

State of the City - 2017
Mayor Benjamin Blake

This is the sixth time I've stepped up to the plate to deliver my state of the City.

As I've said in prior addresses, I believe deeply in the people and promise of this community, and I am proud of Milford's relentless forward progress.

Milford is home to the 2017 baseball state champion Foran Lions; a team that started season out 1-11 - a team that went into the State playoffs in the last seeded spot.

Foran didn't let its last place position get them down – Coach Garrett Walker and the players didn't mope - or hang their heads – instead, they swung for the fences; they refused to lose.

The “boys in blue” went on to wipe the walls with team after team; Foran did whatever it took to out-run, out-hit, out-play, out-work, and out-hustle each squad it faced.

This team has brought great pride to our community not just because they came home with a championship banner but because of the way they won it. Foran overcame great challenges, and they didn't give up. No team in history has ever won a championship in this way or with this much heart.

Adversity made the Foran Lions stronger.

The City of Milford has also encountered a great deal of adversity over the past year.

We find ourselves facing challenge after challenge from the State of Connecticut.

To put it bluntly, State government has been throwing a lot of curveballs our way.

From a mid-year rescission of almost a million dollars in funding that Milford had relied upon and budgeted as revenue, to recent threats of up to \$18 million in potential cuts to municipal aid, the State's strategy to help

balance a deficit that's more than \$2 billion dollars is, in my opinion, misguided.

And clearly, Milford has been unfairly targeted by the State. My concern is that these reduction threats are an undue response to our successful, efficient operation and because we are a well-managed city which has innovated and prioritized our resources.

But to add insult to injury, the State is preparing to dump tens of millions of dollars into Silver Sands State Park to build massive guard houses, maintenance facilities, and beachside administrative offices that no one wants at the same time state government is facing this enormous deficit and slashing funding everywhere, including lifeguards that would help keep Silver Sands swimmers safe.

In Milford, we'd much prefer to see the beaches staffed with lifeguards and to have the Park's natural environment kept-up, and avoid any expensive projects which will have such a huge negative impact on the traffic, parking and public safety in the streets and neighborhoods adjacent to Silver Sands.

Unfortunately, Silver Sands isn't the only example where the State has hijacked our right to local, self determination and frustrated our ability to adopt and live by sound planning principles.

Connecticut's affordable housing law currently allows for abuse by developers who look to flout local zoning regulations for their own personal gain - we've seen this firsthand in Milford.

And while I was disappointed by the Governor's decision to veto amendments intended to strengthen Section 8-30g of the Connecticut General Statutes, I was elated with the broad, bi-partisan support we saw at the veto-override session on Monday.

I do want to thank and commend our entire legislative delegation, Senator Slossberg and Representatives Rose, Staneski and Ferraro for pushing this issue and enacting long overdue improvements to the statute. With this recent win, I'm hopeful the State will be persuaded to address other inequities that affect us locally.

In particular, we've been frustrated by the State's decision to temporarily close the local DMV. I certainly don't agree with the basis for closing such an important office instead of sorting-out operational inefficiencies and so I've been working with our delegation to shake some sense into the DMV decision makers.

Clearly, we've gotten some bad pitches from the State lately. While a lesser community might have thrown in the towel and just given up hope, Milford instead chooses to dig deep and play championship ball.

Milford will continue to take the fight to Hartford and make our case that many of the State's recent proposals are coming out of left field and are upside down and dangerous.

Milford's voices will be heard as we argue that:

1. Any attempt to balance Connecticut's budget on the backs of fiscally responsible, working class towns is beyond ill advised;
2. that pouring millions of dollars into a State Park while we are reducing important programs and cutting municipal aid is absurd; and
3. that closing down the DMV licensing center instead of sorting out operational inefficiencies just doesn't make sense.

So while we've been thrown these curves, we're also ready to run the bases when the right pitches are thrown our way.

Alabama coach Nick Saban reminds us that "One thing about Championship teams is that they're resilient. No matter what is thrown at them, no matter how deep the hole, they find a way to bounce back and overcome adversity."

