



# CITY OF CONCORD

## REPORT TO THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** Thomas J. Aspell, Jr., City Manager

**DATE:** October 28, 2020

**SUBJECT:** 2020 – 2021 City Council Priorities

### **Recommendation**

Accept this report as to the current status of the City Council Priorities established on February 18, 2020.

### **Background**

Members of the City Council met on February 18, 2020 to discuss and set priorities for the remainder of Calendar Year 2020, as well as for Calendar Year 2021.

### **Discussion**

Listed below, in ranked order, are the accepted priorities, projects and ongoing initiatives; and their respective statuses as of September 30, 2020.

#### **GOAL 1. BALANCED BUDGET ISSUES: FY 2021 and 2022**

##### **a) Collective Bargaining/Contract Issues**

**Status:** The City is currently under a collective bargaining agreement with all of its unions. The IAFF collective bargaining successor agreement was entered into in June. UAW and CPPA have also signed successor agreements, making five of the six unions now featuring high deductible health insurance plans as the premium driver. It is anticipated that we will begin negotiations with CFOA in November 2020 for their contract, which expires on June 30, 2021.

##### **b) Health Insurance Costs**

**Status:** The City received a final rate from Harvard Pilgrim of 3.3% for FY 2021. We received a premium rebate of 15% in September, based on our April invoice, which will be processed in the coming weeks. Our “Not to Exceed” rate from Harvard Pilgrim will be delivered by December 1, 2020.

**c) Capital Financing Alternatives/Storm Water Utility**

**Status:** The Engineering Division, with consultants from Tighe & Bond, gave a presentation to the Fiscal Policy Advisory Committee on their evaluation of the City's potential creation of a storm water utility fund. The committee recommended staff return in the fall of 2020 after conducting public outreach and meetings with stakeholders in the community. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this project has been put on hold until such time as in-person community meetings can occur safely.

**GOAL 2. COMMUNITY-WIDE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES TO EXPAND TAX BASE****a) Employment Security**

**Status:** In February 2020, the City received proposals from multiple developers interested in acquiring and redeveloping the former NH Employment Security property. Upon consultation with the City Council in non-public session on March 9, 2020, a list of developers to be interviewed was established. Interviews were conducted in April 2020. The City Council was briefed on the results of the interviews on May 11, 2020. The City continues to market the site and discussions with interested parties are ongoing. The Covid-19 virus has impacted interest in the site.

**b) Opportunity Corridor**

**Status:** Storrs Street North Extension (CIP #18): Discussions are ongoing with Pan Am railways and the NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT) concerning this project. The project was included in the FY 2021 Capital Improvement Program (CIP) as an "asterisked" project; meaning that it was not appropriated as part of the FY 2021 budget adoption process. City Administration will bring forward the required resolutions to advance this project once negotiations with Pan Am and NHDOT are concluded.

**c) Exit 17/Whitney Road**

**Status:** The traffic study commissioned by Laurie and David Rauseo, which examined the impact of a possible roundabout at the Whitney Road/Hoit Road intersection, was accepted by NHDOT. City Council authorized the design/engineering of the roundabout and ancillary related improvements. The Rauseo's have submitted a site plan for their commercial development that will include a Market Basket and a State Liquor and Wine Outlet. It is anticipated that this plan will be reviewed at a public hearing before the Planning Board in December.

**d) Exit 13**

**Status:** The developer has not formally submitted any plans to date. The changing dynamics of the economy due to Covid-19 have already impacted this project with retailers/restauranteurs withdrawing due to broader impacts on their businesses. The housing piece of this multi-phase development may move forward first.

**e) Housing**

**Status:** Prior to the economic impact of Covid-19, new market rate housing construction was proceeding at a steady pace. New single family homes in Concord were selling for \$350,000-\$400,000 in the active developments in the north Concord and Penacook areas. Since the State's gradual re-opening, the City has not observed any significant drop-off in terms of housing transaction volume or price point.

