

State of the City – 2016
Mayor Benjamin G. Blake

Ladies and Gentlemen, this is the fifth time I've stood before this group to deliver my state of the City. As I've said in prior addresses, I believe deeply in the people and promise of this community, and I am proud of Milford's commendable and relentless forward progress.

The State of our City is impressive because of the tremendous and continuous efforts of our residents, our businesses, our volunteers, and our employees who work so hard to make our community even stronger.

But instead of simply accepting my word for it, I'm going to spend my time today providing you with some facts and figures, some unvarnished numbers and let you digest the raw data.

And with these figures at your disposal, I'm going to let you determine for yourself the State of our fine City.

So here's a look at Milford by the numbers in somewhat of a random order:

We are a community that's 377 years young.

We were founded 150 years before George Washington was elected our first president.*

While we were the Town of Milford for the first 320 years, we amended our Charter in 1959, and have been the Small CITY with a Big Heart ever since.

Over our 57 years as a City, we've had 10 different Mayors and 28 municipal elections.

We presently have 34,650 registered Milford voters most of whom will be going to the polls this November to vote for our new a President of the United States.

- Whoever's elected, I know we're all counting on her to make America great again.

We have a \$6.4 Billion grand list which is among the strongest in Connecticut.

Between our City and School operations, Milford employs over 2,100 people.

We have 114 Class 1 Firefighters to ensure the safety and well-being of our residents.

- 113 of whom are certified EMTs and 25 of whom are licensed paramedics.

And we have 116 sworn Police officers who respond to 48,000 annual calls for service.

We have a Health Department whose sanitarians perform approximately 1,090 restaurant inspections a year.

- And last year, only 35 eateries didn't pass muster.

We licensed 2,896 dogs in 2015-2016.

- June is Dog License month, so be sure to stop by the City Clerk's office to register your pup.

We have an outstanding library with over 130,000 print volumes and an ever-expanding reserve of electronic content.

- And a special shout-out to our Friends of the Library, Connecticut's 2016 Outstanding Friends Group, who continue to help increase our library programming.

Milford's population is increasing with over 54,000 residents – we are the fastest growing town in South Central Connecticut.

Geographically, we are 26 square miles of total area, with 3,187 acres of open space.

- Milford's next strategic open space purchase is the 7 acre Platt Apple Orchard adjacent to the municipal Golf Course on North Street.

We have the longest coastline in Connecticut, 17.5 miles of beautiful beaches.

- Other than our people, our shoreline is our greatest resource.

We have 1,016 city streets which our plow trucks clear – this year we were blessed with a mild winter.

We have 247 miles of center lane road.

- We pave approximately 10 miles of road each year. DPW just finished paving streets in Woodmont, Morningside and behind Harborside Middle School. There will be Summer and Fall Paving this year too.

Along those roads, we have 7,500 catch basins and storm drains but only 1 Vac-All truck to clear the clogs.

We have 225 miles of city sewer and 45 pump stations - We have 2 sewage treatment plants that process 10 million gallons of flow per day.

- Because of the tremendous operation by our new Superintendent of Wastewater, Ed Kozlowski, the State is now compensating us for

hundreds of thousands of dollars in Nitrogen Credits instead of us having to pay the State.

Our Public Works Department picks-up 25,000 tons of garbage and 5,000 tons of recycling from 17,000 homes.

- Starting this summer, our garbage collection process will be significantly streamlined as new trucks, new automated technology, and a new contract will allow a single operator to complete a neighborhood route which had previously been staffed by 3 or 4 City employees.
- My dad collected garbage for Milford in the late 60' and early 70's, and he reminds me that the routes and process hadn't really changed in 50 years. For this improved and streamlined system, I'd like thank our great partnership with Milford's Public Works Union and the effective management of our Public Works Director.

Our facts and figures hold up on the Education front:

- We have 14 World Class Public Schools
- 7 Private Schools
- 1 preeminent Technical High School

In our Public Schools, we have 942 non-certified staff and 642 licensed teachers who educate approximately 6,200 students.

Last year, we had 616 students from Foran and Law take 1,052 Advance Placement exams.

We had 438 seniors graduate and go onto some of the nation's top academic universities

- Last year's grads attend far-away schools like UCLA and Embry Riddle and nearby institutions like Yale and the Coast Guard Academy.

And, while the State of Our Schools and our City is stronger than ever, our future looks even brighter by all that the facts and numbers bear out.

For only the second time in the past 30 years, Milford taxpayers will see a decrease, albeit a small decrease in the amount of money we pay locally, as the Board of Aldermen adopted a new City budget that reduces taxes next year.

Milford's mill rate, already far less than any of the neighboring communities, was reduced from 27.88 mills to 27.84 mills.

