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CHELSEA, MA

July 29, 2016

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SUSPENSION

The Honorable Chelsea City Council
Chelsea City Hall
500 Broadway
Chelsea, Massachusetts 02150

Re: *First Year Report*

Dear Councilors:

I have been City Manager for just over one year. So, it seems an appropriate time to step back and review our progress. I specify "our progress" because the Council has been a true partner in all of these efforts.

In the midst of constantly responding to daily crises and focusing on immediate needs, we sometimes overlook the bigger picture and lose sight of broader gains. But, when we carefully consider all that has occurred this past year, I feel we have much of which to be proud. This report confirms that. I have separated the report into categories corresponding to my three previously identified priorities.

**Economic Development**

Three development projects made progress this past year that will significantly add to the tax base in FY17: Phase II of One North, which had its grand opening last week; the FBI building, scheduled for substantial completion before the end of Summer; and the Hilton Homewood Suites and Event Center, now visible in construction adjacent to Chelsea High School, with an expected completion date in the Winter. Two other projects supported by the City are expected to break ground in FY17: the Broadway Hotel adjacent to Mill Creek at the Revere line; and the Chelsea Clock residential project, now known as the Fairfield Residential Project. Depending on state funding schedules, it is possible that the 34 unit French Club project by TND might commence before the end of June, which would certainly help with the City's affordable housing efforts.

The City made some decent progress in its efforts to encourage sound development in the Broadway Business District and on the Waterfront. Several projects involving new residential units above storefronts have been approved for construction in the Broadway area, and there is a pending proposal to improve the former Centro Latino building. Other developers are eyeing the Broadway Business Corridor, intrigued by the City's commitment of substantial public infrastructure investment. Along the Waterfront, the City has submitted to the Seaport Economic Council a proposal for funding a comprehensive Harbor Plan, and we are hopeful we will hear favorable news about this grant sometime in August. And, the owners of the Forbes site continue

to express interest in a major redevelopment of that area, albeit in a scaled down version that better fits the City's goals.

We also made progress in transportation improvements tied to economic development. The road reconstruction work around Phase II of One North is coming to a close. The Everett Avenue reconstruction, from the railroad tracks to Carter Street, should be completed this Fall, and the City now is preparing another MassWorks grant to complete the remaining stretch of Everett Avenue to Route 16. And, Phase I of the Silver Line is on schedule for completion sometime in the first part of 2017.

To enhance economic development throughout the City, the Council is now considering some comprehensive Amendments to our Zoning Ordinance. The proposal includes provisions mandating affordable housing in any residential development of 10 units or more, a major aspiration of this City Council.

Finally, the City Council has approved for the ballot in November a Community Preservation Act surcharge of 1.5%. I know this has been a long-standing goal of the City. If approved by the City's voters in November, that surcharge will generate at least a half million dollars annually for affordable housing, open space development and historic preservation.

**Support for Chelsea Public Schools and Youth Initiatives**

The City Council should be proud of its significant investment and commitment to the Chelsea Public Schools this past year. In just one budget season, the Council reversed a longstanding net school spending deficit and delivered substantial new funding for the Chelsea School System. This funding has allowed the Chelsea Schools to expand its Citizens Schools programming in the middle schools, to enhance the social services offered to unaccompanied youth at Chelsea High School and to add a summer and afterschool program for elementary students. The latter effort will be aided this Fall by a new 21st Century grant for Chelsea Public Schools in collaboration with For Kids Only, the City's new afterschool provider.

The New Clark Avenue Middle School also made substantial progress. The best news is the building is currently on time and on budget. Students are expected to move into the new academic wing of the building in January of 2017. This past year, the City also revamped the design for the front entryway for the building along Clark Avenue, creating a welcoming and much more attractive front yard for this public building.

In addition to greater support for the public schools, the City this past year made a major commitment to general youth programming. The FY17 Budget included a doubling of funding for summer youth jobs. The Council also approved funds for a new Youth Navigator and created a new Recreation and Cultural Affairs Division within the Health and Human Services Department. The hiring for that new Division will take place over the course of FY17. We anticipate that this Division will be at full capacity for next Summer, allowing for increased programming both in Chelsea Community Schools and in the community at large.

**Neighborhood and Quality of Life Issues**

The City also made a well-documented commitment to neighborhood improvements this past year.

In the Downtown, the new FY17-FY21 Capital Improvement Plan carved out $400,000 in planning funds and $5 million in infrastructure improvements for Bellingham Square and the Broadway Business Corridor. The planner, Nelson/Nygaard, has already been hired. The Council also approved a Downtown Urban Initiative that includes a Downtown Coordinator position, a façade improvement program and funding for events. We hope to commence all of these Urban Initiative activities in the Fall with the hiring of the Downtown Coordinator.

The Council also cemented its commitment to addressing social ills in the Downtown. The Navigators Program was fully funded, allowing for two full-time Navigators with wrap around contract services for emergency clinical treatment, including detox beds, and emergency housing. Although problems of substance use, both alcohol and opioid, still exist in the area, the Navigators program seems to be making a dent in the overall condition.

The Council buttressed the social service work with increased public safety support. Due to Council funding, dedicated walking patrols now exist in the Bellingham Square area and along the Broadway Corridor seven days a week, at least until Winter.

During the past year, the Council also supported a handful of other initiatives to improve the quality of life of the residents. There is major park development ongoing or planned in many areas of the City, including upgrades to Kaboom Playground, work on the Highland Street Green Corridor, design work for the Mystic River Overlook Park, and planning for upgrades to the Highland Park basketball courts. The Council also approved funding for major roadway improvements this past year, including new asphalt for the length of Broadway. And, to alleviate the burden on homeowners, the Council approved an unprecedented increase in the number and value of tax exemptions and discounts for seniors, including a new discount on water and sewer bills.

Finally, the Council supported the City's efforts to improve the manner in which residents interact and do business with City Hall. The City unveiled a new website with better information about City departments and services, installed a kiosk in City Hall to streamline the payment of bills, created a Facebook page for disseminating information and acquired a new emergency notification system to ensure resident awareness of important municipal information. And, by the end of FY17, the City hopes to adopt a new software which will provide improved access and transparency to all of the City's financial information through an interactive webpage.

I'm sure I missed some important accomplishments. But, these are the highlights. It is an impressive list.

The paramount task of any municipal government is to improve the life of its residents. During this past year, through collaboration and good decision-making, we have advanced this goal. I look forward to another productive year ahead.

Yours truly,

Thomas G. Ambrosino
City Manager

Cc: Deputy City Manager Ned Keefe
Superintendent of Schools Mary Bourque