



CITY OF NORTH ADAMS, MASSACHUSETTS

Office of the Mayor
Thomas W. Bernard

North Adams: Building Our Shared Future

2019 State of the City Address

Thursday, January 31, 2019

Good evening. I'm pleased to welcome so many colleagues and friends to City Hall on this cold evening, and to greet everyone watching from home on Northern Berkshire Community Television. I'm excited to talk about our great city of North Adams, to reflect on what we've accomplished together, and to chart a course for the work ahead of us in 2019.

Greetings also to the elected officials who are with us tonight, including current and former members of the North Adams City Council and School Committee, members of city boards and commissions, and the other local, state, and federal leaders and staff members with whom North Adams enjoys strong partnerships.

Similarly, I want to welcome my colleagues from the education, business, and nonprofit communities.

It's no secret that great things are taking place in our city and in our region. Collaborations with these partners are critical to our shared success.

Finally, I especially want to acknowledge the city staff in the room for their dedication and service.

Among this group are Chiefs Cozzaglio and Meranti, representing the North Adams Police and Fire departments. Our first responders are on the front lines of keeping North Adams safe, and they do it with professionalism and pride every day.

We saw that earlier this month when North Adams bravest and finest responded to the devastating house fire on Houghton and Brooklyn Streets.

This was a difficult fire to contain and control. It was a terrible loss for the residents and the property owner. But when faced with the challenge our professionals responded in stellar fashion.

We also see it when NAPD officers, working alongside colleagues and partners from the Sheriff's Office and the Massachusetts State Police, execute warrants that take drugs off our streets and arrest those responsible for prolonging the heartbreaking cycle of addiction in our community.

At last week's City Council meeting we recognized the newest members of the departments when we swore in two new firefighters, and two police officers. We also celebrated the promotion of a new sergeant in the department.

I'm grateful to every firefighter and officer for their service, and I'll have more to say about the future of public safety in North Adams later in my remarks. For now please join me in offering my appreciation to our chiefs for their work and that of their teams.

Thank you.

During a visit to North Adams last week Congressman Richard Neal toured Drury High School. I know he was impressed, as Superintendent Malkas and I were, by the deep practical learning and experience demonstrated by the students in Drury's performing arts management program. When we talk about the creative economy as an economic and workforce opportunity for North Adams it's programs like this that are preparing students to succeed in these fields.

We all should be impressed and proud of the preparation and thoughtfulness of the students in the history class the congressman spoke with. They were incredible ambassadors and advocates for themselves, our public schools, and the city of North Adams.

I share their enthusiasm for our city. I share the strong sense of hometown pride all of us who love North Adams wear on our sleeves. Along with the love and support of my family, it is the source of the energy, inspiration, and strength that fuels my service and leadership every day.

I imagine the poet, writer, activist, and chronicler of rural life Wendell Berry would appreciate this sentiment. Berry easily could have been imagining a place like North Adams when he wrote that...

“A community is the mental and spiritual condition of knowing that the place is shared, and that the people who share the place define and limit the possibilities of each other's lives. It is the knowledge that people have of each other, their concern for each other, their trust in each other, the freedom with which they come and go among themselves.”

Like Berry, we have experienced the power of collaborative knowledge, common concern, reciprocal trust, and shared freedom in our lives and work.

We know that these qualities are especially important in times of change.

We know that change can create excitement or discomfort, but that it's rarely easy. It takes time and patience and plenty of communication to get it right. When it's done with purpose and focus it can be powerful. However it happens, it's a process that comes with deep and necessary learning.

It's in that process of learning and change that our resilience is tested.

When we are defined, and limited.

And when we find the courage, the innovativeness, and the strength to exceed our limitations and to build a prosperous, inclusive, and bright future.

That's why I stand here tonight to report with full confidence that the state of the City of North Adams is strong, and getting stronger.

That's why I am proud to highlight the record of achievement my team and I set in our first year together, with support from many people in this room tonight.

That's why I also want to acknowledge some important and necessary work that remains incomplete.

And that's why I'm excited to outline the priorities that will guide me in 2019 and beyond.

Promoting a culture of development

A culture of development is flourishing in North Adams.

It's something I've spoken about with local organizations and in local media.

I've presented to high school, college, and graduate students about the opportunities and challenges facing North Adams.

I've told the story of the smallest city in the Commonwealth at statewide meetings and conferences.

My central message to these groups, and to you tonight, is consistent and clear: People are investing in North Adams. It is a place where they see potential, and where they want to do business.