And like all champions, our success is the result of TEAMWORK. Through the tremendous and continuous efforts of our residents, our businesses, our volunteers, and our employees, all of whom work so hard to make our community strong, we've been able to hit pitch after pitch out of the park.

Over the past year, our sound financial decisions have been recognized by the nation's premier rating agency which upgraded Milford's bond rating to 'AAA' - the highest possible credit grade a city can receive.

This credit score demonstrates our City's fiscal health. But more importantly, this notable evaluation broadcasts that the City has covered all the bases with a strong and growing economy.

As I am now very fond of saying, Milford is in the midst of an ECONOMIC RENAISSANCE with an explosion of new businesses moving into town.

Our business development significantly outpaces all other Connecticut towns and our commercial spaces have an impressive 96 percent occupancy rate.

Over the past three years, we've inspired a 26 percent increase in new business growth above and beyond what Milford has ever experienced.

As a result of the influx of new businesses and the expansion of existing businesses, our grand-slam, Grand List continues to swell. This growth has translated into tax cuts for all residents and businesses for each of the past two years. For the first time EVER, Milford taxpayers experienced back-to-back, consecutive decreases in the amount of local taxes due.

In addition to tax cuts, rating increases, and business growth, each day we continue to score runs that place our community in a better position.

We've made great efforts to restructure operations to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of local Milford government.

For instance, the City launched an automated garbage collection program which enhances Milford's continuous effort to control costs. The new system reduces the amount spent on garbage collection, improves employee safety and provides residents with a clean, convenient and attractive way to dispose of household garbage.

We've also secured several new non-taxpayer income streams to ease the burden on local taxes. For example, a new ambulance system was put into service that allows the Fire Department to transport patients to area hospitals

and bill insurance companies. This new structure improves response times, and brings-in revenue to help offset taxes.

Right off the bat, these illustrations of thrift-driven improvements haven't only saved the City money but enhanced the services we provide our citizens. It's through these types of planning strategies that we're financially able to take on new projects that make our community more attractive. From paving more miles of street than ever before, to making Milford a more walk-able and bike-able town, to creating more downtown parking, we are able to DO MORE and INVEST MORE to make Milford MORE LIVABLE.

I know you are all aware that we're putting the finishing touches on Founders Walk which replaces an old abandon road along the Head of the Harbor.

Those final details should be complete in a few weeks and I do want to thank our DPW, Founders Walk Building Committee, and the Garden Club for pushing this project forward.

On the Recreation front, we've opened the Orange Avenue Athletic Complex featuring two, state-of-the-art turf fields, which are a premier complex for soccer, lacrosse and football.

In addition, we've completely renovated 16 public tennis courts with new surfaces, a new color scheme, new nets, and new fencing.

In our schools, we've installed new roofs and completed other major renovations at all of our eight of our elementary schools over the past year. And if you've driven by Kay Avenue lately, you've seen the progress of the significant renovations which will yield huge educational enhancements at West Shore.

As we look into the future, we will continue to grow our public infrastructure. Over the next year, we're planning the installation of a splash-pad and dedicated pickle ball courts at Eisenhower.

Our public works will be teaming up with our tree commission to plant 200 trees in strategic locations across the city.

And, we will also begin many of the long awaited projects that have already been designed and are now ready for construction; these projects include the:

- a. Installation of a Micro-Grid;
- b. Reconstruction of Gulf Street;
- c. Dredging of our duck ponds;
- d. Creation of breakwater at Gulf Beach;
- e. Repair and expansion of Morningside's wall;
- f. Enhancement of Bayview drainage system;
- g. Re-engineering of Beachland Avenue;
- h. Elevation of Milford Point Road;
- i. Flood proofing at Point Beach; and
- j. Production of the Beaverbrook Boardwalk.

Ladies and gentlemen, I could go on for some time about the many exciting things underway in Milford today. What's quite clear is that our City is playing like a champion and "batting a thousand."

We are a small city with lots of New England charm that continues to prosper in the big leagues of the 21st Century.