



**Mayor Jon Mitchell**  
**State of the City Address**  
**Zeiterion Performing Arts Center**  
**Wednesday, April 8, 2026**  
**[remarks as prepared]**

Thank you for that introduction, Don, and many thanks to Webster Bank for its enduring lead sponsorship, Michelle Hantman and the United Way of Greater New Bedford for helping to organize today's event, and all of our sponsors and today's performers.

I'd also like to acknowledge City Council President Pereira and the members of the Council, School Committee members, county officials, our state legislative delegation, District Attorney Quinn, Auditor DiZoglio, and former Mayor Bullard. I thank them for their partnership and the work we do on behalf of the residents of New Bedford.

Finally, thank you to the Executive Director of the Zeiterion Performing Arts Center, Rosemary Gill, along with her staff and board of directors for hosting us today. We took a leap of faith by moving this event to the Z this year. We thought it would be an opportunity to show off the place after its eighteen-month renovation, but they did such a fabulous job that it's just too easy for the audience to take their eyes off the speaker and admire the splendor. So for the sake of my own self-esteem, I hope you've already had a good look at it.

Some who attended the Z's reopening events have expressed that the rebirth of this place feels like a breath of fresh air amid all the turmoil in the world. And there's something to that. Whatever your politics, whatever your worldview, you no doubt would agree that America is living through a period of

prolonged uncertainty. Our country slogged through a once-in-a-century pandemic and related economic instability, which were followed by major regional wars, apprehension over AI technologies whose eventual effect on everyday life remains anyone's guess, and a state of perpetual polarization among the people responsible for governing the Nation.

The pervasive anxiety about the future of our country has pushed the discussion of national issues all too often to the local level. America has seen local elections decided by candidates' allegiances to national political figures, ordinary school board deliberations devolve into cultural debates that bear little relevance to teaching and learning, and city hall politics more sharply divided along ideological lines. It's as though that famous observation by former Speaker of the House Tip O'Neil has been turned on its head; that is, it seems that in many cities and towns across America, all politics are national.

It's unhealthy. These trends have pushed Americans away from one another, and in some places, it's crowded out the basic, often critical work of municipal government.

With a deeply divided electorate in recent years, New Bedford is vulnerable to these pressures. Our city cannot afford to be consumed by the sound and fury of national politics, much less allow national divisions to open fissures here that would undermine our ability to work together. After decades of post-industrial decline, New Bedford has come too far recently to be distracted from the hard work of rebuilding itself.

I'm pleased to say that as difficult as it has been at times, we have maintained our focus. Our discipline has paid off.

Consider what we've accomplished together just since last year's state of the city address, despite the contentiousness at the national level:

We brought the Star Store back after its shuttering, setting it on a path to redevelopment.

Passenger rail service between New Bedford and Boston resumed.

The Whaling Museum broke ground on a new building that in effect will be a free-standing art museum.

The first major offshore wind project in America was completed, right out of the Port of New Bedford.

Another downtown hotel was announced.

A development partner was selected for the Advanced Manufacturing Campus.

The City's comprehensive plan for the next ten years was completed.

The Quest Center's marine technology accelerator started construction, as did the new Congdon-DeValles School, Leonard's Wharf, and the 195 Viaduct – all major projects.

Design work began on two others, the new airport tower and terminal, as well as the New Bedford-Fairhaven Bridge.

The city's next, sure-to-become iconic work of public art, the Herman Melville statue, is being forged.

New apartment buildings, new restaurants like the National Club, and new zoo exhibits all opened.

And of course, this beautiful theater re-opened.

All of this, since last year.

I'd also be remiss not to point out that after the largest snowfall to hit Southern New England in recorded history, New Bedford bounced back faster than anybody.

New Bedford is running up the score. It hasn't happened by accident or luck. It's because we've kept our eye on the ball. Despite all the distractions, we've remained focused on a sound strategy, which has rested on three pillars of collective effort.

First, city government must nurture a high quality of life by delivering reliable, effective and affordable services.

Second, city government and the business community must work together constantly to strengthen the region's economic competitiveness.

