

MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER
2022 State of the City



Steven T. Noble
Mayor

Welcome everyone. Thank you for joining me for the 2022 State of the City. First, I'd like to thank the Common Council for inviting me to give this annual address tonight. I want to acknowledge the new Council members: Barbara Hill, Carl Frankel, Naimah Muhammad, and Michael Oliveri, welcome. And welcome back to the familiar faces. I would also like to congratulate Barbara Graves-Poller on being sworn in as our new Corporation Counsel. Welcome, Barbara. I look forward to working with you all this year.

This time last year, I gave the State of the City speech virtually, as we were experiencing a spike in Covid cases and anxiously awaiting the vaccine. At the time, we hoped that we'd be back to normal by now, and Zoom would be a thing of the past. Covid has dealt us many challenges over the last two years, and it appears we have a few left in store.

Kingston, you have been courageous, resilient, and compassionate. With heartfelt gratitude, I want to appreciate our healthcare professionals, our teachers, our essential workers, and all those who kept their businesses operating and their homes safe through these difficult times.

Though we are all fatigued, I know we will carry that same resiliency into this new year, and into this next phase of recovery. If we continue to offer our neighbors a helping hand, if we ask for assistance when we need it, our community can – and will – keep moving forward *together*.

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the City of Kingston. In 1872, the villages of Rondout, Kingston, and Wilbur came together to form a new, unified city. Today, I call on all residents - new and longtime - to make 2022 the year of uniting.

The first State of the City speech, given in 1872 by Mayor James Lindsley, started out, "The duties and responsibilities that have devolved upon us call for energy without precipitancy, care in devising, and courage in execution." He is referring to the challenges the community faced as three villages combined, but those words are just as resonant today. We need **energy**, **care**, and **courage** now more than ever.

In his 1872 speech, Mayor Lindsley goes on, "The construction and maintenance of the roadways ... [and] a comprehensive system of sewerage, will demand our early consideration." Mayor Lindsley was also concerned with organizing "an efficient system of police" and erecting a new fire house.

Though at the time, the pressing concern was to build streets to connect the three villages in a coordinated way, these are still significant concerns for our City 15 decades and 35 mayors later: building safe and accessible roadways, rebuilding that 150-year old sewer system, taking

a close look at our policing practices, and repairing our central fire station. In addition to the ongoing pandemic and our severe housing crisis, I believe one of our biggest challenges in 2022 is the painful division in our nation, state, and local community.

In order to accomplish our goals of rebuilding our roads and vital infrastructure, ensuring every member of our community is fed and housed, and making meaningful change to our policing methods, it will take a coordinated and collective effort.

Together we can heal the divides - because we can only move forward if we are working with one another, helping each other along.

Despite the lingering pandemic and the rocky economy left in its wake, the fiscal state of Kingston remains robust. We acted early, utilizing sound budgeting techniques and conservative spending while maintaining services for residents and keeping the City running. The NY State Comptroller's office gave Kingston a fiscal stress score of 1.7 out of 100 for 2020— our best score to date.

Because of our strong financial standing, I was able to deliver a 2022 budget that – without raising taxes for the 7th year in a row – expands vital services for our residents. We added 22 new full-time jobs across many City departments, including 3 police officers, 5 DPW workers, and 4 project managers who will oversee our ever-expanding portfolio of projects.

2021 turned out to be nearly as challenging as 2020, but, with our secure financial footing and our learned experience dealing with the pandemic's hardships, we were braced to withstand the tough times. Despite scaled-back budgets, we were able to finish or move forward many significant projects.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

I know it's hard to remember – now that it's smoothly paved— but we had some major construction on Broadway last year. Starting with the sewer work beneath Broadway, and the sidewalks along the midtown corridor, the Streetscape project has come a long way. Due to supply chain delays, we were just today able to turn on all of our new signals, so that this thoroughfare now has an active bicycle track, working signals, and will move traffic smoothly across the Midtown business district.

In 2021, NYSDOT completed the Roundabout, creating a beautiful and efficient gateway into our City. At the other end of the Broadway Streetscape Project, the Grand Street intersection has been realigned for safety and accessibility, and a blighted eyesore has been removed, making way for much-needed green space.

In addition to these major projects, the Department of Public Works paved 16 City streets with 12,500 tons of blacktop in 2021.

Early last year, the Hudson River Brickyard Trail, part of the statewide Empire State Trail, opened and gave us a beautiful place to stroll along the river.

