

State of the Town Address

MAYOR LAURA HOYDICK

March 26, 2018

Vazzano's Four Seasons

Thank you. It is a tremendous honor and privilege to be here with you today. I am pleased to stand before you this afternoon and deliver the 2018 Town of Stratford address to the business community.

I wish to thank the Stratford Chamber of Commerce, the Bridgeport Regional Business Council and today's event sponsors, Ashcroft, People's United Bank, ServPro of Milford/Orange/Stratford and Sikorsky Financial Credit Union, for holding this event. My experiences working with the BRBC and our regional business partners have provided a tremendous learning opportunity and have helped prepare me for the role as Mayor of the Town of Stratford.

One of my chief tenets as mayor has been to foster a culture of mutual respect between my administration and other government officials, the taxpayers and the public, our local businesses and everyone in between. We needed to listen to each other, engage in civil discourse without resulting in hostility. The best direction for our community is to work in a collaborative fashion and set aside the partisanship and rancor that caused our government to grind to a halt last year.

Consequently, the priority of this administration and the Stratford Town Council, under the leadership of Council Chairman Jim Connor, was to establish a cohesive professional government that provides consistent municipal services to benefit all who live and work in Stratford. I am happy to report that in the last three months there has been improved collaboration and direction. The Council within one

week from being sworn into office, dealt with the Governor's state aid reduction of \$2.8 million, approved the long overdue 2017-18 budget, and set a mill rate. Shortly thereafter they approved a realistic capital improvement plan which provided for the town to operate efficiently through the end of the fiscal year.

With economic stability re-established, my next priority was to develop the 2018-19 budget. Utilizing zero-based budgeting techniques with the assistance of our seasoned department heads, on March 12th I presented a proposed budget to the Town Council. After several years of tax increases, I was pleased to present a modest tax decrease, lowering the mill rate from 39.97 to 39.90, a .17% decrease.

The tax reduction is not remarkable in and of itself—I do recognize it is modest. What is most important about it is that it ends the unsustainable cycle of tax increases on our residents and our businesses. As a former state representative, I understand only too well the negative effects unsustainable state spending has had on all municipalities and businesses in Connecticut.

Stratford is making strides in improving our economic climate and taking advantage of opportunities and grants that enhance the ability to move blighted and contaminated property to the tax rolls. Many of the initiatives put in place by my predecessors and renewed by our administration have expanded our grand list more by 2.02%.

Some of the important economic development and redevelopment initiatives we have in town include the site of the former Stratford Army Engine Plant, the Raymark ballfield and Contract Plating. As we all know, the Stratford Army Engine Plant is a prime location that has languished since the 1995 base closure. As the administrations before

us we continue to work with CT DEEP, the Army Core of Engineers and the approved developer, Point Stratford Renewal (PSR), to come to timely remediating the mud flats prior to the demolition of the buildings. The army has agreed to pay for the remediation of the mudflats. Once a final plan is in place PSR is expected to close on the property. Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro has held numerous meetings with The Army Corps, Department of Defense, CT DEEP, PSR and the Town of Stratford to discuss the remediation, redevelopment and the transfer of the property. PSR presented the new waterfront zone to the Zoning Commission and it has been approved. The State of CT has awarded the Town and PSR several grants totaling \$900,000 for “predevelopment planning and environmental compliance analysis” and a Special Tax District bill was passed both the State House and Senate and has been signed by the Governor. Unfortunately, the state and federal governments move slowly and though our federal delegation has been supportive, the predicted start of the remediation is not before May of 2019.

Conversely, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has released its initial Superfund National Priorities List (NPL) sites with the greatest expected redevelopment and commercial potential including only two sites in all of New England, and one of them is the former Raymark Industries Inc. in Stratford. Bringing a positive conclusion to the ongoing effort to clean the sites in Stratford associated with Raymark contamination is one of my top priorities as mayor. I am very pleased that out of all of the Superfund sites across New England, this site in Stratford was one of only two that have made the short list for EPA to place as a high priority. We are encouraged that the EPA is recognizing the enormous redevelopment potential of this site in its

assessment going forward. The EPA has been a collaborative partner working with us to successfully integrate the Raymark site back to our tax rolls to become catalysts for economic growth and revitalization.

