Mayor Jon Mitchell

State of the City Address

Wednesday, April 27, 2022

[remarks as prepared]

Thank you, Don, for that kind introduction. Thank you, Rick and the Chamber for bringing us back together this year and to Webster Bank and all the sponsors for your enduring support. Many thanks also to Headmaster Bernadette Coelho and her team for their hospitality.

I am thrilled to be back before all of you. The live state-of-the-city address was among the first large events we were forced to cancel in 2020. The virtual addresses we held in their place since then went as planned, but they weren’t like the real thing.

Council President Abreu, members of the City Council and School Committee, District Attorney Quinn and Sheriff Hodgson, state legislators, city and county officials, residents and friends of New Bedford:

It has been a long couple of years. About this time in 2020, we were responding to an unfolding public health crisis, the likes of which
the city and world had not experienced in over a century. In a matter of weeks, nearly every facet of our lives was upended by a rapidly spreading coronavirus.

Here and elsewhere, the uncertainty was intensified by the scale of the loss. Over five hundred New Bedford residents have died from Covid-19. They were parents, sisters and brothers, neighbors, aunts and uncles. They were public figures like former Mayor Fred Kalisz, and they were friends, neighbors, and work colleagues, and all were part of the fabric of our City. Each of us knows at least one person who succumbed to the disease. The loss and hardship are impossible to quantify, and will forever remain with us.

Given the City’s older-than-average population, its higher incidence of underlying health conditions, and our large industrial work force for which working from home was not realistic, the overall challenge here was steeper than in most places.

I am proud of the way our City responded. Our collective efforts avoided a far worse outcome.

There was a long list of innovative steps we took that were tailored to the specific needs of New Bedford, some of which garnered national attention. Suffice it to say, we avoided a much worse scenario because we didn’t hesitate, we were creative, and we worked as a team – city employees, health care workers, and residents, altogether.

There are many who deserve to take a bow, but I would like to salute in particular the Health Department, under the leadership of Damon Chaplin; Emergency Management, headed up by Brian Nobrega; Emergency Medical Services, under Mark McGraw and Mike Thomas; along with Travis Rebello in the Fire Department, who was responsible for testing and protective equipment; the New Bedford Community Health Center under Cheryl Bartlett; and Connie Mimosa
from Seven Hills Behavioral Health, along with all the support we received from Southcoast Health and Hawthorn Medical. They and their teams have worked tirelessly to enable us to understand what we faced and to implement our response. I ask that you join me in a round of applause for the work they so ably performed.

They would be the first to say that their work should not be described in the past tense. They are actively preparing for what’s next with Covid-19. Whatever it is, they will be ready.

**Pressing on With Our Work Despite the Pandemic**

But as I said along the way, responding to the pandemic was not our only task. We still had to press on with the work of building a stronger, more vibrant City once the pandemic ended. It would have been natural to simply hunker down and wait for the storm to pass.

But we didn’t do that. We didn’t let the pandemic become an excuse for not doing the work we’re expected to do.

As hard as it was to carry on, our work together has extended a decade-long run of progress.

Consider the following:

Thanks to the dedication of our Police Department, Neighborhood Task Force and residents who have taken personal responsibility for their neighborhoods, crime in New Bedford continued to fall. In 2020, as violent crime skyrocketed in cities across the country, it dropped in New Bedford some five percent. Property crime fell 21 percent. This continues a record of success over the last six years in which crime overall in the city has fallen 39 percent, one of the sharpest declines in the country.

Many of you will remember a mere ten years ago, when perhaps the city’s most vexing challenge was the abysmal graduation rate here at the city’s flagship high school, which stood at 58%. We have moved
heaven and earth to improve the performance of the school department since then, and in midst of the pandemic, the graduation rate at New Bedford High School reached 88 percent. This has been one of the most dramatic improvements in a major urban high school anywhere in America, and it represents the opening of opportunity for thousands of our city’s young adults.

