



**2024 STATE OF THE CITY  
Mayor Steven T. Noble  
'Rising to the Moment'**

Thank you all so much for being here today. I wish everyone a happy New Year. I want to first congratulate the Common Council and welcome the new members. It's wonderful to see some familiar faces and some new faces joining us. As we move forward into this next term, we may not always see eye-to-eye on every issue...but isn't that the point? Civil discourse is the bedrock of our democracy. We have the opportunity - and responsibility - to arrive at the solutions that are born from amplifying diverse perspectives, engaging in spirited dialogue, and carefully listening. I look forward to working with you collaboratively to serve the City we all love.

I would like to take a moment to thank Radio Kingston for their assistance today and making sure those who couldn't make it here have an opportunity to watch from home.

As I stand before you today, I want to thank the Kingston community. I appreciate your continued belief and trust in me. I am honored and humbled to serve this community for another four years.

I also want to take a moment to personally thank my family for their unwavering support through a third campaign. To my wife, Julie, and son, Matthew – you are the reason why I do this job. You are the reason I strive each and every day to make this community a better place. I want to also thank all of my friends and neighbors who are there to support me in this work.

Today, as I embark on a third term as your Mayor, there are many thoughts on my mind.

For myself, it's how best to **rise** to the occasion of being elected for a third 4-year term.

For the City, it's how to continue our **rising** role as a leader in our region.

For the community, it's how to continue to **rise** to the challenges we know all too well, and to those we have yet to face.

And in preparation for our collective future, it's planning for **rising** tides and climate change.

With all of these things on my mind, my agenda, my conscience, I know: This is not *my* moment; it's the moment **we rise** together.

And so, I ask you all, here in the room, let's **all rise**, stand up and shake the hand of the person next to you. Let's collectively rise to this moment.

**CHALLENGES**

Though the state of our city is strong, and I am optimistic about our future, we face both new and continued challenges.

As we head into the 2024 national election cycle, we brace ourselves for ugly rhetoric and hate, while in other corners of the world, wars continue to rage with immeasurable suffering.

This nation is under siege by the opioid epidemic, with impacts felt right here in Kingston.

The housing crisis continues to weigh on our City, with too many individuals and families struggling with housing insecurity.

And while we are starting to see some stabilization after two years of double-digit price increase in food, utilities, and daily necessities, our City and families continue to feel the effects of inflation.

These are not challenges that the Mayor's office can fix alone. It will take all of us— our national leaders, but also here on a local level - we need our partners in nonprofits, businesses, and our residents working together to tackle these issues to the best of our joint abilities.

I absolutely know that, together, we can **rise** to meet these challenges, I know this because:

When we faced a once in a hundred year pandemic, our community came together to make sure that *no one* here went hungry. Our community partners have delivered 460,000 meals to date.

When, during the pandemic, we saw a sharp increase in mental health issues, we became the first in the region – and one of few in the entire country– to launch a Mobile Mental Health crisis response team. We have responded to and assisted 300 individuals since the program began.

When our country faced a policing reckoning, and our residents marched in the streets demanding action, we made tangible changes. We passed Police Accountability legislation and instituted proactive police-community engagement initiatives like walking beats and bike patrols, which get officers further into the community. Our police officer training is also one of the best in the state. I am also proud to say that in 2023, as of this December, our crime statistics show that our city is continuing to see a decrease in crime as we work to provide support to our most at risk community members.

When we experienced higher rates of vehicle crashes within our City, we worked to improve infrastructure, create off-road paths like the Kingston Greenline System, and launched an educational campaign. We recently were admitted to the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO), as one of the only cities in NY State, and we are actively working toward a better transportation system for all of our users.

When we saw that many of our residents desperately needed photo identification to be able to access child care, social services, and school registration, we created the Kingston Municipal ID program. We have issued nearly 2,000 IDs to date.

When our ambulance provider serving the residents of the City demanded a large subsidy, our team put together an immediate plan to make sure that our community would not only continue to have an ambulance help them in their time of need but allow the Fire Department to assist in medical calls from the start to the finish. Today is day one of that new program and I would like to applaud the members of the Kingston Fire Department for RISING to this moment.

