



# THE CITY OF AUGUSTA

WILLIAM R. BRIDGEO, CITY MANAGER

TO: Mayor and Council  
Department and Bureau Directors  
Fr: City Manager Bill Bridgeo  
Re: Year-end report on Council's 2014 Goals and Actions  
Da: December 20, 2014

Each year, it has been the practice of the City Council to spend time in January and February discussing the issues and community needs that should receive priority attention by Council and City staff for the upcoming year. I believe that there are a number of important benefits that are derived from the time and effort invested in this process. In the first place, it offers an opportunity for open dialogue between and amongst councilors (and City staff) in an atmosphere not dictated by informational and business meeting agendas. Ideally, this encourages brainstorming and free thinking and allows every member of Council the chance to identify items of concern and emphasis. Secondly, once completed, the agreed upon goals and action items really do serve as an ongoing guide for me and the City's management team as we work throughout the year. There are always competing demands for staff time and resources and having a policy guide available greatly assists in prioritizing those demands. Third, the goal-setting process is ideally timed to help me with preparation for the development of the coming year's draft municipal budget.

I appreciate that with the media present, Councilors may feel reluctant to "blue sky" ideas for fear of their comments being misinterpreted. That does pose a challenge. But, I feel that the benefits that the process produces outweigh that risk and I hope all members of Council approach the process in a spirit that stimulates conversation and the healthy exchange of ideas.

To streamline the process this coming January, we will dispense with presentations by the department heads. Instead, they have been asked to provide brief written summaries of their major issues and recommendations for the coming year which will be provided to Council in advance (Ralph will still be asked to do a financial summary in the morning). Each councilor will also be invited to submit something in advance describing what he/she has the strongest concern for and what her/his policy priorities might be. That should leave more time for interaction between and amongst the Council throughout the session.

A year ago, Council adopted six goals. A review of them suggests that Council and staff were successful in achieving – or at least making progress – on them. A copy of the 2014 Goals and Actions is appended so that you can follow along as I attempt to summarize how we did during the intervening year.

Goal #1 was to secure financing for Lithgow Library. I think it's safe to say that 2014 was Lithgow's year. Council took a variety of actions that led to a successful financing strategy and public bond referendum. The library's community champions raised the necessary private donations and City staff advanced the logistical elements of the project to the point where we will soon be under contract with a construction manager and poised to break ground on the \$11 million project in the spring. This is a milestone project for Maine's Capital City and will be an ongoing source of community pride.

Goal #2 was to make neighborhoods attractive and welcoming. Ten distinct actions items were associated with this goal. Our re-energized housing authority, led by its dynamic new director, took the lead in that process starting with a successful community forum and ending the year securing the funding to convert Hodgkins School to senior housing. Here, as with the library, Council, City staff and others all contributed to our success. Council continues to work on a viable historic district ordinance for the West Side and a national district for downtown. We were recently notified that our application for matching MDOT funding for Northern Avenue was approved by MDOT (although with Mt. Vernon Avenue and Bond Brook Road due to be under construction all next summer, we may not want to undertake redoing Northern Avenue until the spring of 2016 so as to avoid a traffic management nightmare). With Chief Gregoire's absence, a report on the changing nature of crime in the City (using the 2011 police study as a baseline) has been deferred but there should be information on this available in the next couple of weeks. The deputy Chief has been working with the Director of Riverview Psychiatric Facility to fund a mental health caseworker to restore that position to the APD and there is reason to believe that the position may be reestablished (under the Riverview umbrella) as soon as next month. The Social Services Task Force continued to meet throughout the year and coordinate efforts between local human service agencies and the City. Evidence of the strong relationships efforts like this committee engender could be found a couple weeks ago at the housing fair held for the victims of the large apartment complex fire.

Additional efforts to make neighborhoods more attractive and welcoming included the dilapidated house demolition and associated park expansion at Cunningham Park; the numerous improvements to Mill Park overseen by the Mill Park Committee; the impressive redevelopment of Haymarket Square (and relocation of the bus stop); and the great work of the Council's OREO committee in vetting and disposing of surplus primarily tax-acquired properties.

