

STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

A JOINT MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL AND SCHOOL BOARD CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS

March 4, 2019

5:30 PM

Present:

- City Council: Pepin, Messier, Cameron and Levasseur, and McCallion
- School Board: Austin, Richardson, Cannon, and Larson

City Manager Belmore welcomed all and introduced Mayor Dana S. Hilliard at 5:30pm.

Mayor Hilliard presented his State of the City Address:

For two hundred and ninety years, the ten square mile community, known as Somersworth, has secured its place within history, defining its foundation upon values which has aided in restoring its identity, confidence in itself and having a clear direction towards its journey of recapturing the successes of its “Proud Past”. The light of the Hilltop City has been illuminated since its founding, attracting immigrants seeking to be part of the American endeavor and citizens throughout the United States wishing to become part of something bigger than themselves.

One does not need to look to the strength of the Salmon Falls River, or the grandeur of the Mills that dominate the façade of our downtown business district to gain an insight or understanding of what the foundation of our community’s soul is. Our success did not come from textiles, shoes or meters which were produced for corporate America.

Our success did not come from the abundance of wealth which was made by businessmen whose homes fill our historic district. Our success, our “Proud Past’ and “Bright Future” is instead found throughout the restaurants, coffee shops, and busy grocery stores. Our success is found on the baseball diamonds, the churches, parks, and gathering places throughout Somersworth. Our success was not crafted from brick and mortar, nor from the machines of human invention. Our success was instead divinely influenced and designed. Our success cannot be labeled with a barcode or have a monetary value placed upon it. For our success and greatest asset has always been and will continue to be the people who proudly call and define themselves as Hilltoppers.

Somersworth has, within six years, gone from wandering the trail with a confused sense of direction, to becoming a model of governing, while celebrating and embracing diversity, and reinvesting and believing in itself. The elements of our success were never lost or abandoned, they were instead forgotten. Forgotten by those who believed that for Somersworth to once again become the giant of the seacoast, a transformation to something else was necessary. Those who believed that for Somersworth to compete, we must become and follow the lead of our neighbors, Dover, Rochester or Portsmouth.

Those who believed that Somersworth was incapable of envisioning how it would once again succeed or define itself as a community which would attract commerce and the next generation of Hilltoppers.

Our own lack of confidence, misinterpretation of our history and unawareness of self, lead to our darkest hours. The hours in which our downtown center became empty, infrastructure deteriorated, lack of support of school and first responders existed and embracing self-defeat and failure were common practices. Yet, throughout those hard days, the Hilltopper spirit of those who truly believe in its story, its values, its commitment and foundation was never surrendered.

For what we sought out to create in 1729 radiates today in the new energy level, excitement and determination to continue envisioning, creating and constructing a community where all can live safely, be supported, find common ground, and be celebrated.

History is filled with the stories of civilizations and communities' time of opportunities and missed opportunities, leaving future generations to ponder and interpret why decisions were made or negated. One's greatest moment is knowing when their time to climb, progress, succeed. Knowing when it is their time to envision, endeavor, commit, and continue "On the Move"! Our Hilltop City no longer needs to forecast into the future when our time will come, for our time has arrived, and we will no longer wait for the right moment or opportunity to create our "Bright Future", for Somersworth, now is our moment. "Now is our Time!"

"Now is our Time" to continue to progress which has been made at reinvigorating our downtown center and commerce areas. We must aggressively market all that is right and intriguing about our 10 square mile community. We must, with confidence, seek every opportunity to attract and welcome the businesses we desire. Gone must be the days when we adhere to the concept that with little to no effort, they will come. We must instead, with the same level of commitment and energy which has set forth the continuation of our journey of success; create, envision, market and seek opportunities which will attract investors and entrepreneurs to Somersworth.

A school system is the first indication of a community's commitment to oneself, its wellbeing and willingness of investment and sacrifice towards a "Bright Future". Progressive schools attract businesses and families who will continue to believe and embrace Somersworth. We hold steady to our commitment to greatness within our school system, through seeking every opportunity available to create 21st century educational experiences for all of our students. "Now is our Time" to continue the financial support we have made over the last 6 years, of passing school budgets which reflect our Hilltopper values towards supporting 21st century education opportunities, while building schools which are nationally recognized for their holistic approach towards growing a student's body, mind, and soul.

