



## CITY OF FRAMINGHAM

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

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**MEMORIAL BUILDING**  
150 Concord St, Room 213  
Framingham MA 01702

Michael A. Tusino III  
Chief Operating Officer

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – 01/30/24**

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## Framingham Mayor Charlie Sisitsky Delivers 3<sup>rd</sup> State of the City Address

FRAMINGHAM - Good evening and welcome to my third State of the City address. Thank you City Council Chair Philip Ottaviani, Jr. for your kind words. Thank you Purple Heart recipient Marty Nislick for reciting the Pledge of Allegiance and for your military service; and thank you to Tonal Eclipse for your beautiful rendition of the National Anthem. Reverend Aaron Stockwell Wisman, thank you for your moving invocation.

I am pleased that since I took office two years ago, we are once again able to be in person for this address. Before I begin I would like to acknowledge the presence of our legislative delegation, representatives from Senate



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President Spilka's office, members of the City Council and School Committee, and members of boards, commissions and committees all of whom volunteer your time to support the valuable work going on in our City. My sincere thanks to all of our dedicated City employees who work every day to serve the entire community. You go above and beyond to make sure that the needs of our residents are met. I am grateful and honored to work alongside you. To my administrative team, my sincere gratitude for all that you do to support my vision and goals for the City. I **never** take for granted that you have **all** allowed me to serve this esteemed office as the Mayor of Framingham. To my family, thank you for your unwavering support along with the sacrifices that you have made to enable me to make a positive impact for Framingham! This has been a year of achievements and change. As we look towards the future, I am proud to report that the state of our City is **strong!**

## Promises made in 2023 SOTC

Making promises happen is not always easy, but last year I made a number of promises to the community that I am pleased to say we were able to



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achieve. These projects don't happen overnight. They are a collaborative effort of my administrative team and the support of the City Council to fulfill my vision to transform the City.

When I promised to bring fireworks back to Framingham, I shared my dream with my department and division heads to think big and bold. With great enthusiasm they worked together to create a **spectacular** Stars and Stripes Over Framingham. More than 10,000 people gathered around Farm Pond and Cushing Park and beyond to enjoy this tribute to the Fourth of July in our own backyard. Mark your calendars for Friday, June 28th for the second annual Stars and Stripes Over Framingham!

After many years of discussing the need for a site for a new southside elementary school and early childhood center, we were able to reach an agreement with the Sisters of Saint Joseph to purchase 32 acres of vacant land on Bethany Road. Following the purchase of this land, we received an invitation from the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) to participate in their funding program. The MSBA's "mission is to partner with communities to support the design and construction of educationally-



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appropriate, flexible, sustainable, and cost-effective public school facilities.” While attending the Mass Municipal Association annual meeting, I spoke to representatives from the MSBA and they indicated how excited they were to partner with Framingham to build a new school.

A new School Building Committee has been established and will shortly begin its work to move this project forward. The proposed new school will serve approximately 650 students from the surrounding neighborhoods, many of whom will be able to walk to this new school. I look forward to when the elementary school and early childhood center will become a reality.

Framingham’s reputation as a center of rail trails in eastern Massachusetts continues to expand. We recently hosted a Mass Trails event at Loring Arena putting Framingham in the forefront of trail development in eastern MASS. I am grateful to the many people who have volunteered their time to support the administration on planning and developing trails throughout the City.



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Following up on our success of signing the purchase and sales agreement with CSX for the purchase of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail at the end of last year, we were able to close on the sale on the right of way. Now that we own this we can begin to design a new rail trail that will run between the Sudbury town line and route 9. This is an historic achievement for the City. Within the past couple of weeks, as a result of filing an application with the Mass Department of Transportation, we were notified that their project review committee has determined that the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail is eligible for 7 ½ million dollars for the construction of this trail.

We are making progress with the design and permitting of The Chris Walsh Memorial Trail. The design for phase one is nearly complete and we are working with CSX, the MBTA, and the MWRA to ensure that the design for phase two can move ahead. This Trail will focus on connecting the Farm Pond and Dudley Road areas to Downtown Framingham. Once we finalize plans we anticipate creating a boat launch and rental facility on Farm Pond that will complement other sections of this trail.



