



Town Manager Annual Report
STATE OF THE TOWN ADDRESS
KEVIN H. SMITH
2022

Members of the Town Council, the Budget Committee, other elected officials, Town employees, and citizens of Londonderry:

I stand before you this morning delivering what will be my ninth and final State of the Town Address as Town Manager.

As I look back on when I made my first Address in 2014, it's hard to believe just how much we have accomplished as a Town Administration and community since that time. Just think about the things that did not exist in August 2013 when I was first hired: on the economic development front, Pettengill Rd. was still just a vision and along with it, all of the industrial development - over two million square feet of it; I-93 had yet to be widened from Exit 3 to Exit 5; Woodmont Commons was still an apple orchard; the Apple Tree Mall had fallen into disrepair and had many vacancies; on the restaurant scene, places like Renegades, Talia's, Bangkok Thai, The Red Arrow, Bacon Barn, Game Changer, and many others did not exist. There was no La Caretta, although you could still go to "The Whipp", and Londonderry had no breweries to speak of; today we have four. In terms of residential development, there was no assisted living facility, no workforce housing, and at least two fewer 55+ communities. As a Town, in 2013 we only had two School Resource

Officers, today we have four to service all of our schools. We've added twelve firefighters to the Fire Department roster, three new police officers in addition to the SRO's, two public works employees, two Town Clerks, and three admin assistants to better handle customer relations within Town Hall Departments. On the capital front, we have a brand-new Central Fire Station to meet the needs and demands of a growing community for years to come; we built a new out building for the employees at the public works garage, and we put an addition and made major renovations to the Senior Center to better accommodate the programs for our growing senior community in town.

We've done all of this and much much more in the span of just eight and a half years. And not to mention the Lancer football team has also won two state championships during this period – not that I had anything to do with that!

And these investments in our great Town have led to Londonderry being one of the most desirable communities in all of New Hampshire. We've been the fastest growing municipality for industrial and commercial development over the last eight years, our population has increase by almost 2000 new residents, and our assessed value in Town has increased by \$2.2 billion dollars.

Budgetarily, under the leadership of Finance Director, Justin Campo, the Town remains in a very strong financial position. Under the watchful eye of Justin, and his predecessor, Doug Smith, over the last 8+ years, the Town has returned over \$11 million dollars to property taxpayers through the undesignated fund balance, as a result of annual budget surpluses. These surpluses have been a combination of prudent fiscal management by the Departments Heads, as well as significantly higher than expected revenues as a result of the robust economic conditions Londonderry has experienced over the last decade. In

FY21 alone, the Town finished with a surplus of \$2.7 million of which almost half was better than expected revenue.

In keeping with the theme of sound financial management, the proposed FY23 operating budget that will be before the voters this March comes in at \$15,334 BELOW last year's adopted operating budget – this is no small accomplishment, and again, Justin and the various Department Heads deserve a tremendous amount of credit for “holding the line” as was asked by the residents of our Town at the beginning of this year's budget process. It's a very good budget that meets the needs of our citizens while fulfilling our contractual obligations, and most importantly, it keeps spending in check at a time when inflation is nearly 7%. Needless to say, I believe it's very worthy of the voters' consideration and approval.

Looking ahead, the Town has its reasons to be optimistic that the very favorable economic conditions it has enjoyed over the better part of the last decade will continue, though to be sure, there are current challenges that will need to be dealt with as well. Pettengill Road remains a very desirable location for new businesses wishing to locate to Town and close by the Manchester-Boston Regional Airport, however, as more vehicular traffic utilize that roadway, it is likely that in the not too distant future, it will need to be expanded from two lanes, to four. And while development at Woodmont Commons was largely dormant throughout the peak of the pandemic, Derry Medical Center, as well as the Baldwin Senior Living Community have already broken ground and will start construction in earnest by the beginning of this spring. In addition, there remains significant interest in locating additional housing units close to the area of Main St. And perhaps most significantly, if all goes according to plan, the long-awaited Exit 4A will finally be under construction by this summer, opening up almost 200 acres of prime commercial and industrial land for

development on the east side of I-93, in which there is already an abundance of interest.

