

Mayor Justin Elicker State of the City Address – February 2, 2021

President Walker-Myers, City-Town Clerk Michael Smart, Honorable Members of the Board of Alders – good evening. To my fellow New Haven residents, visitors, all those who have a deep connection to this inimitable City, and all those tuned in virtually – good evening.

Before I get started, I want to take a moment to remember all those we have lost over the past year to COVID-19 and all those we have lost to gun violence...

[*Pause*]

It has been a long year since I gave the State of the City speech in the Aldermanic Chambers last January. Our Administration here at City Hall has been working nonstop responding to the pandemic and many other challenges we have faced, all while implementing many plans to help those most vulnerable and challenged residents.

I think we all can be proud to say that we in New Haven, together, have responded to the pandemic emphasizing swift action, following the science, collaborating with each other, and focusing on those most in need. Together, with all of you and many leaders throughout our community, our response to COVID-19 has been strong:

- Early on, our Administration worked hard to become one of the first cities in Connecticut to offer COVID-19 testing for all residents free of cost which included walk-up testing, many neighborhood pop-ups and a focus on access for vulnerable populations.
 - o And today, we are one of the first municipalities in the State to implement a robust vaccination plan to save lives across the City. Our Health Department has vaccinated over 4,000 residents and started neighborhood pop-up vaccination sites that will save lives. Thank you to our health workers, school nurses and medical reserve corps volunteers for your tireless work over the past year helping New Haven lead during this health crisis.
- We worked to close the digital divide in New Haven by providing tablets, laptops, computers, free Wi-Fi access, and hotspots to all New Haven Public School students in need.
 - o Today, we are opening schools up for in-person learning for those students that need the structure of in person school to significantly improve their focus on education; and for those hardworking parents that simply cannot make ends meet when struggling to manage childcare and a job. Thank you to the teachers and school staff for

their tireless effort to make remote learning and in person learning successful.

- We worked hard to put food on the table for those families that could not—by distributing hundreds of thousands of meals through New Haven Public Schools and many other food distribution events.
 - o I would like to also take a moment now to thank those countless community organizations and leaders throughout the City who helped organize efforts to distribute food, masks, hand sanitizer, and other items that many families are struggling to acquire:
 - Alder Honda Smith, Alder Carmen Rodriguez, Kim Harris and the Newhallville CMT, KIEDC, the New Haven NAACP, the Jewish Federation, and many more...
- Our Economic Development Administration worked hard early on during the COVID crisis to promote mask wearing with the “Mask Up” campaign, and to set up “Together New Haven” with all of the City’s partner organizations, helping our small business owners struggling to stay open, serve their customers, and bring their employees back to work.
 - o With our specific focus on Black and Latinx business owners, we have 23 businesses in the pipeline for funding out of the \$1.5 million dollar

program approved by the Board of Alders in partnership with HEDCO, the Community Foundation and the Amore Propre Foundation -- thank you to all of our partners in this regard.

- o You will see the “Eat New Haven” posters across the City as we market the amazing variety of restaurants across the City. Even if you are not dining in-person ... take it home or have it delivered all winter long.
- o And while many of our businesses are under economic stress like they have never seen before, we are looking ahead to a strong economic bounce back. Market confidence in New Haven has not waivered because of COVID-19 – we have welcomed 40 new businesses to the Elm City this past year – entrepreneurs such as Tisha Hudson from Edible Couture, a graduate of our small business program, took a risk and bet on New Haven. You can try all her great treats right behind City Hall. Please buy local and support New Haven’s treasures.

Our Administration's dedication to safety has not waived because of COVID-19.

