



CITY OF FRANKLIN, NEW HAMPSHIRE

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

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-January 5, 2015-

Pastor Carter, members of the City Council for 2014 and 2015, City Manager Dragon and Department Directors, honored School Board members, friends, and fellow citizens:

It will not surprise you when I say that we live in difficult and uncertain times. At times we feel as if events are beyond our control. William Butler Yeats put it this way: *"Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world...The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity."* And those words written nearly 100 years ago.

The Great Recession placed terrible strains on the national and local economy, and stalled the impressive growth that our community had experienced from 2000 to 2006.

We find that energy costs for the municipality, schools, and our residents are extremely volatile. We have been told to expect electricity price hikes as much as 50% this winter, due to New England's over-reliance on natural gas. NH Public Radio reminded us in November that: "Between the years ... 2000 and 2013, New England went from getting 15 percent of its energy from natural gas to 46 percent." And we all know how easy it would be to get approval of another gas pipeline or nuclear plant in New England, right?

Like all NH communities, we have also been the recipient of downshifted costs from the State government over the last decade. Given the historic level of expected State revenues, the completed FY 14 budget in Franklin was shorted \$138,000 in state revenue sharing; \$203,000 in rooms and meals revenues; \$205,000 in lost support for mandated retirement costs; \$30,000 from the highway block grant; and \$262,000 in school aid, because our enrollment has dropped 10% in ten years, just like enrollment throughout NH. That list totals \$838,000 in lost state revenue in just one fiscal year. What might have been done with that money if it ever arrived here? Rest assured, the one revenue that has

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consistently increased over the last ten years has been the amount we collect from you in property taxes. Those who dislike the Tax Cap because it "holds us back" - might want to talk to the government in Concord first.

Much has been discussed in social media and the popular press recently about our downtown. It has admittedly and obviously lagged other areas in the city - being built, as it was, in a time when people walked to work and walked to shop. Lest we think we are alone – I saw the same challenges in a sister city just weeks ago. And you do not have to travel far from Franklin to see boarded windows and empty stores in a historic downtown even closer to the interstate. We should remember that when **we** visit Lowes or Tanger, Uno's or Sam's - we are confirming the belief of **their** investors that **they** should not put money in small downtowns.

We have seen nationally that police and other emergency and municipal workers are being disrespected and even killed because of their uniform. Before you say that it won't happen here: My son-in-law is a former soldier and a cop in a nearby community and he has also been attacked and badly injured during a simple traffic stop.

A large local employer has proclaimed "Now Hiring" from its property for many months, but can't find many applicants who can pass the drug screening. Dr. Paul Racicot from LRGHealthcare recently spoke to the Mayor's Drug Task Force and gave us this sad news: Fully 20% of the babies born in the Lakes Region today are born drug-addicted. If that doesn't make you a crusader against substance abuse, then nothing will.

But... because like most of you - I am an optimist, and believe in our city and believe in our people - I strongly feel that we cannot turn away from any of these challenges. And when we fight each other we solve absolutely nothing! So what way forward? Here are just a few of my thoughts:

As mayor, I will host a statewide energy conference in Franklin for business and energy experts early in 2015. As the federal and state governments prepare to make final decisions on the Northern Pass project, Franklin will no doubt be "ground zero" for energy policy discussions. And the likelihood that Northern Pass will be approved in some form continues to grow. The feds have granted the project the authority to start borrowing \$500 million for construction. Not only

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will that converter station pay millions of new tax dollars to Franklin each year and double the taxable value of the city, providing funds for schools, roads, infrastructure, and tax relief - but it also will bring hundreds of workers into the community over the three year construction phase. Demand for consumer services and housing will soar, and the upside for Franklin investors is tremendous. An important mental health agency is currently seeking a location in Franklin, and I have been approached by two great residents in just the last couple of days with their plans for new businesses here.

As I have done at this time in past years, I am also calling upon members of the city council to recruit a business in 2015 from outside Franklin to join us here in the city. Remind them, Councilors, that one prominent investor recently said: "Franklin was the most helpful and accommodating city government that we have found in New England," and another major employer here has said: "[the] entire team ... has been just fabulous to work with" during their multi-million dollar expansion.

I and one of your city councilors will be meeting early in 2015 with another such investor who has made it his life's work to restore the downtowns of New England mill cities. He now has his eye on Franklin. These and some other efforts you read about in the press deserve our consideration, support, and cooperation.

I want to reiterate my profound respect and support for all our teachers, fire and EMS staff, all municipal workers and police. I think that it is important for mayors to be especially protective of cops on the beat - and in response - and contrast - to recent events in NYC, I will call on fellow mayors to join me in creating a movement and an organization to strengthen our bonds with our police officers.

And - as we enter the renewal phase for our Drug Free Communities grant, the Mayor's Drug Task Force has and will enlist the aid of community members in crafting a new grant proposal to steer our young people away from substance abuse and toward a healthier life.

As always, I want to say how grateful I am to have been selected as mayor on four different occasions. Obviously, not everyone agrees with me on every issue (that's nothing new), but I know all of us here are firmly united in our desire to see Franklin and its people succeed.

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So I will conclude by wishing each of you health, prosperity, and luck in 2015 – and promising my own best efforts for the coming year. May God bless our city so that we can be reminded of the words of the Apostle in the 8th Chapter of Romans:

"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ... How will He not ... graciously give us all things?... For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God."

Thank you and best wishes to all of you.