“Now is our Time” to continue with the due diligence of the SAU56 Withdrawal Commission and explore all options which will allow Somersworth to make its own independent decisions regarding the governing of their education system. While full autonomy comes as a cost, we must not hesitate nor be fearful of allowing our community the final step of achieving its own voice in steering its own destiny.

The Somersworth of 2019 has altered in its appearance and growth since most of our childhoods. Today, the Somersworth we live in is home to businesses and shopping plazas where farms once stood. Open space and land which once was habitat to species we rarely came in contact with, are now housing developments to new generations of Hilltoppers, forcing the displaced deer, turkeys, and other wildlife into our backyards, and onto our streets. While our economic progress is and must continue to be a top priority of our community, so must sustaining and conserving its natural resources. We must continue to seek balance between development and maintaining sustainable and conservation practices which protect all natural resources and species for generations to come.

“Now is our Time” to utilize the wisdom, insight and commitment of both the Sustainability Committee and Conservation Commission.

Within the next several months, I will be naming members of both of these bodies to embark on the creation of a 10 year annual plan adopted by the City Council entitled “Preserve Somersworth”. This environmentally friendly plan will ensure Somersworth continues to focus on the balance between sustainable practices in its government, school and community.

We must continue our unwavering commitment towards our first responders. Our Hilltopper heroes, Police, Fire, EMS, affirm each day that without hesitation, they would be willing to lay down their life for the life of a fellow Hilltopper. “Now is our Time” to ensure through our practices, that they are rewarded with competitive salaries and benefits and have access to the tools and equipment necessary to keep us safe.

By the conclusion of this Council’s term, let us vote to finalize the construction of a state of the art Fire Station facility, have our Police Department at full force, creating new officer positions if the demand is warranted and continue to support EMS services who are dedicated and committed to Somersworth.

Since the first volleys of American Independence were fired at Lexington and Concord, our American Veterans have continued to answer the call, defending the values of Freedom and Liberty throughout the world. Somersworth Veterans throughout our history have and continue to serve our nation with the pride and valor which brings honor to our Hilltop City.

The Veterans Park Commission, under the leadership of Councilor Dumont and the Commission members have adopted the preliminary designs for a new Veterans Park

which will create a place of remembrance and recognition that all of our veterans deserve.

“Now is our Time” for us to answer our call, by allocating the funds necessary to begin the work on a Somersworth Veterans’ Park and create a park that allows us to show our thanks and appreciation to all of our veterans.

Over the last six years, we have, at a steady pace, continued “On the Move!” towards upgrading our parks and creating both passive and active recreation opportunities for all Somersworth citizens. Today, the Pines Splash Pad, walking trails and Kayak launches cater to the needs of a community’s desire for wellness practices. “Now is our Time” to not only sustain our support for park upgrades, but to explore and create new recreation opportunities for all residents. Under the watchful eyes of Councilor Cameron, as the new Chair of the Council Recreation Committee, I have full confidence that recreation will continue to have a “Bright Future” in our city.

The Noble Pines Baseball Field has been recognized as one of the best baseball diamonds in the state and has taken on the characteristics of a Norman Rockwell painting during games, celebrating America’s favorite past time, at the highest gathering spot in our community. Sadly, at our flagship park, baseball is limited only to the daylight hours. As the saying goes, “If you build it, they will come”, so over the next several months, Councilor Witham and I will be seeking and exploring all options of making night time baseball games a living reality at the Noble Pines.

With the same dream and determination that illuminated Memorial Field for football, I call upon all baseball lovers to help us bring evening baseball games to the Hilltop City.

On equal footing with a reputable school system for attracting businesses and families to Somersworth, is an updated and well maintained infrastructure. Over the past six years, with the guidance and commitment of the Public Works and Environment Chair Councilor Sprague, our Council has embraced an aggressive approach to upgrading our streets, roads and infrastructure. “Now is our Time” to stay on course with our support and dedication towards maintaining our direction of improvements. A guaranteed way of ensuring Somersworth remains “On the Move” is by continuing our high level of support for street, road and infrastructure upgrades. We must not allow our community to slip back into the practices of apathy which led us to unsafe conditions and deterioration in the past.