Our future challenges as a Town though, are no less insignificant: first, economic development and new housing developments ultimately lead to more cars on arterial and secondary roadways, putting a strain on our public safety and public works departments, as well as residents seeing increased traffic in their otherwise quiet neighborhood roads. Second, while we've been able to return a significant amount of UFB to the taxpayers - \$11 million dollars over nine years, with the recent significant decline in value of our largest taxpayer, the Granite Ridge power plant, as well as refunds owed to them over the next few years, we will be to be careful about how we spend this money going forward so that it can be used to offset any impact to the taxpayers. Third, as I mentioned in my budget presentation in November, with the Town's population continuing to increase and the demand for new programs growing, we are going to need to take a look at right sizing certain areas of both our Recreation and Public Works Departments to bring them both in line with what most citizens expect out of a modern-day operation serving 26,000 residents. Finally, the issue of public health, specifically as it pertains to providing clean drinking water is on the forefront of everyone's minds. As a town, we need to investigate every option at our disposal, to include holding those who are responsible for contaminating our groundwater with PFAS and PFOA's accountable, to ensure that every household in the Town of Londonderry has access to clean drinking water.

And while these challenges are daunting on their face, none are insurmountable. They will have to be addressed over the coming months and years by the Town Council, Town Committees, and Town staff. And if past is prologue, I have no doubt that the creative minds in this room and of future rooms at Town Hall will rise to meet the challenges of the day, just as many of you have over the course of my tenure.

Over the years, as part of this address, I've often highlighted events or notable moments within our community in the past year that I believe brought out the best in the people who call L'town home, and in 2021 there were two such events that will be seared into my mind forever. Sometimes however, a community's spirit is seen in the face of unspeakable tragedy.

In early spring of 2021, I will never forget receiving a text from one of our first responders late one night that there had been a terrible car crash in the area of Hardy Road. As town manager, getting news like this are the moments you dread most. Not shortly thereafter, it became known that the victim of this tragic accident was LHS Senior and football captain, Jake Naar. Jake's death shook our community to its core. Though Jake was a popular student, he was equally beloved by all within the student body, as well as by teachers, and administrators alike. Jake was a son, a brother, and a beloved friend to so many – to include my nephew Zach with whom he shared a close special friendship with. It was Zach, who in a tribute to Jake during a get together of students just a few days after Jake's death, reminded his peers that Jake lived a life of "No Bad Days." And in the weeks of months to come, that motto, No Bad Days, would become our Town's bond along with signs reading "Naar Strong" that popped up on lawns in front of homes all across the community. This tribute to Jake and his beautiful life culminated with the most inspiring memorial service I have ever attended, held on the field of Lancer Park. The outpouring of support from residents and visitors outside of Londonderry was unlike anything I had ever witnessed and was only eclipsed by the beautiful words spoken by Jake's father, Reggie, who reminded us all that day that life is precious, to cherish each day as it may be your last, and never miss an opportunity to say 'I love you' to those whom are closest to us. Almost a year later, the sting of this tragedy remains, yet out of the darkness of that

night and the days that followed, the light of this community shone through in ways that none of us will ever forget; while we are a community of nearly 26,000 people, in a time of need and heartache, we are a family of one, here to support, lean on, and lift each other up when we need it the most.

After night, always comes the dawn. And in in the late summer of 2021, after a very muted Old Home Day in 2020 due to the Covid pandemic, our annual community celebration made a full comeback, bigger and better than ever! In short, the community was ready to celebrate; and celebrate we did. This could not have been pulled off though without a revamped Old Home Day committee stocked with willing volunteers and Town staff who gave blood, sweat, and tears pouring countless hours over many months of planning to pull off a four-day celebration that brought back enhanced old traditions like the baby contest, the fireworks show, and the beer garden, as well as added new events such as a Battle of the Bands, a Strongman Competition, and the first ever Apple Pie Eating Contest. A special thanks first goes out to Steve Dente, who stepped up to take over the complicated task of pulling together the annual Saturday parade, and he did such a great job with it, we recruited him that day to run it for the next twenty years! But so much of the credit for that day goes to my partner in crime, Londonderry Townie extraordinaire, and Lancer Ambassador, Katie Sullivan. Katie, our community is so fortunate to have you, as your attitude of awesomeness just permeates throughout everything you do; the words “Thank you” seem so inadequate as you’ve had such a profound impact on so many lives.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the State of our Town, is Londonderry Strong.

