

# Inaugural address

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*Our best days lie ahead*

**Mayor James J. Fiorentini**

Elected officials, Judge Albany, Reverend clergy, members of the public: -- thank you, all of you for coming here today.

Thank you to our clerk, Peggy Toomey, thank you Judge Albany for swearing me in, and thank you to our inaugural committee. To our knowledge, this is the first time in our history when the entire inauguration was done without spending one dime in government money, all the inauguration was paid for privately. I thank our committee and I would like all of you to come by this evening for the citizen's reception at the Public library.

I would like to take a moment to introduce some folks who took the time to come.

My family: my wife Martha, my daughter Christina, my mother, sisters Anne and Susan, aunts uncles and cousins, thank you for being here today.

There are family members who went before me— particularly my Dad, -- and I pause to remember that

without my Dad's help, encouragement and advice over the years, I would never be standing here today.

I wish my grandparents could be here today to see what a great country this is, where the grandson of impoverished immigrants is sworn in to be the Mayor of this great city.

We are honored to have our Congresswoman, Nikki Tsongas, here today.

A number of our State legislative delegation are here today, and I thank them for their hard work for our city: State Representative Brian Dempsey, State Senator Steven Baddour and State Representative Barbara L'Italien.

I thank the city council and the school committee for their service to the city and I look forward to serving with you to solve Haverhill's problems.

We have a number of former Mayors, who are here, and I would like to recognize and thank them for their service to the city

We have a number of people here from the trade unions, the carpenters, the plumbers, the pipefitters, laborers

and other trade unions, thank you for being here today and thank you for your unwavering support.

We are honored to have with us one of our returning servicemen from Afghanistan, Richard Poore.

Sadly, three Haverhill servicemen have paid the ultimate price for our freedom—Nicholas Schiavoni, Dimitrious Gavriel and Evan O’Neil. We are very honored today to with us the gold star parents of our fallen heroes and I would like to welcome and ask you to join me in honoring the Gold Star families: Chris Gavriel, Barbara O'Neill, Michael O’Neil, Suzanne Swartz, Stephanie Kern and Cheryl Chalmers. The city will never forget the sacrifice of Nicholas, Dimitrious and Evan.

We are much honored to have you here today.

And to all of you who took the time to come on this cold snowy Monday, thank you.

### **GREAT PROGRESS IN PAST SIX YEARS**

As I stand here today, I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to for 2 more years – and I understand – that this awesome opportunity comes with special responsibilities. I am reminded of the words of President

Kennedy: “from those to whom much is given, much is required.” My obligation, and obligation that comes with the responsibility of being Mayor, is to listen to all and to lead the city through these difficult times. I will try my best.

When I was first handed that responsibility six years ago, the city of Haverhill stood on the brink of financial disaster because of the collapse of the last municipally owned hospital in the State—a hospital that served a region.

Six years ago, I offered you a vision and a plan where factory buildings could be remade into upscale housing and restore areas of the city that had been forgotten for decades and turn them back onto the tax rolls. I called it the Haverhill renaissance.

Today, we have \$100 million in new investment in our downtown, a new boardwalk, with new jobs and new business, with a parking garage ready to break ground in the spring. We can say with confidence *the Haverhill Renaissance is alive and well*. We will not allow the recession to kill the Haverhill renaissance.

## OUR GREATEST DAYS LIE AHEAD

But, for all of our progress, I continue to believe that **our best days lie ahead.**

## WHAT I SEE AHEAD—MY VISION FOR A GREATER HAVERHILL

Ahead, I see a beautiful city, with good schools, safe streets, good parks and playgrounds, with trees lining our city. We have planted over 500 trees thus far, and we will plant more this year.

Ahead, I see what our grandparents and great grandparents saw when they came here a century ago to work in the shoe factories—a city with jobs, hope and opportunity for themselves, their children and their grandchildren.

But none of this will happen by itself. Building the future for great city will require hard work and short term sacrifices. Building the future will require us to be bold and innovative and to take chances as we strive to bring new business to our city. The safest way is surely to do nothing, but we do not want to be like the person described by the Ancient Roman Poet Horace: “He who feared he would not succeed sat still.” This term, we will not sit still. We will make economic development and job creation one of our top priorities and we will strive to bring more jobs and more business to our city.

#### **New Tools for Economic Growth**

Every day, I am reminded of the need to bring new jobs to our city.

I am reminded when I meet the woman who used to work at Lucent, who now works for minimum wage with no benefits.

I am reminded when I meet the couple who both lost their jobs and lost their house as a result.

I am reminded every day, when I meet the young person who has to put their future dreams on hold, or the family

who has to decide between rent and medicine: jobs have to be our top priority.

Bringing in jobs is never easy. It is particularly difficult in a recession—it is hard to go up when the escalator is going down. But even in a recession, we need to put the tools in place so that when the recession ends and business is ready to expand again, Haverhill is ready and is first in line to recruit these new businesses.

To be ready, we will need some new tools and new ideas and we will need some new uses of our old tools.

Tomorrow, I will issue an executive order today consolidating several downtown and zoning committees into a new downtown planning committee. I ask them to examine the zoning laws for downtown, to eliminate red tape and regulatory barriers, and establish design standards for downtown so that when business is ready to reinvest in our downtown, Haverhill is ready to make it easy for them.

Later this spring I will ask the city council to join me in establishing an economic development corporation. I will model this after the ones used successfully in New Bedford and Providence with the powers to raise and

lend money as well as other powers to help bring jobs to the city.

I'll establish a new business ambassador program, and ask the CEO's of businesses we brought to the city to join me in telling new businesses that Haverhill is the place to expand.