You only need to drive past the new sign on the corner of State Road and Roberts Drive to see what David Moresi and his team have accomplished at NORAD Mill.

The mill is home to:

A coffee roaster and a wine cellar.

Artist studios and financial services.

A record store and a golf simulator.

A yarn dyeing company and a gem and mineral dealer.

And many other businesses.

Whether you call it an innovation center, a business mall, or an entrepreneurial incubator, one thing is clear - David has found a formula for success.

Equally impressive is how the Tourists resort has put North Adams on the map for readers of *The Boston Globe* and *Vanity Fair*, among other outlets. And seeing it mentioned online as one of the 10 coolest new hotels in the world brings positive attention to our city.

I also look forward to the next phase of development at GreylockWORKS, including the work they plan to do with residential and hotel development on the west end of the Cariddi Mill property.

These projects, and the recently opened Trail House restaurant adjacent to Stop and Shop, are among the private developments bringing renewed vitality to the west end of the city. I'm also impressed by the focus, optimistic energy, and public sector investment that are helping to drive change at Harriman and West Airport.

The new members I appointed to the airport commission are working with veteran members to improve airport policies and procedures. As I said earlier, change can be disruptive, but as the recent airport building relocation proves the results are worth the time and effort.

The small changes and big moves my team and I made also help set the stage for the commission and the community at large to update the airport's master plan. Thanks to our legislators in Washington, including Congressman Richard Neal, the city secured \$90,000 in federal funding to support this planning process.

However, as we have seen, not every project will succeed and not every promising idea will pay off. That can be disappointing, but the fact that North Adams is seen as a place to imagine possibilities, invest in ambitious dreams, and take risks is a positive sign of progress for our city.

One thing that hasn't changed -- and this is something I talk about every chance I get -- is the fact that manufacturing is alive and well in North Adams and in Berkshire County.

It's thriving at Crane Paper following their acquisition by Mohawk Paper.

It's growing steadily and deliberately at Deerfield Machine, where they continue to invest in new equipment, and to provide good jobs, good benefits, and competitive salaries.

It's breaking new ground as B&B Micro Manufacturing develops a deserved national reputation as a premier tiny home builder.

I'm proud that I recently helped to nurture the growth and expansion in our manufacturing sector by supporting a five year tax increment financing (TIF) deal with TOG Manufacturing, which recently was purchased by Stanley Black & Decker.

This is a great deal for North Adams. When I entered office last January, TOG had a different corporate owner, and we faced the potential relocation of the business and the loss of 29 good manufacturing jobs.

With Stanley, we're writing a new and brighter story for TOG, one that includes \$2.75 million in planned capital investments and the anticipated creation of 28 new manufacturing jobs over the next several years.

That's a huge win for North Adams.

It's a huge win for a local company that has been in business for nearly 30 years, as well as for TOG's employees.

We also can celebrate the regional wins like the Berkshire Innovation Center and the recent announcement that Wayfair plans to bring a 300 seat call center to Pittsfield. I'm ambitious for these projects, and the opportunities they present for North Adams residents to compete for these jobs.

The challenge lies in ensuring residents have the skills, and access to the training opportunities they need to compete for jobs throughout the county. We're fortunate to have a phenomenal workforce agency, MassHire Berkshire, as a resource and partner for job seekers and businesses.

The high school and postsecondary education programs at McCann Technical School also help prepare the next generation of skilled tradespeople for the local workforce.

Last year, McCann secured nearly \$200,000 in state workforce skills grant funding to support investments in advanced manufacturing and engineering workstations, 3D printing and prototyping tools, and robotics manufacturing equipment -- machinery that will help prepare, train, and retain future employees and residents of North Adams and the Berkshires.

That's just one of the many reasons why McCann Superintendent Jim Brosnan recently was recognized by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) as an educator "whose exemplary work maintains and advocates high standards of excellence in education."

Making it easier to do business

As we work to attract new business to the city, and to retain and sustain local business, I will continue to find ways to make it easier to do business in North Adams.

Working with the Commonwealth's Executive Office of Housing and Community Development I fought to secure state and federal approval to designate two downtown census tracts as Qualified Opportunity Zones.

This promising new program provides tax incentives to investors who direct capital gains into funds designed to support job creation and development projects like the Extreme Model Railroad Museum and the Hoosac River Revival.

With District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) support from the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission we began the process to update the city's 60 year old zoning map and use tables.