Third, all of us, working together, must reinforce our collective sense of place, which energizes each of us to do the work necessary to improve it.

I am here today to say that we must stick with it. Block by block, we're building the foundation of a thriving city at the center of a vibrant region, a city in which everyone not only feels welcomed, but recognizes they have a role to play – a city that all will be proud to call home.

Let's discuss how that strategy will enable us to achieve that future.

## **Quality of Life**

### Public Safety

As for the first pillar, a high quality of life is grounded in personal safety. If we fail to ensure the safety of our residents, everything else becomes harder, if not impossible. Public spaces and even private ones can't be fully enjoyed, small businesses can't be as profitable, and students can't focus on school.

The good news is that we've enjoyed historic improvements in public safety. Thanks to the sustained, detail-oriented efforts of the police department, the DA's Office and our code enforcement team, since 2011 violent crime in New Bedford has fallen by 66%, while property crime is down 53%. After a time when gun violence had become a routine feature of urban life and residents had lost confidence in government's ability to do anything about it, New Bedford now is an unmistakably safer city.

The challenge for us now is not to rest on these laurels. The success of any police department, especially in an urban setting, depends on its ability to

command the trust of the people it serves. That trust must be earned all the time.

Chief Thody has hit the ground running in his first year on the job, bringing a wealth of experience from his successful tenure as chief in Hartford, Connecticut. He's already launched himself into the work of modernizing the department's policies and procedures, establishing clear accountability for professionalism and performance, strengthening its capacity to collect, analyze and act on data, and expanding training opportunities for officers. The goal of these and other initiatives is to create a healthy professional culture which is essential to sustaining high performance. It is also encouraging that the recruitment of new officers has significantly improved, enabling the department to gradually build back its ranks to pre-pandemic levels.

Our police have had a reliable partner in District Attorney Tom Quinn. He's not seeking reelection this year, marking the end of a long and distinguished career as a prosecutor. He's helped to make New Bedford, and all of Bristol County safer. Thank you, Tom.

The decline in crime here has received considerable attention, but so should the more recent decline in structure fires. A few years ago, the fire department reconstituted its fire prevention office, and began using data to target inspections on the buildings most prone to fire. It also ramped up its education efforts at the neighborhood level. The effort has exceeded everyone's expectations. In the last three years, the incidence of structure fires annually in New Bedford has fallen 43%. This translates directly into lives and property saved. I'd like to thank Chief Medeiros's data-driven management and the determination of our firefighters to stop fires before they happen.

I want to salute our other emergency agencies for their exceptional work. Emergency Management Director Brian Nobrega has put in countless hours updating the City's hurricane preparedness plans and training. During

the recent blizzard, he did exceptional work in facilitating the nearly full restoration of power in the city in just two days.

During the blizzard, Emergency Medical Services responded to 65 emergency medical calls. In the face of 37 inches of snow and seventy-mile-an-hour gusts, the department's get-it-done attitude enabled it to provide timely care.

All of these departments continue to support the work of the Health Department and the Greater New Bedford Opioid Task Force in reigning in the scourge of addiction. We're encouraged by the recent decline in overdoses, but we will not downshift on our commitment to prevent them in the first place. Toward that end, with the help of funds from court settlements involving opioid manufacturers, we'll expand our street outreach programs, especially in the area around the City's bus station. This work will get more people suffering from addiction back on track.

### Housing and Neighborhoods

There's more to do in our neighborhoods, of course. For one thing, they can't thrive if someone with a steady job can't afford to live in them.

We've been faithfully implementing our housing plan, which struck a balance between the need to make housing available to those seeking it, while not allowing New Bedford to become a place of last resort for people displaced from nearby towns. No city of course can afford to let that happen to itself. The key is to remove barriers to the development of new housing at every income level. But everyone also must understand that the housing market here isn't magically fenced off at the municipal border, and that New Bedford's suburbs also need to promote the construction of rental housing. It's a regional problem that demands a regional solution.

