City of Fall River Massachusetts
Office of the City Clerk

ALISON M. BOUCHARD
CITY CLERK

INÊS LEITE
ASSISTANT CITY CLERK

JOINT MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL AND SCHOOL COMMITTEE

MEETING: March 11, 2025 at 5:30 p.m.
Council Chamber, One Government Center

PRESENT: President Joseph D. Camara, presiding;
Councilors Shawn E. Cadime, Michelle M. Dionne, Paul B. Hart, Bradford L. Kilby, Linda M. Pereira, Cliff Ponte, Andrew J. Raposo, and Laura-Jean Sampson

ABSENT: None

IN ATTENDANCE: Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll, Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Mayor Paul E. Coogan

President Camara called the meeting to order at 5:42 p.m. and announced that the meeting may be recorded with audio or video and transmitted through any medium.

Vice President Michelle "Mimi" Larrivee, School Committee, called their meeting to order at 5:43 p.m.

The following School Committee Members were present at the meeting:

PRESENT: Mayor Paul E. Coogan, Kevin Aguiar, Bobby Bailey, Collin Dias, Thomas Khoury, Michelle "Mimi" Larrivee, Shelli Pereira

ABSENT: None

President Camara stated that the purpose of this meeting was for the Mayor's State of the City address and introduced Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Lieutenant Governor Driscoll commended the City of Fall River and the Fall River Delegation for the improvements and achievements that have occurred within the municipality. Lieutenant Governor Driscoll also emphasized the importance of the matters being addressed by the entirety of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, including housing challenges, health care reform and the development of additional Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority commuter rail infrastructure.

Lieutenant Governor Driscoll then introduced the Mayor of Fall River for the annual State of the City Address, a copy of which is attached hereto and made a part of these minutes.

On a motion made by School Committee Member Collin Dias and seconded by School Committee Member Shelli Pereira, it was unanimously voted to adjourn the School Committee meeting at 6:25 p.m.

On a motion made by Councilor Raposo and seconded by Councilor Sampson, it was unanimously voted to adjourn the City Council meeting at 6:25 p.m.

List of documents and other exhibits used during the meeting:
Agenda packet (attached)
Mayor's State of the City Address

A true copy. Attest:

Alison M. Bouchard

City Clerk

In City Council, March 25, 2025
Approved.

City of Fall River Massachusetts
Office of the City Clerk

RECEIVED

2025 MAR -5 A 11: 26

CITY CLERK
FALL RIVER, MA

ALISON M. BOUCHARD
CITY CLERK

INÊS LEITE
ASSISTANT CITY CLERK

JOINT MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL AND SCHOOL COMMITTEE

MARCH 11, 2025 AT 5:30 PM

CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER, ONE GOVERNMENT CENTER

AGENDA

The purpose of the meeting is to allow the Mayor to deliver the State of the City Address

Alison M Bouchard

Alison M. Bouchard
City Clerk

ADA Coordinator: Gary P. Howayeck, Esq. 508-324-2650

One Government Center • Fall River, MA 02722
TEL 508-324-2220 • FAX 508-324-2211 • EMAIL city_clerks@fallriverma.org

2025 STATE OF THE CITY

Good evening, Lt. Governor Driscoll, honorable members of the City Council, School Committee, and our legislative delegation. It is my pleasure to be here with you this evening as I deliver the 2025 State of the City.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the members of our business community, our city employees and anyone who volunteers in the City of Fall River. A special thank you to all Fall River residents joining us both here and at home this evening. You all contribute to make our community a great place to live, work, and raise a family.

I want to extend my sincere thanks to our partners in government Senators Ed Markey, Elizabeth Warren, and Congressman Jake Auchincloss; Governor Maura Healy, Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll, Senator Michael Rodrigues, and State Representatives Alan Silvia, Carole Fiola, and the newly-elected Steven Ouelette. I welcome all of your help as we work together to strengthen Fall River. These partnerships have been invaluable during my time as Mayor.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my wife, Judi, for her unwavering support and for always being there for me and the City of Fall River. I could not do this without you.

So here we go!

Our finance team has made tremendous progress in improving the City's financial health. Since I took office in 2020, we have seen our stabilization fund increase by 24 million while our credit rating remains stable at A3.

