



State of the Town Address

January 10, 2012

Business philosopher Jim Rohn has noted, “Your life does not get better by chance, it gets better by change.” While he likely did not have Bridgewater in mind when he penned these words, they certainly ring true today. Before settling in as a peaceful agrarian community for a century or so, Bridgewater was a hotbed of change. Originally begun as a plantation to the town of Duxbury in 1645, Bridgewater itself had its genesis in change, as the Duxbury settlement stemmed from a grant from the original Plymouth settlers. In June of 1656, the town was incorporated, and, according to the Crane History of Bridgewater, “continued a united and harmonious whole” until 1715, when a petition was sent to the General Court for division of the town into a separate precinct, land that would later become the city of Brockton. Later divisions came in 1723, 38, and 43. Separate incorporations for neighboring towns resulted from a town meeting vote in 1821, and within twenty four months, the three towns and one city as we know them today were formed. In short, for nearly two centuries, change was the norm in Bridgewater. Many thanks to Bridgewater historians Bob Wood and David Moore for this information.

Inspirational speaker Tony Robbins has noted, “By changing nothing, nothing changes.” In April of 2010, The people of Bridgewater once again made the bold decision to change and it has resulted in much tumult, some conflict, and at times, bad feelings – but the town of Bridgewater – this community – is better for that change. Tonight, I will share with you some of the positive steps forward this community has taken in finance, public safety, environmental protection and this communities’ infrastructure – and demonstrate that the transformation brought by this new form of government is good for this community. Ladies and Gentlemen, the state of Bridgewater is strong, its future is solid, and its people are committed and resilient. This community stands on the precipice of a new era of stability and progress.

Tonight is not the first time that community leaders stood before the people of Bridgewater and offered an assessment of the state of the town and a look forward. In December of 1983, then-chairman of the Board of Selectmen David Flynn spoke in the grand ballroom of the Academy Building. He discussed important issues of the day, such as financial stability, the need for professional management in town, the need for a town planner, and efforts to expand the tax base by attracting new business. A generation later, his grandson, who today serves honorably on the Finance Committee, would grapple with the same issues. (introduce Chris)

Slightly more than a year ago, Bridgewater stood on the brink of receivership, its financial condition worsening and its reserves devastated by the worst economic conditions since the Great Depression. The town's free cash, a number that, as many of you know, is determined in part by the accuracy of revenue projections and the presence of reserves, was at an all-time low of negative \$741,000. A severe reduction in state aid, a workforce devastated by personnel cuts, and a road system in disrepair all characterized a broken community. Today, that free cash deficit has been reduced by more than a half million dollars, our cash reserves have increased and continue to rise, our workforce has begun the slow ascent back to necessary levels, and our roads, bridges, and buildings are being repaired. A better Bridgewater lies ahead. This new form of government, despite its growing pains and sometimes painful transition, works. With a single executive authority able to harness the resources and direct the daily affairs of all agencies, and a watchful and attentive legislative body exercising oversight, much progress has been made in the past year.

In finances, the conservative approach adopted by the Town Manager, and shared by the Town Council, has resulted in revenues exceeding projections by more than \$700,000 in the last year, enabling the heretofore unheralded concept of funding capital projects through free cash poised to be a reality. In fact, in the coming weeks, the Town Accountant and I will transmit to the Town Council Bridgewater's first comprehensive five year capital plan, which will fund more than \$4 million in capital improvements over the next five years without raising taxes or impacting operating budgets. In addition, a \$6 million project to restore the historic Academy Building using Community Preservation funds and the much needed

replacement of our Fire Headquarters are in the planning stages, the latter of which will require a commitment from the voters through a debt exclusion.

In the last year, I established a Finance Team of the Town Accountant Janine Smith, Assistant Assessor Shelley McCauley, and Treasurer/Collector Paula Linhares. We met regularly to not only solve problems, but to bring progress and needed improvements to all facets of our financial operations. This aggressive approach has resulted in renewed confidence in Bridgewater in the financial markets. In 2010, the town sought to borrow money through a short term note for cash flow purposes – a common occurrence in municipal finance circles, only this time – in Bridgewater – there were no takers. Just last month, the town sought to refund its debt – similar to refinancing a mortgage – and got three competitive bids, clearly demonstrating that market confidence has returned due to our financial management. During a recent phone conference with Moody's to prepare for this resale, even our bond rating agency noted their renewed confidence in our fiscal management. This one initiative saved the taxpayers and ratepayers of Bridgewater nearly \$400,000. (Recognize Paula) Legislation now sits before the Town Council to continue on this positive track by creating a municipal finance department – a modern, streamlined agency that will have cross-trained employees capable of serving multiple functions – increasing efficiency and customer service – without the addition of personnel.

