



**2025 State of the City
Tuesday, January 7, 2025
Looking Back, Leaning Forward**

Good evening. I would like to thank the Common Council for inviting me here tonight to once again deliver the State of the City address. I wish everyone a happy new year and look forward to another productive year serving the residents of Kingston together.

It's good to be here, talking directly with you all, as we set our sights on the year to come. This is my tenth State of the City address, and as I look back, I'm truly awed by the changes, challenges, and achievements that Kingston has seen.

I would like to thank all of our partners who have assisted in this work from Governor Hochul and her administration, to our State Senator and Assemblymember. I would like to thank our partners in County Government who have worked alongside us on a variety of projects. I also want to thank the members of the Kingston Common Council for the important work you do and the work we have done together.

I want to start tonight by looking back at the many accomplishments of this past year.

Looking back

On January 1, 2024, when we launched our own emergency response service to provide better and more timely medical care, the men and women of the Kingston Fire Department sprang into action and assembled a stellar ambulance program. In its first year, the Fire Department responded to 4,500 calls for medical emergencies with over a 99% response rate. I'd like to take a moment to thank each and every one of our firefighters and the leadership team at the Fire Department for facilitating the transition and for providing the utmost professional care.

Last year, we made huge strides in infrastructure projects, including the completion of the Wurts Street Bridge project, which reopened the 100-year-old structure with safer pedestrian walkways, improved lighting, and a stronger foundation, ensuring it will last another 100 years.

As part of our street improvement program, the Department of Public Works paved 20 streets throughout the City, while our engineering department installed 58 new ADA curb ramps. Public Works staff worked to collect 1,500 tons of recycling and 7,000 tons of refuse in 2024, often during difficult weather conditions.

This spring, we saw the final completion of the Henry Street Safe Routes to School project, which created new sidewalks and improved safety infrastructure for all who walk and bike this high-traffic corridor.

Just recently, we completed the Clinton Avenue Intersection Improvements project, which transformed one of the key gateways to the Uptown historic district. Its two intersections are now safer and easier to navigate. With new lighting and landscaping, the entire area is enhanced.

With help from our partners at NoVo in Kingston, we were able to swiftly and safely complete the asbestos abatement and lead remediation at the Andy Murphy Neighborhood Center, which included painting throughout the gym and a new vestibule. This beloved facility is back open to the public with a beautiful facelift.

Just down the road, Post Office Park is now open with just a few remaining punch list items. This was a true community effort, with local organizations collaborating on its design and the public choosing the park's name in honor of the old Post Office that once stood in its place. I look forward to seeing this space become a gathering spot for folks enjoying lunch or coffee from the shops on Broadway or as a respite for Greenline travelers, and I'm pleased to bring some much-needed greenspace to Midtown. Just in time for winter.

The massive, multi-million-dollar project at Dietz Stadium is now fully completed. The track and turf opened this fall in time for the Kingston High School football season. We created a basketball court with enhanced lighting, parking lot improvements using green infrastructure, a practice field, a courtyard for food trucks, and so much more. The grandstand interior and the shiny new locker rooms look fantastic, finishing the renovation of this state-of-the-art complex. The stadium track and turf will remain open to the public throughout winter during daylight hours, so I encourage everyone to visit if you haven't already. The new Dietz Stadium is not just an asset to the City and school district, but to the entire community. We know this investment will bring economic vitality to Kingston.

In addition to our incredible infrastructure developments, we also implemented ARPA grants to businesses that were impacted by these projects. We have used our American Rescue Plan grant to funnel money directly into the community, with programs like the Accessory Dwelling Unit Design Competition, which provided free permit-ready plans for backyard ADUs, to the new parking lot at the Kingston Point Rail Trail, or the play equipment and bleachers for the Andy Murphy Neighborhood Center, as well as necessary sewer and infrastructure repairs.

Last year, we hired Kingston's first Urban Forester, who will oversee the City's long-term tree protection and maintenance. In November 2020, we set an ambitious goal of planting 1,000 trees by 2030. Today, I'm happy to report that we have already planted 477 trees, nearly halfway to reaching that goal.