In closing, I wish to take this opportunity to thank a number of people without whom, we

wouldn't have had nearly the amount of success and great achievements we've enjoyed during my tenure as TM. The head of any organization is only as good as those with whom he or she works with on a daily basis. In my case, I have been very blessed and fortunate to work with the best and brightest in the world of municipal government. We are not merely co-workers and colleagues, we are a work family bound together by my favorite motto, "Teamwork makes the dreamwork." I am incredibly grateful for the commitment to excellence displayed day in and day out by all of my Department Heads: at our public safety institutions led by Police Chief Bill Hart, Fire Chief Darren O'Brien, and newly installed Director of Public Works, Dave Wholley; at our programs outside of Town Hall, Senior Director, Cathy Blash, Cable Director, Drew Caron, and newly hired Library Director, Erin Matlin; and of course, my Town Hall family: Finance Director, Justin Campo, Planning Director, Colleen Mailloux, Building Chief, Nick Codner, Director of Engineering, John Trottier, Assessing Director, Steve Hamilton, our Tax Collector, Allison Guthrie, and our beloved Town Clerk, Sherry Farrell, and of course all of the uber professional hard working men and women in each of these departments – I owe all of you a debt of gratitude for your support of me, and your commitment to exceptional customer service to the residents of our community. I also wish to give special thanks to four employees who I've shared a very close working relationship with over this period: first, every good Town Manager should have a great Town Attorney, and in my case, I had two! Mike Ramsdell and Mike Malaguti have each done yeoman's work for the Town behind the scenes and have been worth their weight in gold. They've been an asset to the Town, and I've been extremely fortunate to work with each of them. In 2016, seeing the volume of work coming across my desk, both internal and external to the job, the Town Council did me a solid by adding the position of Assistant Town Manager and Personnel Director, which was ultimately appointed in the capable hands Lisa Drabik. Lisa, it is not an exaggeration to say you have been a God send in assisting me in so many

aspects of our jobs on a daily basis. Most notably, I would not have navigated through the perilous waters of the Covid pandemic if it wasn't for your constant attention to detail and implementation of what seemed like ever changing policy directives. You've truly made me a better manager and supervisor – thank you for your steadfast commitment to the town and its employees. Finally, I would be terribly remiss if I did not recognize the person who always greets everyone with a smile and most cheerful attitude regardless of the kind of day *she* is having, my executive assistant who's been with me since day one, Kirby – or as she's more affectionately known in the office, Kirbs. Kirby, you've been a loyal employee and friend since before we both started at Town Hall, and Londonderry is fortunate to have you as one its most dedicated community cheerleaders! Thank you for helping to make our Town the great place that it is!

Finally, my list of folks to thank would not be nearly complete without acknowledging the members of the Town Council. You took a chance on me back in 2013 and I will always be grateful and appreciative of having been given the opportunity of a lifetime. It is remarkable to think that of the five members of the Council who hired me back in 2013, four of you continue to serve the community in that capacity today, which I believe says a lot about your commitment to public service as well as the trust the community has placed in each of you. I am grateful to have known Tom Freda, who served our Town honorably on this Council and as Town Moderator before his passing all too soon a few years ago. I am equally as thankful to have worked alongside with Ted Combes who continues to serve the community on the Planning Board. Deb Paul, I thank you for the passion you bring to the Board and your commitment to keeping the community abreast of important news and events through the Londonderry Times; Tom Dolan, you have served the community with humility, professionalism and class for over 20 years, you've been a teacher to me and the Town will miss your institutional wisdom for sure; Jim Butler you and your family live

and breath Londonderry in all that you do, and I am thankful for the wonderful memories of our coffee and donut chats at Sunnycrest Farm – hopefully they continue in the future; Joe Green, your constituent service is second to none, especially advocating for our senior population – thank you for your hard work to enhance our senior and recreation programs over the years. And last, but by no means least, John Farrell. Some might say our relationship has been akin to that of Brady and Belichick, but since I know you're a Giants fan, I'll refrain from any Patriots comparisons. In all seriousness though, simply put, I could not have succeeded at this position without your guidance, your advice, your support, your critiques, your “life lessons”, your friendship. You have been a mentor since day one and while you weren't always easy to work for, in time I came to learn and even appreciate it was only because you've always had the best interests of the Town at heart, and demanded excellence in our work product. Most people in Town will never see just how much work you do for the Town and its residents “behind the scenes”, but I've had a front row seat for it over the last nine years and it inspired me to do better at my job every day. Thank you for your trust and confidence in my ability to lead the Town all these years; it's been quite a run and was only made better by having you at my side the entire time.

And in closing, my most sincere, heart-felt thanks to all of you – the citizens of the community in which I love – for allowing me to serve you as your Town Manager for the last nine years. It has thus far been the greatest honor of my life and I hope I was able to leave the Town for the next Manager just a little better than I found it. I will forever cherish the memories we have made together; and no matter where I am, Londonderry will always be in my heart.

Thank you and God bless you all.

Respectfully submitted,

Kevin H. Smith