The EPA will be investing an estimated \$95 million to eliminate potential exposures to the community and repair the harm to the environment that resulted from more than seventy years of dumping of waste from the former Raymark Industries. The Town of Stratford has met several times with the EPA, Army Core of Engineers, and CT DEEP to move the clean-up plan forward. The EPA has announced its final cleanup plan of four Operable Units of the Raymark Industries, Inc. and the State of CT Bond Commission approved an additional \$2 million for this project. The EPA has been meeting with businesses and interested community members that will be affected by the clean-up which will begin in the spring 2018. The next scheduled meeting with stakeholders is April 24th. EPA's cleanup plan will allow for the redevelopment of the currently unused and blighted Raybestos Memorial Ball field and will address many commercial properties whose reuse has been hampered by the presence of Raymark waste. This cleanup plan will respond to environmental hazards and allow properties to be used to their full potential, bringing economic benefits to the Town of Stratford.

The town is in the process of evicting Good Earth Tree Care from the former Contract Plating located at 540 Longbrook Avenue, so the assessment and clean up for this property can continue. The town took title to property thru tax foreclosure and The Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) awarded the town of Stratford a \$2,850,000 grant to remediate and demolish the 10.5 acre Contract Plating site which lies within Stratford's Transit Oriented Development District (TOD) for mixed use / TOD development. A phase

2 and 3 environmental assessment and demolition has been completed. The town has met with CT DEEP and EPA regarding the level of contamination and clean-up plans.

Continuing to highlight examples of promoting development of land to a productive public use, an agreement has been made between the EPA and the developer of 576/600 East Broadway. Town Council approved purchase/land lease to the developer, Salce Company. The EPA is working on a site plan that will include redevelopment and reuse of the property with this developer. The EPA has \$4 million to remediate the Raymark waste on the site. The developer also owns the adjacent site on Ferry Blvd. They have demolished that building and have begun construction on a 71 unit apartment building within the Transit Oriented District (TOD).

The Zoning Commission recently approved the second TOD development on 382 Ferry Boulevard for 119 one or two bedroom housing units. The third project to receive zoning approval is at 252 Ferry Blvd. This is a 40 unit building with retail on the first level. The 4th TOD project, 608 Ferry Blvd, will be coming to zoning later in 2018.

The former Center School is within the TOD and the town was awarded a grant \$1.2 M from the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) to remediate and abate a 3.6-acre former public school site at 1000 East Broadway. The town council has approved a resolution to move forward with demolition and remediation of the old Center School. Bids have been vetted and accepted and will be on the town council agenda for April to accept the bid from the lowest qualified bidder. Demolition is expected to begin in May or June. The Redevelopment Agency (RDA) will begin the next steps in the RFQ/RFP proposal.

State of Connecticut Office of Policy & Management (OPM) previously awarded the Town of Stratford a \$200,000 Transit Oriented Development Planning Grant which allowed us to develop a Transit Oriented District (TOD)/Complete Streets Study. The Town of Stratford was recently awarded a \$450,000 grant to complete the technical design of complete streets improvements along a portion of Main Street from Barnum Avenue, south to East Broadway. This was a competitive grant program that supports transit-oriented development and responsible growth in the state and is targeted at boosting economic activity and creating jobs. This project is one of several identified by the State of CT as high-priority in the town's 2017 Complete Streets Plan, and is intended to enhance access and safety for bicyclists and pedestrians. Upon completing the technical designs, the town will be positioned to begin implementing the necessary improvements. Approximately \$250,000 of the total grant award has a set-aside to cover costs associated with any environmental contamination discovered within the project boundary. The final report on the Complete Streets plan was presented to the public in December.

