

A special meeting of the Board of Aldermen was held Tuesday, February 17, 2026, at 7:00 p.m. in the aldermanic chamber.

President Lori Wilshire presided; City Clerk Dan Healey recorded.

Prayer was offered by City Clerk Dan Healey; Alderman Paula Johnson led in the Pledge to the Flag.

Let's start the meeting by taking a roll call attendance.

The roll call was taken with 12 members of the Board of Aldermen present: Alderman Klee, Alderman Chess (via Zoom), Alderwoman Smith, Alderman Thibeault, Alderman O'Brien, Alderman Gregg, Alderman Sullivan, Alderman Sennott, Alderman Johnson, Alderwoman Kelly, Alderman Morgan, and Alderman Wilshire.

Alderman Clemons, Alderman Dowd, and Alderman Lopez were recorded absent.

Mayor James W. Donchess and Corporation Counsel Steve Bolton, were also in attendance.

Mayor's State of the City Address

Mayor Donchess

Good evening, President Wilshire, Vice President Clemons maybe on TV or on Zoom, members of the Board of Aldermen, City Attorney Steve Bolton, Chief Buxton, Chief Rourke, city Directors, and Nashuans from every neighborhood of our City.

Each year I am called upon as Mayor to report to our community regarding the state of our City.

I am proud to say that Nashua is succeeding. We have good schools, a safe city, and a vibrant business community. Our police and fire departments are the best in New England. Our business community is adding jobs and keeping the unemployment rate low. Our schools are succeeding despite the lowest level of State school aid of all 50 States.

I want to welcome our four new members of the Board of Aldermen. You will learn a lot and find service to your City to be a rewarding experience. I want to emphasize that all of the progress we have made here in Nashua has been a team effort – I work together in partnership with the Board of Aldermen, with the Board of Education, with the volunteer members of our boards and commissions, and with our City employees.

A Culture of Innovation

Over the years, innovation has been a key to Nashua's success.

It was in the Nashua Millyard that Nashua's culture of innovation began. The textile mills and the 3-mile-long canal which the Nashua Manufacturing Company built along the Nashua River represented the cutting-edge of early 19th century technology.

Public records show that immigrants came to Nashua to work in the mills and realize the American dream. They came from many countries – Canada, Russia, Lithuania, Greece, Ireland, Germany, Mexico, Sweden, Poland, Austria, and elsewhere. Nashua's immigrants then and now have been working to build a bright future for themselves, their families, and our City.

Textron eventually acquired the mills, but in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the company closed and threw thousands of people out of work. A group of civic minded people led by Hugh Gregg, Eliot Carter, Francis Murphy, Charles Barker, and others formed the non-profit Nashua Foundation and bought the mills along with what is now Mine Falls Park. With a characteristic innovative spirit, they attracted new industries – like Sanders Associates, Sprague Electric, and Edgecomb Steel – to the abandoned mills.

By the 1980s, many of the Millyard businesses found the multistory 19th century buildings too inefficient and they started moving elsewhere. Mills 1 through 7 right on the Nashua River were deteriorating, and were empty, or were used only for dead storage.

Nashua needed to innovate again. In 1987 and 1988 – long before mill-to-housing conversions were common — Nashua competed for federal Housing Development Action Grants or HODAG funds to convert seven mill buildings

into what is now Clocktower Place. Nashua won \$23 million in HODAG grants and the empty mills were converted into 350 units of housing of which 30 percent were affordable. Now almost 40 years later, those 100 affordable units are still being rented to qualifying families.

With the same spirit of renewal, we have recently created the new Renaissance Park, and the boardwalks, and walkways along the Nashua River. For a very long time, the river was hidden. It was polluted in Fitchburg and elsewhere upriver by paper mill, tannery, and other industrial waste. Environmental laws eventually resulted in the cleanup of the river.

Now we are showcasing the Nashua River for the enjoyment of all Nashuans. In future years we can extend the riverfront improvements all the way to Mine Falls Park with the revenue from new housing on the NIMCO and WH Bagshaw sites.

Nashua's Parks

Over the years many people have said to me, "My favorite thing about Nashua is our parks." Our parks include now our riverfront, and also Greeley Park, Mine Falls Park, Roby Park, and other smaller neighborhood parks. Ninety thousand people a year visit Greeley Park and 60,000 people a year visit each of Mine Falls and Roby.