The implementation of the plan under the leadership of our housing director Josh Amaral is yielding what the plan intended. In the last two years,

250 new housing units have been constructed in the city, and there is a pipeline of approximately 1500 more. Thanks to the dogged efforts of Jordan Latham and Ashley Eaton, in the two years since we launched our Vacant Property Initiative, 170 properties identified as vacant have been brought back to occupancy or are in active rehabilitation. These are housing units that are already built.

We've also cleared barriers to housing production. The building department under Danny Romanowicz, along with members of our Permitting Performance Team, continue to streamline processes to make permitting quicker and easier. We also have submitted to the City Council a simple amendment to the ordinance governing stormwater management that will allow DPI to reduce the time and cost of stormwater requirements for large housing developments. We have advanced several long overdue zoning reforms that will make it easier for developers to know exactly what they have to do to build housing. I wish to thank Jen Carloni and her team in the Planning Department for developing these reforms, and I salute the City Council for its support for them.

### Public Infrastructure

Housing is important to the health of any neighborhood, but so are the spaces between the housing. Our residents deserve to live in a clean city with well-designed and visually appealing public spaces and effective infrastructure.

The City's infrastructure has come a long way. When I got into office, the City had no capital plan. Among other things, this meant that there was no routine investment of city funds in roadways. None. We relied on state funds, which weren't – and aren't – enough. It is imperative that cities constantly reinvest in themselves. And for a long time, for whatever reason, New Bedford was not doing that. The City's streets and roadways began to deteriorate to the point where the lack of investment became evident to everyone.

So we established a capital plan and the position of Chief Financial Officer to oversee it. Investing in the physical plant of the city has become institutionalized. One of the most important practices we established has been the City's annual commitment to road maintenance, which has gone from zero, to \$3 million annually. The condition of the streets still has a way to go, but it is gradually improving.

But things are getting more expensive. The cost of public construction projects has gone up nearly 50% since 2018. We need to understand that the city's capital spending has to keep up. Toward that end, in the next capital improvement plan, I intend to propose that we raise the city's annual investment in roadways to \$4 million, a thirty-three percent increase.

I am also announcing today that the City has entered into an agreement with Eversource that will help us catch up with our paving needs. Over the next two years, Eversource will be upgrading an underground main transmission line across the city, and the company has agreed, at our insistence, that it will repave – at its expense – the entirety of the corridor curb-to-curb, even though it is not otherwise legally required to do so. If we had to do the paving, it would cost the city about \$25 million. It's a good deal for New Bedford.

We've also invested tens of millions of dollars to make sure that the city's drinking water is safe and affordable, and that our wastewater system will continue to function as our residents expect. In the last few years, we have aggressively taken advantage of funds made available by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to remove lead water lines, which present a public safety risk that the city must constantly manage. By the time the next phase of line replacements is complete, we'll have removed over 98% of those lines, a far higher percentage than most cities in the Northeast. I want to thank Jamie Ponte and his team for their thoughtful and diligent management of these major infrastructure investments, above and below the ground.

And while we're on the topic, as you've come upon construction projects across the city, have you ever wondered, "When is that project going

to be done?” We want you to be able to get the answer more easily. This year we will launch a digital dashboard on the City’s website that will offer updates to the City’s ongoing public works projects. That increased transparency I believe will give the public confidence that we’re spending their money on things that are needed.

## Education

A major element in a city’s quality of life is the performance of its schools. And we have many people in the room who have a present stake in them. Today we have students representing: New Bedford High School . . . GNB Voc-Tech . . . Global Learning Charter . . . Alma Del Mar . . . Our Sisters’ School . . . , Nativity Prep . . . and UMass Dartmouth. I’m really glad you are here today.

Let me say a few words about the school district whose committee I chair. Over the last few years, the biggest challenge in the New Bedford Public Schools has been the lingering effects of the pandemic. The most glaring problem, here and across urban America, was the dramatically increased rates of chronic absenteeism. You don’t have to be an education expert to know that when a student is out of school for long stretches of time, that student is unlikely to learn much. The longer it goes on, the further the student may fall behind, leaving that student less likely to graduate and get on a career track.

