

2017 STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

BY NASHUA MAYOR JIM DONCHESS

Good evening President McCarthy, Vice President Wilshire, members of the Board of Aldermen, Board of Education members, BPW Commissioners, other elected officials, School Superintendent Brown, Police Chief Lavoie, Fire Chief Galipeau, city division directors, city staff, community members, and guests.

I want to thank my wife Vicki, daughter Caroline, son-in-law David and new grandson Ajax for all the support you give me.

A year ago I called upon my fellow Nashua citizens to come together, and by using all of your talents, know-how, skills and imagination to join me in the work of making Nashua a great city.

And I told you that I want Nashua to be a city for everyone, for senior citizens and young families just starting out, for high tech professionals and

artists, for lifelong residents and new Americans. I told you that I want to make our city government more open to all of our citizens.

Think about everything we have accomplished in just one year by working together.

We are growing our economy and adding jobs. We have new housing in the works. We are improving our schools, and we are lifting up our downtown. We are meeting the challenge of the opioid addiction crisis. And we are making Nashua city government more inclusive and transparent for all of Nashua's people.

This past October *Money Magazine* – based upon its survey of more than 800 communities – honored Nashua with the 16th spot on its annual list of the “Best Places to Live in America.” In July WalletHub ranked Nashua the 10th “Best-Run City in the US.” In addition we have maintained our strong bond rating – Triple A with the Fitch rating agency.

Working with me we have a Board of Aldermen whose members are thoughtful and dedicated to the good of our city. I am privileged to be

working with them and to be leading 2,800 city employees who every day are working hard on behalf of the citizens of Nashua.

In short, the state of our city is strong and getting stronger.

Growing the Economy and Adding Jobs

On the jobs front, our unemployment rate is a low 2.5%. And we are adding more jobs – 300 at BAE Systems’ South End campus, 150 jobs at Prudential Linen, a new cleanroom services business that will be opening in 2017, and more jobs at UPS. These jobs and the ripple effect they create will add many millions of dollars to our robust regional economy.

At Gateway Hills in the South End, we have attracted new companies – like DataGravity, Plexxi, Benchmark and many others – and added 3,000 jobs in recent years. Now we are working with the Flatley Company towards a new R & D facility that will add 500 jobs – a goal we want to accomplish within the next 3 years.

I want to make Nashua a city that offers opportunity to people in all of our neighborhoods – from the Tree Streets to the North End, from Crown Hill to Sky Meadow, from Little Florida to Westgate Village. That is why I am working and striving every day to energize our economy.

Our Downtown – More Vibrant than Ever

And again by working together we are creating a downtown that is more vibrant than ever. I want to thank our many partners in this story of ongoing success – Great American Downtown, our Chamber of Commerce, iUGO Nashua, CityArts, Positive Street Art, our Nashua Arts Commission, our Downtown Improvement Committee, and hundreds of talented and community-minded citizens.

In the spring we held our 10th annual International Sculpture Symposium, and we restored the beautiful wooden doors at the historic Hunt Building.

In the summer we set up pianos on Main Street and expanded the Nashua Farmers Market, planted trees in the Tree Streets, and helped relocate the Picker Building Artists' Collaborative in the Millyard.

In September we put on our first outdoor Fall Music Festival and in October we had our first annual food truck festival. Towards year's end we returned holiday lighting for our downtown, we held another successful Holiday Stroll, and we celebrated Positive Street Art's charming new movie mural on Main Street. This past month we illuminated our downtown rail trail so that people can use this pedestrian corridor safely and comfortably at all times of the day and night.

The Nashua River is central to Nashua's identity. And over the next few months, in concert with a talented landscape architecture and urban design firm, we will be developing a twenty-first (21st) century plan for the Nashua Riverfront.

We know that new housing and arts and music are keys to bringing more people of all ages to the heart of our city.

For housing, we are working to add 165 – and now we think 200 – new apartments to Franklin Street with the mill-to-housing conversion going on there. Thanks to the work of BIDA under the leadership of Jack Tulley, we

are adding 150 apartments as part of the Renaissance development on Bridge Street, and we are looking to add more apartments in the Picker Building on the Nashua River and still more on School Street.

And Nashua is rapidly becoming the live music destination for our entire region. We are already blessed with a music scene which includes venues at the Riverwalk Cafe, Fody's, and Dolly Shakers. In a few months we will be presenting our first outdoor Spring Music Festival.

Long term we are looking to develop a downtown performing arts center. We are in the final stages of a feasibility study which is looking at sites and a workable business plan.

But I believe we may be able to add more music soon.