At a time when most other Connecticut towns are talking about how big their tax increase will be, Milford's discussing the size of our tax cut!

- We're certainly on the right side of this conversation.

So while neighboring towns are approving 6 and 7 percent tax increases, how is it that Milford is able to deliver a tax cut for our residents and businesses?

Here are the key factors that explain how we were able to make this happen:

1. We have reduced our operation costs across the entire city.
2. The State's new municipal revenue sharing funds helped the revenue side of our budget; we received about \$1.6 million in additional money.
3. A perfectly timed Bond Refinancing yielded significant taxpayers savings.
4. For several important reasons, we stand on a fiscally firm foundation:
 - a. We've prudently managed our impressive \$25 million Fund Balance
 - b. We've appropriately funded our Pensions – our Pension is the second most well-funded in the state after the Town of Bristol
 - c. We've worked hard to achieve a prestigious AA+ Bond Rating
5. But most significantly, our financial success is secured by an explosion of business growth in Milford that's expanded the City's grand list and allowed us to maintain great services and cut taxes at the same time.

Ladies and gentleman, the City of Milford brought-in 388 new businesses just last year -- and the year before that, 394 new businesses moved here.

This data comes from the SOTS office, and doesn't even count general partnerships or sole proprietorship which don't file with the State.

There's only 1 word for this type of economic development: "Remarkable."

Milford's new business development significantly outpaces all other Connecticut towns.

Our growth has allowed us to maintain the low unemployment rate of 5.3% - significantly less than the state's 6.2%.

One of the keys to Milford's economic renaissance has been the revolutionary changes to our Building Department.

When I first became Mayor, 9 out of every 10 complaints that came across my desk concerned the inconsistencies and interminable duration of building permits - Milford had developed a terrible reputation across the State and across the region.

- New businesses were terrified of locating to Milford and existing businesses were less likely to invest and expand their local operations for fear of the unpredictability of our permitting process.

Ladies and Gentlemen, times have changed.

Our greatest success story is how effective, efficient and customer friendly our building department has become.

- Kudos to DPLU Director, Joe Griffith, our new Chief Building Inspector, Charlie Correll and their staffs for bringing about this sea change.

Today, the stack of building department compliments is incredibly larger than the complaint pile, and new construction permit applications flood into the office.

Construction permits are a key indicator of economic strength, and in just the first 3 quarters of the '15-'16 fiscal year, our building department has already issued 3,757 permits compared to the 3,319 it issued for all of last year.

While the number of construction permits issued by Connecticut's 169 municipalities increased by 14 percent in 2015, Milford's growth stands out.

- In fact, other than the City of Stamford's building department, Milford is issuing more permits than any other town in the State.

But back to the numbers and back to those projects that continue to move our City forward:

We've begun work on 2 new synthetic multi-purpose playing fields next to the YMCA. This project should be completed by soccer/football season next Fall and will be available to Milford Athletes 24 hours/day, 7 days/week, 365 days/year, without the need to rest, water or fertilize the fields.

We are also resurfacing 4 tennis courts at Fowler, 4 at Anderson Ave, and 8 at Eisenhower Park.

We will be installing 25 new Bike Lockers at the train station with the help of a \$50,000 state grant.

- May is Bike Month; this is Bike to Work Week.*

Next month, we will be dredging 14,000 cubic yards of material from Milford Harbor with no cost to the City, compliments of the Army Corps 150 foot vessel, Currituck, which will visit Milford next month.

- Thanks to Harbormaster Bruce Kuryla, Ray Swift, and the Harbor Commission for their work ensuring Connecticut's most popular recreational harbor is safe to navigate.

We will be paving 80 new parking spaces over the next few weeks at the recently purchased 2.2 acre parcel along the railroad station.

We've line-up 12 eclectic street performances to headline the 2016 River Street Wednesdays which returns on June 8th in front of City Hall – a City Hall that's celebrating its 100 year anniversary this year.

Our 3 Farmers markets will be returning this summer with more produce and more community entertainment than ever before.

After an estimated 25,000 residents descended on Downtown for last year's inaugural Kick Off the Summer Fireworks Extravaganza, we are now more prepared and have ordered 12 additional transgender port-o-lets and lined-up 12 additional food trucks to handle the popularity of this now annual event scheduled for Friday night, July 1st.

Ladies and gentlemen, I've outlined the evidence and presented numbers that simply don't lie – facts are stubborn things that way.

What's quite clear is that our City is stronger than ever and perfectly positioned to meet the challenges and opportunities of this new millennium.

We are a small city with lots of New England charm that continues to prosper in the 21st Century.

So with that, I will thank you for your time and attention and I'm happy to answer any questions. It continues to be an honor and a privilege to serve as your Mayor - Mayor of the greatest city on earth.