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We have reached agreement with the Mass Department of Environmental Protection for the scope of work for the cleanup of the contamination of Mary Dennison Park. Our lengthy discussions with Avery Dennison Company have resulted in a signed agreement for the company to pay 82% of the cost for the cleanup of the contamination. We recently opened bids for the cleanup and construction of a new playground and plan on meeting with the City Council in the upcoming weeks to review the finances for this project. The revitalization of this environmental justice neighborhood park will address safety concerns and provide a welcoming accessible open space to gather for active and passive recreation.

In my first year of office we reimagined the Farmer's Market. With our bold move to waive vendor fees and focus on growing the farmers market, this past year was even bigger than the prior year, with at times over 90 different vendors representing local farms and community resources. Attendance was up 74% with an average of 1500 customers per week. During the season, attendees were able to purchase almost \$400,000 worth of local products. The launch of the SNAP program and a match from Santander Bank, expanded the outreach to more people. Framingham was



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recognized with an award from the Mass Farmers Markets for this amazing success! Stop by any Thursday during the season, which will run from the week of June 20th through October 10th, and enjoy this vibrant resource in the City.

For several months we have been working towards outfitting the property that we purchased at 188 Concord Street for the relocation of the health department, public health clinic, and joint dispatch for fire and police. Once this work is completed we will continue to seek agreements with surrounding communities to create a Regional Dispatch Center. This will enable us to apply for significant grants from the State to upgrade our public safety dispatch infrastructure.

As access to adequate health care continues to be challenging for many residents, we converted a small room in the basement of city hall into a critically needed vaccination clinic. At the direction of Linda Phalen, the new public health nurse, strong partnerships with Gratis Healthcare and Framingham Public schools were formed. Through this collaboration, thousands of **required** vaccines have been administered to 831 students to



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date. By offering health screenings, training, and programs, we will improve health and wellness throughout the entire City.

We continue to work with the Department of Capital Assets Management and Maintenance (DCAMM) to create a Regional Justice Center at the former Danforth Museum building. We anticipate transfer of ownership of the building to the State in the first half of this year.

During the past summer, Eversource broke ground on the Geothermal Project and is well on its way to providing geothermal heating and cooling for over 45 buildings in the Musterfield area including the Concord Street Fire Station and a number of Framingham Housing Authority buildings. This first in the nation, environmentally friendly pilot program has become a role model and may establish a new paradigm for public utilities across the country.

On a Friday night in late August, we were informed that Framingham was going to receive a busload of Asylum seekers that evening. They arrived with nothing more than the clothes on their backs; there was a language



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barrier as most spoke Creole, Portuguese or Spanish, and no provisions were in place for food or necessities. The legislative delegation, members of the City Council, members of my administration, the Interfaith Clergy Association, and community partners quickly mobilized to support these families. I am grateful to all the volunteers who came together and gave their time and purchased supplies, including food, clothing, toys and medicine. This was yet another example that it truly takes a village.

Our Library system is another valuable resource to the community, which we continue to support. During the year, we cut ribbons for the new Pearl Street Ramp, the teen room and the new technology/learning center. You have likely seen the Bookmobile throughout the City providing many people the opportunity to check out books in close proximity to their neighborhood. The Bookmobile carries books in five languages.

### **Feel Good events**

As Mayor, I worked with the City's leadership to increase the number of City-wide Community Events. We continued to build on and add many



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events that have been enjoyable and improve the quality of life for members of our community. The Flag Day commemoration included sports teams who marched along with our first responders from the Police and Fire Departments, the City Council, School Committee, boards and commissions.

On August 7th, Framingham officially received the designation of a Purple Heart City. The purpose of being a Purple Heart City is to express gratitude to the sons and daughters of our community who were either wounded or killed in combat defending the freedoms enjoyed by all Americans. We proudly distributed citations and coins to 7 Purple Heart recipients. In attendance with his family was 104-year-old World War II Veteran Charles Audet.