We are working on a plan, in concert with Great American Downtown and Ben Ruddock of Riverwalk Cafe, to convert, at a modest cost, the historic Central Fire Station on Court Street to a music venue that will draw up to

300 people to downtown on a regular basis. This venue could bring first rate musicians performing Americana, indie, bluegrass and other diverse genres to downtown. We expect to be able to tell you about the details of the plan in the coming months.

We Are Making Progress Against the Opioid Addiction Crisis

Every day I am inspired by the way that Nashuans have shown the character and the heart to come together to attack the opioid addiction crisis.

Right after I was sworn in, I established the Mayor's Opioid Task Force, whose members include our fire and police departments, public health, advocates and professionals from the prevention and treatment communities, as well as other concerned citizens, to develop a battle plan in the fight against opioid addiction. One important result has been that all the key players in Nashua are now on the same team – talking and working together.

But as 2016 went on the number of overdoses was continuing to rise to a peak of 45 ODs with 7 fatalities in October after 7 fatalities in September. So with a great sense of urgency I called together Nashua Fire Rescue, Harbor Homes, AMR, the city Health Department, our PD, and our hospitals. And on November 17 together we launched Nashua's Safe Stations Program.

Under Safe Stations, anyone wanting help with addiction can go to any Nashua firehouse 24/7. A firefighter does a short evaluation and then Harbor Homes picks up each person and develops the best treatment and recovery option.

People in trouble have responded. During the last 6 weeks of 2016, 48 people reported. Since the start of 2017, the response has grown to about 2 per day – over 150 people have reported to a Safe Station since the start of the program.

So far the number of ODs has dropped – in December 23 ODs, 20 in January, and so far X in February. Unfortunately we are still having some fatalities, but far fewer than in September and October.

I am very proud of the way that every day Chief Galipeau and our firefighters, the employees of Harbor Homes and AMR are rising to this challenge.

And to anyone who is here or who is watching tonight, if you or a loved one have a problem with addiction and you want help, go to any Nashua firehouse now. We're here to help.

Going forward it is important for everyone to understand that continued Medicaid expansion is critical to our anti-addiction efforts here in Nashua. This is because in many cases Medicaid is providing the coverage for the crucial treatment and recovery services that people need.

Naturally I am disappointed to see that the recently proposed state budget does not include any funds for continued Medicaid expansion. I will be urging the legislature to make sure that expanded Medicaid is in the final state budget.

The Nashua Police Department is also playing a big role in our anti-opioid campaign by getting drug dealers off of our streets. In 2016 the PD made 749 drug arrests, and Nashua has become known as a place where it is hard to deal heroin. I am proud of that reputation, one that is well earned because of the work of Chief Andy Lavoie and our police officers. And that is not all – through their community policing approach at the Police Athletic League and elsewhere, police officers are steering young people in the right direction.

In Nashua we care about all of our citizens and we don't want to leave anyone behind – whether they are a Nashuan struggling with addiction, a student with a disability, or a senior citizen trying to stay in her home.

Nashua is New Hampshire's Most Age-Friendly City

In our inclusive city one of the most pressing concerns for our seniors is property taxes.

I am proud to say that Nashua is New Hampshire's most age-friendly community. We offer the largest senior property tax credit of all the cities and towns of our state.

The city also provides strong support to our Senior Activity Center. One of our aldermen, June Caron, and our City Treasurer, David Fredette, are active in the management of the center.

Saving Money and Increasing Revenue

And of course, property taxes are a concern for all of us, especially in New Hampshire, where the state tax structure pushes the costs of government onto the local property tax bills.

Still Nashua has the second lowest equalized property taxes of all 13 cities of New Hampshire – only Portsmouth's tax rate is slightly lower.

We are always looking to find ways to save and to spend our funds more effectively. This year we are switching to LED street lights which will save us \$250,000 per year. We are now moving forward with a plan to buy out the long-term lease on the city-owned Mine Falls hydroelectric dam. This buy-out will increase revenues to the city – over and above the cost of acquisition and operations – by up to \$400,000 per year.

Our Schools Are Critical

We cannot talk about the state of our city without recognizing the central importance of our schools.

Families must have confidence that their kids will get the education they need to succeed in life. Good schools are also a key part of our economic development strategy. Employers need to know that we are graduating students who have the skills to perform in the workplace.

Our high school students are making us proud. In Nashua we have more students excelling in Advanced Placement courses than any in other communities in New Hampshire. In 2016 thirteen Nashua students were recognized as National AP Scholars, out of a total of only 42 in all of New Hampshire – so 30% of the statewide total come from Nashua.

Last year 3 students from Nashua were admitted to MIT, while three students Mary Zhu, Aashish Welling and Harshal Sheth won top awards at the New Hampshire Science and Engineering Fair.

It Is Time for Full-Day Kindergarten

Now we have the opportunity to take a dramatic step forward in ensuring quality of education for all of our kids. Superintendent Brown has proposed a creative budget which while making some cuts also includes full-day kindergarten for all of our 5-year-olds.