In 2024, in partnership with Scenic Hudson, we proposed the City's first Open Space acquisition, a 68-acre plot of land, known as the Rondout Uplands, to be preserved as parkland for generations to come.

We continue to incorporate traffic safety models and best practices into all of our City projects, and – I am pleased to say – that in 2024, with the support of the Common Council, we successfully legislated a city-wide 25 mph speed limit. We are asking all of Kingston's drivers to slow down, be alert, and share the road as we take a safe systems approach. We also know that enforcement is critical to compliance. The Kingston Police Department will devote additional resources to traffic enforcement going forward.

Our Arts & Cultural Affairs department continues to bolster Kingston's creative economy, and in 2024 brought a landmark installation to City Hall with the *Sojourner Truth: First Step to Freedom* statue. I hope everyone will visit her on the first floor. She's truly remarkable. While you're here, enjoy a walk through the ground floor gallery to see all the artwork she inspired. It's gratifying to see the collaboration between City Hall, arts organizations, youth groups, and our amazing local artists, who truly make Kingston, Kingston.

Sustainability is a key part of all aspects of City government and in 2024 we built upon our substantial work. When we launched Kingston Organics, our free composting program, we weren't sure how many people would participate. With over 1,000 residents enrolled, we diverted over 50 tons – that's 100,000 pounds – of food waste from the landfill last year. We have received funding to expand the program and are working toward making curbside compost pick-up a reality.

In November, the public overwhelmingly passed the Community Preservation Fund, which will protect our open spaces and natural resources with a reliable, ongoing funding source. This funding source will support local parks, trails, land conservation, and historic preservation well into our future.

As in years past, perhaps our most crucial efforts are in the area of housing. My administration set a goal of approving 1,000 housing units by 2029. We've had to get creative in meeting that ambitious number.

In 2024, we proposed a mixed-use development on an under-utilized property Downtown that has sat vacant since Urban Renewal. This project would create density with much-needed housing units, and with space for nonprofit organizations and businesses, this project has the potential to invigorate the Downtown economy.

We also launched a study to determine the feasibility of building housing at the Kingston Business Park, which we hope will result in a creative live-work concept.

We supported the Barrel Factory in seeking national and state grant funding, and just last month it opened with 12 affordable units in a mixed-use development in the heart of Midtown, and broke ground on 100 more units. This example of adaptive reuse and infill development is exactly what our form-based zoning code envisioned.

We have made many great strides in 2024, and the State of our City is strong. We have been resilient through a global pandemic, an unprecedented housing shortage, climate-related rising tides, steep inflation, and civil unrest. Together, as a community, we have faced these challenges with strong action, smart planning, and a powerful sense of purpose.

Looking further back

When I entered office as your Mayor and gave my first State of the City address in January 2016, the City's Comprehensive Plan "Kingston 2025" was being finalized by the community and was codified by the Council soon after. It's hard to believe we are now living in that far-off year of 2025, which seemed at the time the distant future. I recently sat down with a copy of the plan to see what we have accomplished in these last 10 years, and what remains to be done.

I am astounded to say that we have accomplished over 90% of the goals and objectives set forth in the 2025 Comprehensive Plan.

With the complete overhaul of our City's antiquated zoning code to our new, forward-thinking form-based zoning code, we conquered nearly half of the objectives set forth in the Comp Plan, which focused heavily on standardizing housing use, streamlining the planning process, incorporating sustainability measures, allowing for smart growth Downtown, thoughtful investment in Midtown, and the ongoing preservation of historic Uptown.

With the \$22M RAISE grant, we will make unprecedented investments in our waterfront. Midtown or the Heart of Kingston has seen enhancements with many projects like Energy Square, Franklin and Henry Streets, Broadway Streetscape, and even pickleball! The Midtown Thriving project is also well underway with robust community engagement, to focus on redeveloping vacant properties in the corridor. In Uptown, we will be removing the problematic Pike Plan canopies, which have come to the end of their useful life. We believe returning our beautiful historic buildings to their original form will help boost the economic vitality of Uptown.

