

## **City of Franklin 2023 – Mayor's Inaugural Address**

Good evening and welcome to our 2023 Inaugural City Council meeting. We will be installing a new Councilor from Ward 3, Leigh Webb and saying goodbye to April Bunker. And we welcome back Councilors Ted Starkweather from Ward 1 and Councilor Olivia Zink from Ward 2.

We will also be welcoming several School Board members, so we will be off to a good start. So, how did last year go and what are we looking at for the future?

In truth it was a mixed year, some great accomplishments but also some troubling times. But let's start with some good news. Finally, after 2 plus years securing 12 permits and rain delays, etc., our first Water Feature for our White Waterpark is in and fully functional. We had a dedication ceremony in June that was very well attended and a very successful Winni River Days. Our first in the region White Water Park is on its way. We also saw the completion of the renovation of the old IOOF building into luxury condominiums, and finally substantial work on the Steven's Mill building with the opening of a second Kettlehead location late last year. The 150+ apts are also moving along - drywalling has started. And finally, The Waterhorse Pub has opened in the old Toad Hall - it is a beautiful space and, in case you are wondering has been twice blessed by the US Presiding Episcopal Bishop and the local Catholic priest.

But what has not opened is Cumberland Farms. We had hoped for an April 2022 start but that was delayed. Numerous conversations with the staff have not produced much momentum. And Cumberland Farms was sold this summer to a European Conglomerate, EG Group which owns a slew of chain restaurants, gas stations, etc., around the world. As recently as last week Director Creighton was working with their staff - we do expect this to happen but timing is unclear at this point.

And the City has been the target of white supremacy hate mail. One business was targeted and when the city was notified, we convened a special City Council Meeting in August, heard from the public, drafted and passed a proclamation against Hate and Intolerance and established a Citizen's Task Force Against Hate which has already met a few times. Unfortunately, last Fall the city was also targeted by hate graffiti on a wall behind the armory and the police are working both issues with the State Attorney General's Office. So even our small city has big city problems and we appreciate the efforts of the task force and our businesses in general for putting forward a welcoming face. We will continue to work both incidents with the appropriate authorities to address these issues.

We have also been stalled on our recycling efforts- largely by a market that keeps fluxuating. We are looking to Belmont who recently received a grant to determine if we can benefit from their efforts, but just last week we learned of an EPA grant for which we have become eligible for - a grant for Solid Waste Infrastructure for Recycling Program that ranges from \$600k - \$4M. Director Hanscom is already working to see how we can make it work for our transfer station in Franklin. Councilors Zink and Ribas have reached out to our High School Honor Society about a successful plastic recycling initiative in Laconia that we may be able to copy here in Franklin. The FHS Honor Society is working on getting out some educational flyers on the glass and metal that we do already recycle at the Franklin Transfer Station.

But there is more good news. The council and the economic task force, led by City Manager Milner have continued to secure needed funding for several major projects. Over the past 5 years the team has spurred over \$75 m in new investment and brought in over \$3.5 M in grants and donations. Asset acquisition from the last 5 years, July

2017 - June of last year is over \$13M in capital assets acquired. In the industrial park Vitex has expanded, Black Fly Canoe will soon be building and Ryan Dillon Cabinetry has begun operations. The city applied for and received over \$4M in ARPA funds with about \$2.5M received to date. Also, we have a very strong city leadership team across our departments that has worked together to make sure we are doing the best we can within our tax cap budget. All Directors have worked closely with the City Manager and our Finance Director to stretch the dollars as best we can, but it is never enough to meet all our needs. The Council will continue to work these issues in the upcoming budget cycle.

Another exciting project that is coming to Franklin is the development of Webster Place into a Veterans Campus. The plan, funded by 22M in ARPA funding and managed by Easter Seals, is to provide permanent and temporary housing for veterans and a whole range of social and therapy services. City Manager Milner and I toured the campus in June with Easter Seals and Councilor Webb and I met with the CEO of Easter Seals this fall to walk through again. This will be a first in NH and will provide much needed resources to these warriors.

The SAU has been successful in acquiring ARPA funding to help them overcome the effects of Covid. They have also continued with their successful Portrait of a Graduate program that is helping to redefine what the present day High School should be focusing on. Their FIRST Robotics team continues to do very well, and was recognized for their mental health packets they developed and handed out at a FIRST event this fall.

So a mixed year indeed and we will continue to face budget challenges, but we also need to be mindful of how we treat each other; our fellow councilors, leadership and the public in general. Nothing is gained by

assuming that all negative comments are correct - even if they are on Facebook or Franklin Talking. I would ask that all of us consider that most of us operate under a "do no harm" philosophy and that everyone is looking out for the greater good of our city and fellow citizens, not just ourselves.

So as we move into a new year, let us..... think before we accuse,..... let facts be the basis of our decisions.....and the common good of all..... be our focus.

Thank you all and have a great New Year.

Jo Brown

Mayor - City of Franklin

January 9, 2023