In terms of multifamily housing construction, Phase 1 of the Penacook Landing project (34 units) was substantially completed in September, and it is anticipated that the project will secure a certificate of occupancy in October. Phase 2 of the project (20 units) will likely commence construction in early 2021, subject to securing necessary tax credits and other financing. The CATCH Penacook development on Village Street is slated to break ground in spring 2021 and will feature 42 units of affordable and market rate rental housing.

The City has also had significant interest from multiple developers for larger multifamily housing developments. Plans have yet to be submitted for Planning Board review, but it would be anticipated that at least one project may come before the Board in late 2020 or 2021.

**GOAL 3. PUBLIC SAFETY WORK****a) Opioid/Substance Abuse**

**Status:** The Police Department continues to take an aggressive stance in combatting illegal drug issues facing the City. The Department works closely in this effort with stakeholders in the community and throughout the State to include other police agencies, service providers, City Departments and the court system. The Police Department continues its involvement with the Merrimack County Drug Court Initiative. As part of this initiative, the Department has a member assigned to the Drug Court Team. The Team meets weekly to discuss the progress of individuals that have been assigned to participate in the Drug Court process. The Team regularly evaluates the status of each individual in the program and makes recommendations based upon the individual's performance. The Department conducts curfew checks on each participant that resides in the City of Concord.

During the fall of 2019, the Police Department received a grant award in the amount of \$50,000 through the Law Enforcement Opioid Abuse Reduction Initiative (Project Granite Shield). These funds continue to be utilized by the Department to cover overtime costs associated with conducting illegal drug investigations in the City and surrounding towns. The Department will continue these efforts and regularly assess personnel assignments and initiatives to most effectively address illegal drug usage in the city. During the first nine months of 2020, the Department arrested 151 individuals on illegal drug related charges.

The Department also maintains a prescription drug drop box in the lobby of the police station. This drug drop box allows people to drop off their unused or unwanted prescription medications that otherwise could be available for abuse or unauthorized consumption. During the first nine months of 2020, over 143 pounds of prescription drugs were turned in by members of the community. The Department also continues to participate in the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration's National Drug Take Back

Days. The next scheduled Drug Take Back Day is October 24, 2020. It should be noted that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department restricted access to the lobby in mid-March and, thus, prescription drugs have not been disposed of in the drop box since that time.

The Police Department works closely with Riverbend's Choices program in helping individuals suffering from drug and other substance abuse issues to find treatment.

The Fire Department continues to be very active with its collaboration to address substance abuse through Project FIRST. Since our last quarterly report, we have distributed an additional 254 naloxone overdose prevention kits to persons at risk of overdose and their significant others. Our current case load is approximately 23. We have re-engaged providing CPR and Naloxone trainings to the public on a monthly basis with COVID-19 precautions. These precautions are in compliance with the CDC guidelines and include limiting the class size to 10, ensuring social distancing, mask wearing, and tracking attendees should the need arise for contact tracing. We are keeping in close contact with the other 22 towns that make up the Capital Area Mutual Aid Fire Compact and will provide training as soon as the communities permit.

As a result of the activation of the Fire Department's Incident Action Plan, the Project FIRST Director has increased his collaboration with our community's homeless outreach workers, including doing joint outreach activities and case conferencing with high need clients to facilitate both substance use disorder treatment and housing options. This has also assisted with the tracking of various encampments and better communication and education opportunities for fire safety measures.

The Fire Department has seen an increase in its response to overdoses within the city. This increase in overdoses appears to coincide with the Stay-at-Home orders. Specifically, we have had a significant increase in alcohol overdoses, a small increase in stimulant overdoses, and a slight reduction in opioid overdoses. We have completed a full summary report of the first 14 months of the Department's Project FIRST implementation and submitted the report to the NH Department of Safety. We were successful in securing State funding to carry the grant through September 20, 2021.

## **b) Community Policing**

**Status:** Prior to the restrictions put in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Police Department was involved in a number of initiatives designed to further its relationship with the community. As part of these initiatives, the Department hosted community meetings with multiple community organizations throughout the city. The Department also actively stayed involved with the New American community.

The Police Department has participated in several other programs to help promote community interaction with both children and adults. During the beginning of the year, with the assistance of several local businesses, the Department hosted two "Coffee with a Cop" events in the City. These highly successful events offer an opportunity for community members to interact with the City's police officers in a relaxed atmosphere. Officers are available to answer any questions that residents may have and are able to foster a positive collaborative relationship between the Department and the community.

