



State of the City Address
January 9, 2018
Steven T. Noble, Mayor

Good Evening,

Thank you for joining us tonight. I am honored to be here with all of you and to celebrate the swearing-in of the 2018 City of Kingston Common Council.

I want to thank the members of the Council, both new and returning, for their willingness to serve in these positions. I am very proud of the accomplishments of my administration over the past two years, but one of the areas in which I am most pleased with is the strong working relationship we have cultivated with the Common Council. While there will be times that we will disagree, I commit to you that I will respect you, that I will listen to you, and that I will work with you. Your constituents are my constituents. Your concerns are my concerns. Your challenges are my challenges.

While I am grateful for all that we have achieved together, it is actually the challenges that have meant the most in our efforts to move our city forward. It has been our failures that have taught us who we are and our shortcomings that have forced us to extend ourselves further than we believed possible.

It's easy in our day to day work to get lost, to feel like giving up, and to lose hope. In times of great uncertainty, where it feels like our future is being decided by powerful people 350 miles away, that is where we have to be the city I know us to be: The city that cares more about doing good than being great. The community that sees a problem and instead of running away, figures out how to overcome it. Through every challenge we have ever been given, we have found our way.

As you may remember, in 2016 we applied for the \$10 Million NYS Downtown Revitalization Initiative for our Midtown area. When it was announced that the City of Middletown had been selected, the weight of that defeat felt unbearable. Just for a brief moment, I thought that I could actually hear the sound of Governor Cuomo's motorcade travelling past our city. Knowing that we were so close and yet we didn't bring this incredible opportunity home to Kingston- it was devastating.

But there was no time to linger in this loss. When we found out that there would be another round of DRI funding, I was consumed with the goal of overcoming this defeat. And while the target area for our second application shifted to the Uptown Stockade District as part of a strategic approach to better respond to the grant opportunity, our vision for a strong, sustainable and resilient community transcended any arbitrary district lines or titles. In just a few short days and nights, we rewrote the entire application. We told the story of Kingston- a community which doesn't back down. A community that has been built and rebuilt after each stumble, requiring us

to continue to learn, to create and to overcome. We told that story and this time, the Governor's motorcade didn't pass Kingston by.

In addition to securing the largest grant award in the City's history, 2017 included a number of other notable achievements.

In 2017, we continued to advance our approach to Strategic Budgeting and Fiscal Stewardship.

After managing two full fiscal year budgets and beginning to implement the third, I am incredibly proud to say that we have not asked for a single penny more from our local taxpayers. We have been able to do this because my administration budgets year-round. We spend what we need to in order to offer you high quality essential services and to advance our community, but nothing more. We continuously search for and secure grant funding whenever possible. By diversifying our revenue streams and ensuring that these revenues are achievable and realistic, we have been able to continue to offer services that other communities have drastically cut or eliminated.

We also held a hugely successful auction of commercial and multi-family properties, along with various pieces of city-owned land, bringing in over \$800,000 to the City's coffers and returning these properties back to the tax rolls.

In 2017, our Kingston Police Department and Kingston Fire Department kept our city safe.

Over the past 12 months, the Kingston Police Department responded to 25,300 requests for service, which ranged from motor vehicle accidents and traffic stops, to domestic disputes, to theft and other property related calls, to mental health incidents and welfare checks. The members of the Kingston Police Department have demonstrated time and time again their commitment to professionalism and public service and because of their efforts, our community continues to be one of the safest small cities in our region.

The Kingston Fire Department responded to a total of 4,890 calls. The department continues to be on the front lines of the opioid crisis and delivered resuscitation and life saving measures to 47 individuals this past year. While we continue to battle this terrible epidemic, I thank the Fire Department for their incredible efforts.

Our Building Safety Division issued over 800 building permits, the most issued in many years, and a clear sign that individuals are building and investing in our community. In addition, we added a full-time code enforcement officer to better equip the department with the tools it needs to ensure all of our community members are living in good quality housing.

In 2017, our Department of Public Works kept our city running.