We held another successful School Safety Fair at Cushing Park where over 800 people attended. Students were gifted with backpacks filled with supplies, and thanks to donations to the Mayor's Special Events Fund, we were yet again able to provide a free lunch for **everyone** who attended. My thanks to Middlesex Sheriff Peter Koutoujian's office, the Park and Rec



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department, the Framingham Police and Fire Departments, the Department of Public Works, the Public Library, and the Framingham Public Schools, along with numerous volunteers from City departments and other organizations who made this a huge success!

2023 was the second year that Spooktacular was back in person at City Hall. The departments went above and beyond in their creativity to transform City Hall to a Halloween fantasyland. DJ Jesse contributed to the festive atmosphere and we will make sure that we have more than enough candy this year.

Even though Santa and Mrs. Claus were delayed by a passing train the tree lighting ceremony was another exciting community event. The joy on the faces of young and old once Mr. and Mrs. Claus arrived and lit the beautiful tree was heartwarming.

To honor the 60th anniversary of Loring Arena, my administration suggested that during the December Vacation, the open skate time would cost 60 cents rather than the normal \$5.00 admission. We had more people



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attend during this time than at any other vacation week. The culmination was a visit from the Worcester Railers' beloved mascot, TRAX who helped cut and serve the birthday cake.

As I promised last year, the new tennis courts at Winch Park were constructed and officially opened in the fall. This project exceeded our expectations. Working closely with our designer, we created a state-of-the-art tennis facility with six post-tension concrete tennis courts with updated lighting and fencing. I appreciate the support of the School Department and Park and Recreation Department in making these essential upgrades to our aging facilities. Not only will our FHS tennis teams have a site where they can proudly display their skills, but the entire community can enjoy these state of the art courts under lights.

Following on the heels of the new tennis courts, this spring, we will be installing new electronic scoreboards at the Fuller Middle School fields. We are also going to replace the existing lights at the three Little League fields at the Baseball Complex with LED lighting, and the softball Fields at Walsh School were skinned, laser-graded, and reconstructed.



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We have also broken ground for the reconstruction of the Arlington Street Park, which we anticipate, will be available for use this summer. This project aims to promote neighborhood use, bring site amenities up to the current building and accessibility codes, and increase public health and safety for park users. I want to thank the Community Preservation Committee for supporting the City's Capital Improvements Program with the critical funding needed to complete this important project.

The Callahan Center is a vital resource to our seniors. Attendance was over 31,000 in 2023 representing a 21% increase from 2022. The Callahan Center offered cultural programs to over 1,400 older adults last year.

The Callahan Center partnered with AARP as they prepared taxes for 357 older adults. All of these appointments were done at **no cost** to the participants. Social Services staff provided over 5,000 interactions for older adults needing assistance with physical, mental, emotional and financial needs.



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We purchased Marian High School using ARPA funds for a new City-wide Community Center. This exciting project will benefit the **entire** City and have a long-lasting impact. Through an Executive Order I created a new advisory committee to work with the architect and administration to help transform the former high school into a community center. I look forward to the work that the committee will submit to fulfill my vision for this wonderful resource.

Our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer, Jesse Edwards created and implemented a very successful summer internship program for college students. We had numerous applications and we accepted 8 interns who worked in various departments in City Hall, as well as the Police and Fire Departments. One of the interns was offered a position with the Police Department and has since been promoted! Thanks to a partnership with Framingham State University, another intern was able to extend his internship with the Community and Economic Development Department. Plans are already underway for another internship program this year.



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I have also established a Diversity Equity and Inclusion Advisory Committee (DEIAC). DEIAC members will provide feedback about City of Framingham programs, initiatives, and services as they are being developed; offer suggestions to help the City of Framingham DEI Office improve programs and services to better serve diverse communities; help identify and respond to emerging trends, and opportunities related to equity. The first meeting was held last week.

We have been actively recruiting for positions on many of the boards, committees and commissions in the City. There were 311 applicants, representing every district in the City, for these spots in 2023, which is a 124% increase from 2022. 62% of the applicants have indicated that they have never served on a board before. I am excited about the significant increase in civic engagement.