Our budget, which was before but a collection of excel spreadsheets, is now a volume of information, packed with projections, analysis, and graphic displays; it has become an approachable and valuable tool to demonstrate our professional stewardship of public resources, and a model for other communities to follow. Town Accountant Janine Smith IT Director Brad Dzierzak and I worked day and night to make this modernization a reality. In addition, we have streamlined our financial reporting, modernized our accounting software, increased accountability, and strengthened internal controls, all of which have drawn praise from our auditors. The professional financial management sought by the charter is here. It works. (recognize Janine).

Our new charter also created a finance committee, consisting of nine citizens, appointed by the Town Council, Town Clerk, and Town Manager. This diverse group, led by its Chairman

Gary Oman, has as its charge the consideration all finance related matters. They have become a full partner in our fiscal planning and execution, meeting regularly to discuss implementing new policies and strategies to even further strengthen our recovery. The Town Accountant and I have spent dozens of hours with these dedicated volunteers. Councilor Tim Fitzgibbons has been attending meetings as a representative of the Council's newly reconstituted Budget and Finance Committee, making the circle of cooperation complete.

Our finances, though, cannot sustain the revival of this community simply on the standard annual 2 ½ percent increase in property taxes. We understand that, and are working hard to attract commercial development to ease the tax burden on our homeowners. I have actively worked with our department heads, convening several technical review team meetings, affectionately called "dirt meetings," designed to give potential developers an overview of the opportunities for responsible, sustainable development in Bridgewater. It is working. Today, a major redevelopment project on Route 104, several projects on Elm Street, two major solar farms, and a major project to rehabilitate housing downtown, are all underway – in the final planning stages or ready to break ground. We are not just talking about responsible development – your professional staff and I are encouraging our entrepreneurs and helping them make it happen.

Other than responsibly and professionally managing the peoples' money, no job of local government is more important than protecting and serving the safety of its citizens. Our efforts to maintain and enhance the level of service in police, fire, and public works has been an important focus of the last year. Under the leadership, energy and enthusiasm of newly appointed Police Chief Chris Delmonte, the Bridgewater Police Department responded to more than 7,400 calls for service and answered more than 47,000 business and emergency 911 calls in the last year. This, however, does not tell the story of this department. The men and women who proudly wear the uniform of the Bridgewater Police Department continue to serve with honor and distinction despite still troublingly low staffing levels. From a modern-day low of 27 sworn staff just two years ago, we have been able to begin the slow climb back to the era when Bridgewater was a regional leader in local law enforcement. Today, we have 28 officers and command staff sworn to serve and protect. Early next year, two new officers will be added, bringing the complement to 30.

I would like to read a quote from our Police Chief. *“The town is growing rapidly and the Department manpower has not been able to keep up with this growth. In order to offset this I have asked for three (3) additional police officers and one (1) additional sergeant in our ... budget, as our strength of 29 full-time officers is just not enough to keep up with the demand for services needed by a town the size of Bridgewater. National and state statistics show that a town the size of Bridgewater should have at least thirty-eight (38) full-time officers. We presently have twenty-nine, including the Chief.”* This quote, as true and accurate as it is today, however, is not from Chief Delmonte. It is from Chief William Feriloli, offered as part of the annual town report in 1986, when Chief Delmonte graduated from Bridgewater-Raynham Regional High School. The department saw its staffing peak in 2003, when 40 officers kept our community safe. The Chief and I are working on an aggressive but affordable plan to bring the department back to similar levels in the next five years.

Even with the reduced staff, though, this past year saw many successes for our men and women in blue. Just last month, the class of the 15th citizens police academy graduated their 14 week program in this very room, joining more than 200 fellow citizens in gaining a deeper understanding of the issues and challenges facing modern law enforcement. In the last year, the department was able to rejoin the WEB task force, a regional major crimes team, resulting not only in several major drug busts, but publicity that put local criminals on notice that drugs and violence are not OK in our community.

The men and women of the Bridgewater Fire Department also continued to serve honorably, responding to nearly 4,000 calls for service, and an additional two thousand fire safety inspections. During three major storm events, including two blizzard-like snowstorms and a tropical storm that cut power to some areas of town for more than a week, Chief George Rogers led crews that worked day and night to fulfill the guiding principle noted on their website that pride, commitment to public service and excellence are of paramount importance. Nearly five dozen fires, two thousand medical calls, and a host of community events proved the mantra that these dedicated professionals serve because they care. The modernization of the department headquarters, once a proud historic edifice, and now a tired, non-functional building, is an important priority in the coming year. With the leadership of building committee chairman Ken Mahtesian, who has overseen hundreds of

millions of dollars of private commercial construction, a new, functional, safe, and modern Fire Headquarters lies ahead.