I would like to take a moment to thank the Morin family for donating so generously to our City's parks in memory of their son Jeff Morin. The Morins have given funds at Roby Park for the playing field, and at the playground for the grass turf and the sunshade. And in the coming years, they will be providing funds to help pay for a splash pad at the park we have renamed the Jeff Morin Park, which is at the corner of Central and Pine Streets. We hope kids from the Tree Streets neighborhood can enjoy the splash pad all summer.

For a long time, we have had a Mine Falls Advisory Committee to help guide us with the care of Mine Falls Park as well to organize volunteer clean-up days and other activities. I want to thank Chairman Steven Kenney and the other members of the Mine Falls Park Advisory Committee for taking such an active role in maintaining the park.

Based upon the success of the Mine Falls Advisory Committee, we have recently started a Greeley Park Advisory Committee. I hope that the Greeley Park group will look at the whole park and how well it is addressing the interests and needs of today's park visitors.

Adding Critical Housing

A shortage of housing continues to be a major challenge for us in Nashua as well as across New Hampshire and New England. I focus on this issue every day. We have made considerable progress with new housing at Riverfront Landing, the Marshall Street Apartments, Lofts 34, the High Street Lofts, Monahan Manor, the Indian Head Bank building, Taylor Pointe on Bridge Street, the nearly completed 75 units of affordable housing on Crown Street, and various smaller projects.

We also have new impactful projects in the works. At the former 40-acre Mohawk Tannery site, work has begun on the cleanup of the waste. Over 500 units of new housing, including apartments and condominiums — 20 percent affordable — will follow. Matt Sullivan, Celia Leonard, and Sam Durfee have done a great job in moving this project forward.

We also are working with the Nashua Housing Authority to add more affordable housing at Maynard Homes on Burke Street.

In November, the City sold the former NIMCO site in the Millyard to LMG for the development of housing there and the same company has bought the adjacent WH Bagshaw site. On these two parcels, we will see the construction of at least 400 units housing, and much of it will be affordable. Also in the Millyard, the Nashua Business and Industrial Development Authority led by Chair Jason Haviland has put out a request for proposal for the development of additional housing on a City parking lot and the adjacent City-owned parcel of land.

Delay in the development of housing at a few locations continues to be a frustration. For example, seven years ago we permitted the former Corriveau Routhier site east of Main Street for the start of a new neighborhood and 230 units of housing. Yet the owner continues to hold the property for speculation.

I believe we should not delay any longer in the development of housing at the Elm Street Middle School. We sought extensive community input and given the current housing crisis, the overwhelming opinion of Nashuans is that

medium density housing is best for that site. We have narrowed the selection of the developer down to two capable companies. We can add numerous units of housing there with between 20 and 80 percent affordable. Furthermore, it costs the City more than \$300,000 per year to keep the building open with limited use.

Homelessness is a challenge related to the lack of affordable housing, although addiction and mental illness are big components of the challenge as well. Our Public Health Department led by Bobbie Bagley and LaTonya Muccioli, our Housing Services Officer, work to reduce homelessness every day. LaTonya and our community health workers are out in the City all the time working with individuals to help them find a way forward. This winter has been unusually cold. For a few years now, we have been operating an overnight warming station so people can stay out of the cold. Additionally in the near future, we will be starting a resource center on Mulberry Street to connect homeless individuals with the help they need.

Our Safe City

This past year tested our Police, Fire, and Emergency Management Departments and they have passed with flying colors. Nashua has repeatedly been recognized for being one of the safest cities in America and those accolades are due largely to the training, experience, and professionalism of our emergency personnel. We owe much to the leadership of Police Chief Kevin Rourke, Fire Chief Steve Buxton, and Emergency Management Director Emily Martuscello.

Back on September 20th of last year, a man with a gun entered the Sky Meadow Country Club while there were diners in the restaurant and a wedding reception in the event venue. He shot three people in the restaurant before being tackled by diners. Tragically he murdered Robert DeCaesar, and he injured Steve Burtman, and Brianna Surette. Our hearts go out to these victims and their families.

Our departments worked together on the City's response to this incident.

The shooter fled on foot, and our Police Department captured him in a Sky Meadow neighborhood. Our Emergency Management Department, Fire Department, and Nashua Transit evacuated almost 200 people from Sky Meadow to the nearby Spit Brook Road Fire Station. Together, they singled out the eye witnesses and transported them to the Police Station for extensive interviews. They then transported the remainder of the evacuees to the nearby Sheraton Hotel where Public Health employees and others found transportation home for the people.

