

Mayor Joseph C. Sullivan  
FY14 Address to the Town Council  
May 1, 2013

I want to begin by thanking you Mr. President, and all the members of the Town Council for the spirit of cooperation with which we have continued to address the many issues we face.

I stand before you with my sixth budget proposal. It is a true product of the partnership we have forged since the January '08 inception of our new government. Our commitment to not take the expedient route and to focus on the best for Braintree provides us with the resources to continue to enhance our residents' quality of life and to promote a strong business climate.

Today, we see at the federal level of government elected officials clinging to a rigid ideology, prioritizing partisan politics over problem solving. Yet here in Braintree despite some occasional differences, we have demonstrated a willingness to do what needs to be done. Whether it is conservative fiscal forecasting, implementing technological innovation or prudent revenue enhancement, we attempt to choose the right tool to get the job done and for the most part, we have.

The fruits of our collective efforts are irrefutable. In a time when bond rating agencies have placed negative outlooks over much of the government bond market, including U.S. treasury bonds, Braintree received an upgrade. In its most recent analysis of Braintree's operations, Moody's Investors Service lauded Braintree's "conservative financial management practices which have resulted in positive operating results and increasing reserves."

Since 2008 we have nearly tripled our reserves from 5% to 14.9% of our operating budget resulting in a reserve amount of \$17 million and we have balanced the budget without an appropriation of free cash for three consecutive years. That is good municipal management and thus our financial practices have been commended by the bond rating agencies.

We have been tested in the most challenging fiscal climate since the Great Depression and have worked to ensure strong financial decisions for our town. Along with this budget, I have proposed Financial Policies for the Town of Braintree. They will establish goals and mechanisms for the future retention of financial reserves that will ensure stability today and sustainability for the days ahead.

Through the growth allowed by Proposition 2 ½, a small increase in state aid and an anticipated \$880,000 in private sector revenue from new growth attributable to economic development our town budget will grow by approximately \$4.76 million.

In terms of our budget priorities, once again nearly two-thirds of all new revenue will be provided to our schools. Thus, we will remain consistent in making education our priority. Our school budget will increase by \$2.1 million in fiscal year 2014, providing funding for three new school teachers to address school enrollment and support the establishment of an expanded all-day kindergarten. Let me restate, that two-thirds of all new revenue raised will be provided directly to our schools.

We will also continue to prioritize public safety. We will add several additional patrolmen and we will fill vacancies caused by promotions and retirements in the fire department. We are able to take these steps in part through the savings we have reaped by controlling our solid waste disposal costs. As you recall we had a regional approach to this with our neighbors in Quincy and Weymouth for the past five years. That contract has expired and with Quincy's decision not to renew the regional agreement – we shall go it alone now. Our new contract will realize savings by approximately \$300,000 this year, without impacting the quality of customer service. Controlling trash costs is not going to get you a news headline or a community innovation award. Tip O'Neill used to joke that no congressman would want their name on a sewer treatment plant. But despite the lack of limelight it is important to focus on the nitty-gritty aspects of government as well as the more prominent ones. The dollars we don't have to spend on trash can go to schools, our roads, our public safety and our workforce.

The budget I place before you also continues our commitment to invest in our infrastructure. Within this budget, I am asking for the adoption of the meals tax. This modest increase- an additional fifteen cents on a \$20 meal-will allow for continued investment in our community. I am committing to putting the realized revenue towards the principal and interest of an expanded capital plan. We will continue our 100 Roads program. We will devote resources to school improvements, public safety and public works projects. We will provide a reserve of dollars to mitigate the potential impact of a midyear reduction in local aid which was proposed by the Governor but rejected by the legislature this fiscal year. We will continue to set aside funds to address the looming cost of retired employees' health care. And in this budget we propose modest increases in the budgets of Elder Affairs and in our summer programs and events and celebrations budgets. I want to note that we will mark the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Town Hall on June 26, 2013.

Our 2 year recreational improvement of the 12 neighborhood parks will be finished this year as well. Six park upgrades last year and the other six this year. Braintree is noted for the plaza and other developments in our town, but it is the recreational spaces of our improvements to our neighborhood parks, the new Highlands playground, the splash pad at Watson Park this year and our new river walk proposal in East Braintree. These recreational spaces contribute to our quality of life in Braintree and allows us all an environment that we should enjoy and treasure.

Allow me to speak for a few moments about our town employees. After all, a budget is but it is numbers but it is the people who need to accomplish the work. We are fortunate to have many people both front-line and management that enjoyed their work and the town they serve. They come to work every day committed to making a difference. This year alone we have repeatedly witnessed the commitment and pride of our town's workforce. Whether it was Super Storm Sandy or this year's snow, our public safety, public works and inspectional services answered the call. Their efforts are a point of pride. And I thank each one for their individual effort that has collectively made for us all a better government and a better town.

I am proud of this budget. It reflects the values and priorities of our community. It strikes an appropriate balance between fiscal prudence and investment in our future. It allows kids to go to good schools and seniors to feel safe when they go for a walk in their neighborhood. Most importantly, it allows all Braintree residents to take pride in the operations of their municipal government knowing that we are mindful of the need to provide important local service in the most cost effective way available to us.