to New Haven's network of human services the city now has a Web portal called 'Connectnewhaven.com,' a mobile, virtual, one-stop hub of available resources and opportunities.

The city's transformation is ongoing through other CSA outlets. Anti-smoking and anti-obesity projects are expanded, earning supplemental funding, and reaching targeted goals. The city's 'tobacco-free initiative' has reached literally thousands of students with its messaging, and 'Health in Your Hands' – focused on healthy eating habits, good nutrition, and better overall health, earned its own federal grant last year to advance that agenda.

Ongoing efforts to mitigate the effects of asthma, diabetes, lead poisoning, birth defects, HIV, and AIDS are revitalized and fortified in the city's health department.

We're breaking new ground with older residents through a new initiative in the Elderly Services Department. Its new Integrated Health Services outreach effort is deployed in each of the city's three senior centers, helping the elderly access proper social and healthcare services, track their interaction, and improve the quality of their lives as a result.

The city's Youth Services Department continues to build on its national reputation for implementing programs to engage young people at risk. For example, plans for 'The Escape' – a multi-faceted drop-in center and emergency shelter for young people – continue to gel.

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And just two weeks ago, at a U.S. Conference of Mayors event in Washington, I was invited to present an overview of the city's work to coincide with President Obama's My Brother's Keeper initiative, through which we proactively identify, contact, and deliver appropriate resources to disengaged youth.

Once again, New Haven glistened brightly in the company of other, perhaps larger and wealthier cities, and *every time* it does it confirms how we are a city in transformation – advancing our position as a *leading* American city in public policy and delivery of services, across-the-board.

Another program to help the disadvantaged is underway, initiated by *another* city department, underscoring how collaboration can yield results far greater than the sum of individual efforts. The main branch of the public library system is now an outpost for social service referrals for homeless and in-crisis residents. Outreach workers there help clients access shelter, emergency food supplies, and other immediate essentials.

The New Haven Free Public Library system is undergoing additional transformation: a \$1 million state grant will underwrite construction at the Stetson branch, and just a few months ago its branch manager was one of just ten *in the nation* to receive a prestigious 'I love my librarian' award.

A half-dozen new databases have been installed in the libraries: four to assist adult learners and two in support of the public schools' curriculum. Other technology upgrades system-wide and a new, technology-rich teen center at the main branch keep library patrons on-pace with transformation into the digital age.

And again in Washington, again, just two weeks ago, City Librarian Martha Brogan was joined by Superintendent of Schools Garth Harries and me to represent New Haven – one of just three American cities chosen – to present strategies in process here to improve educational outcomes through the School Change Initiative and the 'ConnectED Library Challenge.' In this way we will further engage public libraries in public education and again yield results far greater through cooperation and collaboration.

On the topic of New Haven Public Schools, there is perhaps no greater evidence of our city's state of transformation than in the faces of the 22,000-plus students enrolled. These children know they're part of something special underway – they know the city is united in its efforts to deliver to them the best possible learning environment, personnel, resources, and support.

Their trust and faith in our collective efforts is mirrored by me – and by tens of thousands of parents throughout New Haven. I know – to the very core of my sensibilities – and they know, *every single* member of the city's board of education is 100 percent committed to building the best possible school district for these kids. *Just* as they should be.

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These efforts by the board, working closely with the superintendent of schools and his administration, are gaining momentum.

Districtwide data show strong progress in a most-important priority – attendance. Students cannot learn if they're not in class. The district's proactive policy to address this matter has had positive results. Throughout the city's K – 8 priority schools chronic absenteeism is down about 7% compared to last year.

While students are *in* school, the district has expanded its implementation of restorative practices to address harmful behavior and instill accountability. Many of you will recall I spoke at some length last year during these State of the City remarks about restorative practices.

Not only does this strategy instill accountability and encourage young people to accept more responsibility, it complements our 'attendance matters' priority by reducing exclusionary practices like suspension and expulsion. Again, students cannot learn if they're not in class; restorative practices keep kids in school.

For the fewer and fewer students who remain unable to attend school, a fortified homebound education program shores up expectations, accountability, and academic achievement to ensure any time spent away from class is time well-spent in terms of schoolwork.