Our economy has snapped back, and our city’s bond rating remains the highest in its history. Small businesses that were blindsided early in the pandemic have been backstopped by short-term lending from the Economic Development Council. Now things are more stable. The fishing industry has rebounded, and our manufacturers are expanding.

Most striking of all, despite the implosion of the nation’s restaurant industry, New Bedford has seen seven more restaurants open than close during the pandemic. Again, I don’t know anywhere else that could match that.

We’ve moved several major development projects along. After a long and complicated process, we put out to bid last week a request for proposals to develop the city’s second business park, located on a portion of the municipal golf course; the deal has closed to build the port’s second offshore wind deployment facility, at the former Eversource site; while construction will soon begin on the North Terminal extension, as well as the new shipyard at the former Revere Copper and Brass site. Any one of these four major projects alone would represent a significant enhancement to our local economy.

As we regroup today and in the days ahead from the long ordeal of the pandemic, we refocus our sights on the New Bedford we aspire to build:

a city that it is the cultural, economic and political center of a distinct region;
a city with a diverse economy that offers opportunity for everyone who seeks it;

a city with a highly professional, caring, and efficient city government that commands the confidence of taxpayers;

a city recognized for its physical beauty, cultural richness and the compassion of its residents, and where everyone feels like they belong.

Our work toward this common vision entails three lines of collective effort.

First, we must provide services that support a high quality of life for all our residents.

Second, we must make the most of our competitive advantages to build a more dynamic and diversified economy.

Third, we must reinforce our connection to place and to one another, so that ours can truly be a team effort.

Let’s talk about each.

**Quality of Life**

Elevating a city’s quality of life requires a commitment to excellence in the administration of city government, and a firm understanding of the needs of our residents and those who might choose to live here.

**Public Safety**

It starts with the basics. A thriving city is built on a foundation of public safety. The steady decrease in crime over the last several years has strengthened that foundation in New Bedford.
There are a number of reasons for the decline, including the growth in our economy, the persistent efforts of the Neighborhood Task Force, and our partnership with DA Quinn’s office. But our police deserve the bulk of the credit. The department has become more sophisticated in the use of crime data and has a healthy reserve of trust among our residents, a fact that goes a long way to explain why New Bedford avoided the civil unrest that plagued most American cities in 2020.

But we cannot, and will not, rest on our laurels. Chief Paul Oliveira understands well that the department must keep up with the changing nature of policing in order to sustain and build upon its success. He has hired one of America’s top policing experts, Bob Wasserman, who was one of the architects of New York City’s turnaround in the 1990s, to help the department develop strategies for 21st Century Policing. This is a collaborative effort among officers in the department aimed at strengthening the trust and legitimacy of the police, which is the basis for effective policing.

At the same time, our Fire and Emergency Medical Services Departments rose to the occasion in the last two years. The Fire Department responded to a spate of house fires that were attributable in part to the effects of the pandemic, and EMS, as you might imagine, responded to a blizzard of Covid-related medical calls.

Meanwhile, they both continue to respond to the other public health crisis of our time, namely the opioid epidemic, which only became worse as people were forced to stay home early in the pandemic. While recent progress has been made, there is much work to do. Thanks to funds recovered in lawsuits by the city and the Attorney General against the opioid manufacturers, we will soon ramp
up our direct outreach and prevention work so that we can finally turn the tide against addiction.

**Schools**

To be successful, a city also must create pathways for its residents to reach their full potential. More than anything else, that means we must offer our city’s children a public school education that enables them to thrive as adults.

We now have a school system that is clear in its academic goals, manages taxpayer dollars responsibly, and has raised the standards for academic instruction. We have revamped the teaching of non-English speakers, upgraded technology, and modernized the curriculum. The work has produced real results, most notably in the dramatic improvement in the district’s four-year graduation rate, but also in increases in test scores at our elementary schools and the strengthened competitiveness in college admissions, which for example helped to land three students from the past year’s NBHS class at Harvard.