Downtown, we'll use our Federal grant to improve downtown, and starting this summer, you'll see a fresh new look and new appearance to your downtown.

We'll work with the MVRTA so that the promise of a new parking garage downtown becomes a reality.

But we recognize that the main ingredient in any downtown isn't government, it is private business. To help them we'll create a new façade improvement program, and use some of our Federal block grant money to lend money to downtown businesses willing to improve the facades of their business.

#### **LOOKING AT ZONING**

Downtown is important symbolically to our city, but the heart of job creation is in our industrial parks. This year, I will propose that we rename our industrial parks as

business parks, and examine the zoning laws in these industrial parks to remove red tape and regulatory barriers that might discourage businesses from locating there.

### **A FRESH NEW LOOK AT OUR ZONING LAWS**

To help keep our city competitive I will establish a zoning task force to take a fresh new look at the zoning laws of this city. We will ask them to take advantage of the new technologies for low impact development, and to develop rules that encourage development that has a minimal impact on our environment and discourage development that takes away what we love best, the beauty of Haverhill.

### **The rail trail**

Our plans for a new and better Haverhill start with zoning, but that is only the beginning.

Two years ago, I announced plans to reorient Haverhill towards the Merrimack River.

Today, our new boardwalk behind Washington Street is open, and the boardwalk on Merrimack Street has been rebuilt.

We used a State grant, and purchased portions of an abandoned rail line in Bradford—the first steps towards creating a walkway and series of parks along the river in Bradford.

This spring, we'll take the next step. We'll ask for volunteers, led by the Friends of the Bradford Rail Trail committee, to start clearing the trail so that people can start to walk along it. We'll begin working on a grant application to build a new set of trails and parks along the river. Someday, our children and our grandchildren will be able to walk along our own string of parks and walkways along the river. When they do, they will know we kept our promise to them, to keep the river – our greatest asset-- for everyone, not just for those fortunate enough to own land next to it.

### **THE SCHOOLS OF TOMORROW**

Building the Haverhill of tomorrow means building first class schools today.

In the past six years, we've made great progress in our schools but there is more to be done. We've improved MCAS scores; our children attend some of the top colleges and universities in the world. Our Classical

Academy is the envy of communities throughout the State.

At the high school, our \$32 million renovation project is nearing completion. We should be proud indeed that while other communities spend up to \$200 million on new high schools, our high school will get a complete makeover for far less. We **will** complete that project this term and we will continue to make better education a priority.

### **THE CHALLENGES OF TODAY**

The Haverhill of tomorrow, the city I see ahead with jobs and economic opportunity, walkways along the river and top quality schools, will take time, and lots of hard work.

But as we consider the bright promise of our future, we cannot ignore the hard times that exist all around us today.

### **GETTING BY THIS YEAR**

#### **Make cuts and reinvent government**

This year, we face enormous challenges. Our unfunded mandates will cause us to spend millions we do not have. Pension costs are rising. The Hale debt is still with us and

we remain the one community required to pay for a hospital that served the entire region.

But the greatest immediate challenge is that the global recession has caused revenues to plummet **downward** at the same time that health care and pension costs are spiking **upward**.

To meet the challenge of providing good services with less money, we will need to continue to reinvent government, and we will need the continued help of our State and Federal partners.

We'll need to make use of new tools and new technology to make government more efficient.

We'll also use some old tools, and go into your neighborhoods, meet regularly with citizens. We will remember always that the heart of Haverhill isn't here at city hall, and it isn't downtown. The heart of Haverhill is its neighborhoods and its people, and we will be in your neighborhoods to serve you better.

To meet those challenges, we will have to start by reforming our health care system. We can no longer afford the employee health care system we have.

The stark truth is this: If we do not change our municipal health care system, then we will have to make dramatic cutbacks in every other area of government to pay for an outmoded health care system we can no longer afford. If we fail to act together, it is our employees and the public who will suffer. The time for change is now.

Cutbacks and health care reforms have to be our first step, but they cannot be our only step. Our challenges this year are so great that we will also have to look for other sources of revenue other than the property tax.

Our citizens demand and deserve good service from their city. If we are going to deliver to our citizens what they need and deserve, we need to use of the tools at our disposal.

#### **DAWN ON THE HORIZON**

In this recession, it is easy to fear tomorrow. When I start to feel that way, I am reminded of the words of President Roosevelt at the start of the depression: “we have nothing to fear but fear itself.” No one can say when the recession will end, but we can certainly say that following this long dark night of a recession there will be the new dawn of a recovery.

Today, we see signs of that dawn on the horizon. We see that our unemployment rate has gone down two months in a row. State tax revenues have begun to go back up. We see a few jobs starting to come back, and we see hope starting to return. No one can say for certain when dawn will come, but we can say for certain that it will.

When dawn finally arrives, and it will, I see what my grandfather saw when he came here 100 years ago-- a city with jobs and hope for tomorrow. I see a city with clean streets, safe streets and better schools. I see a city that is oriented towards the river, a city we are proud to live in, proud to work in and proud to send our children to school in.

We can make that happen if we work together for the common good.

But this is not just about government, this is about you. To make this great new city work and work better, we need your help. We need citizens to work with us, to be on volunteer boards, to help our schools as tutors and mentors, to help our newly revitalized Brightside program. Working together, there is nothing we can't accomplish. Working together, **our best days lie ahead.**

## THANK YOU

A few moments ago, I raised my right hand, and was sworn in for a fourth time, and I made a solemn pledge uphold the law of the land.

I now make a separate pledge, to you and to every person in the city, no matter who you are, no matter where you live, and no matter who you voted for in the last election: I will work night and day on your behalf to make this city better. Thank you.