The Parks & Recreation Department made upgrades to playgrounds at Barmann and Rickel Knox parks, installing a pour-in-place safety surface (the first of its kind in Kingston) and brand new play equipment. A new soccer field and parking lot were created at Kingston Point Park,

and an exciting splash pad was installed at the Andretta Pool, which also got some much needed improvements.

In 2021, the Office of Grants Management assisted city departments with a portfolio of 60 grant projects funded by nearly \$60million in awards from state and federal agencies and private foundations. These are crucial projects for economic development, health & wellness, historic preservation, and sustainability that benefit the entire community.

Last year, we were steadfast in our commitment to Sustainability. We updated our Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory, and in doing so can report that the City of Kingston achieved and surpassed its original greenhouse gas emissions targets, with data exhibiting an almost 50% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions over the last 10 years.

In 2021, we advanced legislation to protect our air quality with the adoption of Anti-idling Legislation and also adopted the NY Stretch Energy Code, a pathway towards compliance that is more aggressive than the State's energy code, achieving greater energy savings in buildings.

Our Parks improvement projects, including those at Kingston Point and Block Park, incorporated resilience to sea level rise and expanded the use of green infrastructure as a solution. And despite the pandemic, we continued to deliver quality environmental education programming to youth and adults throughout the community, serving thousands in our schools and parks.

Two of the significant initiatives completed in 2021 will be before the Council in early 2022 for ratification, including the Climate Action Plan 2030 and the Arts & Culture Master Plan. With the Climate Action Plan 2030, the City will build on our substantial progress and will continue sustainability efforts by committing to reducing greenhouse emissions community-wide an additional 50% in the next 8 years. With the Arts & Culture Master Plan, we will demonstrate our deep appreciation and commitment to support our rich creative community.

In 2021, the Kingston Forward city-wide rezoning initiative got underway, which will completely overhaul our outdated code. The rezoning project is a herculean effort that was kicked off with a series of public meetings and community input. Form-based code encourages revitalization, promotes affordable housing, spurs small businesses, promotes walkability, and will help us preserve what makes Kingston unique.

MOVING FORWARD

So yes, despite the pandemic and its ongoing effects, we have made much progress here in the City of Kingston. And will continue this great work into the new year.

ARPA FUNDING

We know many of our friends and neighbors in Kingston suffered during the pandemic. Families lost loved ones. We had over 3,700 Covid cases in Kingston alone, and lost more than 55 of our residents. We will never forget all of the heartache this virus has caused.

For our local community who suffered due to the pandemic, help is around the corner. The City will receive approximately \$17 million in Federal aid funding for spending over the next five years. After much public engagement, we have been diligently working to create an Economic Recovery Plan that utilizes these funds for the good of all our residents. The Economic Recovery Plan will incorporate community input, will build upon current projects, and will support new initiatives that spur recovery. Our aim is to build on the City's existing resources,

opportunities, and past planning efforts; and to provide funding in areas for sustained future growth that will bolster Kingston's local economy. We expect to have a plan ready to present to the public in early 2022, and then quickly get this crucial funding into the community.

HOUSING

This year, we will move forward with many housing initiatives that help to create housing at all income levels and safeguard tenants' rights. We have hired a new Director of Housing Initiatives who will implement our Anti-displacement Grant, look at all available opportunities to increase affordable housing, and will further the Kingston Forward rezoning project.

Together with the Common Council, we hope to pass the Good Cause Eviction legislation into law early in 2022, one of many initiatives to protect our tenants from rising rental costs and unfair eviction.

Today, I'm happy to announce that, in partnership with Family of Woodstock, we have identified two vacant lots where we will build tiny homes: 81 Cedar Street and 78 Franklin. We look forward to working with Family of Woodstock and moving the Tiny Homes Project forward in 2022.

I am committed to ensuring that all residents have adequate, safe housing, and my administration will be pursuing all avenues to realize this effort.

COMMUNITY POLICING

In the wake of the murder of George Floyd, the City of Kingston formed the Re-envision Public Safety Task Force. Thirteen (13) community members did extensive research into policing practices and policies to deliver a comprehensive list of recommendations, which the Common Council ratified in April.

In 2022, we want to take our commitment one step further, and turn these concepts into real change. The City is working with the Peaceful Guardians Project to devise a concrete plan for applying the task force's recommendations. With the help of the Peaceful Guardians, we will present to the public a two-pronged approach with a 1-year plan for immediate implementation and a longer-term 5-year plan for loftier goals. I, along with the Kingston Police Department, take very seriously our role in maintaining public safety, ensuring fair and equitable treatment for all communities, and protecting our residents with integrity. I thank the men and women of the Kingston Police Department who proudly serve the City, and do so with the best interest of all at heart.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Our City is 150 years old. We have a storied history and distinctive architecture. We also have a lot of work to keep our infrastructure sound and modern. This takes planning, funding and grants, and lots of patience.