Our safety departments worked so effectively that night because they had trained together for a potential active shooter incident. I take great pride in this overall stellar response. Our team's performance in this crisis was so effective that other cities have asked our team to guide them regarding how they can develop a similar response capability.

Then at about 7 a.m. on December 2nd of last year, a major fire started in an apartment building on Vine Street and spread to another building on Ash Street. It took hours for firefighters to subdue the flames. Fire departments from the entire region responded. Emergency Management evacuated 35 people. Those with no immediate place to go were taken in by Public Health at the nearby overnight warming station at the Elm Street School.

Thankfully no lives were lost and there were no major injuries to any of our firefighters. Again, the professionalism of our safety personnel paid off.

Then on February 2, there was a gas leak at the Greater Nashua Mental Health building on Amherst Street. The Fire Department responded immediately with a four-firefighter team. As the firefighters approached the building, there was a major explosion at the gas meter. Again, our first responder departments worked together to make sure that no one was left in the building and to put out the fire. Thankfully, no one was killed. We are continuing to monitor the recovery of our three firefighters who were injured by the explosion.

Over the past few years, the City has adopted various measures to support our safety personnel and improve safety for all. We replaced the traffic preemption system so that fire trucks can enter intersections with safety during emergency calls. We have funded additional police officers. We provided body cameras to our police to document all interactions with the public. We added social worker Leah Elliot to the Police Department to help officers defuse domestic, mental health, and other emotionally charged situations. We have begun annual cancer screenings for our firefighters. We repurposed the former Public Works offices across from the police station for a new police training center and we are seeking to move and improve the fire training facility.

Nashua's Schools

Our schools are vital to the future of our City and are essential in attracting the young families we need to make sure that Nashua remains a great city for decades to come. Under the leadership of Superintendent Mario Andrade and Board of Ed. President Jen Bishop, our schools are helping our 9,500 school children succeed and are preparing them for careers and real life.

Our high schools have 18 Advanced Placement courses - more than all other New Hampshire high schools except one.

And when it comes to a group of students that need a lot of help – kids whose first language is not English – Nashua schools have been remarkably successful. There are about 1,600 ELL students and 49 different languages spoken by Nashua students. Over the past three years, the math and reading scores for English learners in grades three through eight have improved dramatically demonstrating the impact which our teachers are having.

Sunset Heights Elementary School was recently recognized as a Nationally Distinguished School for exceptional academic performance and growth.

Our students are being recognized for many outstanding accomplishments. Ameya Kharade of Nashua South won the First Place Grand Award at the annual Regeneron International Science and Engineering Fair for developing an AI-driven framework for brain aging analysis. In the Samsung Solve for Tomorrow competition, the five-member team from Nashua South was named the New Hampshire State Winner. From Nashua North, there are two National Merit Semifinalists and four National Merit Commended Students.

Property Taxes

High property taxes continue to challenge us here in Nashua and in cities and towns across New Hampshire. The property tax problem is largely the result of decisions by the State of New Hampshire over the course of many years. The biggest culprit is the low level of school aid – so low that the New Hampshire Supreme Court has repeatedly held that the Legislature is violating the New Hampshire Constitution. The State's constitutional duty is to pay for an "adequate education" for our children. If the State paid for the state average cost per student of about \$21,000 per year, property taxes would be cut across New Hampshire by 60 – 60 percent or almost \$5,000 for the typical Nashua homeowner. To make matters worse, the Legislature is devoting new money to paying for the voucher program. That is paying the tuition for students in private schools at a cost of \$61 million for the coming year and rising.

The State of New Hampshire needs to do much better for our children.

But the lack of school aid is not the only issue. The State continues to violate its legal obligation to pay for 35 percent of municipal pension costs – the promise made and enshrined in law when the State created the State pension system. The State's breach of this obligation has cost Nashua taxpayers a cumulative total of almost \$100 million.

Yet when the State has had the chance to use funds that could go for school aid, pension costs, or other municipal aid, it has instead given tax relief to large corporations and wealthy individuals rather than to hardworking New Hampshire families.

For example, the Legislature has repeatedly cut business taxes for large corporations costing \$200 million annually in lost revenue. And it entirely eliminated the Interest and Dividends Tax paid mostly by wealthy individuals, costing lost revenue of almost \$200 million per year. If these funds had been used for property tax relief in some form, property taxes across New Hampshire would be cut by 10 percent.