The unsung heroes of our local workforce, the Department of Public Works has its hands in nearly every component of life here in the City of Kingston. Just in sanitation alone, the Department collected over 1,960 tons of recycling and 7,700 tons of refuse in 2017. They paved 16 Streets, responded to 14 winter storms, addressed significant drainage issues, and worked with other City departments on a number of key infrastructure projects. DPW has also taken the lead in the use of a new workflow management system, which monitors every service delivered to the public so I know exactly what we are accomplishing and where we are falling short, all in in real-time.

In 2017, our Parks and Recreation Department continued to manage our extensive network of park facilities and provide innovative programming for all ages.

Our Parks and Recreation Department again delivered a wide variety of educational and recreational opportunities to thousands of children, adults and seniors. Our parks system, one of the best in the region, is continuing to be upgraded thanks to a mix of private funding and grant resources. This past year, we completed the second stage of the Forsyth Park Improvement project with the renovations of the Ron Woods Tennis Court Complex. In addition, we installed a new roof on our Rondout Neighborhood Center and secured funding for ADA improvements to our Kingston Point Beach. At our Forsyth Nature Center, which attracts over 50,000 visitors each year, we opened a brand new reptile house, allowing the public to view reptiles throughout the year. It's a big hit with the kids! In 2018, we will be developing a master plan for our Kingston Point Park Complex and begin work on a series of improvements to this incredible City asset.

In 2017, we furthered our Sustainability efforts throughout the City.

In order to keep moving forward, we need to do so with the goal of building a resilient community and reducing our negative impact on our environment. I am pleased to announce that this past year, the City of Kingston was declared one of New York State's first clean energy communities! This is an incredible honor and another example of our city becoming a model in sustainability and environmental stewardship in the State. This designation also enabled us to access a \$100,000 grant, which requires no match. The grant will be used in 2018 to retrofit the windows of City Hall and install LED lighting in the facility. Finally, your City Hall will reflect the sustainability efforts we have been pushing forward for over a decade.

We also made significant advancements towards our goal of transitioning our fleet, with four electric vehicles purchased and available for use in 2017 and three to be delivered in early 2018. The City was also the host of a hugely successful Statewide Conference on the Environment, with participants coming from 17 counties. In order to ensure our sustainability values are instilled in the next generation, we have continued our popular Environmental Education program, which served 4,600 residents and visitors this past year.

We were also recently awarded funding to develop an Organics Waste Plan so that we may better understand how our city can launch a city-wide composting program and significantly reduce the amount of food that we are throwing out.

I am also pleased to soon be hiring an Environmental Specialist who will work as part of a team responsible for environmental asset and fleet management. This work will be essential in order to ensure that we manage and upgrade our assets in a strategic way, rather than due to an emergency.

While much has been accomplish in 2017, it's time to look ahead.

In 2018, we will improve the way people can move around by changing our public transportation system.

We have spent a significant amount of time advancing our Kingston On The Move transportation strategy, a dynamic and multi-faceted approach to transportation, that integrates the needs of vehicle owners, pedestrians and bicyclists. In 2018, my primary goal in transportation is to

advance the transit integration discussions with Ulster County. Our residents need access to affordable, accessible and convenient transportation options and we do not have the resources or capacity to meet this need. I am committed to offering the highest quality of essential services, but I also am not too proud to say that we need help. By integrating our transit services with UCAT, we have the opportunity to strengthen this public service and connect residents and visitors throughout the City of Kingston and Ulster County.

In 2018, infrastructure planning and upgrades will take place throughout the city.

The 2018 and 2019 construction seasons will be a busy time in Kingston. In 2018, we will be going out to bid and to construction for the Hasbrouck-Delaware Parklet, the Kingston Point Rail Trail, and the Hudson River Promenade. We will also be preparing for a number of major infrastructure projects slated for early 2019, including the Broadway Streetscape Project, a multi-million dollar overhaul of the Broadway corridor, the New York State Department of Transportation's I-587 Roundabout, and the Henry St. Safe Routes to School sidewalk reconstruction project. I will also continue to meet with the new working group dedicated to offering recommendations regarding the future of our Central Firehouse. The Common Council and I will then have to determine whether it is in the best interest of the City to renovate the existing firehouse or build a new one in Midtown.

In 2018, we will continue our wide ranging Economic Development initiatives.