Our new growth for FY25 is approximately $3.6 million which is an increase from FY24 of over $700,000. This increase is due to the realization of additional growth in residential, commercial and personal property. This will help distribute the tax burden, thereby benefiting existing Fall River taxpayers.

Thanks to the dedicated staff and our consistent collection efforts, the City of Fall River has the lowest rate of uncollected revenues of all other similarly-sized Massachusetts communities.

Our investment practices have yielded a large increase in our investment income. We are looking to strategically continue sound budgeting practices to provide tax relief to Fall River property owners.

Funding from the 2022 American Rescue Plan Act provided the City of Fall River with a unique, one-time opportunity to stabilize the municipal budget by purchasing equipment, upgrading water infrastructure as well as street reconstruction, rehabilitating municipal buildings, and restoring outdoor green spaces. All of Fall River's ARPA funding was delegated by the December 2024 deadline. We have completed 51 of 82 projects

thus far and are on track to expend the remainder of funds by December 2026.

Our Fall River Police Department, under the leadership of Interim Chief Kelly Furtado, is working on reorganization with a renewed focus on community engagement, crime prevention, and public safety as a whole.

Recruitment and retention are a challenge. In 2024, a total of 13 new officers joined our ranks, with another 18 starting at the Police Academy by April. To further promote recruitment efforts, the FRPD has opted into the new hybrid Civil Service Reforms, which allow hiring up to 50% of new officers from a department-specific list rather than relying solely on civil service testing. We have recently received over 85 new applicants which is a significant jump!

This year, under Interim Chief Furtado's leadership, we have seen organizational reform in the police department with the creation of the NEET and CAST units. These units were formed to specifically address gang violence, drug dealing, and illegal firearm possession. Since November 2024, these teams combined have made 187 arrests, seized 12 illegal firearms, and removed large quantities of fentanyl and crack cocaine from our streets. These teams have significantly upgraded the Police Department's ability to attack crime and enhance the quality of life in Fall River neighborhoods.

We have a 24% decrease in violent crime from 2023.

The Fall River Fire Department hired 7 firefighters in October 2024. All 7 are currently receiving fire training through the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy. They are expected to graduate and begin their service to the City of Fall River this month.

The Fire Department has received close to $1.5 million in grant funding to address manpower, fire safety education, and purchase new vehicles and equipment. It has received a new off road firefighting vehicle to assist in extinguishing brush fires as well as provide emergency transport in difficult terrain. The MBTA has also provided a large supply of tools needed in rail emergencies to the city that will be invaluable with the start of commuter rail.

The Bureau of Fire Prevention, under the leadership of Chief Neil Furtado, has aggressively worked alongside the Information Technology and Inspectional Services Departments to get a large portion of permits and inspections processed online. This has drastically improved our customer service.

The Fire Department is in the process of finalizing mutual aid with other departments who share resources for any potential rail emergencies. These agreements are designed to provide the various resources needed at large-scale incidents without the burden being placed solely on one community.

Fall River Emergency Medical Services has pioneered several new initiatives this year and will continue to provide exceptional 9-1-1

services. Fall River paramedics began training the next generation of EMTs at their newly established EMT school, with several recent graduates already assigned to City ambulances.

This past October, EMS entered into an agreement with Southcoast Hospitals to handle transfer services for patients. As a result, we have been able to expand 9-1-1 coverage across the city and bring on 3 additional ambulances.

In addition, as part of a partnership with Southcoast Hospitals, Fall River Emergency Medical Services has launched its mobile integrated home visit program, Mobile Integrated Healthcare or MIH, bringing essential care and services to patients where they live. This new initiative hopes to alleviate some of the burden from emergency room visits while also providing care to residents at home.

On February 1, 2025, the Fall River Public Schools' district Pre-K through 12 enrollment was 11,447 which is an increase of 358 students. Our student enrollment is growing on a daily basis, which means our students' needs continue to change.

Our preschool program is able to serve 600 children. In addition, the Fall River Public Schools are partnering with Head Start and People, Inc. through the Commonwealth Pre-School Partnership Initiative to provide access, special education services, and consultation support to our students.

As a district, we strive to continue to improve and expand access to Pre-K programs.

The School Department saw an increase in the percentage of teachers retained from 2023 to 24 of 3%. A new collective bargaining agreement, coupled with recruitment efforts, including job fairs, agreements with local colleges and universities, and expanding our partnerships with local teacher preparation programs, will help us to continue this trend over the next 3 years.