I support full-day kindergarten, and I am announcing tonight that I will include full-day kindergarten in the budget I present to the Board of

Aldermen later this spring. Research shows that kids from all backgrounds benefit from all-day kindergarten – fewer drop outs, higher GPA's, more success.

In 1988, when I was Mayor before, we started half-day public kindergarten in Nashua for the first time, when kindergarten was not state-mandated. We have waited a long time for the completion of what we started back in 1988.

In order to bring on full-day kindergarten, and to achieve a budget with a 1.3% increase, Dr. Brown's proposed budget eliminates some things which I believe we should keep. Ensuring that all of our children reach their full potential as well as seeing to it that the quality of our teaching remains high require that Clearway High School and two teaching coaches be retained in the budget as key elements of our educational program. In addition, I believe that cutting 10 custodians is too much.

Clearway – an alternative high school run by the Adult Learning Center – has been effective in educating kids who thrive in a smaller high school environment.

The two teaching coaches enable our junior teachers to fully blossom into the classroom leaders we need. I want to make sure that all our teachers have the skills and experience they need to enable Nashua's school children to reach their full potential.

When I submit my budget to the Board of Aldermen, I will add funds for Clearway High School, for the two teaching coaches, and for some more custodians.

Let's Thank Our Teachers

Let's thank our teachers. In thinking about Nashua's schools, we must understand the critically important role that our teachers play in the lives of our students.

Some don't fully understand the challenges our teachers face today. Many kids come to school unprepared to learn because they are hungry or cold; 267 students are classified as homeless. Too many kids have parents or family members who are in the grip of addiction.

Yet Nashua teachers are meeting these classroom challenges every day.

Dedicated teachers, principals, and other staff are also working hard for Nashua's needy kids by collecting and distributing food, clothing, and other necessities. Other members of our community are also making a difference. The Chamber, Alderwoman Mellizzi-Golja, and George Katis of Nashua Wallpaper organize the Back to School event at the library every fall. And the volunteer organization End 68 Hours of Hunger distributes food to 50 needy families at 4 of our elementary schools every Friday.

Ending Childhood Hunger in Nashua

But we can do more to combat childhood hunger. Therefore, tonight I am announcing that along with the Nashua Soup Kitchen, End 68 Hours of

Hunger, United Way, the Salvation Army, the Corpus Christie Food Pantry and others, we will launch a new initiative – End Childhood Hunger in Nashua – before this year is out. We will start in Crown Hill, the home to the Dr. Crisp Elementary School, where over 80% of the kids qualify for free or reduced lunch.

I want to thank Michael Reinke, the new leader of the Soup Kitchen, for the inspiration to launch an end childhood hunger campaign here in Nashua. I know that by working together we can make the lives of many hungry children a lot better.

We Are Making City Government More Accessible

We are making Nashua city government more open and accessible.

I am reaching out to citizens and learning from them about their hopes and dreams for Nashua. For the second year I am holding town hall meetings in all of the neighborhoods of our city. I have also started a monthly

Coffee-with-the-Mayor at Jajabelle's on Main Street. I have talked with hundreds of Nashuans in these informal settings.

I have also appointed nearly 50 new people to city boards and commissions.

I want to involve leaders from our millennial generation in helping to chart the course of Nashua's future. Therefore, a number of my new appointments are millennials – Lydia Foley, Simon Sarris, Amanda Schneck, Dan Weeks, James Tobin, Alison Bankowski, and Sindiso Mnisi Weeks on boards and commissions, joining James Vayo, Sarah Marchant, Tim Cummings, and Madeleine Mineau who are working inside city government. We are also working closely with other young leaders, especially downtown where the passion of our millennials is clearly focused – leaders such as Aldermen Ben Clemons and Tom Lopez, Paul Shea, Manny Ramirez, Jessica DePontbriand and Ben Ruddock.

Our young leaders are helping us plan a city that has walkable streets, new housing, a beautiful and accessible river, and a diverse business community.

It is inspiring to me that we have so many talented Nashuans who are willing to share their time and talents for the benefit of our great city.

The New Nashua Citizens Academy

In a new effort to open Nashua city government to even more citizens, I am announcing tonight that starting on March 6, we are launching our first Nashua City Academy.

On Monday evenings over the course of 13 weeks up to 50 citizens will be able to learn from our division and department heads about the details of city operations and budgeting.

Do you want to see what goes on inside a firehouse? Do you want to learn more about how the city plows its streets or landfills its garbage? Do you

want to learn more about city budgeting? Sign up for the Nashua City Academy right away.