The school department has worked double-time to pull kids back into school. Under Superintendent O’Leary’s leadership, and with the support of the School Committee’s Academic Achievement Subcommittee, the district delved into the data and talked to students to understand why some were not showing up to school. The solutions included a combination of carrots and sticks, such as changes to the school calendar, more direct outreach to families, and when necessary, holding some parents accountable in juvenile court. Perhaps the most important measure was a determined effort to

convey to students and their families that we love having you in school, and we miss you when you're not here.

The approach has yielded results. The district's chronic absenteeism rate has fallen below the pre-pandemic rate and is poised to continue falling. The four-year graduation rate is rising and now stands at 87.5% percent – a far cry from the 58% back in 2012.

The work in our schools will be supported by renovations to the school buildings themselves. In recent years, nearly every one of the district's 24 schools has undergone a major upgrade. In its first year in operation, the new central kitchen has modernized the provision of student meals across the district, and the new student health center, which will be named in honor of the late School Committee member Bruce Oliveira, is scheduled to be opened later this year.

Many here no doubt have seen the construction of the new Congdon-DeValles School in the South End, which was designed by T2 Architecture, a nationally renowned design firm whose offices are two blocks from this theater. It will be fabulous when it opens in the middle of the next school year. The principal at the current Congdon School, Mary Carvalho, and her team run one of the best schools in the region in a 120-year-old building, and I can't wait to see what they can do in a brand new one.

Over at Voc-Tech, under Mike Watson's leadership, the school is making Greater New Bedford more economically competitive, and it is opening the doors of opportunity for students across the region. Voc-Tech is the largest vocational high school in Massachusetts, and one of the oldest in the country. Its staying power is attributable to its staff's skill and dedication, but also its ability to stay on top of the ever-changing needs of the region's employers. They have their finger on the pulse of our regional economy, and it shows.

A great example is Voc-Tech's co-op program, which continues to create opportunities for students and employers alike. I'd like to give a shoutout to its leader, Henry DeGrace, who has enabled countless students to realize

professional success. This work is an extension of his career in the Army, which featured his service in the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division in Somalia and in the invasion of Iraq. Thank you, Henry, for making a difference in the lives of your students through your work and your example of selfless service.

One of the ways we can enable students to perform at their best in school is to ensure they get off to a fast start. New Bedford has been in the early childhood education business for over fifty years, and now there's a broader consensus among childhood development experts that high quality programs are even more important than originally believed. The early years of course are when the brain develops fastest. Services to improve thinking, language and social skills during early brain development can help negate learning disabilities and reduce, and in many cases eliminate, the future need for special education. Investments in these services can have a huge payoff for both students and the cities they grow up in.

In the last couple of years, we've stepped up our early childhood efforts with two major initiatives. This school year, Superintendent O'Leary converted the Parker Elementary School into the City's primary center for early childhood learning, bringing under one roof several preexisting programs. The facility is now thriving. In addition, the United Way has convened a group of early childhood providers, medical professionals at South Coast Health, and various government and non-profit agencies into a formal service network, whose purpose is to foster communication among everyone who has some responsibility for the well-being of young children. This group is energized to get down to work.

What their network and programs need now is a quarterback. Based on our research on approaches that work in other cities, we believe the best course would be to create a position of Early Childhood Coordinator in city government that would serve as a nerve center for the network. The idea behind it is that if everyone is talking to one another, the members of the network can identify learning disabilities more readily, and expert providers can intervene with services in a timely way. I hasten to add that the position

won't be funded out of the general fund, but through a partnership with the school department. Investments like this today could pay off enormously tomorrow.

### City Finances

That we are not assigning this position to the general fund reflects our caution over the city's budget. In my budget address to the City Council next month, I'll have an opportunity to offer more detail about the City's financial outlook. But for present purposes, it is important for everyone to understand that like most other organizations – public or private, large or small – city government is facing intensifying financial pressures.

Some of it is attributable to what everyone has experienced the last few years, which is the rising cost of gas, electricity and other goods, and these are bills that municipalities must pay, too. Salaries likewise have gone up, driven by collective bargaining obligations.

Another of those bills is healthcare premiums, which is projected to rise ten percent this year and by at least as much next year. This of course is not sustainable.

