

Remarks by Town Manager Michael J. Driscoll June 22, 2021 Town Council Meeting

Mr. President, members of the Honorable Town Council, the audience here and watching at home, as this is the first in person meeting in 15 months, I wanted to share some reflections. The past year and a half have been a time of reflection for all of us. We have much to be proud of over the past months, years and decades.

Much has been accomplished over the last twenty-nine years and here are some of the accomplishments.

We have initiated services such as curbside recycling over 27 years ago and Intermunicipal agreements for services with Belmont.

We initiated Faire on the Square in 1999, Watertown Free Summer Concerts Series in 2002 and Watertown Farmers' Market in 2014.

We created an aggressive capital improvement program and reinvested in the infrastructure of our community including the following:

- We built a new Senior Center in 1993 and a new Police Station in 2010. We should look to build a new Senior Center.
- We have renovated and expanded the Library and Public Works facility, with both buildings being the envy of surrounding communities.
- We have renovated three fire stations, Town Hall, skating arena and parks and playgrounds.
- Town Council has appropriated \$17.4 million dollars within the General Fund Budget over the last 24 years for street and sidewalk improvements; and beginning in FY2013 and continuing through FY 2026 has or will authorize loan orders for another \$51.3 million of street and sidewalk improvements, all within the confines of Proposition 2 ½.
- We joined the Group Insurance Commission on July 1, 2009 which allows the Town to continue providing quality health insurance to its employees and retirees; and we have an agreement in place to continue this group health coverage through June 30, 2023.
- On November 7, 2013, Standard & Poor's Ratings Services, a municipal bond credit rating agency, upgraded the Town's long-term rating from 'AA+' to 'AAA', the highest rating attainable.

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- We have executed a lease extension with the Boys & Girls Club through August 2042.

- **Fully Funded Retirement System as of July 1, 2021**

As a result of aggressive funding of the Retirement System, whereby the Pension appropriation increased by \$11,159,992 from Fiscal Year 2009 through Fiscal Year 2019, which is a 152.34% increase or an annual average increase of 15.23% over those ten fiscal years, the Town's Unfunded Pension Liability will be fully funded in 9 days!

- **Funding Plan to Address the Unfunded (OPEB) Liability**

As a result of aggressive funding of the Retirement System, the Unfunded Other Post- Employment Benefits (OPEB) Liability is being addressed with the continued implementation of a Funding Plan that began in Fiscal Year 2020. The Town will be having an actuarial valuation of the Post Retirement Benefit Program as of June 30, 2021. Subsequent to that valuation, the OPEB Funding Plan may be adjusted.

- **Funding of the Three Elementary Schools Project**

As a result of aggressive funding of the Retirement System, financing of the \$170,000,000 for the Three Elementary Schools Project continues in Fiscal Year 2022 and all of this project is being done within the confines of Proposition 2 ½.

- **Acquisition of Land/Open Space Stabilization Fund**

Last month on May 11th, as a follow-up to conceptual recommendation #32 on the Fiscal Year 2022-2026 Capital Improvement Program, the Honorable Town Council established an Acquisition of Land/Open Space Stabilization Fund and approved an initial appropriation of \$6,500,000 thereto.

- **New High School Stabilization Fund**

At the same meeting, as a follow-up to the top priority of the Honorable Town Council's Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Policy Guidelines and conceptual recommendation #22 on the Fiscal Year 2022-2026 Capital Improvement Program, the Honorable Town Council established a New High School Building Stabilization Fund and approved an initial transfer of \$2,500,000 thereto.

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- **New High School Project**

The School Building Committee has been working tirelessly to review conceptual design options for the new High School in an effort to ultimately select a preferred design option that is in the best interests of the Town, the taxpayers and the successful education of our children.

On June 2, 2021, the School Building Committee (SBC) unanimously voted to move forward with Option 1H, a 4-story new building constructed on the existing high school site only in a single phase with the use of temporary modular high school at the PFC Richard Moxley Field. The SBC plans to submit the new Preferred Schematic Report (PSR) to the MSBA on July 7, 2021 in anticipation of approval at the August 2021 Board Meeting. The PSR submission will complete the Feasibility Study Phase for the Watertown High School project, after which the project will proceed into Schematic Design.