Fixing Nashua's Streets

Speaking of our streets, Nashua has not kept up with street paving, and the condition of our streets has deteriorated over the years. This is a problem that many citizens have spoken to me about. We have completed an assessment of all of Nashua's 1,300 streets and have determined the Paving Condition Index, or PCI, of each street.

I am announcing tonight, that in concert with the BPW and David Deane, Ken Siegel and other aldermen, I will be proposing a big leap forward – a plan to devote \$7.5 million per year to paving and patching our streets over at least the next 5 years. This catch-up initiative will significantly upgrade the overall condition of our streets.

Better Recreation for our Kids

Our beautiful parks and our active recreation programs are part of the fabric of Nashua. We have historic Greeley and beautiful Mine Falls Parks.

This year through a combination of funds raised privately and over \$175,000 of city funds, we established the state's first all accessible playground at Labine Park. Eric Brand was the inspiration and driving force for the Legacy Playground, and many others contributed including Eric's Leadership Greater Nashua class, donors, volunteers, and Parks Superintendent Nick Caggiano.

However, there is one area where our recreation programs need improvement, and that is the number of soccer/lacrosse fields we have. We have only 11 fields, and we have not added a new one in at least 20 years. Eleven is not nearly enough. We have about 2,000 kids and a lot of adults engaged in soccer and lacrosse.

The condition of our fields needs to be better, but grass needs rest in order to grow. That is why we need more fields, so that we can establish a

rotation schedule – letting the grass grow on some fields while kids and adults are using others.

Tonight I am announcing a plan to build two fields in the dusty area next to the Charlotte Avenue Elementary School and a third field at the park on Jewell Lane next to the school. Our partners in this project are Rob Leonardi and other members of the Charlotte Avenue Elementary School PTO, the Nashua School Department, and the Nashua Parks Department.

Reaching Out to New Residents

Nashua has a long history of immigration. Waves of French Canadian, Irish, Lithuanian, Jewish, Polish, German, Greek and other immigrants worked in our mills and built our city in the 19th and 20th centuries.

In the 21st century new immigrants have been arriving and helping us build our community – people from India, Mexico, Brazil and other countries. Nashua is the most diverse city in New Hampshire, and we are proud of our diversity.

A recent study by the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine found that immigration has a positive impact on the long term economic growth of the United States. The study also found that second generation Americans, the children of immigrants, are among the strongest contributors to the US economy.

The Nashua Chamber of Commerce has found that over recent years Nashua's population would have dropped by 4-5,000 people but for immigrants coming from outside of the US. We have many successful new Americans here in Nashua. There are many examples, but I will mention particularly John Olapurath who immigrated from India and who founded Zco Corporation, a successful software and app developer that employs 25 people right in our Millyard.

Nashua is extending a hand of welcome to new Americans. During 2016, with the support of the Nashua Chamber, United Way, and many citizens, we officially became a Welcoming City – signifying that we welcome new

Americans who wish to move here and contribute and that we remember the contribution of past immigrants.

In 2016 we also established a Sister City relationship with Mysore, India. Mysore is a cultured, university city in southern India, a region from which many of our Indian-American citizens have come. Mysore has a highly educated population and is today one of the IT centers of the world. We hope to build upon this relationship to strengthen our economy and enrich our city.

Working with our Legislative Delegation to Help Nashua

We are working with our legislative delegation to help Nashua, and I want to thank our delegation for taking up the city's cause. A major goal is to halt the downshifting by which year by year the State of New Hampshire pushes more costs onto local government and raises property taxes while crowing about "no new taxes" and about a "budget surplus."

The largest of these downshifts right now is the imposition of another \$2 million in pension costs on the city and our taxpayers. Our legislative delegation has advanced three bills to address this problem and we are fighting to get at least one of these bills passed.

There are other state actions which would increase property taxes – one is the reduction in state education aid. Nashua's school aid was reduced by \$479,000 last year while aid to Bedford and Windham almost doubled.

A major legislative objective for us is extending commuter rail to Nashua. During its last session, the legislature cut the funds necessary to accomplish the final planning steps for commuter rail even though the funds required were all federal – not a dime of state money was needed. This session I have testified in favor of including rail funds in the capital budget and against eliminating the state Rail Authority.

During the past year, I have been inspired by many Nashuans – but I want to single out our Nashua's Safe Stations team – Nashua Fire Rescue, Chris Stawasz of AMR and Harbor Homes. As I have visited our firehouses like

the Amherst Street Fire Station and as I have talked with our team about the shattered families who are coming to a Safe Station, I have seen their total commitment to the mission of rescuing Nashua from opioids.

Our Safe Stations team are showing the character that is part of Nashua's history and fabric. I am thankful to every one of them.

So let's continue pulling together, working together, and showing the heart that is evident in every neighborhood of our city – together we can accomplish great things.

God bless the great city of Nashua. Thank you.