Nor is our situation with the cost of our annual employee pension contributions. This, too, will rise by just over 10 percent this year.

These trends have forced the city in each of the last two years to use surplus funds from the previous year to close budget gaps. That is a less than ideal financial practice.

At this point, the city is looking at an \$18 million budget gap for next year, which is about twice as much as it's ever been at this point in the process.

As I said, these pressures are not new, and we've been able to hold them at bay for a while. City government has become more efficient in recent years, especially through the adoption of performance management

practices, the expert guidance we've received from Bloomberg Philanthropies, and the work of the city's Director of Data Management, Christina Cotsoridis.

Despite these gains, our ability to pay the bills has become more constrained. For many years now, the state has been gradually closing off the spigot of unrestricted state aid. This year we received about the same amount we did in 2008, which is remarkable given how much everything has gone up in price since then. As state aid has fallen in real terms, city government has had no choice but to rely more on property tax revenue. The situation is not fair to property taxpayers. I am committed to working with the Council so that the City can manage these obligations, but we can no longer avoid tough choices.

## **Economic Development**

The second pillar of our strategy is to strengthen the City's and the region's economic competitiveness. As you've heard me say before, we in Greater New Bedford are competing in a global economy for investment and jobs, and if we don't compete effectively, they will go elsewhere. Because we are not close enough to a major metro simply to tether ourselves to its economy, the task is entirely up to us. So compete we must, which is fine by me. We in New Bedford compete to win.

How we compete must be guided by a well thought-out strategy, and we have one. The City's new Comprehensive Plan includes a detailed economic plan for the next decade, which was developed with the input of many of the region's business leaders. Its basic approach is consistent with what we've been doing all along, but with a fresh update.

Much of the plan doesn't depart from what you'd expect in cities that center a regional economy. It calls upon us to cultivate small business formation and growth, enhance the vitality of the downtown core, build and maintain useful infrastructure, and support and help form anchor institutions. The nub of the strategy is to build on New Bedford's particular strengths.

Instead of chasing fads or imitating what might work in other places, we build on local differences and turn them into greater strengths. In other words, the trick is to do more of the things we're already good at.

New Bedford's connection to the water represents perhaps its greatest set of locational advantages. That's why we will continue to devote so much effort to bolster the competitiveness of the fishing, offshore wind, and other maritime industries.

We have put all of our maritime industries in a stronger position because of the historic amount of investment in port infrastructure in the past twelve years. Led by Gordon Carr and his team at the Port Authority, we have been able to shepherd a total of over \$1.3 billion in new or upgraded piers, harbor dredging, and environmental remediation, with more to come. That's why you've seen so many cranes across the waterfront.

Our support for the fishing industry remains essential. New Bedford of course is America's high-grossing commercial fishing port, and much of what we do on the waterfront depends on its continued success. As we always have, we will advocate for federal policies that reflect a fair consideration of the industry's interests, whether in the policies that allow the reasonable stacking of scallop permits, the responsible siting of wind farms, the opening of fishing grounds, or excessive tariffs on imported seafood that is processed here.

The offshore wind industry also has a home in New Bedford. Given the President's personal hostility to the industry, it is safe to assume that no major projects will advance in the thirty-three months remaining in his term. But in New Bedford we play the long game. With the development of AI data centers, the U.S. is facing a growing electricity shortage in the coming years, and it will be necessary to build out more, ideally renewable, sources of electricity, and that includes offshore wind. No other East Coast port has the infrastructure and a workforce better suited for the offshore wind industry, and we must be prepared to make the most of these advantages when federal policy changes.

And I can tell you that Jen Downing from the New Bedford Ocean Cluster is already working on it.

One of the more exciting developments in the last couple of years, which Jen also is helping to drive, is New Bedford's emergence as a center for marine technology. We're building out more of what they need right now: a marine accelerator at the Quest Center, which is almost complete, a digital twin of the harbor with UMass-Dartmouth to perform various simulations, and a mobile testing facility in partnership with the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute.