Another priority to improve the transportation corridor of Ferry Boulevard is the creation of the I95 Exit 33 full interchange. This project, which has been a long time in development, will ensure easier access to one of our largest commercial areas from I95 and quicker access for commuters who use the Stratford Train Station. While the governor has stalled this and numerous other transportation projects, the state has expended some of the \$24 million federal funds approved for Exit 33 Interchange. Construction is estimated to begin spring of 2019. Raymark waste needs to be remediated and removed before any work can begin. Funding for the project was unanimously approved by the Greater Bridgeport and Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (GBVMPO). The approval by the metropolitan planning organization

(MPO) will provide \$24 million in funding for various phases of the project.

The infrastructure improvements continue with the Stratford Avenue Streetscape Project. The streetscape improvement for Stratford Avenue/ Honeyspot Road intersection includes new sidewalks, road and traffic flow improvements, a roundabout, new bus stop shelters, landscaping and signage. The Town of Stratford, BL Companies, and CT DOT have met on the Traffic design for this project. A public informational meeting was held in January of this year. The project is moving forward and we expect to have the design approved by DOT in the fall of 2018. The Town of Stratford has met with businesses in the area that will be affected by the upgrades and is having final approval meetings this week. The construction will be paid by a grant from the State of Connecticut Department of Transportation, while the design work has been funded by the Town of Stratford. Once all design is complete a bid will go out for construction.

A bit down the road from the new roundabout Two Roads Brewing Company has begun construction on a new \$12 million dollar, 25,000 sq foot sour and barrel-aging brewery facility on Stratford Ave. A ground breaking ceremony was held the October. This project is on 3 acres abutting their current property. Another construction in progress is the renovation of Stratford High School. The nearly \$126 million project will receive almost 60% reimbursement from the state. The Prefab of Bridge – Decking/Framing/Roofing will begin in place this week and the erection of the bridge coming in the near future.

At the other end of town on route 110 the State of Connecticut awarded Stratford a \$1.5 Million urban action grant for a road improvements and traffic light realignment at the intersection of Main Street and Oronoque Lane. The project will encompass traffic light upgrades and road improvements to mitigate traffic congestion outside

of the Sikorsky gate. Anyone who has tried to get through this difficult intersection during rush hour understands the need to improve traffic flow, pedestrian access and safety. Sikorsky is making a major investment modifying their parking lot and roadways to compliment the new traffic pattern. We hope to have a start date summer 2018.

Several new businesses now call Stratford home. Crickets Car Hop reopened in its new location on Access Boulevard. Within the last few months the Whiskey Barrell and MVP Deli opened and are located on East Main Street already the home of Popeye's and Bev Max. Papas Place, a Puerto Rican and Italian food establishment is on Main Street at Hard's Corner. Nutmeg Credit Union who acquired the Housatonic Teacher's Credit Union reopened the financial location in ShopRite. McDonald's located at Barnum Avenue Extension had a grand opening celebration last month after the completion of their renovation.

I am pleased to report that we have had some important success in the arenas of our departments. Our Health Department, who is the lead agency for the Raymark remediation headed by Andrea Boissevain, is one of 3 health departments in Connecticut that are nationally accredited by the Public Health Accreditation Board.

Our Public Works Department under the leadership of Moe McCarthy keeps the operation of Stratford's infrastructure--parks, recreation, WPCA, sanitation and roads running smoothly. I would like to point out the exemplary work Moe and the Public Works Department have done during some recent challenging winter storm events, keeping up with clearing streets, as well as dealing with a number of downed trees and power lines due to heavy wet snow and high winds.

Our Fire Department still maintains an excellent ISO2 rating and our EMS services have kept pace with an increasing workload of 300 more call in the last two years while maintaining the same staffing levels.

Our police department remains vigilant protecting our residents and the crime rate in town has dropped by 8%. I want to thank our Police Chief Joe McNeil, Fire Chief Bob McGrath, EMS Chief Mike Loiz, our Dispatch Supervisor JP Sredzinski, as well as our Public Safety Director, Larry Ciccarelli for the great job they and their staff do every day to make Stratford a better place to live.