Across Kingston and in our three distinct business districts, small businesses have thrived. In the last 10 years, the number of vacant and underutilized properties has reduced substantially. While the pandemic brought

unique challenges for our local businesses, we were proud to offer grants through ARPA funding, and support projects in receiving additional funding.

Open Space preservation was another large part of the City's 2025 Comp Plan, which encouraged the creation of the Kingston Greenline network, the codification of an Open Space Plan, and creating other public amenities through strategic partnerships. Not only did we complete the Kingston Point Rail Trail Phase 1 in 2019— with more sections in the works— thanks to our partnerships with New York State and Scenic Hudson, the Greenline is connected to the Empire State Trail and a brand-new State park right here in Kingston - the Sojourner Truth State Park, which opened in 2022. From a new youth soccer field to the \$25M Dietz Stadium project, we have been working to improve a variety of Parks & Recreation facilities for the community.

The 2025 Comp Plan called for improving the City's transportation system and the safety of City streets. In 2019, Ulster County took over City bus service. Not only have they offered free ridership, but the UCAT team has been collaborating with the community to make the system more useful and efficient.

The Comp Plan called on the City to proactively improve street, water and sewer infrastructure. We have completed several major road safety improvement projects, like Franklin Street Complete Streets, Broadway Streetscape, the Broadway Prince intersection improvements, and countless others. We completed a \$18M dam rehabilitation project at Cooper Lake to preserve our pristine drinking water, completed a \$9.5M project at the Waste Water Treatment Plant to improve water quality in the Rondout Creek, and we continue to repair the sewer system throughout the City.

Now that we have reached – or are well on our way to reaching— so many of these goals, I invite you all to join us in creating a new Comprehensive Plan for the next 10 years. Now is the time to think big and envision the future we want to see for our community.

Looking forward

As we work together to build the blueprint for our City's future, we have some exciting projects to announce for 2025.

With \$3.5M in State grant funding, we will begin planning for improvements at the Kingston Point Beach to prevent erosion and protect the beach against sea level rise. We will expand renovations at the Andretta Pool, with an ADA-compliant lift, steps, and splash pad feature, and the installation of a much-needed shade structure.

Kingston Parks and Recreation is also excited to launch a new online registration platform that will serve as a one-stop-shop. Starting tomorrow, you can register for sports leagues, adult and youth programming, environmental education, reserve a pavilion, and sign up for summer camp - all on a fresh new website.

Back in 2020, the City of Kingston partnered with "Kingston Needs a Skate Park" to build community interest and momentum in turning an abandoned tennis court at Hasbrouck Park into a community skate park. I'm happy to report that just last week, thanks to a generous grant from Governor Hochul, we won over \$650,000 to help build a skate park!

In 2025, we will move forward with Phase 1 of our city-wide wayfinding plan, with the installation of gateway and directional signs in over 40 locations. The new signage will reduce sign clutter and will make Kingston's attractions and business districts more accessible and easier to navigate by car, bicycle, or on foot. We will have a new sign at the roundabout to warmly welcome everyone into our City.

Last year my Listening Tour to all 9 wards was so successful - I know you all loved the opportunity to express your feelings to me in person - we are bringing it back in 2025. Get your laundry list ready!

Trees! What can I say, Kingstonians love their trees, and why shouldn't they? Trees improve property values, create clean air, make it cooler in the summer, and provide the beauty that we all need in our lives. To help protect more of our trees, I am happy to announce that we will put forth a Tree Preservation Ordinance. This law would protect our largest native species, and ensure that when a tree is removed, another tree is planted. To help us understand where our trees are and where they are missing, our Urban Forester has created a new online tree map that will launch this week.

We know that housing will dominate our conversations in 2025. With new projects moving forward like the exciting Broadway Commons, a mixed-use development at the long-abandoned 615 Broadway site and our planned mixed-use development on the large underutilized Garraghan Drive property, we will continue to put housing at the forefront.