In lockstep with these initiatives, New Haven Public Schools is working to increase parent engagement through citywide outreach efforts. Parents are now encouraged to play a more active role in their students' progress; daytime appointments to go over quarterly report cards and other initiatives are meant to build an all-day-long educational support structure around each child.

This expanded concept of team-teaching has an increasing reliance on real-world experiences, through what's called 'blended learning' at internships, apprenticeships, and work-study programs on par with a vocational – technical school experience.

New Haven's magnet schools and special academies are shining examples of this, and we're grateful to a growing number of private sector partners for their willingness to help us place more and more of these students.

What's more, New Haven Public Schools is accepting a greater role in assisting with students' social and emotional development as a direct response to, and as a direct result of increasing evidence of need. Simply put, more and more New Haven students arrive at school not merely hungry for breakfast, but hungry for support, encouragement, and direction.

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There are only a few years in the lives of young students to make a positive impression and provide guidance toward a self-sustainable, self-actualizing adult life. That window is only open while these kids are enrolled in our schools.

Along those lines, the school district has secured additional state grants to expand after-school programs and an evening supper program is to be implemented at five school sites. These efforts follow in the wake of the successful ‘Six-to-Six’ pilot program at the Lincoln-Bassett School.

In addition, four groundbreaking Saturday Academies are now underway with an emphasis on technology but also with strong social and emotional learning opportunities, and New Haven Public Schools is working with Boston-based Citizens Schools to provide a longer learning day in other schools, so students have rich, diverse, and *sustained* educational stimuli each day.

Should New Haven Public Schools go forward in partnership with the Citizens Schools program, they will feature a S.T.E.A.M. focus – that is to say, Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics. This is by design, to match the city’s public school curriculum with what employers tell us they need in terms of a knowledgeable, versatile, experienced workforce.

Make no mistake: we *are* targeting underperforming schools with these extended learning opportunities. We are swimming against the tide in our efforts to shrink a glaring educational achievement gap, and this redoubled emphasis on spending constructive, productive time at school is a major component of that effort.

In a transformative New Haven, there is simply not enough time to spend even a minute, and there is certainly not enough money to spend even a nickel on petty, picayune distractions.

There is no overstating this: old methods of educating today’s students – and old results – will not stand in this city any longer. Our public schools system is under transformation to become the training ground for lifelong learners who will have options and opportunities to specialize, reach their full potential, and become contributing, productive adults in today’s *knowledge*-based economy.

In New Haven we know our *local* economy is undergoing a transformation. This month the city welcomes hundreds of new employees to the new, downtown, world headquarters of Alexion Pharmaceuticals. By the time Alexion’s move is complete, more than 1,000 employees will be at work at 100 College Street – a beautiful building for which plans had to be expanded just since the groundbreaking.

In terms of employment, there is an estimated multiplier effect to suggest more than two and a half times as many workers will eventually be needed to fill jobs in related businesses in support of Alexion.

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Beyond that, there are additional hopes this growing, global firm will attract to the city other booming, bioscience and medical research firms.

We have every reason to expect there will be sufficient housing in New Haven for new workers. Something of a building boom is underway: hundreds and hundreds of new apartments are coming on-line and as a happy byproduct, local construction companies are forecast to receive about \$18.8 million in construction contracts in the current fiscal year. About \$15.7 million worth of *those* are projected to be with women and minority-owned construction businesses.

As an aside, revenue on the building permits line of the city budget is running a surplus for the second consecutive year, as well.

More and more small businesses are getting a running start in New Haven as well, at the city's new small business development academy on Dixwell Avenue. Just a few months ago a graduation ceremony was held in this room for many of them. The sense of pride and future promise – among new small business graduates *and* among the city staff that helped them – was palpable.

We're particularly proud of the booming aspect of one sector in the small business economy: hundreds and hundreds of mobile food vendors provide an eclectic, vibrant array of options for a fast-paced city in transformation. There might be no more convincing evidence of how New Haven is attracting – and keeping – residents and businesses that value diverse, high-quality, *interesting* culinary options in their day-to-day lives.

In June, all of you and the entire greater New Haven region will be invited to the second annual food truck festival to celebrate these exciting entrepreneurs *and* to benefit the small business academy.