The Fall River Public Schools, in partnership with SSTAR, has instituted a Mobile Health Van which provides students and staff at Durfee with healthcare access. This service was made possible by the ongoing advocacy of Senator Rodrigues and our legislative delegation.Also, Healthy Smiles is partnering with HealthFirst pediatric dentistry to provide preventative dental care in grades Pre-K through 8.

The PASS Program at the Boys & Girls Club, funded primarily by the Fall River Opioid Funds settlement, began serving students in January. This program is a family choice program that provides students an opportunity to avoid short-term out-of-school suspensions.

School attendance improved overall with almost all schools making positive gains. Our average is now 90.8% and the chronic attendance rate dropped by 7%.

Early College enrollment is growing. We have seen a 4-year increase of 366%. Our students' educational outcomes continue to improve, with current Durfee students on track to earn well over 2,000 college credits. 91% of early college students successfully submitted the FAFSA, which is the #1 predictor of college enrollment. This is compared to 54% of all students statewide.

\

In a little less than 2 weeks we will see for the first time since 1958 passenger rail service in the City of Fall River. The long awaited SouthCoast Rail project is scheduled to begin service on March 24th. We know that commuter rail is good for Fall River. It helps sustain jobs, reduces business costs, and delivers critical public benefits like lower emissions and reduced highway congestion while providing job and recreational opportunities for all residents of the Commonwealth.

Fall River's current unemployment rate is 6.1%. Still to high, the city continues to see business expansion, new businesses opening, and the creation of jobs at all skill levels.

The Fall River Redevelopment Authority closed on the sale of 76 acres of land in the SouthCoast Technology Park to Vitas, who envisions

constructing 4 industrial buildings totaling approximately 900,000 square feet and creating 225 new full-time jobs.

Gold Medal Bakery, a 112-year old family business under 4th generation leadership, continues to expand after purchasing an 80,000-square-foot commercial property on Commerce Drive. Gold Medal plans to make a substantial investment in developing this property to create new production capabilities and new jobs.

InvaGen Pharmaceuticals: one of India's largest drug manufacturers, already invested $5.7 million in their 927 Currant Road facility, are now leasing a newly constructed building and investing $20 million more to create a manufacturing, warehouse, and research & development facility.

The Saint Anne's Hospital/ Steward Health Care issue was addressed when Brown University Health acquired Saint Anne's Hospital and saved 1,500 jobs vital to the Fall River community and our health care sector.

TACO Comfort Solutions on Bedford Street is investing $20 million to dramatically expand their Fall River Plant.When the new facility opens, there will be an additional 30 new jobs.

The Senator Thomas Norton City Pier on Davol Street, in the Spring of 2024, saw a dock open to the public that accommodates 14 boats. Its neighbor, Northfield Point, also part of the pier, is being restored to offer

walking paths and fishing. Construction is expected to be completed by Summer of 2026.

The most important project ongoing today is the Route 79-Davol Street Improvements Project. It is well underway, and a master plan is being drafted for the development of the almost 19 acres of land that this project will create. The plan envisions a vibrant neighborhood with residential buildings, commercial space, restaurants, and shops to connect the existing community to the waterfront.

The development of an Urban Renewal Plan is nearing completion for the Flint neighborhood. The plan details a wide variety of strategies, including recommendations for addressing vacant properties, improvements to streets and sidewalks, and the addition of new stores, restaurants, and housing on Pleasant Street. Rehabilitation of properties along Pleasant Street is expected to yield new housing units.

Several storefronts on Pleasant Street have already received dramatic facelifts through a storefront improvement program administered by the Community Development Agency, with the program expected to transform many more.

With nearly $1.7 million in federal funding secured by Congressman Auchincloss and a $7 million bond in the 2025 Economic Development Bill secured by Senator Rodrigues and our state representatives, Pleasant Street is on track to undergo its first major renovations in several years.

While in our downtown a partnership of business, civic, and cultural organizations, along with the City and Redevelopment Authority have worked to develop and implement revitalization strategies. One example is the Fall River Museum of Contemporary Art that attracts a regional audience that extends from Boston to New York City, while the Fall River Arts and Culture Coalition's, Ignition Space, has a large gallery that is also used as a flexible event space.