These last two years, the School Department was tested as never before. Like its counterparts in other cities, it was faced with the unprecedented challenge of ensuring the safety of students and staff, while minimizing the pandemic’s disruption of education. School districts across America struck the balance in different ways, and in the Northeast, the prevailing wisdom in urban districts in the first year of the pandemic was to rely exclusively on remote learning. Superintendent Anderson, with the support of the School Committee, followed the public health advice, which said that the risks could be managed. Of the ten largest school districts in Massachusetts, New Bedford was the only one that operated in at least the hybrid format throughout the school year. Compared to most of the state’s urban
school districts, New Bedford did not experience as dramatic a decline in test scores, while it still protected student health.

The task now is for the district to start moving forward again. New federal and state funding will help. More than at any point since the 1970s, the school district is rebuilding its physical plant. Replacements of four elementary schools are in the pipeline, as is the construction of a new central kitchen facility, along with major renovations at most of the district’s 26 schools. These investments will help establish supportive learning environments for years to come.

The pandemic’s emotional toll on students demands our attention. Prolonged isolation, the cancelling of rites of passage like proms, sporting events and graduations, and in many cases, the loss of family members, made it more difficult these past two years to be a kid. We adults need to restore a sense of normalcy to New Bedford’s children as much as possible.

This year’s school budget will include major funding increases for social and emotional services for the many students who need them. We are expanding our pre-K and early literacy programs so more of the city’s littlest ones can begin elementary school with a running start. To reconnect students of every age, we will upgrade extracurricular programs and actively encourage more students to participate.

For high school students, we are launching an early college program with Bristol Community College to prime the pipeline of college enrollment and performance. We will continue to build out the Honors Academy with new supports for college admissions, so that still more of our students can be admitted into America’s top colleges.

The district also has its first certified vocational program up and running, so that we can prepare students for the city’s growing hospitality sector. Today’s servers are among the first students in the program, and they’ve demonstrated that they’re off to a fast start.
The city’s non-district schools are also helping to provide the extra support students need right now. On this front, I want to offer a special shout out to Mike Watson and the team at Voc-Tech for their efforts during the pandemic. Maintaining continuity of instruction in shop classes at the state’s largest vocational school was inherently difficult to pull off through remote learning, yet they managed to keep things going.

It will take our best efforts to enable our city’s children to get back on track. They deserve nothing less from us.

Physical condition and appearance of the city

We will continue to invest in the city’s built environment so that New Bedford will become an even more functional, resilient and pleasant place to live.

A city’s infrastructure is a vast machine comprised of roadways, buildings, and various utilities that enable residents and businesses to connect with one another and otherwise go about their lives. Keeping it working properly requires a commitment to continuous investment, and historically that hasn’t always happened in New Bedford.

My administration made a conscious decision to seize responsibility for the physical condition and appearance of the city’s public spaces and facilities. The city didn’t have a capital plan when I got into office, and there was an enormous backlog of roadwork and building repairs. But the capital plan we developed and executed since then has enabled us to more than double spending on road maintenance and building renovations.

We are committed to increasing this funding further still. As part of this year’s capital budget, I will propose a 25 percent increase in road
construction funds. We’re catching up with road work, and I’m committed to doing it even faster.

I want to thank Jamie Ponte and the team at DPI for their dedication to managing the city’s infrastructure. This includes the infrastructure below ground, which is where most of it is located. Right now, we’re investing hundreds of millions of dollars to ensure that the city’s drinking water is safe and affordable, and that our waste water and storm water systems are resilient, in keeping with the city’s Climate Action Plan.

It will be vitally important that the City Council move the long-term spending plan on waste water projects forward without undue delay. Like dozens of other cities, New Bedford is subject to a federal court order to upgrade its waste water and storm water systems, and that financial assistance from state and federal governments is available only to those municipalities that meet their application deadlines. This didn’t happen last year, and we missed out on considerable funding. I look forward to working with the Council to ensure that New Bedford receives the funding it is entitled to.

When it comes to the city’s built environment above ground, I’ve heard the criticism that I spend too much time making things look pretty. Now, I swear that I’m not out there in my spare time, as some have alleged, planting flowers in city squares. But otherwise, as Andy Warhol used to say, my critics are absolutely right.