During the beginning of 2020, the Department scheduled a Rape Aggression Defense (RAD) class, but it was canceled due to not having enough participants. RAD is a comprehensive self-defense course for women and includes situational awareness, prevention, risk reduction and avoidance, and progresses to the basics of hands-on defense training. The RAD system is dedicated to teaching women defensive concepts and techniques against various types of assault by utilizing easy, effective, and proven self-defense tactics. The system of realistic defense provides women with the knowledge to make an educated decision about resistance. At this time, the scheduling of RAD classes has been put on hold due to the pandemic.

Due to the unfortunate trend of mass shootings occurring in businesses and schools throughout the country, the Police Department has been offering active shooter training seminars. Since the start of 2020, the Department participated in one active shooter training with over 20 attendees. The Department also conducted six safety presentations for local businesses and the New Hampshire Technical Institute, as well as two fraud educational presentations for seniors. Also as a result of COVID-19, these training classes have been put on hold.

The Police Department continues to work on new initiatives to assist in community engagement. One of the most positive initiatives that the Department recently deployed was the introduction of a police comfort dog. Liberty, a two year old female Labrador retriever, has been instrumental in interacting with community members and members of the Police Department. She has been deployed to numerous scenes and locations where violent or traumatic events have occurred to help lend relief to those suffering or affected by the incident. Liberty has also engaged those suffering from mental health issues, and has also made appearances at schools, hospitals and other venues. She has participated in many social and community events throughout the City and has a large following of supporters.

In December 2019, the Police Department was very fortunate to receive a donation of \$50,000 from an anonymous community member. The donor requested that members of the Police Department identify persons and families in need and make monetary disbursements or use the funds to obtain goods and services for the recipients as appropriate. This mission has been known as *Operation Blue Elf*. Police officers and civilian support staff made great strides in completing this mission by the close of 2019. *Operation Blue Elf* was a community policing success and has continued into 2020.

The Department's Adverse Childhood Experience Response Team (ACERT) launched in October of 2019. This team is made up of a member of the Concord Police Department, a member from Riverbend Community Mental Health, and a member from Merrimack County Human Services. The team deploys to residences where children have been exposed to violence. At the residences, the team meets with the families and assesses the situation to determine next steps that can be taken for the child, such as support groups, mental health counseling, early childhood education, or child-parent psychotherapy. ACERT made 94 home visits during the first three months of 2020. However, home visits were put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The team continued to follow up with families by phone. The team was able to reinstitute home visits in August. During 2020, the team has made contact with over 450 families either by phone or in person to assist with services that may be needed.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Police Department has been limited in participating in many of its community-based programs. In an attempt to stay active with the community, numerous officers have participated in birthday and honor parades throughout the city.

The Police Department is committed to participating in these types of initiatives and continuing to foster the relationship between the Department and the community. All officers are encouraged to participate in community engagement activities. The success of the Police Department in providing the safest community possible is dependent upon a cooperative effort between the Department and the community as a whole.

c) **Working with School Districts**

**Status:** Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, the Police Department had three officers assigned as School Resource Officers (SRO). Officers were assigned to Concord High School, Merrimack Valley High School, and Merrimack Valley Middle School. Each of these officers is responsible for the safety and security of the schools' campuses, to act as mentors and educators, to be community policing liaisons, and to be problem solvers. The SRO's are also expected to help guide students through personal, educational, and social pressures that are part of being an adolescent.

During the beginning of 2020, the Department was extremely active in all of the schools throughout the City. The Department currently has six officers trained in D.A.R.E. The D.A.R.E. Program is designed to teach students at an early age the dangers of drug and alcohol use. This program has been widely successful and appreciated throughout the schools. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic shutting down the schools, several of our D.A.R.E. officers video recorded their lesson plans, with the help of Concord TV. These lesson plans were played by the schools through their on-line learning platforms. While distance learning is still in place at both school districts, arrangements have been made to carry on with the D.A.R.E. program remotely.

