



# CITY OF CONCORD

## REPORT TO THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** Thomas J. Aspell, Jr., City Manager  
**DATE:** April 20, 2016  
**SUBJECT:** 2016 – 2017 City Council Priorities

### **Recommendation**

Accept this report as to the current status of the City Council Priorities established on January 25, 2016.

### **Background**

Members of the City Council met on January 25, 2016 to discuss and set priorities for the remainder of Calendar Year 2016, as well as for Calendar Year 2017.

### **Discussion**

Listed below, in ranked order, are the accepted priorities, projects and ongoing initiatives; and their respective statuses.

#### **GOAL 1. BALANCED BUDGET ISSUES: FY 2017 and 2018**

##### **a) Collective Bargaining/Contract Negotiations**

**Status:** The City's negotiating team has reached a tentative agreement with the Concord Police Supervisors Association (CPSA) which provides for 2.5% cost of living adjustments in the next three years. The parties also agreed to re-opener language in the event medical plans need to be modified to avoid the Excise Tax (Cadillac Tax) on medical plans. The City will be negotiating contracts in 2016 with AFSCME, CPPA, and UAW.

##### **b) Health Insurance Costs**

**Status:** This year, the Health Benefits Review Team sent out a Request for Proposals for medical insurance. Six vendors responded. The incumbent, Harvard Pilgrim, had given the City a not-to-exceed rate increase of 14% in December 2015. After a lengthy review process of the proposals received, the City negotiated with Harvard Pilgrim to offer the same plans to active employees with a 6.9% increase. This brings our five year average for premium increases with Harvard Pilgrim to 4.6%, as this five year period includes two years with no increases.

As of July 1, 2016, all City employees will be paying 10% of their medical and dental plan premiums. This cost sharing was implemented as a way to control the cost of health care. Compared to the previous health insurance points structure provided by the City, these changes will reduce the overall health insurance costs and share part of the responsibility with employees.

The City is moving retirees over the age of 65 to a new Medicare Enhanced plan that does not cover prescriptions and is one third of the cost. We will be adding a supplemental drug plan through Aetna that is a Part D Medicare plan. This will reduce the monthly premium from \$477 to \$318 per month, representing a 33% decrease in cost for a substantially similar plan.

## **GOAL 2. COMMUNITY-WIDE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES TO EXPAND TAX BASE**

**Status:** On April 11, 2016, the City Council approved a resolution which expanded the RSA 79-E Program to make historic buildings not located within the two established RSA 79-E Districts in downtown and Penacook Village potentially eligible to participate in the program.

Over the last several months, the Community Development Department put forth two significant changes to the Zoning Ordinance to facilitate the development and redevelopment of property. The first, approved by Council, eliminated the 60% open space requirement for minor subdivisions addressing what was considered a particularly onerous regulation for property owners in Concord. The second change is scheduled for a public hearing in May and will alter the base thresholds that trigger minor site plan review. Currently, property owners or would-be tenants must submit a full site plan in limited instances where a new use is permitted but no change to the site is actually proposed. If adopted by Council, such conversions, which have virtually no impact on the surrounding neighborhood, will no longer require the expense and time of site plan submittal making it easier for business growth.

## **GOAL 3. PUBLIC INFORMATION, MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS**

**Status:** The City is working effectively towards increasing public awareness through branding, marketing and communications.

City Administration: A “Communications Collaborative” has been created, which consists of public information specialists from Parks & Recreation, the Library, Police, Fire, General Services, and the City Manager’s Office. The “Collaborative” will meet regularly to discuss initiatives and ideas for increasing/improving communications.

Fire Department: The Fire Department maintains an active presence in print, electronic and social media. WKXL hosts a weekly segment to provide an update on Fire Department activities and safety messages. Recent topics have included fire safety and fall prevention, drug abuse, and major incidents. The Department’s Facebook page has 3,024 followers, and its Twitter account has 754 followers.

General Services Department: The General Services Department continues to increase communications with the community. The Department disseminates public information via website updates, print media, press releases, the City Manager's newsletter, its monthly General Gazette newsletter, and bill stuffers. Social media is used to improve community engagement, continue branding, and encourage public awareness of services.

During the first quarter of calendar year 2016, the General Services Department promoted curbside Christmas Tree collection, the 2016 Solid Waste Brochure, water main break updates, employee spotlights, water quality, Everett Arena events, spring road load limits, and EPA Watersense's "Fix a Leak" Week. A YouTube video, "How to Detect a Toilet Leak," was created in conjunction with free toilet dye test kits for Fix a Leak Week to encourage water consumers to find toilet leaks to save water and potentially money on their utility bills. Through March 2016, the Department has 666 Facebook likes, 316 Twitter followers, 24 Google+ followers, and 38 subscribers to its YouTube channel. Approximately 50 press releases have been issued to the local media.