We should keep in mind how much New Hampshire's cities contribute to our State economy. The Nashua/Manchester metro region generates 35 percent of the State Gross Domestic Product – something the State of New Hampshire routinely ignores in making its policy decisions.

Our Effective and Efficient City Government

Despite the challenges posed by the New Hampshire Legislature, we need to do everything we can to realize savings right here in Nashua. Seventy-five percent of our costs are wages and benefits for our employees – teachers, police officers, firefighters, Public Works personnel, and employees at City Hall, Public Health, and Public Library. So major savings cannot be realized without laying off employees and cutting services for Nashua residents.

Several years ago, we cut some top positions in City Hall to save \$300,000 per year. This year I am calling on all City departments to come up with ways to combine positions or functions across departments to save money that way.

City wages go up roughly with the cost of living but health care costs continue to skyrocket. In the current fiscal year, health care costs are up 9 1/2 percent or about \$4 million per year and we are projecting a 12 percent or \$5 million increase for next fiscal year. This \$5 million will cause a two percent property tax increase all by itself.

In addition, the City costs for the distribution portion of the electric bill paid to Eversource is projected to go up by over 20 percent next year. Natural gas prices may go up as much as 19 percent.

Another concern is school busing costs. They were up nearly 20 percent or almost \$2 million last year and they will be going up a lot again in the coming year.

Despite these headwinds, Nashua has repeatedly been recognized as one of the best run cities in the county based upon the efficiency and effectiveness of our city services and our control of costs. I want to maintain and build on that record. And I want to thank our budget team of Megan Caron, Dawn Enwright, and Tim Cummings, as well as the Budget Committee Chaired by Alderman Rick Dowd.

Community Power

Recently, we have experienced a setback with respect to New Hampshire Community Power. Over the first eighteen months beginning in 2023, Community Power saved Nashua customers about \$7 million on their electric bills. However as we have discussed beginning on this past February 1 – a few weeks ago, the rates set by New Hampshire Community Power are higher than the Eversource rates. Energy Manager Doria Brown will be keeping a close eye on this in the coming months. Any customer who wishes to pay the lower Eversource rate for the next six months can do so by going on the Nashua Community Power website or by calling New Hampshire Community Power.

Downtown

Here in New Hampshire and across the U.S., a city's downtown is a place of great importance. A downtown resonates with the community's founding, with the sweep of its history, and even the personality of the city. In Nashua when I walk across the Cotton Transfer Bridge not far from the center of town, I am always struck by the beauty and loveliness of our river and of this place. I have always felt this. I am always concerned about the health and vitality of our downtown.

With the addition of hundreds of units of new housing, our downtown is in the process of being repopulated with new residents and fresh vibrance. I take heart when I see people walking their dogs or out for a run. They are making downtown their home.

Since the spring of 2023, the Nashua Center for the Arts has become a new cornerstone for this neighborhood and it has brought hundreds of thousands of people downtown, many of them from outside of Nashua. And our new Renaissance Park promises to draw many Nashuans and visitors alike.

New businesses have opened. On West Pearl Street veteran restaurateur Elisa Drift opened Local Streets Eats, Chef Pun and Chef Tony opened PunThai Kitchen, and we welcomed the book store Bound Together. Recently, the toy store Rollo opened on Main Street.

Yet, the national affordability crisis is causing people to pull back on spending. And this contraction is being felt by downtown businesses. Reports are that there are less customers and the amount spent by each customer is lower than before.

One initiative we are undertaking to counteract the effect of the affordability crisis is the addition of more downtown events. Last July we attracted 4,600 people with the new Summer Stroll and we will hold the event again this coming July. Economic Development Director Liz Hannum and Alyssa O'Mara of the Nashua Downtown Association are working closely together to create smaller events and I know they have some great ideas.

A question regarding downtown which comes up often for me – most recently in connection with the riverfront improvements – why are you spending more money on downtown than elsewhere in the City? Let me address that. Yes, the downtown projects like the riverfront improvements are very visible. However, we are spending far more on capital projects across the City.

We have spent about \$75 million on our 10-year Paving Plan of Action which has paved and repaired hundreds of miles of streets. These improvements have touched every neighborhood and improved the daily life of all Nashuans. Lisa Fauteux, Dan Hudson, and Mark Saunders have done a great job in making this happen.

Also, the biggest capital project over the past 10 years has been the middle school upgrade plan which – at a total cost of \$123 million – fully renovated and modernized the Pennichuck and Fairgrounds Middle Schools and built the new Brian McCarthy Middle School. These schools serve all neighborhoods of the City. In addition to that, we have recently spent \$16 million improving the Birch Hill and the Main Dunstable Elementary Schools in two of our neighborhoods.