New Bedford Research and Robotics already is playing a key role in these efforts, and it's really just getting started. With funding from a variety of sources, it is rapidly building out its space on Purchase Street, and start-ups are already moving in. It's founder, Mark Parsons, had run a similar robotics accelerator in Brooklyn at the Pratt Institute, one of America's leading engineering schools. The program was successful, but he thought he could have a more significant impact back home in New Bedford, so he pulled up tent pegs and moved his family back here. In a city that has long struggled to attract and nurture a tech sector, he has brought instant credibility to our effort, which is matched only by his passion to create real opportunities for our residents. Thank you, Mark, for returning here to make a difference.

### River District

As we think about New Bedford's coastline, we should consider the potential of the areas that are not primarily industrial. There is tremendous value there, too. All around the world people are drawn to bodies of water to live, work and play, and because they tend to be willing to pay more to have that connection, waterfronts are attractive places to invest.

We need to take full advantage of the entire seventeen miles of the City's coastline. The right planning and public investments can lead to private investment, job opportunities, and more vibrant neighborhoods.

This is exactly what we've been doing for the last decade in the South End, and on the Peninsula in particular. By building the HarborWalk and CoveWalk, we made available to the public a connection to Buzzards Bay that had been walled off from them for a half century. We invested millions into our beaches, Hazelwood Park and Fort Tabor Park, the roadways along the water, so that they look great and work well. It has led to major private investments like the Kilburn Mill complex, the redevelopment of the shopping plaza across the street, new housing, and Cisco Brewery, along with the hundreds of jobs that came with them. More people have been drawn to that part of the City than ever before, so much so that parking is now an issue we have to manage.

We now have an opportunity to pursue similar goals in the Near North End and its potential connection to the Acushnet River. Next year, the Environmental Protection Agency will wrap up its billion-dollar, forty-year long, cleanup of the river and harbor. This is historic news, but we're not waiting until then to get moving. Thanks to the skill and determination of our Resilience Director Michele Paul and her team, in the coming months we will submit detailed permitting plans for the long-awaited RiverWalk project, which will begin construction next year.

Just like in the South End, the public won't be walled off from the water any longer. You'll finally get to take in the views of the river, and just imagine what you'll be able to see. I'll tell you what I've seen. When I was out on a boat tour with the EPA a couple of years ago, I saw a bald eagle fly by. It turns out they've nested on the Acushnet side of the river. Another cool feature of the project is that once the RiverWalk is connected to the rest of the Blue Lane, you'll be able to walk, bike or run the full coastline of the City.

But we shouldn't think of the RiverWalk strictly as a recreational asset, as terrific as it will be, but as an anchor for the redevelopment of an entirely new district of the North End that is oriented around the river. This district already has in place many of the elements an urban planner would hope for in a thriving neighborhood: dense, mixed-use neighborhoods, large employers,

beautiful public spaces like Riverside Park, and proximity to the highway. There's also a huge opportunity for recreational boating, and you'll start to see that beginning this calendar year. As the EPA winds down its cleanup of the harbor, new parcels along the river will become available for development, and what happens on those parcels will be key to tying the whole district together. All in all, building out this district will not be an overnight exercise, but if we are deliberate in our planning, this new River District could change the equation for the Near North End. For a part of the city that has borne the burden of shuttered factories, highway construction, and environmental contamination, it's a long time in coming.

### Off the Waterfront

The water isn't of course the only place where New Bedford has advantages to accentuate. Arts and culture have long been among our primary economic strengths, and the recent investments of ARPA funds into cultural facilities the last few years will make them more so. The Z of course is now done, as is the Madeiran Heritage Museum; the Rotch-Jones-Duff House is nearly complete; the Whaling Museum's expansion will be done next, which will be followed by the New Bedford Art Museum's expansion. And we're working on bringing the Star Store fully into this mix of cultural institutions.

Then there's also the seed funding we grant to individual artists through our cultural fund. And it's no surprise that thanks to our creative strategist Margo Saulnier and the City's numerous working artists, New Bedford continues to be recognized nationally for its leadership in the arts.