In 2022, substantial work will proceed on the Wurts Street Bridge. I'd like to thank NYSDOT and Assemblyman Kevin Cahill for supporting and funding the \$45 million, two-year rehab of our historic bridge. Other major projects that will progress or be completed in 2022 include: the Elmendorf Street Bridge, several Midtown sewer repairs, the Safe and Accessible Flatbush/Foxhall Avenues Project, and Wilbur Avenue paving. We will be upgrading three

Midtown parking lots with green infrastructure, and will get started on the Franklin and Henry Street Complete Streets Projects.

In addition to renovating Schwenk Drive and Clinton Ave as part of the DRI Uptown Transportation Project, our last remaining Downtown Revitalization Initiative project will also progress: the transformational Kingstonian project. Once complete, the Kingstonian will double the current municipal parking in that space, provide a public plaza with public restrooms, and will create 143 units, including 14 units dedicated to workforce housing, while meeting the National Green Building Standard's Bronze Certification. As the third mayor who has sought to redevelop this site, I look forward to seeing this beneficial project get the final approvals and move forward in 2022.

In our efforts to continue to protect the water quality of the Rondout Creek and Hudson River, we will begin a \$9 million project at the WasteWater Treatment Plant to modernize and improve our facility, which serves the City of Kingston, and parts of the Town of Ulster and Town of Esopus.

This fall, construction will begin on an \$18 million 2-year project to renovate and modernize our beloved **Dietz Stadium**. Together with the Kingston City School District, we will be revitalizing the stadium and grounds with: a new scoreboard, grandstand upgrades, brand new locker rooms, press box renovation, track and turf resurfacing, new parking lot with green infrastructure, a beautiful gateway and so much more. Once completed, we will have a state-of-the-art facility that will compete on the State level, and will continue to be an asset to all of our residents who use Dietz on a daily basis.

You have heard me say this before: with progress there is discomfort. For all of these very necessary and transformative projects, there will be construction. But construction is the sign of progress. So you will see a lot of "progress" ahead.

RECOVERY

In addition to the many streets, sewers and sidewalks projects, the 2022 Budget includes 22 additional City staff positions, which will provide services to make a difference in every Kingston resident's life. The streets will be safer, the parks and green spaces will be better maintained, and overall quality of life will be improved.

During my tenure as your Mayor, it has been my commitment to build and retain a diverse, inclusive workforce. My new recruitment and retention plan, which was unveiled during the 2022 budget process, will help us keep our valuable City employees with starting salary increases, and will help draw well-qualified candidates to vacant positions.

We have built a strong, capable team to better serve our residents, and I thank each and every City employee, from the Fire Department for the 5,000 calls they attended to last year, to the Building Department, which saw a dramatic increase in permits and inspections, to the Water Department and WasteWater Treatment Plant workers who provide us with clean water. From the men and women of DPW for making sure our streets are clean and cared for each week, to the Parks & Recreation Department for providing programming and safe refuge for families and children, to the Police Department for answering 20,000 calls for service, and to the staff at City Hall who serve a variety of residents' needs each and every day.

In May, we will celebrate the 150th Anniversary of our fair City. We will have a series of celebrations, and the work on the City Hall tower will be completed, as will the beautiful lunettes here in Council Chambers which are currently being repaired and restored. It's important to celebrate how far we have come as a community, cherish and continue the preservation of our most valued assets both environmental and historical, and to plan for the next generations.

CLOSING

In the time it took to give this speech today, hundreds of people have driven smoothly from our waterfront neighborhood, through a bustling Midtown, and into the historic Uptown district. That would not have been possible one year ago.

It has taken patience and understanding to get through these last two years - the pandemic and the roadwork. I can't promise an easy road ahead, but I do know that when we approach our challenges with compassion – *together* – the path is smoother and the journey safer.

The City can rebuild a road, but it's up to each of us to walk across that street and speak to our neighbors, to bridge the divides both physical and political.

Mayor Lindsley recognized back in 1872, "Putting aside local prejudice and personal interest, let us bring to our work a singleness of purpose and desire to benefit our whole city..."

I call on the folks of Kingston once again to put aside prejudices and personal interests, and work with a singleness of purpose. Let's move forward and heal as a community. Let's push ourselves and our City to be all that we know it can be.

We are making progress, and we won't stop now. If we work together with **energy**, **care**, and **courage**, we can accomplish anything.

