

Thank you Reverend Clergy. Good evening ladies and gentlemen. I am privileged to be here with you this evening to begin my fourth term as your Mayor.

Let me start by recognizing my beautiful wife Andrea, our three daughters Taylor, Ally, and Avery, and the newest addition to our family, Brady Edward Bettencourt.

I am very blessed to have the love and support of my family. I could not do this job without you.

It is my honor to recognize some of our distinguished elected officials in attendance tonight including:

Thank you all for your friendship and for your ongoing commitment to the city of Peabody.

To the members of the city council, school committee, electric light commission and board of library trustees: Thank you for your willingness to put your name on the ballot and to work so hard on behalf of our fellow citizens.

A special thank you tonight to all our department heads and city workers for everything you do to help move our city forward. These talented, hard working men and women dedicate their professional lives to public service.

The recent snowstorm provides a great example of their dedication. Many of our Department of Public Services workers logged double and triple shifts during the past four days.

Although there are areas that need improvement, overall, I believe they did an outstanding job for our city during extremely challenging circumstances.

I also want to acknowledge the hard work of our water department. Arctic cold temperatures resulted in multiple water main breaks throughout the city. Water department crews responded to each one, working in trenches and extreme conditions to repair the breaks and restore water service as quickly as possible.

Thank you also to the many volunteers who serve as members of the various city boards and commissions. Your work plays a critical role in city governance and we are most grateful for your service.

To our military veterans and their families: Thank you for your service to our great country and for helping to keep us safe and free.

Thank you as well to the men and women who serve our community as Police Officers and Firefighters. You answer the call to protect your fellow citizens and we are forever grateful.

I would like to recognize three outgoing members of the City Council. State Representative Tom Walsh, Councilor-at-Large Mike Garabedian and Ward 6 Councilor Barry Sinewitz. Thank you all for your distinguished service.

When I was first sworn in as Mayor in 2012, I shared a vision for Peabody which included a growing economy, great schools, safe neighborhoods, and a good, affordable quality of life for our fellow residents.

In setting forth an agenda for my administration, I strived to be ambitious and optimistic; befitting a City built by the ambition and optimism of generations who came before us.

I sought to be a problem solver – because a city the size of Peabody has its fair share of problems to solve. And I sought to renew the Peabody Pride which so many of us experienced growing up in this wonderful city.

Working together with so many of you here tonight during the past six years, I am proud to report that we have made remarkable progress towards this vision of a better Peabody.

In six short years we have revitalized key sectors of our local economy, increased our investment in education and public safety, and helped make Peabody an even more desirable place to live, work and raise a family. And we have done it all without sacrificing the affordability for which Peabody has long been recognized and admired.

### **Economic Development**

To help restore our city's stature as a driver of the region's economy, we immediately set our sights on revitalizing downtown Peabody. Once a hub of people, culture and commerce, and the center of civic life in our community, downtown Peabody has struggled for decades to carve out an identity of its own.

In the past six years however, the downtown has undergone a dramatic makeover. Beginning in 2013 and concluding last year, we leveraged two state Massworks grants to redesign Main Street and Peabody Square, to create additional parking, improve pedestrian safety, and make the entire area more attractive to business and residential development.

All told, we invested nearly six million dollars in state and local funds to improve our downtown infrastructure; an amount few cities and towns of any size can boast.

This targeted use of state and local funds to attract private investment is paying significant dividends. The most recent example is Number One Main Street, a building that has been largely vacant for decades.

Historically known as the O'Shea Building, the new owner of the property, Pat Todesco, is building 21 units of much-needed apartment housing in the upper three floors of the structure. The first floor, as many of you may have heard, will be home to the all-new Brodie's Pub. Work is already underway. I have seen the plans and they look amazing.

One Main Street is exactly the type of combination residential and commercial development that helped revitalize downtown Beverly, Salem, and Danvers in recent decades, and will likewise help downtown Peabody to thrive in the years ahead.

In addition to the new Brodie's, the return of Brother's Deli, Breaking Grounds Coffee and our outstanding roster of existing downtown restaurants, there is more good news coming to Main Street.

A new Mexican restaurant, La Siesta plans to open this spring at number three Main Street next to the future Brodie's. This is another property that has been vacant for several years and which contains a residential component on its upper floors.

Local favorite the Next Mex Thing looks to expand their operation at seventy five Main Street across from the Main Library and right next door to the proposed site of Peabody's first ever brew pub, Granite Coast Brewery.