The last six years have seen Somersworth develop a state wide reputation as the “Welcoming City”. Our commitment to each other, and the diversity which our Hilltopper strength comes from, has and continues to attract all who embrace the American creed of liberty and justice for all. From LGBT equality to standing firm and insuring the rights of immigrants and those of faith and non-believers, Somersworth once again shines as a beacon of hope as a community where one can be themselves, live in peace with security and be celebrated. Let us not only continue to open our arms to all who embrace diversity and democratic values, but “Now is our Time” to utilize our asset

of diversity and strength within our people, to grow our economy and expand our community's opportunities. I have recently begun discussions with members of the Indonesian Community Connect as to how the largest population of Indonesians north of New York City, in partnership with the Indonesian government, can help Somersworth continue "On the Move" towards its "Bright Future". Several ideas have been germinated, and as they progress, announcements and experts will be sought to help make ideas a reality for our "Welcoming City".

For two hundred and ninety years, our home, our ten square mile community that we call Somersworth has continued "On the Move". Through its competitiveness on the global market during the Industrial Revolution, to overcoming the fall out of the shoe industry and downsizing of General Electric, Somersworth has never abandoned its values or commitment towards honoring its "Proud Past" while continuing on its journey towards a "Bright Future". While the actions, success and failures of our past are now in the pages of our history books and throughout the rooms of the Somersworth Historical Museum, "Now is our Time" to write the next chapter and volumes of our destiny towards greatness. Let the commitment towards ourselves continue, let the energy continue to rise, for dawn and its first light has arrived and is shining throughout the Hilltop City, for "Now is our Time".

-Presentation slides are on file.-

City Manager Belmore explained that a State of the City Address is done because it is a requirement of the City Charter Article XIX.

City Manager Belmore introduced Deputy City Manager and Director of Finance, Scott Smith.

Director Smith presented the financial conditions of the City. He began by saying that the City's audited financial statements and budget are on the City's website (www.somersworth.com) and he is available at any time if anyone has any questions on this information.

Director Smith presented the General Fund Revenues. The largest part of the city revenues are property taxes, but as a whole, the total budgeted revenues is \$33,275,034, with current receipts as of February at \$32,012,813; a 96.21% collection, which is in line with previous years collections at this time.

He went on to explain the appropriations. The fiscal year 2019 General Fund Budget is \$13,349,101. As of February, General Fund Budget has expended 62% of appropriations. They are still watching Recycling Costs, Human Services, and Fire Department budgets as the year progresses.

Director Smith explained the Fund Balance policy, stating that it was adopted by City Council in September 2011. The policy states that the General Fund will maintain an unassigned fund balance equal to 5-17% of the total appropriations. The current fund balance is \$3,728,362 (8.04%). Director Smith stated that this is a good, healthy spot under the Fund Balance Policy. He stated that the city has maintained a consistent fund balance over the past several years.

Director Smith then outlined the City's Debt Service. This is the bonds that are issued for funding of various projects. He explained that the City's Capital Improvement Plan recommends replacing retiring debt to minimize the impact on the tax rate. (See presentation)

Director Smith went on to present an overview of the Enterprise Funds for the Water Division and Sewer Division.

Moving on to the Assessing Department, the Citywide Evaluation is scheduled for 2019, as the State of New Hampshire requires Cities and Towns to reassess all properties every 5 years. The field review is set to begin in April for all properties.

Next in the presentation was the review of the Capital Expenditures and Plans for FY2019. Director Smith explained that the City Council has adopted CIP funding for various road resurfacing projects, replacement of Video and Audio Equipment at the Police Station, various equipment for the DPW, Police taser replacements, and Leased Vehicles.

Director Smith introduced Shanna Saunders, Director of Planning and Community Development.

Director Saunders discussed various projects in the Community.

First is a DOT – Transportation Alternative Grant project which is a series of connective pieces, which when constructed, will make a connected pedestrian way from downtown, to the Somersworth Middle & High School and Maplewood Elementary School. The total cost of this project is \$986,500, with an 80/20 cost share.