During the beginning of the year, officers also participated in "Police Readers" throughout the schools in the Concord and Merrimack Valley School Districts. Officers go into first and second grade classes where they read the class a book and answer any questions the children might have. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, officers made video recordings of themselves reading books. These videos were then shared with the schools where the videos were played over their on-line learning platforms.

Since the beginning of the year, members of the Police Department presented two internet safety talks in the Concord and Merrimack Valley School Districts to help educate students about the dangers of the internet and social media and how to avoid being victimized. Officers provide suggestions to students on how to protect themselves from becoming victims.

The Police Department will also be assisting the Concord School Board by participating as a member of a task force focused on developing a strategic plan for improving student safety and wellbeing. This task force will also involve a variety of stakeholders from within the Concord community, and will be facilitated by Gerri King, Ph.D., a nationally recognized organizational facilitator.

The Fire Department continues to build their relationship with Concord High School through supporting the CRTC Emergency Services Program. This program helps students build a foundation for a career in fire and emergency medical services. The Fire Department has coordinated with all the schools in the city to support a safe response and reopening process associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. The Fire Prevention Bureau adjusted the delivery methods for fire safety education to ensure that these important messages are delivered even during times of social distancing and increased health precautions.

d) **Recruitment**

**Status:** During the first three quarters of calendar year 2020, the Police Department has aggressively worked to recruit staff. Staffing and training continues to be one of the Department's main priorities and will remain so until our agency stabilizes our work force.

Since the beginning of 2020, the Police Department has hired 11 new police officers. These officers are in various stages of training based upon their experience level at the time of hiring. Three officers are currently in Field Training status after graduating from the Police Academy in August. Six officers are currently attending the Academy and will be graduating in December 2020. Additionally, two new officers, who were certified in other states at the time of their hiring, are both currently in Field Training.

All of the above-mentioned police officer candidates were the result of targeted recruitments. Department staff put in countless hours to identify, meet, and recruit these candidates one on one. We worked to educate them on our hiring process and the transition to become a police officer.

The Department currently has six vacant police officer positions. The Department has given final offers of employment to three new officers who will be starting their employment with the City in November. We currently have several promising candidates for future consideration, and anticipate making another significant impact on filling our remaining vacancies as we move through the remainder of the year.

At the beginning of 2020, the Police Department had three vacancies for police dispatchers. A recruitment process took place during the first quarter of 2020 and we were able to hire two new dispatchers on May 17, 2020. One of these dispatchers resigned shortly after taking the position. The Department hired one new dispatcher who began working at the end of August and an additional dispatcher will begin employment with the City at the beginning of November.

It is critically important to understand that in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, many of our fellow police agencies have postponed their hiring and recruitments. The Concord Police Department has not stopped efforts with regards to recruitment or hiring. We have found creative ways to connect with applicants and conduct interviews in a responsible and safe manner. We have continued to push forward despite these challenging times.

## GOAL 4. PUBLIC INFORMATION, MARKETING, AND COMMUNICATIONS

### a) Overall Economic Development

**Status:** In addition to standard business attraction/retention efforts, the Economic Development Director worked with three clients that are making direct investments in businesses in Concord to assist in the development process (Teatotaller, Doggy Day Care Kennel, and a corporate acquisition). Social media communication continues. The Economic Development Director began outreach to businesses with resource assistance during the COVID-19 state of emergency; co-created a business survey with the Greater Concord Chamber of Commerce to gauge needs during the shut-down; and followed up with impacted business owners.

The City also worked with the community's restauranteurs to allow for flexibility during the COVID-19 re-opening. Efforts included temporarily waiving requirements for site plan compliance for parking spaces used for outdoor dining in private parking lots, and expanded permitting for outdoor dining on public sidewalks and in public parking spaces. At its October 2020 meeting, City Council authorized the expenditure of \$15,000 to provide financial relief for restaurants in Concord as they gird themselves for the upcoming winter season in the pandemic. City staff is working with the Greater Concord Chamber of Commerce to roll out a program using those dollars.