With the designation of the City of Kingston as the winner of the Downtown Revitalization Initiative, the next 12 months will quite possibly be the busiest in our City's history of economic development. In the first quarter of 2018, we will be focusing on the Strategic Investment Plan that we must submit to the State by March. As soon as that plan is approved, we will be starting to implement the priority projects selected by the community and approved by the Governor's office. Throughout this entire DRI process, we must balance our need and desire to grow and create jobs with our shared concerns about displacement and economic inequities.

During my 2017 State of the City address, I committed that I would work to advance development in one of our long vacant properties, the site of the former parking garage at the corner of Wall and North Front St. This past summer, I was pleased to introduce the development team for what will be known as The Kingstonian, a mixed used site that will include residential, commercial, lodging and public parking. This \$50 million investment has gained the attention of the State and was recently awarded \$2 million through the NYS Consolidated Funding Application.

In 2018, I will be using a similar model and focusing efforts on advancing the responsible development of another long vacant property, now known as Broadway Commons, located at 615 Broadway. This is an incredible property located in the heart of Midtown and neighboring the City's recently renovated Ulster Performing Arts Center. We have enjoyed numerous community events at this site and I was pleased to honor the late Pauline Oliveros by naming a portion of the property in her honor. In 2018, we will build on this collective vision and attract a developer to help this site reach its full potential. I am committed to maintaining a portion of this site as a public area and look forward to reviewing creative proposals on how we can best use this space. I will be releasing an RFP for this property later this month.

This year, we will host series of roundtables to hear from local businesses about how we can best serve them. In addition, we will soon be hiring a part-time Director of Arts and Cultural Affairs in order to better support our growing Midtown Arts District and the broader arts community.

In 2018, we will work with the community to enhance diversity in our workforce and volunteer base.

I recently hosted a few children from one of our after school programs at a holiday event at City Hall. During our tour of my office, we spent some time in the adjoining conference room. For those of you who haven't seen it, the conference room has a portrait of nearly every past Mayor of the City. As I talked with the children, I noticed that they couldn't help but look around at these pictures. It became abundantly clear that there were only pictures of white men in that room. We spoke about what this meant to them and why it was deeply concerning. We talked about leadership and the work we need to do to make sure that our leaders reflect our diverse community.

In 2018, I am committed to supporting and encouraging our residents to serve in leadership positions in our community and will address any barriers along the way. I believe that effective and long-lasting change can be made through collaboration and that our City is at its best when the perspectives and concerns of our diverse community are comprehensively represented. But I need your help. I need our community to help us reshape a system that has benefitted some and alienated others for far too long. We need to examine how we are falling short in recruiting applicants and candidates from underrepresented and marginalized populations in our community. Whether this is in our Police, Fire, Recreation and Public Works Departments, our City Hall offices, or in volunteer positions on our boards and commissions, we need to do better.

In 2018, we will be further developing and refining our policies.

Without good policy, we are building on nothing more than a crumbling foundation. This coming year, my administration will be focusing on overhauling our Zoning Code and establishing more formal and clear Police Commission policies.

I want to thank the past members of the Comprehensive Plan Zoning Sub-Committee for their work over the past few years reviewing our zoning and recommending changes to ensure we are consistent with State law. In 2018, I will be launching the second stage of the zoning update and will be recruiting local volunteers to delve into such complex subjects as affordable housing, urban agriculture, parking and parking waivers, form-based codes and much more. This work is necessary in order to ensure that our zoning is consistent with our Comprehensive Plan, spurs responsible economic development and preserves our community's high quality of life.

My administration will also be working to build and enhance our police and community relations. In order to do this, I will be working with the Police Chief, Corporation Counsel, local community members and municipal partners to further develop the policies of the Police Commission. This will include the establishment of by-laws and a clear and consistent process for review of any complaints. In addition, I will be looking to the Common Council to help me advance legislative action, including the adoption of a resolution based on the "Right to Know Act", and the review and correction of portions of the City Code that are punitive in nature, such as the Bicycle Registration law.

Our City is safe because of those sworn to protect us. In 2018, I will continue to support the esteemed members of our Police Department, who work tirelessly to protect our community and uphold the integrity of this department. I have confidence that our Police Department, our Police Chief Egidio Tinti, and our community can work together to preserve public safety for all.

In 2018, we are going to focus on Equitable Development and Fair Housing.