## **RISING STAR**

By meeting these challenges with innovative, forward-thinking strategies, Kingston has become a rising star in our region, and even a leader in many fields nationwide. We are doing cutting-edge work and leading the way on several initiatives, from instituting a citywide form-based

zoning code to developing a comprehensive package of legal, policy, and direct service initiatives to address our City's housing needs.

We recently held a design competition to create permit-ready Accessory Dwelling Unit designs. Not only does this raise awareness of the legalization of ADUs citywide, it also provides residents with a free concept to use, literally in their own backyards.

We are leading sustainability action state-wide by implementing green infrastructure into all our projects. We are converting City Hall and the Andy Murphy Neighborhood Center into carbon neutral buildings, and our flooding resiliency work is a model for the region.

As I said earlier, working together is essential, so we have had unprecedented community engagement here in Kingston: from how to spend our \$17M Federal Covid relief, to what to name a community greenspace, to hiring bilingual staff in many departments, my administration continues to ensure that the community has a voice in the decisions that impact all of us. I am proud of the strides we have made to become a more welcoming and inclusive community to all.

### **RISING RENTS / RAISING HOUSING**

Housing has been one of the most pressing issues during my time as Mayor. Even before the pandemic, we saw an influx of new residents and a significant change in the housing market. We knew we were headed toward a housing crisis. In 2020, I founded the Office of Housing Initiatives, and since then, we have implemented various programs to assist our residents: homeowners, renters, and landlords alike. We know that this will take every tool available to us and that many solutions are needed.

We know our programs like the Right to Counsel, the Affordable Housing Fund, and the Emergency Tenant Protection Act keep our residents in their homes and create safe, comfortable places to live. This year, with the new zoning code, we implemented regulations on short-term rentals, legalized accessory dwelling units, and made developing housing in Kingston much easier.

We have incredible housing partners in RUPCO, the Kingston City Land Bank, Family of Woodstock, Legal Services of the Hudson Valley, Youth Build, Gateway of the Hudson Valley and so many other partners who help us to implement our housing agenda. Without such amazing non-profit support, we would not be able to do all this good work!

With our new zoning code now in place, we have laid the foundation for what will be a comprehensive push to incrementally develop the housing our community needs. Today, I am announcing my administration's goal for the City of Kingston to approve 1,000 new units of housing in the next 5 years.

Through this effort, we have streamlined the Planning Board process and will be working throughout 2024 to make our Building Department approvals easier with online permit applications, and adding more staff so that the Building Department can continue to meet the needs of our growing city.

Housing is a basic human right. I believe that with every new program we implement, with every unit we help build, with every person we help stay in their home, we are creating a brighter community for all.

### **RISING TIDES (SUSTAINABILITY)**

We are so fortunate to live in one of the most beautiful places in the world. Though Kingston has been my home all my life, I am still awed by the mountains and waterways surrounding us. In

addition to protecting our people, what could be more important than protecting these natural resources we've been given?

As we look to the future, we know climate change is a reality. We have to be prepared. That's why my team diligently applied and reapplied – three times – for the RAISE grant, which we brought home last year. The \$22M in funding is an incredible opportunity to plan for the future with resiliency efforts, safer streets for all users, and increased access to the waterfront.

Since I began my career as an Environmental Educator for the City and since I've been Mayor, we have made significant strides in Sustainability.

We've gone electric! Since 2016 we've purchased 13 plug-in vehicles for our fleet and installed 9 electric vehicle charging stations across Kingston for greater access to renewable energy. Next year, we'll add two more.

We have installed solar at 3 municipal sites, and in 2024, we will complete 4 more.

We launched a composting program that has been so successful, we hope to be able to implement a second phase at your curb!

We have conducted many studies and created many plans, and now we are putting those directives into action. The 2020 Open Space Plan isn't just a document; it's a promise to plant 1000 trees, add more public access along the Hudson, and protect and enhance open space all over the City.

The Climate Action Plan 2030 provides a blueprint to build sustainable, resilient, and independent energy, food, economic, and social systems. With the community's help, we created a bold vision to achieve sharp greenhouse gas reductions by 2030.

We will hopefully adopt the Community Preservation Plan in 2024, which will set up a fund to financially help us protect our precious open spaces and natural resources.

We are planning, implementing, and incorporating sustainability into every aspect of City government. I am happy to report that we are ahead of schedule in advancing our goals of the Climate Action Plan and look forward to further advancing these initiatives in 2024.