And I want to take a moment to talk about safety, because it means so many things to so many people. It is the fundamental expectation that we all should have – that we feel safe in our homes, in our community – and the reality is that today it is just not the case:

- o Safety means that families with young children deserve to live without fear of their child being poisoned by lead. In the past year our Health Department has increased the lead inspectors from four to six, implemented new inspection processes including digitizing data and streamlining inspections, and established the Lead Advisory Committee to keep New Haven's most vulnerable children safe.
 - o Despite being limited by the impacts of the pandemic, our Health Department conducted 117 lead inspections and another 233 re-inspections, and so far has overseen lead abatements for 26 housing units.
- o Safety means safe streets. In addition to the 22 speed humps and traffic calming infrastructure built this year, our City Engineer and Traffic, Transportation and Parking Department are scheduling neighborhood meetings as we roll out our "Major Corridors" project. This project will

improve the safety of many City-owned traffic arteries that have historically posed a safety threat to our pedestrians, drivers, and cyclists.

- o And thanks to our partnership with the Board of Alders and State legislative partners, we implemented increased fines and other consequences for those who wish to ride through New Haven streets illegally on ATVs and dirt bikes.
- o And safety also means being safe from pollution. We, as a community, fought back against big corporate interests and stopped the expansion of a trash facility in the Annex; we stood up together—the entire State Delegation, the entire Board of Alders, residents, neighborhood leaders and non-profit partners—for environmental justice. And we were successful.

But I want to take a moment to talk in particular about violence. Let's be clear, most people in our City do not feel safe from violence – especially in our Black and Latinx communities. Like many cities at this moment, we are struggling with an increase in violent crime. This challenge has an urgency like none other, because we are losing our young people prematurely and the waves of impact go beyond the loss of that one individual. We are working urgently to address the violence and our plan focuses both on the short-term and long-term:

- First, we hold violent offenders accountable. Our Police Department has worked hard to make arrests and take guns off the street. This time last year, we seized 8 guns and made 6 arrests. This year, we have seized 14 guns and made 14 arrests. As for major felonies, there was a homicide arrest in January 2021 and 3 arrests for non-fatal shootings. There were also 140 felony arrests in January.
- And while we struggle to fund even more positions in our police force, we are working hard to rebuild and fill the vacancies that currently exist. Last week we graduated 16 new officers who are already out on the beat. And the Civil Service Board just certified a list of 167 candidates with whom we will begin the hiring process as we prepare to seat our next police class.
- Beyond policing itself, we are implementing policies to address violence in both the short-term and long-term:
 - o We are working with State Probation and Parole—after they took a long hiatus because of COVID, they are now doing custom visits to returning citizens suspected of being involved in violence. Starting next week our team will be doing 10 custom visits per week.
 - o We will be conducting a gun buyback event in the coming weeks to take more guns off the street.

- o Our Youth Connect Team (previously known as Youth Stat) is working to engage New Haven's most at-risk young people one by one, person by person to ensure they have the resources they need.
- o And last Tuesday we hosted our first "call-in" in over a year, where Project Longevity, our Police Department, law enforcement partners, and support staff provided options to the 17 men participating and a pathway so they could put the guns down and receive support. This call-in was only the second call-in to happen in the country amid this pandemic. Group violence intervention is proven to work and is critical in addressing the increasing violence in our City. We are preparing another call-in in the coming months.
- o And being safe for many in our community doesn't always mean police responding to crises. That is all too clear. This has been elevated more than ever before by the millions of people around the nation and thousands in New Haven demonstrating that Black Lives Matter. Safety is about undoing historical inequities, addressing the trauma in our communities, and undoing racism. We are responding to this call in many ways:

- o As a City we are working to undo racism. I applaud the Board of Alder's Health and Human Services Committee for working to define and address racism as a public health emergency.
- o In addition to this work, I am announcing that the City of New Haven has joined the Government Alliance on Race and Equity. GARE is a national network of local governments working to achieve racial equity and advance opportunities for all. This work allows us to reach deep into our bureaucracy to normalize the conversation and make the necessary structural changes in the way we serve the public.
- o And safety to many does not mean calling the police when there is a crisis. Many times, mental health and social service support is needed rather than a uniformed officer with a gun. After much planning work, our team is poised to launch the Community Crisis Response Team PILOT program where social workers and medical experts will help respond to substance use and addiction

problems, mental health issues or episodes, domestic issues, and other calls for service that may not need a police response.

