

Mayor Thomas P. Koch
Midterm Address
January 5, 2015

Thank you, Mr. Clerk. Reverend Clergy, Former Mayors, Congressman Lynch, Justice Coven, Senator Keenan, Majority Leader Mariano and members of our state delegation, County Officials, President Finn and Members of the City Council, members of the School Committee. Citizens of Quincy, Friends all:

I wish to dedicate my remarks this evening to the memory of my brother, Joe, a veteran of the United States Army and a 37-year employee of the Department of Public Works and the Park and Forestry Department. His work on so many projects around the City is a permanent reminder of *his love* for Quincy, and his memory will live on through those of us who *loved him*.

I stand before you tonight as Mayor of our great City with humility, gratitude and a profound sense of hope for our future. The state of our City is strong, made so by the commitment of so many in this room and in the neighborhoods across our City. We must, however, commit ourselves – all of us – to making our community even stronger in the months and years ahead. 2014 was a year filled with personal challenges and challenges for our entire community. These challenges come amid a time of unprecedented growth in our community. Our City was named by two distinct national studies as among the best mid-sized cities to live anywhere in America because of our schools, our parks and open spaces, our diversity, safe streets and a sharp focus on the future. And just this past month, Channel 5 dedicated an entire day's worth of coverage to Quincy as a great place to live, work and play.

While we don't shrink from the work ahead, we should all take great pride in the recognition we have received and pause to celebrate all the good that goes on each and every day in our great City. It does not happen in a vacuum – it happens through the hard work of many and the commitment of each and every one of our citizens to make our community a better place. It happens because of the work of those who serve the people of our community.

To President Finn and members of this City Council, you have worked tirelessly over the last several years in a strong partnership with our administration to stabilize the City's finances in the aftermath of the greatest fiscal crises since the Great Depression while at the same time working to protect and expand our vital public resources. Although we may not agree on everything, I am truly grateful for your work, counsel and friendship as we continue to move Quincy forward.

To the members of the School Committee and Superintendent DeCristofaro and his team whose efforts on behalf of our young people have created a public school system recognized for its quality not only among urban districts but of any school district in the entire Commonwealth, thank you for your work.

Representatives Chan, Hunt, Ayers, and Majority Leader Mariano, whose work at the state level has provided Quincy with perhaps its strongest lobby for our community in more than a generation. To have someone who has gained the trust of his colleagues and risen to the rank of Majority Leader in

Representative Mariano is a great benefit to everyone in the Commonwealth, brings great honor to our City, and has earned him a well-deserved reputation as a national leader on insurance matters.

Senator John Keenan, who in just a short time in that body has become an important leading voice on some of the most important issues facing our Commonwealth, such as mental health and the tragedy of substance abuse.

Congressman Lynch, whose ability to work across party lines in a place so polarized as today's Washington, is nothing short of remarkable and a tremendous asset to our City.

Justice Coven, whose quiet leadership at Quincy District Court over so many years should stand as the model for community-court partnerships across the Commonwealth.

District Attorney Morrissey who has worked by the mantra that the office is not about just prosecuting crime, but finding creative ways to prevent crime within the communities of Norfolk County. The same is true of Sheriff Bellotti, who has set a standard for providing inmates the tools and services they need to become productive members of society.

Our veterans, whose defense of our nation will always be remembered. Our police officers who keep our streets safe, and our firefighters who answer the call every day; your sacrifices and work protecting our citizens on a daily basis will never go unnoticed or unappreciated by this community. To our teachers. In a time with so much attention paid to state and federal mandates and test scores, it is our teachers in the classroom every day that light the spark of a love for learning that unlock our children's creativity and potential. To our department heads, managers, laborers, clerks, and all of our workers, I am grateful for your hard work every day on behalf of this community. Seven years ago, at our first inaugural we talked about a great line from John F. Kennedy that "every citizen holds office." To all of our volunteers, on boards and commissions, with youth groups, in our churches our nonprofits, who give of their time for the sole reason of making our community a better place, I say thank you.

At the core of our work now and in the future is a strong financial foundation. I am pleased to say that our City's fiscal standing is at its strongest point in many years. Our reserves continue to build, Wall Street's confidence in us continues to grow, a number of financial reforms created a foundation of stability, and our total debt remains among the lowest of any City in the state.

To look at what's been done over the last several years, the inclination of some may be to suggest "You're doing too much" – two new schools and third on the way, the restored Coddington Building and old City Hall, new roofs, windows, doors and security systems at schools citywide, new parks and playgrounds, a new track facility, our first Senior Center, the much needed improvement to the facilities at North Quincy High School, unprecedented investments in flood relief projects and underground utilities.

The fact that we've been able to accomplish this and to maintain a total debt burden well below state averages and to have property taxes stand at nearly \$20 million under the state limit is a great indicator of our financial strength. Not only are we under the state property tax cap, but we can move forward on these projects without resorting to Proposition 2.5 overrides. Folks, let's put that in perspective, the reality is just one of those projects I mentioned above would require many of our neighboring communities to exceed the limits of Proposition 2.5.

For our residents, it means our children are walking every morning into state-of-art new learning facilities; our seniors have a place to go for companionship and assistance; our neighborhoods have the kind of infrastructure that protects home values; our popular youth programs, like the Quincy Track Club, have terrific facilities.