Human Resources Department: In an effort to improve outreach activities as they pertain to position vacancies within the City, the Human Resources Department utilizes online cloud-based recruitment software for applications. An applicant can be made aware of other City job opportunities by completing a job interest card. Job interest cards are sent out to those who have completed a profile and have let us know what types of work they are looking for. This has served to reduce phone calls within the Department, while saving the job seeker time in having to check back to our website. It has also saved in recruitment advertising costs. Job vacancies are a hotlink on the home page of the City's website. The Department also advertises vacant positions on Facebook.

Concord Public Library: The Library makes good use of social media to post information about upcoming programs and library services. A YouTube channel was created for the posting of videos of Library programs, and a Facebook page is also maintained. The Library recently launched a Twitter account to market to a new demographic of patrons. The Library also makes great use of the News Flash feature of the City website.

Parks and Recreation Department: The Parks & Recreation Department creates four seasonal brochures each year, which are delivered to all elementary school children in the city. These brochures highlight all Department programs and events for the next 3-4 months. The content of the brochures is also posted on the Parks & Recreation web site. In addition, the Department maintains a very active Facebook page, with over 2,000 "likes". The Department also creates a monthly newsletter for the web site, weekly news releases for local media, a monthly TV show ("We Are Serious About Fun") with Concord TV, and numerous public service announcements. The Department works very closely with the Friends of the Audi to advertise events and rental opportunities.

The Parks & Recreation Department also maintains the web site for the Beaver Meadow Golf Course. Staff creates and sends out weekly and monthly e-mail blasts to several thousand golfers who have signed up to belong to our online e-club. The web site receives 2,500-3,500 unique web hits per month. The Department also maintains a very active Facebook page for the course, with over 1,400 "likes". During the golf season, staff coordinates weekly newspaper and radio ads.

Police Department: The Police Department utilizes a number of social media sites, as well as the City website to present information regarding the Department to the public and to keep the public informed of events occurring within the City. The Department's website includes many pages with valuable information, including guidance on how to obtain reports and other services that the Department provides. The site also provides notification on upcoming hiring processes, drug take-back days, upcoming citizen police academies, and other events. In addition, all Police Department press releases are placed on its web page.

The Police Department's Twitter page has approximately 1,400 followers, and its Facebook page has approximately 1,700 friends. Both of these venues are used to disseminate information regarding Department and/or City events, and provide emergency information as necessary.

The Police Department also administers the Concord Regional Crimeline, which allows individuals to anonymously provide tips regarding ongoing investigations in Concord and surrounding towns. Tips can be submitted by phone, online or by text message. During 2015, 399 tips were received through Crimeline leading to the arrest of 32 individuals and the ability to close out numerous cases.

The Police Chief participates in a weekly radio show on WKXL, where different topics are addressed based upon events occurring in the city, state and, on occasion, the nation.

Another initiative of the Police Department is "Coffee with a Cop". This program is designed to promote interaction between the community and the Department by sharing coffee and fostering discussion in a relaxed atmosphere. Since its inception, the Department has held six "Coffee with a Cop" events at different locations throughout the City. The most recent event was held on March 16, 2016 at White Mountain Coffee on Pleasant Street. All of these events have been well received by the public and business owners.

During the 2015-2016 school year, the Police Department took part in two new programs focused on the schools: "Lunch with a Cop" and "Police Readers". "Lunch with a Cop" features police officers joining students throughout the city during lunch time to field questions and leave a positive impression with the students. The "Police Readers" program has police officers go into K-2<sup>nd</sup> grade classrooms and read books to the students. The Department participated in both programs in the early months of 2016 and plans to do a few more sessions before school lets out in June.

The Police Department offers Rape Aggression Defense (RAD) classes, which is a comprehensive course for women and includes situational awareness, prevention, risk reduction and avoidance, and progresses to the basics of hands-on defense training. The RAD System is dedicated to teaching women defensive concepts and techniques against various types of assault by utilizing easy, effective and proven self-defense tactics. The system of realistic defense will provide a woman with the knowledge to make an educated decision about resistance.

#### **GOAL 4. PUBLIC SAFETY WORK & CONTINUED SUPPORT OF SOCIAL SAFETY NETWORK**

**Status:** The Police Department takes an aggressive stance in combatting the opioid crisis facing the City. In January of 2016, the Department assigned an additional investigator to the Drug Enforcement Unit in order to augment the Unit's efforts in conducting undercover drug investigations and to assist in collecting and disseminating drug intelligence. The Department has worked closely with other stakeholders on this matter to include other police agencies, service providers, and other branches of the criminal justice system. The Department will continue these efforts and regularly assess personnel assignments and initiatives to most effectively address illegal drug usage in the City. During the first three months of calendar year 2016, the Department made 100 arrests of individuals with illegal drug related charges. This is a 61% increase in the number of drug-related arrests over the same period last year.