I believe that our residents deserve a city that looks great. No one wants to see trash, graffiti, unnecessary signage and other clutter, where they live. Clean, well-designed, and properly maintained public spaces and corridors proclaim to residents and visitors alike that ours is a city that cares about itself.
We’ve embraced this ethic. We’ve planted over 4,000 trees, restored dozens of city buildings including City Hall, revamped the trash system and enforced the trash laws to reduce litter, eradicated graffiti, and built five new neighborhood parks, along with the HarborWalk and CoveWalk.

To my mind, why we work so hard at this was best captured by Richie Marshall, a custodian here at the High School who recently retired. Richie lives in the South End, and he spends lot of time on the HarborWalk, taking in the spectacular ocean views. I asked him not long ago why he likes it so much, and his response was, “I look out on the water, and it’s just so beautiful. I’m so glad I live here.”

Think about that: I’m so glad I live here. What’s different in New Bedford today is that we reject the idea we once tacitly accepted, that nice things are for others. Our residents want and deserve a city that they can be proud to live in.

And there’s much more to come. We intend to plant another thousand trees in the next two years. Using federal relief funds, there are a slew of park upgrades across the city now in the pipeline.

And we will make the most of our access to the water by connecting the downtown and the central waterfront by the State Pier, as well as along the Acushnet River in the North End. On that point, we are actively working now with the EPA to finish up the harbor Superfund cleanup, so that we can build the RiverWalk with the goal of wrapping the Blue Lane around the entire City.

New Bedford is looking better than ever, and it is about to look better still.
Finances and Governing Capacity

None of the work we do is possible if we can’t pay our bills. We are proud that we achieved the highest bond rating in the city’s history, and that we have maintained that rating despite the pandemic.

But you’ve heard me say it before: money is tight. It remains that way despite the cuts we made during the pandemic. The problem is that the city continues to run what is generally referred to as a structural deficit, in which the cost of providing services is projected to rise faster in the long run than our ability to pay for it. We’ve made cuts to city government, and it is smaller and more efficient than it was ten years ago, but it’s not enough to close the gap in the long run. In particular, the rising cost of pensions and healthcare, which is almost entirely driven by state policy, increases the pressure on the city either to cut important services, offer uncompetitive salaries for positions that are hard to fill, or to raise taxes. Unfortunately, in recent years, we’ve had to take all of these steps.

It may not look bad right now in part because of the cuts we recently made, and the availability of federal relief funds. But we have to take seriously the need to direct the city on a more sustainable financial course.

We of course will continue to increase efficiency wherever we can.

And we will seek every opportunity to expand the tax base by encouraging the development of underutilized property. The establishment of the Advanced Manufacturing Campus at the municipal golf course is the most prominent example.

There are still other parcels that can be developed and put on the tax rolls even more quickly. Toward this end, I am announcing today that we are setting aside five million dollars in funding from the American Rescue Plan Act to accelerate the development of vacant commercial properties that need just a little bit more funding to be
redeveloped. By helping these projects over the proverbial hump, we can help the city pay its bills.

We also will attempt again to deal with the rising costs of healthcare for city employees. I will resubmit a proposal this budget season to adopt a state law that would give the city greater control over these costs. It has been adopted by nearly every city and town in Southeastern Massachusetts, but has failed twice to pass the city council. I urge the Council to give this proposal a thorough airing this time, so that everyone can understand that we can get a better handle on the long-term cost of healthcare without compromising the quality of coverage our employees enjoy. All of our immediate suburbs have done it. So should we.

I also look forward to working with the Council to ensure that our pay scale enables us to bring in the best talent to city government. This may not sound like a cost cutting measure, but it is. In the long run, hiring mediocre candidates for important positions inevitably makes government more expensive, not less.

Progress on this and every other front will be required to lighten the tax burden on residents and small businesses alike, and deliver the services they expect.

**Economic Competitiveness**

The work of elevating a city’s quality of life represents the blocking and tackling of municipal government; doing it well is indispensable to success, but alone it is insufficient. And that brings us to our second line of effort.