Our Director of Planning and Economic Development, Sarkis Sarkisian, in addition to fostering relationships and working to expand our local economy, worked extensively with Seabra Foods to find a new location for them in the downtown area when it was learned that they were going to



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lose their existing location on Waverly Street. With the City Council approval of a tax increment financing agreement, they were able to purchase the former Salvation Army building on Concord Street and are well on their way to designing and constructing a new and larger supermarket. This will allow Seabra to double their size and create an exciting new supermarket to serve not only the downtown, but the entire community.

Traffic continues to be an issue throughout the City and we are diligently working to find creative solutions to address the issues. We have expanded our traffic calming activities in parts of the city including Coburnville Tripoli Neighborhood, and Grove Street. Improvements are scheduled for various intersections including Arthur & Bishop Streets, finishing up design for reconstruction of McGrath Square in Saxonville, which we hope to bid in FY 25. We have also completed all the administrative work and design for a new signalized intersection at Central Street & Edgell Road. The State has put it out to bid and work will begin in the spring.



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Other infrastructure maintenance projects included roadway improvements on Edgell Road, Elm Street, as well as drainage improvements on Herbert Street, water main replacements on Mt. Wayte Avenue, Lindsay Street and George Street.

In addition to the infrastructure improvements, DPW maintained 278 pieces of equipment including cars, light, medium and heavy trucks, trailers, loaders and equipment. In addition to the DPW equipment, the Fleet maintenance division assists numerous other city departments with repairs and State Inspection services while also maintaining the fueling facility for gasoline and diesel vehicles utilized by most City divisions.

The Grants Manager is a relatively new but highly valuable position for the City. The Grants Manager not only seeks new funding opportunities for the City of Framingham, but is also responsible for establishing processes, maintaining detailed records, managing grant-related logistics, ensuring compliance, and overseeing expenditures, reporting, and reimbursement requirements related to all grant or legislative funding.



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The Grants Manager worked with City departments to identify new funding opportunities, strongly encouraged and provided support to City employees seeking grant funding for projects requiring additional funds, took the lead on grant applications, and ensured that relevant deadlines and requirements are adhered to.

The City is currently managing and administering over \$15 Million in state and federal grant funding, with over \$5 Million in grants awarded to Framingham in the last year alone.

We have frequently heard from downtown business owners regarding their concerns. Through a collaborative effort with the Police Department to address and ultimately resolve problems in this area and elsewhere in the City, we have created and implemented a Community Impact Unit (CIU) with police officers specifically dedicated to its mission. The CIU commenced in October 2023 and immediately began addressing quality of life issues citywide, strongly focusing on the downtown area. The CIU blends a mixture of proactive law enforcement with compassionate interactions for those who are in need of assistance. During a routine day,



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the CIU interacts with residents, businesses and visitors of Framingham collaborating with other city departments and community partners to address issues which will improve the quality of life and safety of all those who live, work, and play in Framingham. The CIU is also focused on responding to complex calls for service, which need a specific, specialized, long-term outcome which may not be possible on a regular call for service.

In November alone, there were 524 calls in the downtown area with the top calls for directed patrol, motor vehicle incidents, medical incidents, suspicious activity, and well being checks. Their presence has already had a positive impact in the downtown area and we will be making a presentation to the City Council and the business community in the near future.

We set a new record for responses by the Fire Department in 2023. There were over 14,000 emergency incidents where the response rate of emergency personnel and equipment totaled almost 32,000. These included EMS responses, along with multiple building, cooking, brush and



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motor vehicle fires. The ability to respond to these incidents couldn't happen without a robust department of first responders.

These are just some of the examples of how busy our various departments were in providing service to the public over the past year.

## **Events and in 2023**

The issues surrounding MetroWest Medical Center continue to concern the community. I have had multiple meetings with the leadership of the hospital, Tenet Healthcare Corporation along with Senate President Karen Spilka's office and other members of our legislative delegation regarding the issues with the hospital. These efforts are ongoing including a recent public hearing held by The City Council with representatives of the hospital and Tenet. We all hope that these efforts will help rectify these issues and return the hospital to the vital resource that our community needs and deserves.