The collaborative relationship between the Stratford Public Schools, the Stratford Board of Education and the Town of Stratford is positive. Superintendent Janet Robinson, Board Chair Eric Lazzaro, Council Chair Jim Connor and I worked together to propose a reasonable budget for the 2018-19 fiscal year.

Through the efforts of the Green Task Force, the Town of Stratford has attained TWO designations: Stratford Town Hall was **designated as energy efficient**, having received an ENERGY STAR score of 91; and the Town was also **designated as Gold by SolSmart**, a program funded by the U.S. Department of Energy SunShot Initiative. Stratford was one of five towns in Connecticut to participate in the SolSmart Advisor program and receive technical assistance from the Connecticut Green Bank. To achieve Gold, Stratford demonstrated excellence in solar permitting, planning and zoning, and residential and municipal solar deployment. I would like to compliment our Planning and Zoning Department under the leadership of Jay Habansky, our Building Inspector Brian Donovan and Town Engineer John Casey for their dedication to our town.

I would also like to note some important events that are coming up. With spring's arrival, the Celebrate Festivals, managed by Amy Knorr, will be underway soon. These events showcase the best events in the Town of Stratford. We are proud to offer ten events this year from April to December. Each unique event attracts families and friends

from Stratford and surrounding communities. Held in every season of the year, Celebrate Stratford events span from the north end at Roosevelt Forest to the south end at Short Beach. These include:

- Restaurant week **April 22-28**
- Main Street Festival **June 2**
- Summer Concert Series Tuesdays through the summer starting **June 12**
- Fireworks **July 3** (rain date July 5)
- Blues on the Beach **July 28**
- Latin Music Fest **September 16** (rain date sept 23)
- Forest to Shore day **September 22**
- Civil War Day **September 29**
- The Great Pumpkin Festival **October 20**
- Holiday Lighting Festival **Nov 27**

I would also like to note that we have our annual Stratford Veterans Breakfast right here at Vazzano's at 9:00 am- on Thursday, May 24th. Veterans are served free - It's a great time to recognize the many great veterans here in Stratford and their sacrifice and service to our great country.

Additionally, the Mayor's Charity Golf tournament will be taking place this year on Monday, June 4th at the Mill River Country Club. The proceeds of the tournament provide financial benefit to many of Stratford's charitable organizations. Organizations such as Stratford Hispanic Heritage Committee, CT Audubon, Police Activities League (PAL), Stratford VFW, Emerge, CT Air and Space Center, Perry House Foundation, Sterling House Community Center, Stratford VNA, and the

Stratford Public Schools mentoring, scholarship, music and sports programs, were among some of the charities that the golf tournament proceeds assisted in achieving their missions in helping the Stratford community.

Stratford Sister Cities Chorus will be hosting their 2018 reunion in Stratford, Victoria, Australia this year from September 5th - September 11th, and I look forward to having a delegation from our Stratford represent us abroad. We will be recognizing those who will represent us at the Town Council meeting on June 11th.

One of the keys to a smooth transition has been a great staff. I am fortunate to work with individuals who run the gamut from a few months to 40 years of employment with the Town of Stratford. I am grateful to Chief Administrative Officer, Chris Tymniak, Finance Director Jay Wahlberg, Human Resources Director Ron Ing, Town Attorney Chris Hodgson and Economic and Community Development Director Mary Dean for staying on as part of my team, while continuing to bring the level of professional excellence for which they are known. I thank my Chief of Staff, Mike Downes, constituent services and Community Development Administrator Chris Bandecchi and Executive Assistant Rickey Williams for providing excellent service and communications from the Mayor's office to our residents, businesses and tax payers.

We are at the beginning of a new administration and the challenges will be many but I look forward to facing them together with all of you as we work to make a united Stratford the best we can be for our residents, our children, our employers and employees. The future of Stratford and our region is bright and I thank you for attending today.