All these trends support the idea that New Haven is transforming from the industrial and manufacturing economic hub it was 50 or 75 years ago into the high-tech, bio-medical hub emerging today. We know the private sector is investing in New Haven, we know Yale is investing in New Haven, and we should all be *very* excited about the prospects for the continuing economic transformation – both short-term and long-term – of this city.

There might be no sector of the local economy changing at a faster pace than that near and dear to arts and culture aficionados. There's no question but that New Haven is a cultural hub – the 'heartbeat' of artistic expression in the region. I'm happy to report the city doesn't rest on those laurels on any single day.

For instance, the John Slade Ely House, a fixture on the local arts circuit and a cultural resource for all of greater New Haven, will soon change hands – with the city's encouragement over these past many

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months – to become an Education Center for the Arts, perpetuating the draw of this landmark mansion and attracting the creative instincts of the region.

A new series of concerts went border-to-border last summer to promote both the arts and New Haven's beautiful city parks. The Cool Breeze Music in the Parks series also featured access to the library's Readmobile, parked nearby, to promote literacy and encourage reading.

Many of you alders have already been taking advantage of the new, regularly scheduled Arts Tutorial with members of the Cultural Affairs Commission, at which the artistic, cultural, and financial potential of the creative economy is explored.

Again, there is no question: New Haven is perfectly positioned to entertain new residents, students, and visitors with an array of cultural treasures and cutting-edge creations – burnishing the city's reputation as a destination for same.

I'll confess to you that one of the most exciting things for me – as a mayor just beginning a second term – is to have seen already the transformation underway, with so much promise for more progress in the immediate future.

For instance, with hopes we're together again this time next year for another meeting like this, we have reason to expect good progress toward a new Q House community center on Dixwell Avenue. As you all know, the State Bond Commission approved \$14.5 million for that project just the other day.

This new facility will supplement efforts to engage at-risk young people and provide them with a structured, supervised place to be where they can pursue creative, productive ways to pass idle time.

A year from now a new Clean City Initiative should be well underway, to capitalize on the intrinsic beauty of this place we share, and to improve the quality of life for all who live, work, study, and visit here.

With strong faith in the notion that a clean city is a safe city, we plan to initiate neighborhood cleanups, bring negligent owners of vacant lots and empty buildings into code compliance, crack down on illegal dumping, and engage in an anti-littering community service program and public relations campaign.

To the extent each of us invests in the city, our collective sense of pride in the city will soar, and that'll resonate in every direction far beyond the city line.

And a year from now I expect there will be good progress with regard to planned, significant upgrades on the New Haven Green. As you know, the city does not own the Green per se, yet the Parks and Rec

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Department and Town Green Special Services District certainly contribute to its maintenance and upkeep.

But now, with the owner's permission, the city engineer has been working on plans to improve lighting, irrigation, and other vital infrastructure, understanding it is a focal point for the city and an important landmark to be polished to the best of our ability so it shines as brightly as possible.

One of the highlights of this planned, comprehensive upgrade – and please don't anyone think twice about it, we've applied for state funding to underwrite the project – is the availability of strong, reliable WIFI for all those who need it or want it on the Green.

We see this as part of an irresistible draw for New Haven, and the start of another economic development tool for us to use. With an idea a wired city almost automatically becomes a capital for commerce in this day and age, we see WIFI on the New Haven Green as a significant marketing superhighway, for both large businesses and small – for both the short-term and the indefinite future.

New Haven is in a state of transformation: it is in many ways already transformed in these past two years, and there are many more exciting transitions underway. As a result of this, New Haven is emerging as a destination city for more businesses, more residents, more students, and more visitors.

In turn, as a result of *that*, New Haven will enjoy more commerce, more cultural activity, more progress, and more challenges as we work to manage it all. These are welcome challenges, we are fortunate to have all these positive developments to anticipate.

As I mentioned earlier, I am honored and blessed to be mayor of this great city – now for the start of a second term – and I am impressed every single day with the hard work, creativity, resolve, and resilience on display throughout the city.

I remain grateful for the opportunity I have to serve the city as mayor, and for the chance I've had this evening to share these thoughts about it with you.

Thank you very much. God bless you, and God bless the great City of New Haven.

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