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We have had ongoing dialogues with the Brazilian community including a meeting with the Brazilian Consulate and the Governor of Piaui. In early October the First Lady and I hosted a luncheon to gather members of our vibrant Brazilian and Hispanic community in honor of Brazilian Hispanic Heritage Month. We had nearly 40 people representing local business members who shared stories about the impact on their businesses in the community.

I also attended a meeting arranged by Congresswoman Katherine Clark and Senate President Karen Spilka to meet with members of the Black Economic Development Council. As a follow up to these meetings, I have created an Asian, Black, Brazilian, Hispanic, and Latino (ABBHL) Business Advisory Council to provide additional outreach to members of these groups. This Council shall serve to advise me on issues relating to the economic prosperity and wellbeing of the ABBHL community in the City.

To further expand our ability to communicate with Portuguese speaking members of the community, we have implemented WhatsApp, which is a vital means of communication for this community. Last May, the City of



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Framingham became one of the first cities in the country to begin using WhatsApp to communicate to residents. Although only currently available in Portuguese my administration is looking to expand WhatsApp to other languages.

Our overall communications outreach to the community has expanded significantly. In October, we launched The City Newsletter, which comes out weekly on Sunday evenings. There are currently over 1,000 subscribers. We are exploring options to make the newsletter accessible in multiple languages.

The City of Framingham launched TikTok in October as a pilot program to try to engage residents in their 20s and 30s. The City plans to expand its social media in 2024 to further engage that demographic.

We will be launching a Communication Page on the website to make residents aware of ways to get news from the City including the NotifyMe system, which has more than 5,000 subscribers.



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I created a Mayor's Advisory Food Composting Task Force to address the growing interest in expanding the existing privately operated composting program. This committee has already begun meeting and is preparing recommendations on the best ways to increase composting alternatives for the City. I anticipate that the recommendations from the committee will be forthcoming in time to be considered for the FY 25 budget discussions.

People often talk about having a seat at the table. In late September, I was asked by Governor Healey to fill the seat on the MBTA Board of Directors that she created to "better ensure that the communities served by the MBTA have a seat at the table". It is both an honor and responsibility to hold this seat at the table in a very crucial time for transportation needs in the community.

## **Relationships and Community Partnerships**

My administration has worked vigorously to maintain relationships with community partners. The MetroWest Worker Center along with Jewish Family Services of Metrowest stepped in to bring desperately needed



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**MEMORIAL BUILDING**  
150 Concord St, Room 213  
Framingham MA 01702

Michael A. Tusino III  
Chief Operating Officer

services to the asylum seekers. JFS continues to provide support to our entire community. SMOC has also been supporting this situation and they are managing one of the hotels where the migrant families are residing.

Daniel's Table and the United Way have long provided vital resources to our community. They both made it possible for food and supplies to be delivered to the migrant families until the State, JFS and SMOC were able to take over.

We continue to enhance our relationship with major corporations in the City including TJX, Sanofi, Staples and Bose. My administration and I have had numerous meetings with these companies and others to let them know that we value their partnership and support their operations in the City. I look forward to involving them in some of our ongoing and planned community wide projects that are in the development phases.

The relationship that my administration has with the City Council for the most part has been civil and respectful. I am disappointed to note that there were occasions when this broke down. With the new year and new City



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Council, my hope is that we will engage in respectful and constructive dialogue to find balance with a lens of gratitude for the critical work we are doing.

Oprah Winfrey reflected on the gift of gratitude. “In order to feel it, your **ego** has to take a backseat. What shows up in its place is greater compassion and understanding. Instead of being frustrated, you choose appreciation. And the more grateful you become, the more you have to be grateful for.”

It is vitally important that the manner in which we handle these dialogues set a tone for every other board and commission in our City. Mutual courtesy and respect is the foundation of the culture that I expect for my administration and those who interact with them.

## **Promises/Goals for 2024**

Just as I enumerated goals for last year, a few of my goals for the coming year include the following. We are committed to continue working on projects that we’ve started including the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail, the



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Chris Walsh Memorial Trail, park upgrades including Arlington Street Park, Mary Dennison Park and Reardan Park which will all include splash pads. Additionally, we expect to see significant progress with the Public Safety Dispatch Center, the Community Center at Marian High School, and the new southside elementary school complex.