The City, via the Revolving Loan Fund Program, partnered with Provident Bank and the Capital Regional Development Council on a \$4.1 million financing package to support the construction of a new corporate headquarters for Eastern Analytical, Inc., a Concord-based environmental testing agency and laboratory, to be relocated to 51 Antrim Avenue in the Airport Industrial Park. This undeveloped property has been vacant since the development of the Henniker Street and Antrim Avenue project, approximately 15 years ago. The City's share of the financing package was \$287,000. The project has tangible economic development and financial benefits for the City. Specifically, it will retain a Concord-based employer which has been located in the City for 25 years. The project also retains 32 full-time jobs and will spur the creation of another 3-4 full-time positions in the near future. Lastly, property tax revenues from the new development will be approximately \$43,000-\$55,000 annually.

### b) Concord TV

**Status:** The City of Concord works closely with Concord TV on a variety of initiatives including informational videos, public service announcements, event promotion and coverage, and monthly podcasts.

The Fire Department worked closely with Concord TV to produce a public education video for Fire Prevention Week. The collaboration between Concord TV and the Concord Fire Department was a crucial component to ensuring that the Fire Prevention Week message could be delivered during a period of limited in-person opportunities.

### c) Concord / Merrimack Valley School District

**Status:** The City is working with the Concord and Merrimack Valley School Districts to enhance their presence on the City website. The City and school districts are also exploring other ways to collaborate.

## GOAL 5. WORKING WITH STATE AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

### a) Transportation with NHDOT

**Status:** Mayor Bouley announced that he was going to empanel a committee of citizens to review the I-93 widening project.

### b) Department of Justice / Garages

**Status:** The General Court of New Hampshire, in coordination with the NH Department of Administrative Services, sought proposals for the preliminary study of constructing a new office building to house the New Hampshire Department of Justice, certain Legislative space, and a new parking garage. The work was scheduled to be undertaken in the fall of 2019 and deliverables completed by calendar year end. The City now understands that this project has been tabled in light of the anticipated financial impact on the State from the COVID-19 shutdown.

### c) Stickney Avenue

**Status:** The NHDOT has secured a realtor to market their Stickney Avenue garage property with restrictive historical covenants that include preserving the main garage building and addition. Proposals from prospective buyers are due on October 2, 2020 to NHDOT. If a buyer is not found, the City understands that this property would then be considered for demolition in the fall/winter.

## GOAL 6. ENHANCED COMMUNITY EVENTS/ARTS

### a) Promote Community Events with Community Partners

**Status:** Unfortunately, the COVID-19 state of emergency has led to the cancelation or postponement of many special events in our community that typically would take place in spring and early summer.

## GOAL 7. SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES

### a) Form Based Code

**Status:** After a successful series of stakeholder and public meetings in February, the draft of the first phase is undergoing final review. Legal counsel has been collaborating with Planning and Code staff regularly to ensure that the document and its proposed multi-phase adoption have the essential fundamentals to ensure compliance and defensibility. This has required a significant amount of coordination between Community Development divisions and the City Solicitor's office. Staffing issues with the consultant have also contributed some unforeseen delays. Staff hopes and expects to have Phase I adopted by late 2020 or early 2021.

### b) Street Light Re-lamping

**Status:** It is anticipated that the City's street lights will be replaced in the upcoming fiscal year (2021) with LED fixtures. The City is currently awaiting formal confirmation from the Public Utilities Commission, through Unutil, regarding expansion

of their on bill financing program. Once the approval is received by Unitil, the City will present an authorizing resolution to the City Council for approval.

**c) Renewable Energy & Conservation**

**Status:** At its April 13, 2020 meeting, the City Council approved a recommendation from City Administration to award a bid for a small scale, “behind the meter” facility located at the Hall Street Wastewater Treatment Facility, in the front of the parcel. The City is projected to save up to \$100,000 over the life of the project (slightly less if the system has to export some of the generation due to added costs).

ReVision energy provided the City with a refreshed proposal. Review by the Selection Committee and the City’s consultant concluded that the proposal, while it would show support for renewable energy, ultimately was not economically beneficial as presented. Also, there is the risk that electric costs may not escalate as modelled and the City could end up in the red on this project, negatively impacting sewer utility rate payers. The Selection Committee referred the proposal to the City Council for its direction and decision at the July 2020 Council meeting.