Winning the DRI is not just about replacing the locker rooms at Dietz Stadium or repairing broken sidewalks. We'll do those things too. Instead, this is about New York State looking to Kingston as a model and investing in our future to protect and advance our community. It's about us using that investment to foster the stable and responsible growth of our city in a manner that improves the quality of life for all of our residents, not just for some. It's about creating equitable development, fair housing, improved transportation, living wage jobs, and community resiliency. It's also about preventing displacement. We have neighbors struggling to keep their homes. Food pantries trying to keep their shelves full. Parents working multiple jobs just to keep their families afloat. If we're going to address these issues, we need to be bold. We need to have the conversations that matter. In 2018, we're going to talk about what affordable housing means to our community. Because regardless of what your income level is- we all need access to good, quality housing that we can afford. So we're going to look at housing through a wider scope. We're not going to just measure our progress in housing by how many units for a certain income level are being created. Housing isn't really about four walls and a roof; it's about people.

Over the next seven months, the Office of Economic and Community Development will be working with the community to create the City of Kingston's Fair Housing Plan. Once approved by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, this plan will give us a series of measurable outcomes and goals that will be the basis of our community development efforts for the next five years. The plan will cover all barriers to housing, including transportation, walkability, employment, and more.

In 2018, we are going to work across sectors to revitalize our neighborhoods.

In order to achieve our vision for creating a strong and resilient community, we need to focus our efforts on strengthening each of our neighborhoods. In the coming year, my administration will be developing and implementing neighborhood revitalization projects, using a holistic approach that brings together multiple departments and community agencies. Instead of looking at one issue, such as housing, I want to look at the neighborhood as a whole. Do pedestrians have adequate sidewalks to walk on? Do families live near stores where they can purchase affordable and nutritious food? Are there banks nearby? Are there support services available for senior citizens in the area? Is there enough greenspace available for youth and families? Where are residents finding work and are these jobs paying a living wage? These neighborhood assessments, which will be developed as we prepare our Fair Housing Plan, will be the guide for multiple projects over the next few years. Our pilot area will be Franklin St. in Midtown Kingston. The Franklin St. Revitalization Project will include the rehabilitation of at least three city-owned properties, with the subsequent sale of the houses to first time home buyers, the replacement of an entire mile of sidewalk, the expansion and improvement of the facilities at the Everette Hodge Community Center, the exterior upgrades of the Kingston Library, which are being supported by funding from the City's Community Development Block Grant, and the availability of housing rehabilitation funds for homeowners. In addition, we will be expanding our efforts to address so-called zombie properties and will be holding financial institutions

accountable if they do not maintain their properties. I want to thank Ulster Savings Bank and RUCPO for being the first two community agencies to sign on to this ambitious project.

We have a lot of work to do in 2018. If you feel like it is not possible, that this vision is too broad, or that we don't have what it takes, consider this:

- New York State turned us down for the DRI, but we worked even harder and now we are being hailed as the economic engine of an entire region.
- We declared our community a welcoming and inclusive city one year ago and while there were concerns that we would lose our funding or our public safety would crumble, it didn't happen. I just signed our Community Development Block Grant contract and our City's crime rates continue to drop.
- We issued more building permits this year than ever before because people want to live, work and raise a family here
- We rebuilt the Greenkill Avenue Bridge on budget and three months early
- We increased the fund balance and paid down debt, in spite of increasing healthcare and pension costs
- We hosted two Bob Dylan concerts in our city, attracting over 7,000 people from across the state
- We worked with Kingston Local Development Corporation to sell the former Armor Dynamics building in the Kingston Business Park to the Bruderhof Community, bringing the building back on the tax rolls and creating jobs that pay a living wage
- We passed a budget that did not raise taxes one penny for the third year in a row
- We have become the model city for sustainability and resiliency in a time when the President of the United States refuses to even acknowledge climate change is real

The State of our City is strong. According to the Mid-Hudson Regional Economic Development Council, "this is Kingston's moment." What we do with this moment determines who we are as a community and where we go from here. We are entering into the new year, ready to face the challenges that come our way and hopeful for the opportunities still ahead. We are going to continue to do the work that matters, even when it's difficult or the hope of finding a solution to our biggest obstacles feels impossible.

Because as long as we keep moving forward together, we are unstoppable.