The reality is we need these things, and we need to continue doing them to secure our future for our children and grandchildren. And the City's current financial stability means we can continue to make important investments that are at the same time financially sound.

To that end, I will be proposing a 5-year capital improvement plan in the coming months that will continue to address a number of long-standing needs of our public infrastructure. Specifically, that will mean increased investment in our streets and sidewalks, sewer, water and drainage projects, and a focus on our public buildings that need serious attention.

Our police officers and our firefighters make a great commitment to our City on a daily basis, and we owe them and the public that relies on them no less than safe and functional buildings. In the coming weeks, we will be proposing major improvements to our neighborhood firehouses as part of our capital plan, and I am announcing tonight the creation of a planning committee to begin studying the feasibility of a public safety headquarters -- with the help of a \$1 million planning grant secured by our state delegation. Both the Police Headquarters and Fire Headquarters are showing the serious strains of age, and these are conditions that simply cannot be ignored.

This effort will include a separate planning committee to study the needs for a new animal shelter – with the expectation to dovetail with a plan to locate a dog park at an appropriate location in the City.

The focus on the bricks and mortar of public infrastructure are vitally important, but no more so than the human capital that creates our great school system and our safe streets and homes. We will continue to make the kind of necessary investments in both manpower and technology that will keep Quincy moving in the right direction.

This focus on our public resources is both a factor in, and a requirement of, the unprecedented growth in private investment in our City. Property values are soaring, commercial buildings are being sold at prices far above their previous values and a litany of projects are either underway or being planned from Marina Bay to South Quincy and of course, Quincy Center.

We've made great progress in our collective effort to redevelop our downtown. And while we hit a roadblock at this time last year, our resolve remains steadfast and our commitment is producing results. Construction will begin this year on the first phase of development in downtown and interest has never been higher. I expect to be discussing with you in the coming weeks a number of additional development plans for many areas in Quincy Center. Folks, if this was easy, it would've been done a long time ago.

This surge in private investment and growth in the community presents its own series of challenges – down to the neighborhood level. We have made tremendous progress in rebuilding a number of major intersections, roads and bridges. This year, we will develop a broad strategic plan to resolve a great number of our traffic and parking issues citywide while focusing our development programs on areas immediately surrounding our public transit stations. For neighborhoods built in the

18th century, there is no easy solution for 21st century transportation issues. But we can and will make substantial improvements going forward.

Our challenges don't define us – our responses do. Last year, the federal government, through the bureaucracy of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, dramatically changed flood insurance regulations and the flood-plain maps that dictate who must pay flood insurance. Rather than complaining, we rolled up our sleeves and mounted the most aggressive, scientifically factual appeal anywhere in the Commonwealth. I expect to be talking to you about the successful results of this work in the coming days.

Another challenge presented itself in November when Steward Health Care, a private for-profit company, announced it would close Quincy Medical Center with the approval of the state Attorney General. We've spent the days since the announcement, working with our partners at the state level, to ensure that critical services such as an emergency department and our veterans clinic, remain in Quincy. Our work is only beginning. The City has not been in the business of running of a hospital for almost 20 years and we must also be mindful of the market factors and the financial reality that led to the closure. That said, this City is not going to give up any of its rights relative to the future of the Quincy Medical Center facility and its property. We must and we will have an open and expansive dialogue with the entire community about the future of health care services, and the role QMC is to play, in our community as we move forward.

Of all our challenges, there is none more serious, none more pressing than the continuing epidemic of substance abuse that has affected far too many families in communities across the Commonwealth. We first began talking about this issue several years ago, and I am proud that we've stood together as a community to fight this problem. We doubled the size of our police drug unit, we formed a task force of community leaders that became a regional example, we became the first police department in the country to be fully equipped with a life-saving anti-overdose drug; we stood together to support a rehabilitation facility that will open this year, and we were recognized by the White House as a national model for addressing this problem. It would be easy for us to sit in the back row and say nothing or say we've done enough, but the fact is we can't. We have to do more.

Tonight, I am calling for a renewed sense of purpose in our fight against substance abuse. Through our task force, we will be making a new series of recommendations for expanded education programs and enforcement and treatment strategies. And because this epidemic knows no boundaries, either locally or nationally, I will be joined by fellow Mayors Joe Sullivan of Braintree, Sue Kay of Weymouth, and Congressman Lynch and will ask for Governor Baker's support in a national call to action to confront this tragedy. This year, we had a handful of confirmed cases of the Ebola virus in the country, and it was on the news and in the paper every night for months. Heroin and other drugs kill 115 people in our country every single day -- these are our children, our nephews and nieces and our neighbors, and yet it seems to be OK. We shrug our shoulders and say what a shame. **We need to do more.**

As we continue to meet the challenges that impact each of our citizens, let us never forget the value and dignity of each and every person.

Let us continue to support our kids' dreams and build an economy that provides them a future.

Let us be there for those seniors whose physical challenges pale to the need for the human touch.

Let us be there for those suffering with addiction so they don't lose hope and for their families that they know they are not alone.

Let us support our families - for they are the rock bed of any community.

Let us respect our environment for we owe it to our children's children.

Let us honor our differences as neighbors and value what unites us as a City.

Let us continue to have faith in God and in each other, let us have hope for a peace-filled world, and let us show greater love for each and every person in our community.

As the old sage says For what has been we say Thanks. For what will be we say YES.

God Bless you.