A high quality of life is impossible if the city is not fueled by an economy capable of creating wealth for its residents. And that can only happen if the city is competitive in a global economy.
How a city competes varies a whole lot from city to city.

A Region Defined

We are joined today by a number of candidates for state office, and I want to direct my remarks to them about the approach we’ve taken to competing, because there is an important role for the state to play. New Bedford’s approach to economic development does not match up exactly with the conventional wisdom in many policy circles in Massachusetts, which tends to categorize nearly all of the state’s urbanized municipalities, some twenty-six in total, under the label “Gateway Cities.” The label is a well-intended attempt to inform policy, but it has the effect of treating every city with an industrial past identically. It fails to capture the fundamental difference between cities that are satellites of Boston, and those that are themselves truly regional centers, which is what we are. New Bedford is sixty miles from Boston, farther away than the two biggest cities in the next closest states. Although there is some overlap between our and Boston’s labor markets, this region does not rise with Greater Boston’s economy.

Passenger rail service between New Bedford and Boston, which is slated to start next year, won’t materially change things. While I and many other elected officials have advocated for the project as a useful public transit option, a ninety-minute train ride will not suffice to pull our region into Boston’s orbit. And frankly, that’s fine.

Greater New Bedford may not be a major metropolitan area, but we are proudly a distinct metropolitan area nonetheless of nearly quarter of a million residents, with a center city, closely tied suburbs and a unique history, ethnic mix, and economic base. This is the way the state should think about this region.
There are two major implications of being a center city of a non-major metro in today’s America. The first is that the center city is chiefly responsible for driving the economic competitiveness of the region; you don’t get to ride the coat tails of another city or the state.

The other implication is that, in the modern American economy, if you are not part of a major metropolitan area, competing effectively is much more difficult. America’s large metro areas like Greater Boston have been enjoying a Golden Age of prosperity, in which they have attracted an outsized share of investment capital and talent. The dividing up of winning and losing cities in America, which is sometimes referred to as the Great Divergence, has been driven by changes in technology and global supply chains, and it goes a long way to explain why so many small and mid-sized stand-alone cities with industrial pasts, particularly in the Northeast and Midwest, have fallen further behind.

New Bedford has defied these odds. Twice in the last decade, New Bedford led all of America’s cities in its year-over-year decline in unemployment – twice. Our population is growing steadily; and we’ve seen major investments in several key areas.

We’ve succeeded because we made the conscious decision to seize responsibility for our own economic competitiveness, we have planned comprehensively, and we execute our plans relentlessly. We look to the state as a partner in our efforts, not as a savior.

Investing ARPA Funds

The essence of our strategy, which was developed through a collaboration with the region’s leading businesses under the auspices of
the New Bedford Regeneration Committee, has been all about capitalizing on our strengths, whether it’s in the arts and culture sector, health care, hospitality, or manufacturing. We don’t impulsively pursue the latest hot industries or other fads. We double down on what we’re good at, we help to cultivate small businesses that grow organically here, and we support our anchor institutions.

We have an opportunity now to accelerate our progress through targeted investments with American Rescue Plan funding.

We recently announced a commitment to use ARPA funds for storefront upgrades that will not only provide a shot in the arm for restaurants, shops and other small businesses, but also upgrade the look and feel of business districts across the city.

Small business support organizations also will be getting ARPA funding to expand their ability to offer technical support and seed capital, and bolster marketing initiatives like never before.

We will invest ARPA funds in the city’s arts and cultural scene, which is one of the spices of city life that makes New Bedford attractive to residents and tourists. Grants will be made available to independent artists -- each one of them a small business.

The backbone of our arts scene is the city’s major cultural institutions, and the one with the most direct impact on small businesses is the Zeiterion Performing Arts Center. If you don’t believe me, just try to get a table at restaurant downtown the night of a show at the Z. The Z is not only a driver of small business, it is an educational institution, an historic landmark, and a gathering site for important civic
events. The Z is about to undertake its most comprehensive renovation and expansion in nearly forty years.