I will follow through with legislation approved last year to establish an Economic Development Committee. It is my intention to have this committee advise the administration on forthcoming complex projects. I envision these to include: a new community pool, and the creation of a performing arts center inside the Memorial Building.

Many people expressed interest in creating a Performing Arts Center for City Hall. A very successful event was held on New Year's Eve, and this convinced me and others that more than ever the Memorial Building would be an ideal location for such a venue. We have begun the process by requesting community preservation act money to study and propose upgrades for improving accessibility in the building.



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The community suffered a significant loss with the closing of the pool at Keefe Tech. We are looking into creative solutions to find an appropriate location to build a new pool. I have met with private parties who are interested in developing a public/private partnership and are excited with some of the options I have proposed.

We will be finalizing our recommendations for creating a new Traffic Division for DPW. The intention of this is to make it easier for residents in neighborhoods to obtain quicker results to their requests for solving traffic issues throughout the City.

I have committed to monthly district meetings to visit with residents. Joining me for these meetings will be the respective City Councilor for that district along with other City Councilors, School Committee representatives, the police and fire departments, DPW, planning and economic development and members of my staff. I recently held the first meeting in District 9 and I look forward to upcoming meetings in all the districts.



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I will be re-activating the Cushing Memorial Chapel Advisory Committee. The Committee has been inactive since Framingham became a City in 2018. The committee, in conjunction with the Veterans Council and my office, will be planning an 80th anniversary celebration this year. The Committee is also needed to review repairs to Cushing Chapel.

I welcome anyone who is willing to think big and bold to join me on this journey. It takes collaborative and creative thinking along with leadership, which can make this all a reality.

## **Challenges for 2024**

We are also facing challenges for next year and beyond. We have vacancies in critical areas of the administration and we are working diligently to fill these vacancies. In the interim, I am extremely grateful to members of our team who have stepped up and taken on additional responsibilities to ensure that the operation of our government continues to function smoothly and efficiently.



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School bussing continues to have a significant impact on our students and community. In early May, I spent the weekend having extensive conversations with NRT and the Teamsters to avert a bus driver strike. In the middle of a joint press conference with the school committee, I received a call from the business manager of the Teamsters. It was an emotional moment as I was able to announce that both sides agreed to sign the contract and there would not be a strike.

The bus driver shortage is a nationwide issue that has impacted nearly every state in the country. We are looking into alternatives to remediate this situation, and we are awaiting the response of a bid that will be due in early February. I am committed to working with the School Department leadership to find a better resolution. But we also need to understand that if there was an easy fix, this would have been resolved years ago.

We continue to make progress with issues surrounding water & sewer billing problems. It is my goal to have a solution in place by the time we hold the rate setting hearings at midyear.



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The ability to continue with our various projects and maintain existing operations is partially dependent on what happens on Beacon Hill. We are hearing that state revenue has not kept up with projections and we have to be vigilant and monitor the Governor's proposed FY 25 state budget and its impact on local aid. **There is much to be done.**

As I reflected two weeks ago upon Martin Luther King Junior's birthday, we must see each other as neighbors and not enemies. It is not enough to continue to pursue non-violent change, we must cease spewing verbal attacks, too. Inspired by the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., we must work together to find common ground and drive positive change for all those who call the City of Framingham home.

In the words of author Ellen Goodman, "We spend January 1st walking through our lives, room by room, drawing up a list of work to be done, cracks to be patched. Maybe this year, to balance the list, we ought to walk through the rooms of our lives ... not looking for flaws but for potential." I encourage you **all** to look for the potential in everything you do.



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The words that we choose, whether spoken or written can have a powerful impact on the audience we are addressing. For those who continue to hide behind the veil of anonymity, or only look at your perception of negativity, I ask that you seriously consider whether your cowardly approach brings any value to the City that we have been trying to move in a positive direction.

**We have to change this culture. Each and everyone of you**, whether sitting here tonight, watching this, working for the City, participating on a board or commission, and every member of our community, can be a part of making this shift in a positive way. Temper your criticism with kindness. It starts here and it starts **now**. Thank you and goodnight!

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