**d) Recycling**

**Status:** The General Services Department has worked with property management firms and condominium associations to address significant contamination in the multi-family recycling stream, making changes to programs as needed.

**GOAL 8. RECREATION AND PARKS**

**a) Athletic Fields**

**Status:** The Parks and Recreation Department coordinates the reservations and maintenance of the City’s parks and athletic fields. During the course of the year the following fields are maintained and reserved for numerous user groups: four baseball fields, five lacrosse fields, seven softball fields, two flag football fields, three football fields, one field hockey field, and 19 soccer fields.

COVID-19 canceled all spring sports for the three high schools that use our fields. In June, we took advantage of the fields being closed and top dressed several fields to help improve playing conditions. All regular youth and adult leagues started by early July, and many of them played well into the fall due to the late start. So far this year, overall use of the parks has visibly increased, as people have been getting outside to relax.

Working with the Recreation and Parks Advisory Committee and members of the Keach Park Community, the Department continues to have a soccer field at Keach Park from early April to the end of October. This field is reserved for community use two evenings a week and all day on Sundays.

**b) Terrill Park**

**Status:** The new Master Plan for Terrill Park has been approved and is fully permitted. Phase 1 of the project, completed in the fall of 2020, includes a new upper parking lot, a new dog park, the paved Merrimack River Greenway Trail, and related site improvements. Phase 1 was funded in partnership with the Friends of the Merrimack

River Greenway Trail, a grant from the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and the City of Concord.

**c) Merrimack River Greenway Trail (MRGT)**

**Status:** The City is engaged in ongoing discussions with property owners, stakeholders, and potential partners concerning the possible acquisition of private property to support future development of the MRGT. The Parks and Recreation Department is working on the next phase of this project, which will bring the trail from Loudon Road south to the wetland north of Phase 1 of Terrill Park.

**d) City Trail System**

**Status:** As the Governor's State of Emergency was implemented, there was a significant uptick in trail usage leading to some concerns from the general public about parking and lack of social distancing. The Conservation Commission put out messaging to advise the community of the availability of other less popular trails as alternatives.

The Parking Committee also reviewed this matter and recommended the installation of emergency No Parking signs along an impacted section of Long Pond Road adjacent to the Swope Trail.

**ONGOING INITIATIVE 1. FORMER TANNERY SITE/PARK**

**Status:** In 2004, the City held a design charrette for the purposes of soliciting public input concerning redevelopment of the former Allied Leather Tannery complex at 23-25 Canal Street. As part of that exercise, the community expressed a strong desire to develop a new public riverfront park at the Tannery property to support future redevelopment of the site, as well as revitalization of Penacook Village.

In 2012, the City acquired additional property at 5-11 Canal Street to support future development of the park. As part of marketing efforts conducted for the Tannery site in 2008 and in 2015, the City commissioned various conceptual site plans for the former Tannery complex, which included a new riverfront park.

In conjunction with the sale of the portion of the Tannery site located at 35 Canal Street to the Caleb Development Corporation for the Penacook Landing housing project in September 2019, the City retained a 1.53 acre parcel with approximately 500 feet of frontage on the Contoocook River for the future riverfront park.

The current park concept plan was commissioned by the City in 2015 and had an estimated total cost of \$950,000. The concept included full reconstruction of the Canal Street Public Parking Lot. Adjusting for inflation, the estimated total cost of the project is \$1.35 million. It is anticipated that the total cost of the park will be supported by the Penacook Village Tax Increment Finance District, as well as with recreational impact fees. The project was included in the FY 2021 Capital Improvement Program as an "asterisked" project; meaning that it was not appropriated as part of the FY 2021 budget adoption process as the project will require amending the Penacook Village Tax Increment Finance District Development Program and Financing Plan. City Administration will bring forward the required resolutions to advance this project later in FY 2021.

**ON-GOING INITIATIVE 2. ENHANCED NEIGHBORHOOD STREET PROGRAMS**

**Status:** The FY 2020 Paving Project was completed by September 30, 2020. The FY 2021 project will go out to bid by mid-November with an early spring 2021 start date.