Ultimately, we cannot address violence and many other challenges we face as a community without addressing the roots of the problem. These roots are based on the opportunities people have and do not have – opportunities for economic stability, for safe and affordable housing, for a good education, for a second chance.

Everyone in New Haven deserves the opportunity to thrive. This is the reason I ran for mayor and continues to be the primary focus of our Administration. And while this work may take years, even decades, this is the work of our time, for this is the work that will make a true difference in our City's ultimate success. This past year we have continued to build on the work of past leaders to do just that:

- Later this week, in partnership with Project MORE, we will launch New Haven's first one-stop "Re-Entry Center." We cannot expect our returning citizens to succeed if they have no path to success, and the re-entry center is designed to do just that. In New Haven, we believe everyone should not only have an opportunity to thrive, but they should have a second chance.

You will hear more about this effort later this week, but I can tell you I'm proud of the work that the City's Reentry Coordinator Carlos Sosa-Lombardo has put into this effort and am confident the impact will be significant.

- And people cannot thrive without an opportunity for a job. This past November, we launched a construction jobs program to give our residents the training, education, and work experience they need to set them up with a lasting career in the construction trades. Thank you to all our partners and especially to New Haven Works as we now move forward with placing graduates into employment and moving to the next training cohort.

And, of course, people cannot thrive without safe, stable housing. And this is an area where our team is working to take significant steps – both within New Haven and by advocating beyond our City.

- Even as we continue to grow, residents are faced with rent burden. Over 6,000 households in New Haven need housing at the deeply affordable level in part due to income at 30% or below the median income for our area.

- And, to be clear, the burden falls squarely on New Haven with little to no assistance from our suburban towns. Let me first acknowledge the groundswell of support for the lawsuit against the Town of Woodbridge, which seeks to open up affordable housing options in one of our neighboring communities. However, that lawsuit turns out, we will still need to drive forward on dramatic change in order to deal with the affordable housing crisis.
- Substantial progress has been made this year:
 - The new Affordable Housing Commission will have its first meeting in the coming weeks. Thank you to our new Commissioners for stepping up and volunteering to serve.
 - We anticipate that the state will receive over \$200 million dollars in federal funding to support tenants at risk of eviction. It is important that we all work together, identify our neighbors in need, and ensure they have the support and resources to keep housing stability. Our CASTLE program, the Coronavirus Assistance and Security Tenant Landlord Emergency Program, is working to assist homeowners and tenants falling behind on payments so we have a strong foundation to help support those facing instability.

- The 16 new housing units on Judith Terrace, Thompson Street, and Winchester Avenue are finished with new homeowners building wealth and contributing to neighborhood stability.
- Over the past year, our Administration worked with our local partners and the State to rehouse over 350 homeless individuals into permanent housing. And we will continue to work with our partners to give people a chance at having a stable home environment and the support they need to get back on their feet.
- Looking ahead to the next four months, we will launch the next set of initiatives to make Housing available for all:
 - In terms of removing zoning barriers that exist right here in New Haven, we are in step with the Desegregate Connecticut approach: preparing new ordinances for inclusionary zoning, accessory dwelling units and opening up our most restrictive zones for more density.
 - As you know, we inspect rental units on a rolling basis for compliance with the Housing Code. But we do very little in terms of training and education. Just passing the inspection is not an acceptable standard. Through a new training program to be run out of LCI, landlords will

be better prepared and always held accountable to the Housing Code.

- At some point, the moratoriums on tenant eviction will expire.

Nobody has an exact number of households at risk of eviction. There is no early warning system before a “notice to quit” is served on the family. In the coming months, our foremost responsibility is to educate tenants on their rights, work with landlords and tenants on mediation and work outs to prevent evictions, and then support tenants in crisis when faced with an eviction. Alders, if you are made aware of a tenant in crisis, let’s connect the family to resources at Legal Aid, the Connecticut Fair Housing Center, and our case managers at LCI and the Financial Empowerment Center.