Improving Nashua

There are several capital projects I believe we should make progress on during the coming year.

A project which we must complete this coming spring is the repair of the Rotary Pool near the Fairgrounds Elementary School. The pool is decades old and needs to be rebuilt. If the necessary repairs are not done this spring, the pool could fail and would need to be closed for the summer. This would be terrible for a lot of kids and unfortunately, the estimated cost is \$2 million.

A pressing project regards the Nashua Public Library. Our library was built in 1972 and its design flaws have become evident over the intervening years. Constructed mostly of concrete and brick, the walls are not insulated. Fifty-six years later, water is leaking through the walls and windows. The HVAC system is so antiquated that Director Jen McCormack has to go down to the basement and move a lever to adjust the air flow if the building is too hot or too cold as the weather changes. Water pipes are rusted and in one case, a corroded water pipe broke and flooded part of the building. Without improvement, the condemnation and closure of the library in the next few years is not out of the question.

Libraries are important for communities because they offer free access to knowledge. Benjamin Franklin, one of our greatest minds, attended the Boston Latin School for less than a year at age eight and was largely self-taught. He understood the importance of books and literacy to a thriving democracy. In 1731, he founded the first public library in the American colonies, the Library Company of Philadelphia. At a time when universities – and even learning itself – are under assault, public libraries are more important than ever.

The Library Board of Trustees has completed a study of the library and have developed a plan. It is a hybrid of new construction and restoration. I am suggesting that we move forward with this approach in the coming year.

Another project I believe we should begin is the traffic calming measures along the West Hollis Street corridor west of the Everett Turnpike. The current daily traffic situation on West Hollis Street negatively affects the quality of life for the many Nashuans who live along it. Traffic is heavy and the street often becomes a speedway. We need to make the corridor resident friendly and we have designed a number of traffic improvements that can be undertaken over time. Overall, this is an expensive project. I suggest that we undertake Phase I of the project, which would correct the dangerous left turn situation in front of the MicroSociety Charter School. Phase I would add a traffic light, create 1,000 feet of sidewalks, and add a shared-use path for bikes and pedestrians, and it would install a stoplight-protected crossing for pedestrians.

I also believe we should investigate the construction of one or two new athletic fields for soccer and lacrosse in the empty parcel of land on West Hollis Street behind the YMCA. We have only 18 full-size rectangular fields throughout all of Nashua. With over 2,000 kids in youth soccer and lacrosse and with adult leagues as well, we need more fields to avoid the constant wear and tear which turns a grass field into mud and bare dirt.

The parcel on West Hollis Street formerly included a landfill so there is waste beneath the surface. We will first need to assess the possibility of establishing an athletic field or fields and then work with New Hampshire DES regarding the waste. There is a good possibility that we can construct one or two fields there.

Over the years – with the addition of the Conway Arena, Stellos Stadium, the YMCA, and the David Deane Skateboard Park on Riverside Drive – the area is being transformed into a municipal center for sports and recreation. With the completion of a new Public Works garage at the Four Hills Landfill, we will remove the current obsolete Public Work garage on Riverside. This will leave additional land for the expansion of Conway or another recreational use. We will have a wonderful sports and recreation area that can be enjoyed by many future generations of Nashuans.

Thank You to Our City Team

Now before I conclude, I want to thank our City team of 2,800 who work hard every day to serve the people of Nashua – our teachers, police, firefighters, City Hall employees, my staff, and everyone in Public Health, and our Public Works employees. And I want to personally thank each of you for your hard work in serving the people of Nashua. Finally, I want to thank my wife Victoria.

God bless the great city of Nashua. Thank you very much.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION BY ALDERMAN KLEE THAT THE FEBRUARY 17, 2026, MEETING OF THE BOARD OF ALDERMEN BE ADJOURNED, BY ROLL CALL

A viva voce roll call was taken, which resulted as follows:

Yea:	Alderman Klee, Alderman Chess, Alderwoman Smith, Alderman Thibeault, Alderman O'Brien, Alderman Gregg, Alderman Sullivan, Alderman Sennott, Alderman Johnson, Alderwoman Kelly, Alderman Morgan, Alderman Wilshire	12
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Nay:		0
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MOTION CARRIED

The meeting was declared adjourned at 7:37 p.m.

Attest: Dan Healey, City Clerk