Viva Fall River has been the lead partner, planning events and activities in the Downtown area. This partnership is now focused on a much smaller section of Fall River's downtown historic district and is creating both long- and short-term plans for beautification, improved lighting, and ongoing maintenance. The district includes at least seven restaurants, arts and event venues.

We are also focusing on the redevelopment of several vacant properties which will bring commercial and residential units to downtown.

The City of Fall River in partnership with the Community Development Agency, who's primary objective is to provide the city with affordable housing, has committed to 11 affordable housing projects in various stages of development. A few of the projects on the list are the former St Louis School, a property on Rock Street, and the former Notre Dame Rectory on Eastern Avenue. Upon the completion of these projects, 113 new affordable units will be added to our housing stock.

Other development projects are in the works on Linden Street, Elm Street, Lebanon Street and Durfee Street just to name a few. This development is revitalizing former schools, mills and vacant properties that would otherwise sit abandoned. In addition the Flint Revitalization project is underway with 4 properties being identified for rehabilitation on Pleasant Street.

In 2020, my administration identified 172 properties that were vacant, foreclosed upon, or needed to be brought up to code. In an effort to"fight blight" in our neighborhoods we reinstituted the "Building Blocks" program in partnership with the Attorney General's Office. This program sought to reduce the number of vacant and dilapidated properties by holding the property owners accountable for bringing their buildings up to code.

Over the last several years the number of vacant and abandoned properties has dropped from 172 to 72. These properties have been returned to the tax rolls and the blighted properties have been brought up to code. Of the 72 properties remaining 8 are presently being considered for the "Building Blocks" program. There is more work to do.

One of the major challenges facing the City of Fall River at this time are our homeless. We have received state and federal funding that has been used to renovate and establish a permanent 30 bed overflow shelter, we also provide warming centers and additional shelter beds in severe weather as the homeless numbers continue to grow across the state.

The City has created the first ever FAST Team that provides outreach to the homeless and those with substance abuse disorder by visiting encampments with a team made up of a police liaison, recovery coaches, and clinicians to assist with their shelter and treatment needs.

This year the city has also started an initiative "Enhancement without Encampment" that provides unsheltered individuals with substance abuse disorders the ability to enter treatment and after discharge provide sober living arrangements for a period of up to 6 months. To date 61 individuals have taken advantage of this program. We have seen 17 graduate successfully from the program and remain housed in supportive housing programs.

Our Opioid Settlement money has provided funding to the Fall River School Department, Advocacy Fund, SSTAR, FAST Team, the Fall River Trial Court and SouthCoast Health. These organizations provide services such as education and intervention, treatment options, addressing immediate financial needs, assisting with continuing shelter needs, as well as providing recovery coaching to remove the barriers for success for those with substance abuse disorder.

The Department of Veterans Services brought on a new director back in June of 2024. The Director has been state certified and trained by the Executive Office of Veterans Services.

Currently the department has scheduled programming to support veteran behavioral health awareness in the community to fulfill the requirements of the Mental Health Outreach for Veterans Project funded by ARPA.

They have also taken over Elderly and Veterans ride program. This service to the community enables veterans and the elderly the ability to get to and from medical and VA appointments.

The Department of Veterans Services has created programming to provide much needed resources that veterans and their family members of all ages can take advantage of.

I am happy to announce that working with the Council, I will by Order increase the Veterans exemption to 100% thanks to the Heroes Act; and we will also be increasing the exemption for the blind as well as our seniors.

Fall River is grateful for all our Veterans and we thank them for their service .

There have been a number of capital improvement projects over the last several years to our city buildings and parks.

In our parks, we have seen upgrades to lighting at baseball fields, the repaving of roads and sidewalks within parks, the resurfacing of basketball courts, new volleyball and pickle ball courts, the development and design of a new skate park, and the renovation of the comfort station at Britland Park.

The City has instituted upgrades at the Police Department, Government Center, and the library .

Additional projects for this year thanks to ARPA, CPC and grant funding the city will begin the upgrades to the Lewiston Street DCM facility, the Central Fire Station, the Fire Museum and the old Nagle Auditorium, as well as modernization projects at the 3rd and Pearl Street Parking garages . We have also been awarding grant funding to lower energy cost for residents and businesses.