After completion of Schematic Design in December of 2021, the Town will seek approval from the MSBA at their first Board Meeting in 2022.

During all of the School Building Committee's tireless efforts, we have been working on how best to proceed with the financing of the new High School. As indicated on April 27th, I am pleased to inform that a plan will be finalized and presented at October's Fiscal Year 2023 Preliminary Budget Overview whereby financing of the new High School Project with MSBA funding included will be done within the confines of Proposition 2½; and all of this to be done without the need to request debt exclusion financing from the taxpayers of Watertown.'

All of these accomplishments are good government initiatives that have involved a lot of planning, a lot of hard work and a commitment to the taxpayers of Watertown.

As Town Manager and since 1993, I have seen firsthand a lot of hard work and commitment to the taxpayers of Watertown from 15 sets of Town Councillors who were elected in the biennial Town election for 2-year terms by the voters of our community. I would like to personally thank all of the Town Councillors who have served from 1993 and through 2021 for all of their efforts.

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The final report of the Watertown Charter Commission that was issued in 1980 indicated that a majority of the Charter Commission's members believe that a special relationship should exist between the Council President and the Town Manager. After serving as a Town Councillor since 1995, Mark Sideris was elected Town Council President on November 3, 2009. Since January 2010, Honorable Town Council President Mark Sideris has strived and fulfilled the expectation of the original Charter Commission members that a special relationship should exist. Mr. President, thank you again for all of your efforts.

On August 18, 1977, I began working for the Town of Watertown at the young age of 24!

Tonight, I am announcing my intention to retire as Town Manager the end of January 2022, when I will be 69 which will be 45 years of serving our community, with the last 29 years as Watertown's Town Manager.

A few months prior to the start of COVID-19, my Mom passed away on January 19, 2020. I miss her and think of her daily. Mom's guiding principle in life was family, family, family. It is time to continue my Mom's legacy and spend more time with my family.

My family starts with my beautiful, lovely and wonderful wife, Jane. Jane is my everything and I love her dearly. I will be forever grateful for her unwavering support and concern for my well-being. Thank you, Jane. I am really looking forward to spending more time together and have committed to having dinners at a far more reasonable time, unlike the many late dinners through the years.

As many of you know, I have 4 loving daughters, Amy, Allison, Aileen and Sarah, and their presence in my life means everything. At the risk of bragging, all four of my daughters are smart, beautiful, wonderful and I love them all dearly. Over Father Day's weekend, I informed them of the decision and their reactions were overwhelmingly positive and each of them confided their long-standing hope that my retirement would become a reality.

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Although calendar year 2020 was trying for everyone in facing the threat of COVID-19, we were blessed with the birth of 2 precious grandchildren, Lola Jane on September 16th and Charlie Duke on October 25th. As a very proud Papa, I am really looking forward to spending more time with Lola and Charlie.

Lastly, our family dog, Libby has been pressing me to retire since she became a member of the family back in May 2010!

As a follow-up to earlier comments regarding hard work and commitment to the taxpayers of Watertown, we are blessed that our Town employees are incredibly committed and are led by talented and dedicated Department Heads who put their heart and soul into their responsibilities.

I am very appreciative and will always be grateful for all of their efforts.

I would also like to thank our Board and Commission members for their tireless efforts and for the continued support of our Legislative delegation.

CLOSING

As I have mentioned many times throughout the years, the goal of this administration and all of the Town departments is to provide the highest level of services to the citizens of Watertown while utilizing the taxpayers' dollars as efficiently as possible.

I believe the 29 budgets that have been submitted beginning with Fiscal Year 1994 and through Fiscal Year 2022 are consistent with this goal; and are focused on achieving the long-term goal of sound financial management and fiscal stability in accordance with the Honorable Town Council's Ongoing Budget Guidelines.

In closing, and most importantly I want to thank all of the members of our community for their support throughout the years. It has been and is a privilege and an honor to serve as Town Manager for all the citizens of Watertown.

Thank you and God bless.