Goal #3 was to grow business investment. It included seven action items. The first item had to do with rezoning the area around the new hospital and, absent any concrete proposals, that has not been a front-burner item to date (the anticipated extended stay hotel anticipated for that area apparently will now be located off Western Avenue). A local respected entrepreneur, Dick Parkhurst, stepped in to take the lead on restoring the Colonial Theater and has made significant progress in advancing that cause, including achieving national historic designation status. The old Maine General building – now the Ballard Center – is leasing up well ahead of schedule (not including our upcoming two year library tenancy there). Unfortunately, not the same can be said for the Kennebec Arsenal (although the developer did arrive at a temporary legal settlement with the State and has pledged to move the project forward). At the Kennebec Locke (Statler Tissue Mill), we have concluded the environmental clean-up

process and the State is issuing it “V-Wrap” certification. Although there were several conversations with potential development firms about the site’s possibilities, nothing concrete is in the works at this time. Similarly, there is no known developer interest in the Riggs Brook Village area (but with the Council recent relaxation of the zoning standards there that might change). Business did grow in Augusta in the past year with expansion at the marketplace (Chipotle’s!); the relocation of Oakes and Parkhurst Glass into Augusta; the expansion at the Journal Square shopping center (Men’s Warehouse, U.S. Cellular, etc.); new Veterans’ Home headquarters and regional pharmacy; and the 50,000 square foot expansion of NRF Distributors to name several.

Goal #4 was to build needed public infrastructure. The five action items included a) exploring options for storage of city equipment which was fully addressed with the funding, planning and construction of the new \$600,000 storage facility at the DPW complex; b) advancing the North Augusta Fire Station accomplished by approval by the voters in November of the necessary \$3.5 million in funding and retention of the architect to design and bid the facility for construction in 2015; c) exploring the feasibility of expanding the City’s recycling program accomplished through significant study this past year and the anticipated implementation of a single-stream collection program (on a six month pilot basis) this coming spring; d) follow-through with the gas companies to restore our streets and sidewalks accomplished by the dogged follow-up by DPW Director Lesley Jones and Street Superintendent Jerry Dostie (although still not an ideal situation good progress has been made here and will continue diligently in the 2015 construction season); e) and the last infrastructure item was to explore options for the disposition of Hodgkins School which as discussed above was a great success thanks to AHA Director Amanda Bartlett and Developer Kevin Bunker.

Other notable City infrastructure improvements accomplished in 2014 included the reconstruction of School Street; the leasing and redevelopment of the old Cony Flatiron Building; the construction of the Bond Brook Recreation Area access road; and the completion of the Alumni Field improvements.

Goal #5 was to communicate with partners. In line with this, the City worked closely with the board and staff of the Downtown Alliance, the Housing Authority, The University of Maine at Augusta (especially on its downtown initiatives and its CAP-EDU collaboration); the Board of Trade; Kennebec County (most notably in regard to the development of the new courthouse); The Maine Municipal Association and the Maine Service Center Coalition and the Mayors’ Coalition throughout a difficult legislative session; our Maine legislative delegation; MDOT (on a temporary fix to Mt. Vernon Avenue as well as the prep work for the full 2015 project; the Western Avenue project and Riverside Drive and upper State street); and GAUD to name some examples. It is clear through the actions that City Council has taken throughout the year that a strong premium is placed on collaborating and communicating with willing partners and that emphasis is carried through at the staff level. By way of example, Community Services Director Leif Dahlin cites his department’s ongoing work in 2014 with the Boys and Girls Club, the YMCA, the Farmers’ market, the Chamber of Commerce (e.g. Day in the Park), the United Way, Augusta Trails, CARA and the Friend of the Rail Trail. Think of the extensive community engagement that each of these collaborations constitutes let alone the aggregate.

Goal #6 was stated quite simply : “Budget Responsibly”. As happens each year, in 2014 City staff worked very hard to present to Council a balanced budget proposal that maintained core services. My initial proposal suggested a property tax increase of 6% that Council determined was too much and the Council then set out to modify the budget and roll back the proposed tax increase. The end result was maintenance of services (actually including an additional police officer position to allow for a school resource officer) and a 3.5% tax increase. Some additional reliance on fund balance was required to do this but all parties agreed that it was a responsible budget outcome. Council also expressed its intention to maximize the use of TIF funds for necessary capital improvements and in August adopted a capital improvement program for the fiscal year of \$9.5 million dollars (not counting the Lithgow Library project), \$8 million of which is coming from TIF funds.

Capping the year as relates to fiscal responsibility, our outside auditors issued an entirely clean audit report for the last fiscal year – an accomplishment worth being proud of and a reflection of the emphasis that Council and City staff have over the years placed on responsible budgeting and fiscal administrative practices.

Have a safe and happy holiday – see you in the New Year!