Another project is the DOT – Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Grant (CMAQ) for a signal system optimization of the High Street/Rte 108 corridor in order to improve traffic flow and streamline intersections as well as provide for pedestrian improvements. This project is funded by the DOT at a cost of \$698,750 with an 80/20 cost share.

Director Saunders went on to say that in keeping with the Master Plan goal of providing community service, the online GIS maps have been upgraded, to a searchable, interactive system.

Director Saunders shared the three incentive zones within the community; ERZ, CRTR, and OZ.

Moving on to Construction projects, one of the Master Plan Goals is to actively promote growth and business development. Some of the projects include Green View, which includes 28 single family home lots off of Rocky Hill Road, Green Ridge, which includes 28 condo units on Green Street, Sunningdale Phase 3, which includes 26 single family homes in development off of Stackpole Road. There is also a VA Medical Building project at Terrascape Park on Rte. 108 and the NH Liquor Store at 481 High Street.

In the Recreation Department, the NH Department of Natural and Cultural Resources Land and Water Conservation Fund Grand funded project upgrades at Jules Bison Park including a river themed play structure, ADA accessible pavilion, ADA accessible parking lot and pathway system.

The Recreation Department has also expanded Senior activities to include Senior Sips and Sentiments Holiday Card Making Workshop, Senior Holiday Tea, and the Senior Picnic.

Director Saunders introduced Director Public Works and Utility, Michael Bobinsky.

Director Bobinsky touched on the various FY2019 road repairs at a cost of \$899,777. Projects include Complete Streets Design on Cemetery Road, Main Street, and Constitution Way.

Water and Sewer future improvements include the Blackwater Road pump station upgrade and improvements to the Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Other projects include the Emergency Preparedness-Water Interconnection with the City of Dover.

The City received a Moose Plate Grant to fund improvements to the Forest Glade Cemetery Entrance Gate.

Director Bobinsky introduced Police Chief, David Kretschmar.

Police Chief David Kretschmar shared information on various community events including Coffee with a Cop, Somersworth Senior Picnic, Shop with a Cop, National Night Out, and Community & Crime Prevention Presentations.

The Community Access to Recovery (CAR) Initiative is a program where the Police Department assists people in their recovery process by partnering with area hospitals and Health and Recovery Coaches.

Also, to date, the Police department has provided Free Active Shooter Training to over 650 City, School, and Private Business Employees.

The Police Department has acquired an Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) which allows them to connect to the national identification database.

Chief Kretschmar was happy to introduce Bravo, the Police Department K9. He is progressing well in his training along with his handler, Officer Deschenes, and he will have his Patrol Dog Certification this year.

City Manager Robert Belmore gave presentation for the Fire Department, as Chief Keith Hoyle was unavailable. City Manager Belmore shared statistical data of response time and incidents. The Fire Department is involved in various community outreach events including, National Fire Prevention Week Open House, Outreach for students, elderly fire safety classes, Children's Festival, National Night Out, Touch-a-Truck, Indonesian Fair, Toy Drive, and Fire extinguisher training at local businesses.

The Fire Department received a FEMA Fire Act grant to replace a Community Mutual Aid Association Recharge Van. The Fire Department also received a grant to participate in a water resources drill on the Salmon Falls River, and a grant to complete a NH Homeland Security Continuity of Operations Plan in the event of a natural or man-made disaster in Somersworth.

City Manager Belmore shared the plans for a proposed New Fire Station and the research and steps that have been taken up to this point.

Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Robert Gadomski reported that the current enrollment of students in Somersworth Schools is 1479. He went on to share information regarding collaborative partnerships between the schools and community.

He stated that the school department has received infrastructure funds to increase safety measures in all school.

They continue to implement best educational practices in schools, including cooperative learning, Competency Based Learning, full day kindergarten and preschool, behavior support and counseling, after school support program, increase community/family engagement programs and restructuring of the prek-5 programs.

Superintendent Gadomski went on to review the past and current school budget.

City Manager Belmore thanked everyone for attended and thanked everyone listening at home.

The State of the City Address concluded at 7:04 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Trish Harris, City Clerk