We secured a \$50,000 grant from the Commonwealth's Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs that will allow us to build on this work and to conduct a comprehensive update to the city's zoning ordinance.

As a related issue I also established an abutter lot sale program through the assessor's office. This program enabled property owners to purchase properties held by the city in tax possession, to improve them for private use, and to return them to the tax rolls.

I also worked with my colleagues in the Offices of Community Development and Tourism to secure a \$15,000 grant through the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (MDI) to provide downtown merchants, and those on Eagle Street in particular, with technical assistance to enhance their marketing and promotion efforts.

This business development support complements the efforts of the Eagle Street Initiative to improve signage, enhance green spaces, and build excitement and community around Eagle Street as a unique brand in the city.

Leveraging our assets

We're fortunate to have many key partners working with us to leverage the assets that make North Adams an incredible place to work, learn, live, and visit.

LEVER

Last summer Lever, Inc., awarded \$25,000 to a local startup through their Arts Innovation Challenge program.

Over the next several years we can look forward to the cultivation of new entrepreneurial ventures through Lever's challenges in the advanced manufacturing and healthcare sectors, supported by investments from the Massachusetts Life Sciences Center, the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative, Williams College, and Berkshire Bank.

In fact, last week the Lever team made their first \$25,000 award through their manufacturing challenge program.

What's exciting about these investments and programs is their potential to establish North Adams as a business incubator. Programs such as these also help connect North Adams with regional efforts such as the Berkshire Innovation Center currently under construction in Pittsfield.

Equally exciting is Lever's Berkshire Business Interns program. BBI provides paid internships in fields ranging from technology and healthcare to engineering and manufacturing. These opportunities not only provide professional experience and a network of peers and industry contacts, but also enable college interns -- including students at Lever's partner colleges: BCC, Williams, and MCLA -- to see North Adams and the Berkshires as places where they could imagine themselves living and working after graduation.

MCLA

Attracting people to North Adams to secure their future is a significant contribution of another key partner here in the city, the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. As demonstrated by the college's recent engineering collaboration with General Dynamics, MCLA creates a pipeline from classroom to career.

Following its long tradition of excellence, there are recent accolades to reinforce a feeling of pride in MCLA.

U.S. News has recognized MCLA for its academic quality. It shares the "Top public schools in the U.S." designation with highly selective service academies like West Point and Annapolis.

The University of Southern California's Race and Equity Center recently selected MCLA as one of the top public institutions in the nation for serving African American students.

The Eos Foundation recently named MCLA one of the top colleges in Massachusetts for their work to achieve gender parity in enrollment, senior leadership, and board composition.

Such credit is the result of MCLA's focus on academic quality; faculty, staff, and student recruitment and retention; marketing and promotion; engagement with off-campus partners; and sustained efforts to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. This last area is an issue of critical importance not just for the MCLA campus, but also for the relationship between the college and the community.

As if that were not enough, besides being a good community partner, MCLA's economic impact to North Adams is vital. Direct spending by the college as well as by employees, students, and visitors contributes about \$15 million annually into the economies of North Adams and the northern Berkshires.

In celebrating their 125th anniversary this year, we should take time to recognize that MCLA is a fantastic school -- with a terrific president in Doctor Jaime Birge.

MASS MoCA

Also celebrating a milestone anniversary this year is the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art. It's been 20 years since MASS MoCA opened to the public.

The spaces where North Adams residents, or their parents or grandparents -- including my grandmother -- once made their living now are home to exhibitions and performances that bring incredible regional, national, and international attention to our city.

While MASS MoCA's 250,000 annual visitors and the estimated \$51 million in economic impact are powerful statistics, they mask a persistent challenge: that visitation numbers alone -- impressive as they are -- do not translate into robust downtown development.

Reactivating the downtown core is not a singularly MASS MoCA problem, but the energy, excitement, and critical mass that MASS MoCA generates absolutely plays a part in building a durable and sustainable solution for North Adams.

Getting small businesses to open and thrive is a challenge everywhere. North Adams faces the same challenges -- including the convenience of online shopping and the pricing advantages of big box retail -- as small cities across the country.

Still, there are signs of progress, with four new businesses slated to open soon on Main Street, and the significant investments that Bob Fraser and the MountainOne team are making to consolidate their North Adams operations downtown to help build a thriving and sustainable Main Street.

Preparing for a green future

In addition to business sustainability, environmental sustainability must remain a top priority for North Adams. While we always can and should find ways to do more, I want to highlight the steps my team and I took this year to advance our commitment to be a Green Community.