- I want to take a moment to thank the Financial empowerment Center. This past year they have assisted over 400 New Haven residents, including enrolling clients in financial counseling, and helping to reduce their debt and increase their savings. I am proud of the work the center is doing to address systemic inequality at its core by assisting people for a stable financial future.

- And not just in the next four months, but for the entire year, we must also have a commitment to build housing and encourage investment.

Here are just some of the projects I am very much looking forward to:

- The City will take on the second phase of the Thompson/Winchester project and the George Street historic renovation project adding 18 affordable units, 8 of which will be going to homeowners.
- Partners are delivering on large scale, transformational projects. The Prince Street School renovation is underway, creating 30 affordable units as part of the Hill to Downtown plan. Farnum Phase 2, Westville Manor, Antillean, and the Valley Townhomes are all moving forward.
- CONNCORP's proposed mixed-use redevelopment of Dixwell Plaza—together with the Q House across the street and the Beulah Development at Joe Grate's site—will immensely elevate the quality of daily life and inspire kids of all ages to love their neighborhood and stay close to home to raise their own families.

- Alders, residents, and stakeholders listening in tonight...is vitally important to support this growth and keep pushing forward at every level to create safe, quality housing for all. We have a strong plan but have much work ahead of us to implement this plan.

Finally, our City will not thrive without adequate resources. I would be remiss if I did not talk about the elephant in the room, or rather the ivory tower in our backyard. The City's financial health is dire. In the next fiscal year, our City faces up to a \$66 million-dollar deficit. And this problem will continue into future years. We cannot cut or tax our way out of this problem. Our City is at a crossroads today. And Yale University and the State of Connecticut are, too. All eyes are on them.

In the coming days, Governor Lamont will submit an over \$40 billion biennial budget proposal to the Legislature at the state level. Connecticut billionaires made many more millions over this past year while hundreds of thousands lost their jobs. Based on data collected by Forbes, seven of Connecticut's billionaires last year increased their wealth by \$1.7 billion dollars. These seven individuals made enough money to close New Haven's budget deficit for decades. There is

something deeply wrong with this. The Governor has indicated he does not want to raise taxes on them. But at what cost? That forces our Cities to raise taxes on residents who simply cannot afford it. Governor Lamont, we are looking to you to add funding in your budget to support the tiered PILOT proposal in front of the Legislature. The proposal has bipartisan support, has the support of the Mayors of major cities and First Selectpersons of small towns, that is practical, progressive and costs only half a percent of the State's annual budget. Think about that, half a percent. Governor Lamont, we are looking to you.

And in our backyard is Yale University. Yale spends over \$4 billion dollars each year to serve 12,000 students; whereas the City of New Haven spends under \$600 million dollars to serve 130,000 residents. Something is just not right there when Yale spends over \$300,000 per student, and we spend only \$4,600 per resident. Yale, we are looking to you to dramatically increase your voluntary payment because it is the right thing to do, because it is good for the City and Yale, and because it is high time.

We want the State, Yale, and New Haven to thrive together. We can only thrive together, if we all thrive, if we all thrive. All eyes are on you.

Last year in my State of the City, I talked about the precarious position our City was in. Without a doubt, throughout this past year, we have shown time and again that, despite the challenges we face, we are resilient, we will persevere. So, this year, I would sum up the state of our City as hopeful. While we face many challenges, the opportunities in front of us are incredible. We have more to go, but the end of the pandemic is in our sights. With it will come a significant economic rebound. Our financial challenges are daunting, but our partners give me cautious optimism to have faith we will not only overcome the challenges but vanquish them. And our community gets stronger every day. We in New Haven have shown just what we can accomplish when we work together, together we have led in a time of crisis and together we will continue to lead the way and ensure that New Haven is a place where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.