Our Community Utilities Division continues their mandated lead service and replacement project. From 2022 to the end of 2024, over 1000 full or partial lead services have been replaced at no cost to the individual property owners while lead inspections have been made at around 5000 properties. This program will help us to ensure the quality of our drinking water.

Thanks to grant funding applied for and received by the city the Stafford Square Drainage project is in the design phase. We continue to look for funding for these massive construction costs.

During 2024 the city saw a significant increase in construction sprojects, approximately 200 locations saw substantial sidewalk repair or replacement and 25 locations saw roadway reconstruction projects.

Construction to improve recreational spaces in the Downtown and on Columbia Street are either completed or underway, including the Jerry Lawton Plaza. This project included a complete rebuild with ADA accessibility, landscaping, and a stage area that will allow for outdoor events.

A highly anticipated and long overdue project is the Columbia Street Reconstruction. This will completely reconstruct Columbia Street and its sidewalks, lighting, and landscaping. This culturally significant area is certainly deserving of these improvements. The project is currently being prepared for bid, with construction to begin this summer. Also, getting underway is the reconstruction of the Columbia Street Plaza near Santo Christo Church. This will become a great neighborhood meeting spot.

We have added bicycle lanes, improved pedestrian crosswalks and signals, and added parking along Water and Rodman Streets.

A project for the continued expansion of the Quequechan River Rail Trail starting easterly along the backside of the Curtain Loft Apartments is underway terminating at Father Travassos Park.

Another area that needs attention is the intersection at Bedford and Robeson Streets. This project will include new signals and new traffic patterns to ease congestion.

Spearheaded by the Fall River Redevelopment Authority and their consultant, Stantec, the Davol Street Master Plan is also in the works. This process included extensive stakeholder outreach, public information sessions, and potential developers' meetings, needed to craft the Master Plan.This document

will become publicly available this Spring.

With the skyrocketing cost associated with solid waste disposal and the contamination of our recycling the city has been forced to step up its enforcement efforts to try and combat these recurring issues.

Community outreach has been initiated to educate the public on recycling efforts and items that can and cannot be recycled. A residential cardboard Pilot Program has been rolled out to 300 homes to remove cardboard from the recycling stream as it is a marketable product and we are looking to expand this program.

This year, we have many exciting community events planned for our residents. The City of Fall River, in conjunction with Viva Fall River, will host the 5th annual We HeART Fall River Festival on Old Second Street, the 3rd annual Kite Night on the Norton City Pier, the Summer Evenings in the Park, our monthly food truck festivals at the Gates of the City,

Other great events include the Holy Ghost Feast, Day of Portugal, Children's Holiday Parade, the Narrows Center's summer concerts at the Norton City Pier, and of course, our Fourth of July celebration, which is always a spectacular family-friendly event.

In addition to all the other activities organized, Massachusetts 250, an initiative from the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism, is funding special events across the state to celebrate the 250th anniversary of American independence in Massachusetts. Here in Fall River, the

City, Viva Fall River, and the Lafayette-Durfee House will host a reenactment of the 1778 Battle of Fall River at Heritage State Park.

The water taxi that transported people up and down the Taunton River last summer will continue again this year along with the Fall River Trolley, which was a huge success.

New restaurants adding to our waterfront are Primo on Water Street offering authentic Italian-American cuisine. Morgan's Cantina on Ferry Street is anticipated to open this month. The Redevelopment Authority plans to purchase a vacant property on Anawan Street for additional waterfront event parking and development.

Lastly, I want everyone to know that I look at Fall River with hope and promise. I think of my time in the Mayor's office and focus on how, in the long run, did we make lasting, positive changes to our community? And for some reason, five things always come to mind:

One, the new Durfee High School . Two, Route 79/the Davol street corridor project. Three, the train. Four, the waterfront. And five, the new Diman Vocational school.

These types of major improvements, coupled with the hundreds of smaller projects, but almost just as significant will help revitalize Fall River for decades. The team of local, state, and federal officials, in

collaboration with our caring, hardworking residents, is moving Fall River forward.

I am not blind to think that there aren't any problems in the City of Fall River. Of course there are. But we work hard to fix them, we work hard to improve things, and going forward I will always need your help. Thanks for being here tonight, and God bless the City of Fall River.