Both Chief Delmonte and Chief Rogers are regional leaders in obtaining grants, bringing more than \$400,000 in public safety grant funds to Bridgewater and the region. They are ably assisted in these efforts by Deputy Tom Levy and Lt. Tom Schlatz, both long-time committed public servants who put in many long and dedicated hours to benefit their hometown. From cooking thanksgiving dinner for our seniors, to delivering toys and meals to needy families at Christmas, our police officers and firefighters exemplify commitment to the community.

Highway Superintended Paul Hurley and I meet regularly to discuss the challenges of maintaining our infrastructure and to work together on repairing and sustaining it. In a meeting a short time ago, Paul looked at me and said, "I want to thank you. For the first time in my life, I have a career, and not just a good job." Paul's commitment to improving our roads and bridges is contagious, and exists throughout the highway, water and sewer departments, and will be a hallmark of the combined Department of Public Works, which will be sought through legislation soon to be filed with the Town Council. In the last year, within available funds, We have invested more than a million dollars in the infrastructure of this community, from repairing the Bridge Street Bridge, destroyed during the floods of early 2010, to painting more than 100 miles of lines to improve safety on our streets, to major paving construction and maintenance projects in virtually every section of our town. In addition, We completed Bridgewater's first ever complete pavement analysis, a comprehensive review of the condition of our roads and an objective, non-political look forward to planning road improvements for the next ten years.

The signalization of the intersection at High and Broad Streets languished in a bureaucratic no-mans-land for more than a decade, until this year, when the team of Councilor Bill Wood, Representative D'Emilia and I lobbied to bring it back from the abyss. We worked hard and succeeded. In August, the Old Colony Planning Council approved funding through its Metropolitan Planning Organization for \$1.4 million for this long awaited and much needed public safety improvement. Citizens were here tonight – working with elected and appointed officials alike – to move this project up in the queue. We applaud their efforts.

Information technology – bringing Bridgewater into the information age - is also a key component of the resurgence of our town. Working with Building Inspector Mike White and IT Director Brad Dzierzak, we recently embarked on a complete overhaul of the permitting process in town. In the coming months, the entire process for obtaining a building permit will be electronic and paperless - and accessible to anyone on the planet with access to a computer. We are not just talking about open, transparent, and accessible government – we are living it – this government of the people is being brought directly to the people in the comfort of their homes. The IT Director and I have worked to make information a key tool in our outreach, creating a facebook page that has brought the world of social media to our government, launching a new website that has even more improvements planned, and we recently sought a paperless solution for the Council themselves, a solution that is both tech savvy and environmentally sound. Working with BTV Veteran John Myers, I launched an interactive show on BTV, where citizens have asked the town manager questions and raise concerns on their government – their community.

Openness and transparency are not just important priorities, they are the hallmark of the management of today's Bridgewater. A few months ago, a news reporter, posing as an interested citizen, walked into several town offices in the region, asking for basic budget and spending information. Not only were they welcomed into my office, which to this day offers an open door policy to citizens, they were rapidly provided with detailed financial data, along with an offer to explain it in detail. We were praised by the Enterprise reporter for our openness and accessibility during sunshine week.

The environment continues to be a key focus of our daily work. In Bridgewater, community preservation is not simply a concept – it is a cornerstone of our governmental philosophy and a core local value. The purchase of the Keith Homestead, approved unanimously by the Town Council, was the result of months of staff work and negotiations, and presents a unique opportunity to encompass all aspects of the community preservation act – historic preservation, affordable housing, passive recreation, and open space preservation – in a single project. Many thanks to the citizen task force that will make recommendations on the future of this precious resource. Since its adoption in town, the community preservation act and its hard working committee, sponsored several projects – from the installation of fencing

at the Mount Prospect Cemetery, to the renovation and restoration of our historic and beautiful town hall. These projects, though, were without stewardship and direct involvement by committee members, until I brought the dedicated volunteers from the CPC to the table, drawing on the vast and committed experience of its membership and helping these projects move forward. Today, each project has a steward, and community preservation has renewed hope.

We have taken important steps forward to make recreation activities more accessible to Bridgewater residents, lowering enrollment fees, thanks to an increase in funding through the override. We will continue to work to improve our fields, and are working on a cooperative project with the CPC, Recreation Commission and others to replace the Journey's End playground with a more modern and accessible family recreation area. Who among us has not driven by the Olde Scotland Links Golf Club on a Sunday and seen a large figure in the distance, working in efficient solitude, piecing together the house that Charlie built? Recreation Director Charlie Simonds' love for this community knows no bounds; he is a shining example of the dedication of our department heads. The new clubhouse, a true community barn raising, will add value and revenue to this multi-million dollar asset, and will assist the golf course with much needed revenue.