I added the first hybrid vehicle to the City fleet, a modest but powerful symbolic action. Thank you to the Council for encouraging us to strengthen the alignment between budget decisions and sustainable solutions.

I also secured a \$30,000 grant from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. These funds will enable us to study climate-change related hazards in the city. This study will prepare us to compete for larger grants offered through the state's Climate Vulnerability Preparedness Program.

The cost of investing in clean and renewable energy systems can be prohibitive for many business, nonprofit, and multi-unit residential property owners. That's why I worked with MassDevelopment and the City Council to enact a property assessed clean energy -- or PACE -- resolution. PACE will enable property owners to fund energy efficiency projects by tying loans to a betterment assessment on their tax bill.

North Adams also will become greener over the next several years as we plant 800 new trees throughout the city. Along with Greenfield, North Adams was selected by the Franklin Land Trust to be part of a three-year United States Forest Service tree planting grant program.

This effort, initiated by my administration and coordinated by the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition, will include planting trees in public spaces while also making them available to residents and business owners.

Building community and rebuilding our neighborhoods

I recently attended a presentation on strategies for attracting and keeping visitors downtown. The consensus was that there are two essential elements for success. The first is the development of mixed use and market rate housing as a catalyst for commercial and retail development.

This is an area of unrealized opportunity for North Adams, and one where I will continue to engage private developers along with state and local partners.

The second initiative is one that North Adams already does better than most communities: attracting residents and visitors with engaging public events.

From the upcoming WinterFest on Saturday, February 16; to MCLA's DownStreet Art Thursdays; to summer standbys like Parties in the Park, Windsor Lake Concerts, National Night Out, Downtown Celebration, Motorama; and, of course, to the Fall Foliage Parade -- to name just a few -- we know how to bring people together, and to celebrate our hometown pride and community spirit.

I was so happy to bring that pride and spirit into City Hall in December when the students in the Kids4Harmony program filled this building with music and joy. I look forward to announcing future City Hall concerts soon.

This energy and pride, and shared support also is flourishing in our neighborhoods and community centers.

I see it in every visit I make to the UNO Community Center. I hear about it when I visit the Mary Spitzer Center and speak with seniors about their commitment to active living as well as about their concerns about safety, affordability, transportation access, and our shared ongoing struggle for accountability and fairness from our cable provider.

And we've invested in building community and critical mass through outdoor recreation. In particular, North Adams has been incredibly successful in securing state funding through the Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities -- or PARC -- program overseen by the Commonwealth's Division of Conservation Services.

This program helped fund the skate park and splash park improvements to the Noel Field recreational complex. Recently, I announced that North Adams was awarded a \$318,500 PARC grant to upgrade the park on Brayton Hill Terrace.

Closing out old business

I'm proud of my administration's record of achievement to date. I also want to highlight work begun in 2018 that I expect to complete or advance this year.

This includes completing the sale to Cumberland Farms of the former Department of Public Works property on Ashland Street, and the sales of the Ashland Street salt yard and the Notre Dame church and school.

This spring I also plan to reissue the request for proposals for Sullivan School in order to determine what private interest may exist for that property.

I also look forward to completing the North Adams Public Schools central office move into City Hall. It's going to be an adjustment for all of us, but it also will provide opportunities for us to look at strengthening our collaboration, looking at making our operations more effective and efficient, and exploring additional shared services.

As chair of the school committee I also want to congratulate Superintendent Malkas and her team for securing a \$286,000 Community Preschool Partnership Initiative (CPPI) grant from the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) to support a collaboration with Child Care of the Berkshires.

Speaking of collaboration, in last year's State of the City address I stated that I would convene a community conversation about the future of the Mohawk Theater. I know that this has been an issue of great interest to many in the city for a number of years.

That's why I was so pleased when community members took the initiative last summer to organize a brainstorming session about the future of the theater.

That grassroots effort proved to me that the future of the Mohawk does not need to rest in the city's hands alone. Government can help to support development efforts, but we also have the opportunity to explore how the private sector will write the next chapter for the Mohawk.

Therefore, I will be coming to the City Council at the next meeting seeking support to declare that the Mohawk is no longer needed for a municipal purpose. This declaration will enable me to work with staff in the Office of Community Development to issue a request for proposals to identify interests and opportunities to privately redevelop the Mohawk into an asset that will anchor the next phase of downtown development.