The Police Department also continues with initiatives put in place to best address community safety concerns. The highly successful Problem Oriented Policing (POP) Unit is a tool the department utilizes to address issues which can be best resolved with a concentrated pro-active approach which is not always possible through the Patrol Division. The POP Unit is able to address public safety issues through enforcement and by coordinating with other City and community resources. The POP Unit has been very successful in addressing issues with the homeless population, panhandling, nuisance properties, and many other quality of life issues within the City. The POP Unit is scheduled to become active in early April 2016. Additionally, all officers are encouraged to participate in community engagement activities. The success of the Police Department in providing as safe a community as possible is dependent upon a cooperative effort between the Department and the community as a whole.

In an attempt to strengthen its partnership with the refugee/New American community, the Police Department has held several Q&A type meetings with the refugee/New American community to address any questions or concerns they may have relating to the community, local and state laws, and the Police Department. The Department has its next scheduled Q&A meeting with the refugee community in mid-April. With the assistance of the NH Department of Motor Vehicles, the Police Department has implemented a driver training course to assist those having difficulty obtaining a driver's license due to language and cultural obstacles. This remains a work in progress.

The Fire Department actively participates in collaborative efforts with Concord Hospital, Riverbend Community Mental Health, and the Concord Regional Visiting Nurses Association for effective patient care, particularly for patients suffering from mental health conditions. The Department works with a broad range of agencies to assure that persons who access emergency services receive appropriate follow-up and support from agencies assisting aging persons and persons with disabilities. The Department was a participant in the recent NH Falls Prevention Task Force data meeting, reporting that falls were the leading cause for emergency medical dispatches and providing information on the increase of falls in the last calendar year.

## **GOAL 5. PARKING MASTER PLAN / IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES**

**Status:** Draft recommendations and a pro forma modeling the financial implications of the recommendations were presented to the City Manager for review, which was completed on March 24th. The staff report is now being finalized for presentation to the Parking Committee in May.

## **GOAL 6. FOSTER/ENHANCE DIALOGUE WITH LEGISLATIVE DELEGATION**

**Status:** In coordination with Merrimack County, the City provided support regarding a proposal to construct a new County Courthouse, adjacent to the existing courthouse, instead of on the Heights. Support included testifying at numerous State Legislative Committee hearings and background work associated with those hearings.

In coordination with the Greater Concord Chamber of Commerce, the City provided support regarding a proposal to open the State House to the public on weekends to promote tourism in downtown Concord.

## **GOAL 7. ENHANCED COMMUNITY EVENT OPPORTUNITIES**

**Status:** The Mayor is in the process of establishing an Ad-Hoc City Council Committee to review the process, costs and revenues associated with community events. City staff has collected information needed for the committee to conduct its analysis.

The Concord Public Library is the current repository of the four community mosaics created by Concord residents as part of the Citywide 250<sup>th</sup> celebration.

## **PROJECT 1. MAIN STREET COMPLETE STREETS PROJECT**

**Status:** The South Main Street phase of the project began on March 28, 2016. Currently, work is primarily taking place on the east side of the street.

On April 11, 2016, the City Council appropriated \$2 million for installation of underground utilities on a section of South Main Street, roughly between FIT Outfitters and Thompson Street.

## **PROJECT 2. CITYWIDE MULTI-GENERATIONAL COMMUNITY CENTER**

**Status:** On February 8, 2016, City Administration presented three new conceptual plans for a citywide community center at the site of the former Dame School on Canterbury Road. On March 14, 2016, City Administration provided a comprehensive staff report, which discussed these options in detail, as well as provided supplemental information about potential turf centers and walking tracks for each of the three options. City Administration recommended that the Council pursue Option 1A for \$7.1 million. On April 11, 2016, the City Council approved \$6.55 million of additional funding for design and construction of Option 1A. The approved design will include Library programming for 15 hours per week. Design and permitting will commence immediately with a goal of soliciting bids for construction in September 2016.

### **PROJECT 3. SUSTAINABILITY: MUNICIPAL FACILITIES, RECREATIONAL ASSETS, AND NORTHERN PASS**

**Status:** In March 2016, City Council approved a proposal to locate solar array(s) at the Hall Street Wastewater Treatment Facility. One or two 1.98 million kilowatt hours (each) solar photo voltaic arrays will be installed.

City staff provided a report and presentation to the City Council on the impact of invasive insect species within the City of Concord at its April 2016 meeting. The City Council accepted the report with the understanding that there will be several action items over the next several years.