Tonight, I am happy to announce that we will move forward with a request for proposals to redevelop the brownfield at 25 Field Court, which for decades has been a vacant eyesore in the heart of our city. We will also launch a public mixed-income housing model, which will generate new financing methods to help create new housing. This model will support deeper affordability in the housing projects it supports.

Last year, President Shaut and I launched an effort to bring community members together to discuss parking issues. In 2025, I am excited to move that project forward by hiring a consultant to create a comprehensive Parking Management Plan. The plan's strategies and recommendations will go a long way in making parking less of a headache, while also making sure we have the right amount of it.

Did you know that Kingston has almost 80 miles of sidewalks? Sidewalks are a critical piece of infrastructure and a part of our everyday life. Our historic bluestone sidewalks reflect the unique early history of our area but are showing their age. In 2025, my team will be working on a Sidewalk Improvement Plan to document current conditions and provide recommendations on how to manage and pay for long term sidewalk improvements.

To further our work of slowing vehicles down and creating safer streets, we included \$50,000 in the 2025 Budget for traffic-calming resources. This funding will allow us to install signage, rapid flashing beacons, speed tables, crosswalks, speed radar devices, and more, to protect all our road users.

In 2025, I am excited to partner with a local technology firm that has designed an innovative software to make the municipal planning process transparent and user friendly. The public will be able to view Planning Board documents for a given project and will be able to see how the project has changed over time - from initial proposal to approved plans. My administration has spent the better part of the last 10 years working to break down barriers between government information and our residents, and this is yet another useful tool.

As the City works to implement our Climate Action Plan, we are launching exciting new initiatives toward those goals. First, we will be transitioning to a new diesel fuel called Renewable Diesel this spring. Renewable Diesel works in a regular diesel engine but is made from renewable, biodegradable sources, which will reduce the emissions of our diesel vehicles by 65%. The Kingston Police Department will continue to electrify its fleet, with a total of 12 new EV vehicles scheduled to be delivered. This year, 100% of the City's electric usage will be offset by a nearby solar farm.

One thing we don't want to see in 2025 is flooding, but we know we must be prepared. With City ARPA funding, the United States Geological Survey will install a new stream gauge on the Rondout Creek to help us better forecast and prepare for damaging floods.

Looking back at all that we have accomplished over the last 10 years, and looking forward to 2025, I want to acknowledge that none of this could be done without the hard work and dedication of the City of Kingston workforce. Our nearly 300 employees work day-in and day-out to provide Kingston residents with the services we all enjoy. City staff help improve and move our City forward in big and small ways, and I thank you all for your service!

Leaning into the unknown

As we enter into a time of uncertainty with the new Federal administration coming into office, I know many in our community are concerned. We have seen the rights of so many individuals threatened, and we fear for our most vulnerable.

During my tenure and throughout our long history, Kingston has steadily charted our own course, and we will continue to move toward our goals of equity, inclusion, preservation, and progress – no matter what comes our way.

Since 2016, we declared Kingston a welcoming and inclusive community, created the municipal ID program, have instituted a myriad of housing efforts, including protections for renters such as the Emergency Tenant Protection Act and Good Cause Eviction. We have passed legislation ensuring that all new development includes affordable housing and have implemented anti-displacement strategies. We are working to create housing at every level, to lift the demand pressures. Like we did eight years ago, we will safeguard our City's values and strengthen our goals.

I believe, now more than ever, cities are leading the way. The best way we can protect our nation's democracy is to serve in our own community.

If you have listened to one of my annual addresses before, you probably know by now that I'm a John F. Kennedy fan. He is someone who I like to borrow from from time to time. I feel strongly that as we head into 2025, this final part of his 1961 inaugural address is even more relevant today. He said "And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country." So I ask all of you Kingstonians, ask not what your City can do for you - ask what you can do for your City.

I hope you'll join me in reinforcing the fabric of our City, redoubling our efforts, respecting our neighbors, and reaching for the future with a focus on our values and hope in our hearts.

I look forward to working with you all in 2025. Good night.