Shortly after arriving in Bridgewater, I convened and led a brainstorming session of local officials, volunteers, educators, and staff from the University, taking a look forward and developing a vision of "Bridgewater 2020." A major outgrowth of this session was the current effort to revitalize our downtown, and our related involvement with the Community Development Block Grant program. These efforts are proof that, working together, leadership, energy, and a committed citizenry can be a game changer – and a community builder.

Community building must include all aspects of a community. Our neighbors at Bridgewater State University are full collaborators in the downtown revitalization effort, and our relationship with this most important partner is also reaching ever more cooperative and productive levels. I meet often with Executive VP Fred Clark and VP for Administration and Finance Mike Gomes to not only discuss, but to roll up our sleeves and work on important

issues of mutual interest. We now meet regularly with the “boots on the ground” officials for the town and the University, working together for common solutions. Just last week, I met with Partnership Chair Bill Callahan, and set out an aggressive meeting schedule for the Council to take its rightful and important seat at the table on critical issues such as traffic, campus development, and wastewater treatment. The University sharing its own master plan with the citizens of this community was a necessary and important step forward that demonstrates the commitment to partnership and friendship that now exists. On that note, I’d like to take a moment to recognize the extraordinary contributions made by our late friend Dr. Ed Minnock to this effort. I have often called Ed an ambassador of friendship. He was that and much more, and his tragic passing still stings, but his legacy endures. Thank you, my friend, for showing us the way to work together.

Community building must include our schools. Our partnership has strengthened with the Bridgewater Raynham Regional School District, evidenced by the presence of School Committee chair Patricia Riley and Superintendent Dr. Jackie Forbes here tonight. We continue to work together on important issues facing the community and tonight renew the commitment to providing sustained and sufficient funding for our partners in the district and to support their critically important work. Just today, a team of officials from the town joined school district officials in a planning session to strategize on ways to reduce suicide in our communities. When it comes to working with the regional schools – partnership is an action word.

Partnership is just the word to describe the relationship between Bridgewater and its freshman State Representative. Representative D’Emilia has worked indefatigably in his first year in office, sponsoring the restoration of our prison mitigation, which led to nearly \$100,000 in unanticipated state aid, and the restoration of an additional \$220,000 in previously reduced funding. He was a critical player in reviving the High and Broad light and personally attended a meeting with Mass DOT officials to lobby for this important project in his district. These are but a few examples of his hard work on behalf of Bridgewater. Thank you Representative, and your colleague in the Senate, Sen. Pacheco, for helping to build a better Bridgewater.

Even the building in which we hold this address has been part of the turnaround of this community. It wasn't so very long ago that the discussion of a closed and shuttered senior center was part of the daily banter in the coffee shops. Today, this building and the programs in it stand as a symbol of the strength and resilience of our senior population – and their role in bringing this community back from the brink. From meals on wheels, which I have proudly delivered with many of our department heads, to congregate lunches, exercises and computer classes, and even intergenerational get-togethers, the Bridgewater Senior Center is alive. It thrives, bustles, and overflows with energy and enthusiasm. (Lorraine)

Our library, which joined its Central Square brethren as a building once symbolizing the decline of a previously proud downtown, is also on the rebound. Close to being shuttered itself, the library, under the passionate and tireless leadership of Director Sean Daley and the support of the Library Trustees, and with additional funding proposed in my budget submittal and approved by the Council, is now open 54 hours per week, has an interior that has been reorganized to make it more user-friendly, has collections that are being revitalized, and is on the road to recertification.

None of these successes are due to the efforts of a single person. Our department heads, my incredible and professional support staff, the Council, and I are all spokes on a wheel that is, after many detours, finally headed in the right direction. All spokes must be connected to the sprocket, the common purpose of a better government and better community, though for the wheel to continue its journey on the right path. That is the challenge for us all in the coming year. The time for conflict, consternation, and carnage has ended. It is time to work – and work together. Legendary newsman David Brinkley had a recipe for success in the face of adversity - “Lay a firm foundation with the bricks that others throw at you,” he said. That is what we have done in the last year – brick by brick, meeting by meeting, and cornerstone by cornerstone – we have laid a foundation for a stronger future and a better Bridgewater. The naysayers will continue to throw their bricks, and I and others will continue to build on the foundation discussed tonight.

A friend of mine often shares a favorite passage in an attempt to redirect the thinking of his fellows. “When I focus on what’s good today, I have a good day, and when I focus on what’s bad, I have a bad day. If I focus on a problem, the problem increases; if I focus on the answer, the answer increases. In other words, if we focus on the solutions before us, the momentum of the past year will continue, our finances will continue to strengthen, our infrastructure will continue to be restored, and the very identity of this community will continue to recover. To paraphrase our 42nd President, there is nothing wrong with Bridgewater that cannot be fixed by what is right with Bridgewater.

I will continue to focus on the solutions. That is my pledge to you tonight. Thank you, and good night.