The City continues to follow the Northern Pass project closely. Per Council's direction, the City has filed as an intervener at the federal and state levels. The Council's Northern Pass Committee, the Community Development Department, and the City Solicitor's office are working closely to fully engage the City as an intervener.

### **PROJECT 4. OPPORTUNITY CORRIDOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES**

#### **a) South Main Street**

**Status:** The City continues its efforts to market the former NH Employment Security property at 32-34 South Main Street.

#### **b) Penacook Village**

**Status:** The City continues its efforts to market the remaining City-owned portions of the former Allied Leather Tannery property at 27-35 Canal Street.

The City, working with local partners, has engaged with the developer of the former Summer Street School, located at 12 Cross Street, about financing needs in order to renovate the property into eight market rate residential condominium units.

The Concord Public Library is monitoring potential locations to better house the Penacook Branch Library, as the current building has increasing challenges.

#### **c) Downtown 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Redevelopment**

**Status:** In February 2016, the developer of the Remi Block (formerly known as the Vegas Block) closed on a \$2.8 million financing package for renovation of the property into 20 market rate apartments and three commercial storefronts. The City contributed \$200,000 to the financing package through its Revolving Loan Program. Further, the City has supported the project with a RSA 79-E Tax Relief Incentive benefit (valued at \$315,000), a license for installation of balconies over the City's adjacent streets, and parking.

**d) North Central Corridor/Storrs Street Connection & South End Rail Yard**

**Status:** Using budget surplus associated with the recent cleanup of the former Tsunis property, staff has begun the process of securing an engineering consultant to commence the preliminary design process.

**ON-GOING INITIATIVE 1. SEWALLS FALLS BRIDGE**

**Status:** The old bridge has been removed in its entirety. The south abutment is complete and work is progressing on the north abutment. Erection of the steel for the new bridge will begin in June 2016. Construction is still on schedule for substantial completion by November 1, 2016.

**ON-GOING INITIATIVE 2. MAJOR TRANSPORTATION CORRIDOR IMPROVEMENTS – LOUDON ROAD**

**Status:** The City Manager, Deputy City Manager for Development, and City Engineer met with representatives of the NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT) to review alternatives for Loudon Road. City staff will work with NHDOT on costing out and itemizing potential revenue sources for those alternatives and will return to City Council in May or June.

**ON-GOING INITIATIVE 3. CREATE AND EXPAND PARTNERSHIPS (particularly in regards to Recreation and Economic Development Opportunities)**

**Status:** The Parks & Recreation Department coordinates work with many community groups to expand recreation opportunities and to help with the offering of the following programs and services:

- Coordinates the Adopt-a-Spot Program with over 50 different organizations maintaining areas around the city.
- Works with numerous youth sports groups to assist with marketing and registering of participants. In addition to the Concord Crush Youth Lacrosse Program, the Department works with Concord Youth Hockey to assist with their “learn to play hockey” registrations.
- Works with the Pope Memorial SPCA for the operating of the dog park at Terrill Park.
- Coordinates with several groups for community park clean-up days, including the Friends of White Park, Concord Crew at Kiwanis River Front Park, the Merrimack River Greenway Trail Committee, and the group representing the Skate Board Park.
- The Senior Citizen Program continues to expand due, in part, to partnerships with the Concord Regional Visiting Nurses Association, AARP, and the Community Action Program.
- Worked with the Concord School District to host their weekly Concord Heights Family Resource Center at the former Dame School.
- Works with the Friends of the Audi to promote events, marketing, and volunteer days.
- Worked with the Capital Area Wellness Coalition, the Patriots Alumni Club, the Concord Police Department, the Concord Rotary Club, Black Ice Pond Hockey, and Friends of White Park to offer several special events around the City.



The Concord Public Library has partnered with local businesses to offer its first “How To” Festival on a Saturday in May. The festival will offer thirty 25-minute educational sessions for the public on a range of topics, including biking opportunities promoted by S&W Sports; scarf tying provided by Gondwana; and useful information about the City’s trail system to name just a few.

#### **ON-GOING INITIATIVE 4. CREATIVE ECONOMY WORK**

**Status:** Creative Concord is preparing to undertake a strategic planning and priority setting effort in the spring and summer of 2016. At present, Creative Concord is actively engaged in conducting the Americans for the Arts economic prosperity survey and is working with the City on the development of pilot programs for the coming year.

#### **ON-GOING INITIATIVE 5. CONTINUE EXPANDED NEIGHBORHOOD STREET IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM**

**Status:** Working with the City’s Purchasing Division, the General Services Department successfully procured bids for the upcoming construction season. Depending upon weather, the work may begin as early as April.