While I have received inquiries about the theater, the RFP isn't intended to advantage any idea, or to privilege any interested party. As with past requests for proposals, this will be an attempt to understand what ideas are out there, to determine whether any are viable enough to recommend for sale, and above all else to refresh a conversation about the theater that has grown stale and repetitive.

So, what are my priorities for 2019 and beyond? I'll highlight four.

1. Leadership transitions

This week, Deborah Pedercini officially took over as our new City Clerk.

And searches are underway for a new police chief, a new city librarian, and an assistant MIS director.

That's a lot of change, and it will be disruptive in ways that both are challenging and exciting.

It's not easy to say farewell to colleagues who have been effective leaders and who possess vast stores of institutional knowledge. At the same time, I look forward to the energy, ideas, and fresh perspectives that new colleagues will bring to these critical jobs.

Managing these transitions will take time and careful attention. It also will help me build a change management roadmap as we plan for other anticipated retirements over the next several years. And it highlights how urgent it is to upgrade our technology and our business process to be more efficient and responsive.

2. Public safety

Welcoming a new police chief is part of my ongoing focus on public safety this year. We're building from a position of strength: Chief Cozzaglio leaves an impressive legacy of leadership and service, including as a partner with me on two important changes to how the North Adams Police Department is organized. Along with Chief Meranti, he helped make the case for reestablishing our department leaders as chiefs rather than directors.

And, with support from the City Council, along with Senator Hinds, Representative Barrett, and Governor Baker, we secured the removal of the department from the state's civil service system.

This will provide increased flexibility in how we recruit and promote officers while ensuring standards of professionalism and quality that are equal to, if not stronger than, what existed under civil service.

These changes are important because our police continue to face serious public safety challenges common to most city police departments. We know that these are largely fueled by two factors: the opioid epidemic, and the persistent problem of domestic violence.

District Attorney Andrea Harrington has hit the ground running with a strong focus on both of these issues. As I mentioned at the start of my address, the state police unit attached to the DA's office continues to be a close and effective partner in cracking down on drug dealers, while helping to support treatment for those victimized by the specter of addiction.

The D.A. and I understand what so many in our community also recognize: that addiction is a disease. This understanding is especially important in a small, close-knit community like North Adams where nearly every one of us knows someone struggling with their own addiction, or that of a family member.

In many cases it is a disease with clear and identifiable vectors: deceptive marketing by pharmaceutical companies leading to overprescription of legal opioids by physicians that too often create a cycle of dependency that ends up in the misuse of illegal narcotics.

That's why I joined over 100 cities and towns in Massachusetts by signing on to the class action lawsuit that aims to hold the drug manufacturers responsible for their role in this epidemic.

That's why it's also critical to have partners like the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition (nbCC) and others -- including Josh Bressette Commit to Save a Life, recently honored as the city's 2019 MLK Peacemaker award winner -- who are leading the charge in helping us all to understand that addiction and substance misuse are diseases that affect us all.

And I know that District Attorney Harrington will be a strong and effective partner in addressing the epidemic of domestic violence and its related symptoms.

As we address these and other public safety challenges, we can no longer wait to take action on our public safety building. I appreciate that the City Council approved my request for funding to replace the outdated, leaking roof on the facility. However necessary as it was, no one in our community should be satisfied with or complacent about this investment.

The facility where our police officers and firefighters do their work is in deplorable condition, but it didn't get there overnight. We know that, and we know correcting this problem will take time and money, but we can no longer ignore this critical need. It is time for action. It is time for a plan.

Senator Hinds and I brought the former state secretary of public safety, Dan Bennett, to North Adams this past fall to tour the building. While it was clear that the Commonwealth understands our needs -- as well as those of Pittsfield and countless other communities in Massachusetts -- state funds are limited.

I'm encouraged that my proposal for \$1.1 million for a siting, engineering, and design study for a new public safety building was included in last year's state infrastructure bond bill, and I thank Senator Hinds and Representative Barrett for their support. This line item is helpful, but it also is critical to bear in mind that a bond bill is a promissory note. No funds have yet been appropriated by the Commonwealth for any of the priorities in that bill.

The money would help, to be sure, but its greatest benefit is as a spur to action. We don't need study money to start considering where we might locate a public safety complex. There aren't too many options that align both the need for physical space with ease of access for our first responders.

So let's start talking about what is possible, and putting a plan in place.