Then there's the manufacturing sector. Most people are aware of brand name manufacturers like the Acushnet Company and Joseph Abboud, but there are over one hundred manufacturers in New Bedford, and they employ about 12.5% of the city's workforce, which is about twice the rate of the state. With the release of our manufacturing road map, Derek Santos and the Economic Development Council have focused on attracting manufacturers in sectors that already have roots here, supporting the growth of existing

manufacturers, and promoting urban and small-scale manufacturing. The timing of this effort is opportune now that we have a development partner for the Advanced Manufacturing Campus. Smaller sites are becoming available as well.

## **Connection to Place**

So we've talked about how city government can support a high quality of life through the services it provides, and how we can enable businesses to be more economically competitive. But the third pillar on which our City's future rests may be the most important. It doesn't have to do with what government can or should provide, but what residents, businesses and everyone who professes a love for their city are prepared to do in its service.

Some 2,500 years ago, Plato observed that, "A City is what it is, because its people are what they are." If a city is to thrive, if it is to achieve its aspirations, if it is to long endure, its residents must understand they can and should contribute to the greater good.

Citizenship is rooted in the idea that we have obligations to others. In a city, these obligations are tied to the place itself. It's not just the city's location on the map or its physical attributes. It's more about our relationships to the people, institutions, and the stories associated with the place that prompt us to call it home.

Those relationships can arise from different sources. Maybe you grew up or your family has its roots in the city; maybe it's where your friends live or where you work; or it's simply a place you enjoy. Whatever your connection, if the place feels like it's part of you, you owe it to yourself to cherish it.

Think about the theater we are sitting in. The project to remake it was ambitious; the goal wasn't simply to preserve the condition of the facility, but to make the space more beautiful and its operation state-of-the-art. It was plain to everyone that it would be expensive – \$37 million ultimately – and that raising that kind of money would take a while. Although it was reasonable to

assume that city government could help pay for it, most of the funding would have to come from elsewhere.

We know now the happy ending. Here we are. But as we gather in this magnificent space to discuss where we want to take our city and how we can get there, we'd do well to consider the choices made by the people who contributed to this project.

They chose to spend their time, many for countless hours over a decade, to organize, plan and persuade. Every one of them no doubt had something else they could have been doing.

They chose to donate. We all like money, and our first instinct isn't to give it away.

They chose to ask others to volunteer and donate. As we all know, it can be awkward to impose on your friends.

They chose to stake their reputations on the project. There was no guarantee of success, and they knew full well that it can be painful to have your name associated with failure.

They chose not to compromise on the details. If the final product looked average, that wouldn't be good enough; a great city like New Bedford deserves a great theater.

They made these and other choices – these sacrifices – not because they were expecting a financial payout, a prestigious award, or the adulation of others.

They did it:

So that those who attend shows here could connect with their fellow residents in a moment of shared joy, and thereby strengthen the bonds of community;

That students could have opportunities not available in the classroom to learn and grow;

That visitors could experience something memorable, and say to themselves, the Zeiterion is fabulous and so is New Bedford.

That the city could have an institution that can continue to enrich the lives of the city's residents long after we're gone.

This is what it took to build a first-rate performing arts center, and it's what it takes to build a great city. I want to thank all of them not only for giving us this fabulous space, but for offering an important example of civic mindedness we'd all do well to emulate.

And if you are one of those people I'm talking about, the ones who played a role in making this happen, please stand and let us thank you.

To all of the students here, and to the young at heart, there is always opportunity to do great deeds for your city just like them. And remember, even if you live in one of the surrounding towns, New Bedford is your city.

If you've been sitting on the sidelines, I want you to know that your City – our City – needs you to get in the game.

Everyone has something to offer. Volunteer time to a worthy cause. We're all busy, but you can surely carve out some time. Join a neighborhood organization to help improve your corner of the City, or even start your own. And, of course, vote, or better yet, run for office.

If you are a business leader, chances are that you have more to offer than most. Remember that when you step up for your city, you are helping lay the foundation for both your own business's success and that of your employees and their families.

New Bedford is a special place in America. There's nowhere quite like it. And there is no time like the present for us to roll up our sleeves and get down to the work of making it better. Let's get to it.

Thank you, and God bless the City of New Bedford.