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City of Pawtucket's year in review - by Donald Grebien

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Donald Grebien

2023 was a year filled with pride and excitement for the city of Pawtucket. Several of our key education, economic development, and quality of life initiatives came to fruition, making our city a better place to live, work, and play.

Over 6,000 people turned out to celebrate “McCoy’s Final Inning”, a night filled with great music, delicious food, and spectacular fireworks! We continued to host annual events such as the Pawtucket Arts Festival, Empanada Fest, Fourth of July Fireworks, St. Patrick’s Day Parade, Haunted Tunnel, and the Pawtucket Hall of Fame Awards; all of which have been a great success!

I want to express my sincerest gratitude to our partners in the Pawtucket City Council, city employees, school committee, school department, and our Pawtucket delegation. These accomplishments would not have been possible without their hard work and dedication to our great city.

Economic Development Projects: In January of this year, we officially opened the Pawtucket-Central Falls Transit Hub. The transit hub has over 200 parking spots which are occupied to the brim each day, and the ridership level is in the 500’s. To accommodate more riders, we will open 200 additional parking spots later this year. More than just a train station, the surrounding district has already attracted tens of millions of dollars in investment, including historic mill conversions into new housing units and businesses.

The Tidewater Landing Project was in full stride this past year and continues to move forward. This project is the most significant economic development project in our city’s history. It will create a vibrant mixed-use destination along the banks of the Seekonk River including a 10,000-seat soccer stadium, public waterfront amenities, hundreds of housing units, 60,000 s/f of commercial space, and 57,000 s/f of retail and restaurant space. You can drive by the site today and see the steel beams and other structural elements of the stadium emerging already! We can’t wait for Rhode Island FC and their mascot “Chip” to begin playing here in 2025 with the other developments to follow.

Quality of Life: When it comes to quality of life, we continue to work hard to improve essential city services and invest in our physical infrastructure. In the past 12 years, we have paved nearly 75% of Pawtucket’s roads. We’ve also improved trash collection and launched a new bulky waste and yard waste pickup option. As a city, we are committed to investing in infrastructure and ensuring it functions properly for our residents.

Parks and Greenspace: We must continue to prioritize the upkeep and creation of new parks and green spaces, not only for our residents but also for their furry friends. In June of this year, we opened the state-of-the-art Fairlawn Dog Park, followed by the re-opening of the Slater Park Dog Park in September, after much-needed improvements. Both parks were funded by the city as we worked closely with the Pawtucket Dog Park Committee to accommodate the needs of residents and their pets.

We have invested millions of dollars into improving our basketball and tennis courts, as well as remodeling playgrounds, splash pads, and other public recreation spaces. In the summer of 2024, construction will begin on the Veterans Memorial Pool in Fairlawn.

Visitors of the Leon S. Mathieu Senior Center now have the opportunity to exercise outdoors with their new and improved fitness equipment, paid for by city-allocated ARPA funding. The city also invested over \$80,000 in the construction of a greenhouse at Pawtucket Housing Authority's Galego Court development.

While new and existing recreational facilities are vital to the community, we also continue to search for and improve green spaces. In September, the city was awarded a \$3 million Urban and Community Forestry Grant to plant trees in the areas that need it most. The city has also purchased over nine acres of unused land from the Riverside Cemetary, which will be revitalized into a public park for residents.

Education: Making investments in our students and public schools is a top priority of not only my administration but also the Pawtucket City Council and the Pawtucket School Committee. In 2022, Pawtucket voters overwhelmingly approved a bond question for the construction of a new, state-of-the-art Pawtucket High School, a transformational investment in the future success of generations of Pawtucket students. Throughout 2023, we have worked diligently to apply for funding and create plans for the new school. As of last week, we have received the necessary RIDE funding to move forward with the project.

Progress continues on a new Baldwin Elementary School, and we also opened "Everyone's Playground", one of the only ADA-accessible, all-inclusive recreational facilities in the State of Rhode Island. We are constantly pursuing new opportunities to invest in education for all students here in Pawtucket.

Public Safety: The men and women of the Pawtucket police and fire department have served proudly throughout 2023. Earlier this year, Pawtucket fire chief, John Trenteseaux, was sworn into office. Under his leadership, our fire department was among the first in Rhode Island to have an entire, full-time, paramedic EMS division. This means our rescues are fully equipped to handle and provide the highest level of care to Pawtucket residents in need.

The Pawtucket Police Department made headway in many areas of development this year. Thanks to state funding, the department was able to implement body-worn cameras for over half of our officers. The cameras have proven to be a great success thus far, and I thank our officers for their cooperation and commitment to learning and training.

I would be remiss to recognize our outstanding Community Policing Unit (CPU). Throughout 2023, CPU has attended countless meetings, community events, and trainings on behalf of the city. They also continue to plan and host some of the city's most successful events; K9s for Kids, National Night Out, and Trunk or Treat at Slater Park. Our CPU works day in and day out to bridge the gap

between the community and our police department.

I want to thank both chief Goncalves and chief Trenteseaux for their leadership and partnership, as well as all of the men and women who so honorably serve the city of Pawtucket.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: This past March the city hired Charles Carvalho as our chief equity officer. Under Carvalho's leadership, the city has successfully organized several flag-raising and cultural events. These events included the inaugural Hispanic Heritage and Black History Month award ceremonies, along with the continuation of our Women's History Month event and various cultural flag-raising.

Our chief equity officer helped to develop the city's "Deliver Good to Your Neighborhood" initiative, partnering with DoorDash. In late 2022, the city received over \$17,000 in DoorDash gift cards for community distribution. Those funds have now been allocated to youth in our community who need it most. Recipients have included participants in the Summer Youth Employment Program and the Snow Shoveling Program, as well as other local partnerships.

In April of 2023, Pawtucket became the first municipality in Rhode Island to install free menstrual product dispensers in all public buildings. These products are accessible at no cost to any who needs them.

Looking Forward: There is so much to be proud of and thankful for throughout 2023. I want to thank the residents of Pawtucket for their care and concern for making our city a better place. Please do not hesitate to reach out if there is anything we can help you with. I wish you and your family a happy and healthy 2024.

Donald Grebien is the mayor of Pawtucket, R.I.

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