3. *Vision 2030* update

Speaking of planning, I want to engage the community in a review, celebration, and reconsideration of our Vision 2030 comprehensive plan. Adopted in 2014 the plan was the product of several years of work and significant community input. Since its adoption the plan has served as an effective blueprint for growth that has been used by the city administration, city council, boards and commissions, and the community at large.

The strength and the challenge of the plan is that it truly is comprehensive. It consists of seven priority areas -- economic development, open space, housing, historic preservation, food and health, infrastructure, and land use -- which in turn encompass 43 goals, 96 policies, and over 350 separate action items.

In order to ensure our ambitious plan remains a meaningful and reliable tool that supports data-driven decision making, that accomplishments are appropriately documented and celebrated, and that city efforts align with the countywide priorities in Berkshire's updated Berkshire Blueprint I plan to conduct a fifth year review of Vision 2030.

My goal is to work with a broad and representative coalition of residents and community members, anchored by the city's Community and Economic Development Advisory Board (CEDAB), to consider the progress the city has made in addressing the goals, policies, and actions within the Vision 2030 plan, and to hear your ideas about how we continue to use the plan to move North Adams forward.

4. Coffee and conversation

In order to move North Adams forward I want to ensure I'm hearing all voices and considering all points of view.

One of my biggest rewards serving as your mayor is having the opportunity to meet and hear from so many people in our community and to learn about what you are doing, as well as about your hopes and concerns.

I appreciate my many conversations with you at downtown events, in our schools, at local businesses, and in City Hall. You've told me about your business ideas. You've shared your concerns about taxes and affordability; potholes and water main breaks; transportation and cable; domestic violence; and the opioid epidemic, among other topics.

You've passed along compliments about the work of our dedicated public employees, and challenged them -- and me -- to do better in areas where we can be more responsive.

These conversations reflect an idea that's very important to me, something that the urban activist Jane Jacobs expressed this way: "Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody."

And while I have heard your hopes and concerns, it's time to put into action a pledge I made last year to hold informal listening sessions throughout the city. Tonight, I am announcing that I will be holding these meetings on the first Saturday of every month through the spring.

This coffee and conversation series begins this Saturday, February 2, at 9 a.m. at Empire Cafe on Main Street, with future meetings to be held at BrewHaHa, the UNO Community Center, and the Greylock Valley Community Room.

Scheduled events will be announced in the press, in my monthly North Adams Notes newsletter, and on social media.

These conversations are open to the public. There is no set agenda, just a chance for informal conversation. I invite you all to join me to share your hopes and concerns.

As we work together to build a prosperous, inclusive, and bright future for North Adams I ask you to consider the following fact:

North Adams is the smallest city in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

What does it mean to be the smallest? In a world that believes that bigger is better, small things are often seen as insignificant.

As unimportant.

As unworthy of attention or only of attracting notice as “a hidden gem” or a “diamond in the rough” or a place with a glow you cannot see.

Does that sounds like North Adams to you? Because it sure doesn't to me.

Yes, we're the smallest city in terms of population, but consider our influence.

We are home to the largest contemporary art museum in the United States.
And the greatest (small) public university in the country!

And while I'm at it, let's claim the best vocational high school in the Commonwealth!

And I know our neighbors in Adams will be quick to point out that Mount Greylock lies within the borders of their town, but we all know that thousands of visitors drive, hike -- and in the case of my brother Gregor, bike -- through North Adams on their way to the summit of the tallest mountain in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

So let's make being the smallest what we all know it is: a competitive advantage.

A source of pride.

The foundation of connection and collaboration.

The recognition that we live, and work, and serve in a place that knows how to pilot, model, and test new ideas, and where we compete relentlessly for our share of public and private dollars.

A place where even modest investments of private, federal, and state resources yield powerful results that can be replicated at larger scales in other communities, and where major investments create positive, transformative change.

A place where we know our neighbors, and look out for one another.

Let's treat 'smallest' as the superlative it is.

That's why I'm fiercely proud to serve as the mayor of the smallest city in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts!

So let me close tonight with a second quote from Wendell Berry. To me it encapsulates the spirit that has animated and inspired the residents of North Adams for generations, one that I hope will continue to do so for decades to come as we work together to build our future.

Berry wrote,

“All right, every day ain't going to be the best day of your life, don't worry about that. If you stick to it you hold the possibility open that you will have better days.”

Here's to knowing that our best days are ahead of us.

And to recommitting ourselves to a shared purpose: to sticking to it, to sticking together, and to making that possibility a reality for our beloved City of North Adams, and all its residents and visitors.

Thank you! And let's get to work.