These new establishments will create dozens of new jobs, tens of thousands of dollars in new revenue for the City, and will dramatically improve the appearance of the Main Street landscape with new facades and sidewalk amenities.

To help further showcase the improvements we've made downtown, our visionary Peabody Main Streets organization has hosted several very successful 'pop-up' events, including pubs, block parties, and dinners in the park. Not to be outdone, the annual International Festival drew a record 78,000 people to Main Street and Peabody Square last Fall.

A new initiative this year is a focus on bringing performing arts to downtown Peabody. Thanks to our exceptional partnership with the Northeast ARC and its team of dedicated fundraisers, many of whom are here tonight, the Black Box Theater will soon open as downtown Peabody's newest cultural attraction.

In partnership with the Peabody Cultural Collaborative, we will expand our performing arts program here at City Hall as well to include concerts and other performances designed to attract visitors downtown. We have invested in state of the art audio and visual equipment for the Wiggin Auditorium and will soon embark on renovations to the historic and beautiful auditorium ceiling.

And I am very excited tonight to share with you our plans to build a statue in honor our city's namesake, George Peabody. The statue will become the centerpiece of a new greenspace right next door to City Hall, which will take the place of the building that currently houses Brodie's Pub.

Although some in our community cautioned against any attempt to revitalize downtown Peabody, others demonstrated the courage and vision to challenge conventional wisdom. Although much work lies ahead, downtown Peabody stands on the cusp of a historic revitalization.

## **Education**

As you know, our city's commitment to education was on grand display last year with the opening of the new Higgins Middle School - a ninety two million dollar building project which came in on time and on budget and is now considered a model for cities and towns across Massachusetts.

The project's final phase, the new James Rice Memorial Fields, will open later this year and provide much needed play space to generations of Peabody athletes.

This past summer, Peabody High School underwent a major renovation with the installation of a new roof, improvements to the auditorium - including all new carpeting and seating, and a new floor surface for the gymnasium. A second phase of auditorium improvements is being considered as part of our capital budget planning along with long-overdue enhancements to the upper athletic fields.

The past couple of years have brought a renewed focus on science and technology in the classroom. We invested five hundred thousand dollars to introduce the renowned Foss Science curriculum to grades K-10, including a new biology curriculum at the high school.

The new curriculum emphasizes hands on, lab-based learning and has helped spark the imaginations of so many future scientists. I want to thank Superintendent Herb Levine, incoming Superintendent Cara Murtagh, and the School Committee for their advocacy and forward-thinking on behalf of our students.

Before I leave the subject of education, I want to provide you with an update on our city's Chromebook initiative. To assure that our students have access to the very latest in 21<sup>st</sup> century learning technology, we endeavored to provide every student from 6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade with a Chromebook and equip every 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade classroom with a Chromebook cart.

This year we were able to expand the program to include 10<sup>th</sup> graders and our aim is to include 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders in the next two years. Also next Fall, every elementary school grade will be equipped with Chromebook carts.

And to accommodate all this new technology, the high school and all our elementary schools have been retrofitted with the latest Wireless technology.

## **Public Safety**

As I have said before, the success of our city depends on the safety of our citizens. Last year we made a substantial investment in public safety by adding additional firefighters to the ranks to ensure that each of our five stations has a minimum of 3 firefighters on duty at all times. This helps better protect our residents and their property and it helps better protect our firefighters. Thanks to Fire Chief Steve Pasdon for working with me and the City Council on this important initiative.

Recently, the Massachusetts Police Accreditation Commission awarded the Peabody Police Department accreditation status for the seventh consecutive assessment.

Achieving accreditation from the Massachusetts Police Accreditation Commission is considered a very significant accomplishment; it is a recognition that is highly viewed by the law enforcement community. It demonstrates professional excellence and is a tribute to the hard work of all our police officers and support personnel. I want to recognize Police Chief Tom Griffin for his leadership.

This Fall, our community came together to show our respect and eternal gratitude to our police officers and firefighters when we dedicated the beautiful new Peabody Public Safety Memorial near Emerson Park.

It stands to honor the dedication and sacrifice of those who serve, those who once served, and those who will serve this great City of Peabody in years to come. And it will be a great source of pride for generations of Peabody residents.

Our commitment to public safety continues to yield tangible results. Peabody was just named among the Top 30 Safest Cities in America by SafeHome, an organization that analyzes FBI crime statistics for America's cities and towns.

And to further safeguard our community, I will once again petition the City Council to pass a ban on recreational pot shops in the City of Peabody.