So that the Z can continue to thrive and contribute to the life of the city for the next forty years, I am announcing today that we will invest $5 million in ARPA funds into the Z’s effort. As cities must reinvest in their anchor institutions, this one is a no-brainer.

We’re also investing ARPA funds to help backstop employees of businesses of every size by expanding housing and childcare opportunities in the city. And we are actively developing plans to build out a broadband network to make affordable high-speed internet available to business districts and neighborhoods alike.

I also want to note that the New Bedford Regional Airport, another pillar of the regional economy, is poised to rebound after a decline in air traffic during the height of the pandemic. A lot has happened there since we last met. The airport’s governing commission, led by Carlos DaCunha, now has several new members, and the strategic plan is being implemented. Having rebuilt both runways in recent years, we will use ARPA funds for the design of a new entry way and a new terminal. These investments will help put us in a more sustainable position to connect our region with the rest of world.

There’s more to come with ARPA funds. It offers us a generational opportunity to invest in what’s working in New Bedford. I want to thank Senators Warren and Markey and Congressmen Keating and Auchincloss for their support of the American Rescue Plan, as well as City Council President Ian Abreu, Councilor Brad Markey, and all the members of the council who worked with my administration on developing a thoughtful plan for ARPA investments.
Modernizing the Port

Of course, much of our work in economic development centers around the Port, which represents the single largest set of New Bedford’s competitive advantages.

The Port of New Bedford generates over $11 billion in annual economic activity, and supports nearly seven thousand jobs. Its strong suit of course is in fishing, as it’s both the top commercial fishing port and the largest seafood processing center in America. Next year the Port will launch the American offshore wind industry with the Vineyard Wind project, the first of what is predicted to be more than $24 billion worth of wind projects along the East Coast in the next decade.

This is happening while existing maritime businesses are growing. Much of the East Coast’s fishing industry is gravitating to New Bedford, with well over a hundred out-of-state vessels landing here each year. We’ve seen several processing plants relocate here or undergo multi-million dollar expansions. The island ferries are thriving, and the recreational marinas are full and have waiting lists.

Much of what makes fishing in particular so successful here – such as our geographic proximity to valuable natural resources, useful infrastructure, a cluster of maritime businesses, and the most skillful seafaring workforce in America – can also support the development of other industries, particularly offshore wind. We are accentuating these advantages both to bolster our strength in fishing, and to capture the massive amount of investment up for grabs in offshore wind.

There are many other East Coast ports vying for this investment. We have been gearing up for this competition for several years. And we will compete to win.
Our strategy is multi-faceted. Its starts with expanding the industrial capacity of the port. Years of planning are now bearing fruit in the largest set of infrastructure projects in the long, esteemed history of the Port of New Bedford. In addition to the North Terminal extension, the development of the Eversource site, and the new shipyard, that I mentioned earlier, there’s much more. Last year, the federal government renovated and returned to our custody the former EPA terminal, a major port facility and warehouse; we are working with the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center, which recently set aside $30 million for the expansion of the New Bedford Marine Commerce Terminal; we are shoring up our main fishing piers; we are working with MassDevelopment to activate section of the State Pier to support operations and maintenance of wind projects; and we are assembling the financing for a two hundred foot extension of Leonard’s Wharf.

Meanwhile, the dredging necessary to allow vessels access to all of these facilities is about to get underway in earnest at a scale not seen here since the 1950s. I go through this long list to emphasize that these and still more port projects represent hundreds of millions of dollars that are coming directly into the port, which will serve as a foundation for a beehive of economic activity for the foreseeable future.

I am grateful for the support of our federal and state legislative delegations for funding the programs to which these projects could apply, and the work of the Port Authority to compete successfully for the funding and execute the projects.

Much of the rest of our maritime strategy builds on this foundation of hard infrastructure. We are developing plans now with MassCEC, UMass-Dartmouth under Chancellor Fuller and other institutions to create new platforms for marine innovation and
entrepreneurship, so that the maritime cluster here can continue to evolve and create new businesses and jobs.