Although I support the City Council's medical marijuana zoning ordinance, we must make a clear distinction between medicinal and retail marijuana operations.

Medicinal marijuana operations are indistinct buildings, set away from neighborhoods and schools and protected by professional security personnel. Patients require state-issued identification and a doctor's prescription to purchase the drug.

Retail marijuana outlets on the other hand, rely on walk-in business and market their product aggressively in full sight of passersby, including children.

In the midst of an opioid epidemic that has destroyed countless lives, and with the dangers our children already face online and elsewhere in a troubled world, why create another threat?

Is this what we want as a community? The answer to me is a clear and resounding no! Our residents deserve better. Our families deserve better. Peabody deserves better.

A majority of Peabody voters opposed legalizing recreational marijuana just 14 months ago. I urge the City Council to approve a ban on retail marijuana and keep pot shops out of Peabody neighborhoods.

## **Quality of Life & Affordability**

Quality of life issues continue to be chief among my highest priorities as Mayor. By modernizing our aging infrastructure, creating new open space and recreational opportunities, and providing the core municipal services that taxpayers expect, we help make Peabody an even more desirable destination for families and businesses.

I am very happy to announce this evening that Peabody has been approved as eligible to receive nearly ten million dollars in state and federal funds to rebuild the entire Central Street corridor, beginning at its intersection with Walnut Street and continuing through Wilson Square.

The project includes new road surface and sidewalks, crosswalks and traffic signals, and modern landscape and design amenities. It will improve traffic flow, accessibility, and the safety and quality of life of tens of thousands of Peabody residents.

In 2018, we also plan to embark upon the Route 1 Water Quality and Drainage Improvement Project which will replace outdated 6-inch water mains with new 12-inch water mains.

This project will improve drainage throughout the area and help alleviate the low water pressure issues that have long plagued several Peabody neighborhoods located near the Route One corridor.

Also this year, we will review plans to expand the Peter A. Torigian Senior Center to provide additional classroom space for adult learners.

As you all know, the Senior Center is a hub for thousands of older residents and has long been the envy of the entire North Shore region. From transportation to meals to social services to our Adult Day Health Center; the Senior Center and its dedicated staff and volunteers are a big part of what makes Peabody so special – and foremost among the reasons why Peabody was designated an Age-Friendly Community by the World Health Organization and the AARP of Massachusetts, one of only nine Massachusetts cities to receive this coveted distinction.

I am happy to report that Phase One of the Crystal Lake Restoration and Beautification Project is complete. Some 40,000 cubic yards of sediment was removed from the lake basin restoring the water to its natural flow and clarity.

Phase Two begins this spring and includes the installation of a spray fountain, a fishing and boating dock, paddle boats, picnic tables, and other amenities to help make the area an inviting destination for Peabody families.

For the fifth consecutive year, Peabody is being honored with a ‘Playful City USA’ designation for our commitment to improving two city parks each year.

In the past six years, we have made significant enhancements to MacArthur, Raddin, James Street, Corbiel, Symphony, Lake Shore, Lalikos, and Farnham Parks, with more on the way.

And speaking of parks, I am very happy to announce that the Peabody Dog Park will open in 2018 on Perkins Street across from Coach Bob Driscoll's Old Time Skating Rink.

A good quality of life includes getting good value for our tax dollars. As mayor, I am committed to maintaining Peabody's affordability while still delivering the core municipal services that residents expect.

Although our budget obligations have increased, we are still able to invest in Peabody's future thanks to our city's financial strength and the strong partnership my administration has established with the City Council.

Our sound fiscal management continues to pay significant dividends for our city. Our bond rating remains strong thanks in part to our healthy reserves and excess levy capacity.

For the third year in a row, our average residential home value has increased. Last year Peabody home values increased by an average of 6.7% and are projected to increase by another 5% this coming year.

Peabody is a desirable place to live because homeowners get exceptional value for their tax dollar.

While our residents enjoy a level of municipal services which meet or exceed those of nearby cities and towns, they benefit from property tax bills that are on average hundreds and even thousands of dollars less than those communities.

In fact, once again this year, Peabody homeowners will have among the lowest residential tax burdens in all of Massachusetts.

In closing, I want to express my sincere gratitude to so many of you here tonight and across our great city for supporting a bold, ambitious, optimistic, courageous, problem-solving vision for a better Peabody.

I am committed to continuing our remarkable progress in 2018 and beyond. Thank you.