We are also getting ready by preparing the workforce maritime industries will need. Bristol Community College’s National Offshore Wind Institute, Greater New Bedford Voc-Tech and MassHire Greater New Bedford are leading the way when it comes to developing programs to create opportunity for anyone who wishes to pursue a career in offshore wind or other maritime industries.

And we have now fully launched the New Bedford Ocean Cluster, whose job will be to tie much of this activity together. Under the leadership of Jennifer Downing, the NBOC’s mission is to ensure that local businesses are connected to all the opportunities we have coming our way, and to promote the port to businesses that might invest here.

So, yes, a lot is happening on the waterfront. Our goal, simply stated, is to establish New Bedford as the top blue economy city on the East Coast.

We will lead in fishing, we will lead in offshore wind, and when it comes to marine innovation, we will lead there, too.

**Working Together**

We in city government will continue to work hard to help make New Bedford a stronger, more vibrant, and sustainable city. I am eager to work with the City Council toward that end, as I know that they feel the same.

I emphasize that in building a city, municipal government has a role to play. Government cannot do it all, and maybe not even most of
it. It is not realistic to turn to City Hall for the default solution to every problem, however minor.

    No city can succeed without robust private initiative. Something is expected of each of us.

    And as we emerge from the pandemic, it’s perhaps more important than ever for all of us to recognize this.

    The notion of citizenship is rooted in the idea that we have obligations to others. It requires more than simply expressing an opinion about what someone else should do, without asking first what we can do.

    Citizenship requires actual action in service of our collective interests -- even when it's not perfectly convenient, even when it's not easy, and even when you think someone else should be doing it.

    It recognizes the difference between posting a picture of a littered sidewalk on Facebook and lamenting the mess, and instead picking up the trash and throwing it away.

    For everyone who professes love for our great city, your city needs you to act on that love – to go all-in on New Bedford.

    Great examples of going all-in on New Bedford are not hard to find.

    Steve Silverstein has gone all-in on New Bedford. He founded the Not Your Average Joe’s restaurant twenty years ago and built it into a successful restaurant chain that extended down the East Coast. A few years ago, he decided to divest from the company. He could have built new restaurants anywhere or simply retired to Florida, but he wanted
to make his mark in New Bedford, the place where his family has done business for four generations. He has put his hard-earned money behind his devotion to his city, and now he’s leading New Bedford’s burgeoning restaurant scene, while ruining all our diets along the way. Thank you, Steve.

Former Mayor John Bullard has been going all-in on New Bedford his entire adult life. He’s proven his skill and commitment again and again, not only as the City’s leader during the challenging economy of the late ‘80s, but also as an historic preservationist, as a leader on climate action, and in federal service. At each stop, he has left an enduring legacy. At this point, he has nothing left to prove.

But last year I asked him to help launch the New Bedford Ocean Cluster into an operating non-profit, one that could accelerate New Bedford’s emergence as the center of the blue economy. He agreed to it, even after I told him we wouldn’t pay him a dime for it. But Mayor Bullard loves New Bedford, and he understands as well as anyone the opportunity before us. He has poured himself into the establishment of this new institution that will help to create well-paying jobs for our residents for years to come. Thank you, Mayor Bullard.

Helena Hughes has been going all-in on New Bedford for decades. As the head of the Immigrants Assistance Center, which this year is celebrating its 50th anniversary, she leads an organization that extends the welcome mat to those who choose to pursue the possibility of America, right here in New Bedford. This past year she has been instrumental in enabling two dozen of our Afghan allies to settle into the life of our City, and now awaits, with extended hands, those fleeing the war in Ukraine. Thank you, Helena.

To fulfill the aspirations we hold for New Bedford, our city needs all of us to be all-in.
You will find that it is well worth the effort. A city is more than a place on a map. It shapes our relationships with one another, and is woven into our individual identity. It is part of who we are -- past, present and future. When you devote your talent and energy to make your city a better place, you've committed to improving yourself.

I look forward to the work ahead with you.

Thank you, and God Bless the City of New Bedford.