### **RAISES FOR CITY STAFF**

We can make plans and create strategies, but at the end of the day the success of a City relies on its employees. From your refuse, recycling and yard waste getting picked up curbside each week, to the firefighters who are no more than 3 minutes away from any call for help, to the police officers who are working to keep us safe and create community connections throughout Kingston, the Park staff who keep the trails and parks clean, the Recreation staff who inspire our youth, City Hall staff who run our day-to-day, and the remaining 300 staff, we wouldn't be the special place we are without these dedicated employees.

I am proud to say, in 2023, I was able to negotiate a fair deal with CSEA to get our lowest paid City employees a much-deserved **raise** in wages. I want to thank my staff for all their hard work, and I hope they understand how very appreciated they are.

### **RAISING EXPECTATIONS**

When I stepped into office in 2016, I knew what Kingston could be. Having grown up here, and worked as a City employee myself, I knew that by setting an ambitious agenda and bringing practical optimism to the job, Kingston could and would exceed all expectations.

I was determined to not only support the staff and successfully manage the day-to-day work, but to see the big picture.

In the last eight years, the City of Kingston has taken on a \$26M project to revitalize and renovate Dietz Stadium, to make it a cutting-edge facility and a regional draw.

We rebuilt Broadway with better infrastructure, safer access for cyclists, and a smoother, more inviting ride through the heart of our City. We replaced miles of sidewalks so that we can more easily access all that Kingston has to offer without needing a car.

We created the Kingston Greenline, transforming abandoned railroad tracks into an appealing urban trail, providing a green pathway from our Waterfront through our growing Midtown and into Uptown and connecting food desert neighborhoods to a bustling shopping area.

We completed a \$10M upgrade to our Wastewater Treatment Plant to better clean our water and protect our waterways.

We completed a \$20M project to protect our drinking water at Cooper Lake.

Next year, we will see the historic Wurts Street Bridge fully restored.

We completely overhauled an antiquated zoning system and replaced it with a new zoning code that encourages smart growth, values preservation and, above all, helps right some of the egregious inequities in the old zoning code.

In eight years, we have received over \$110 million in grant funding!

In addition to establishing the Grants Management Department in 2016, I am proud to have created the departments of Housing, Arts & Cultural Affairs, and Health & Wellness, so that our residents can continue to thrive in all areas of life, and the City's first Communications Office, so that each and every resident feels connected, included, and involved.

We have increased accessibility with 311, the Engage Kingston website, and robust community outreach. We have increased transparency across government, including the budget process, public/private partnerships, and of course everyone's favorite Friday newsletter!

In my eight years, I have been able to look at Kingston holistically to: fix what was broken (ancient sewers), mend what was flawed (35 miles of paving), and envision a future for our City.

I believe we are stronger, more resilient, and better prepared than ever before, but we have work yet to be done.

## **RAISING HOPE**

In 2024, we have many exciting projects that are in the planning phase, design phase, or getting built to help revitalize our city.

Though we don't know what's on the horizon, when I think about the next four years and beyond, we have set our sights high. We want to achieve 100% renewable energy, plant 1,000 trees, approve 1,000 units of housing, and continue Kingston's path towards a healthy and prosperous future for all.

## CLOSING

In 2016, I offered a pledge of what I would do as Mayor of our great city:

- I will work in partnership with the Common Council to move this city forward
- I will communicate openly, intelligently, and respectfully with all residents, businesses, media, and other stakeholders.
- I will make decisions based on facts and reason, listening to all parties and weighing all options.
- I will build within our City workforce a cohesive team made up of qualified, skilled, and committed employees who will be proud of their contribution to our City.
- I will work with local and regional governments to identify opportunities to share services and resources.
- I will ensure responsible and transparent spending of our tax dollars.
- I will build up morale of those who work in each of the City departments, while also supporting those in our community who are privately working to bring out the best in Kingston.

Over the past eight years, I have worked hard to meet this pledge. Today, I am committing once again to these principles in my next term.

I thought it fitting to also end with something I said 8 years ago. It stuck with me and I hope it still resonates with you as well.

“If I have said anything today that stays with you, I hope it's this: this is your City Hall. This is your Common Council. I am your Mayor. Our job is to work together to make Kingston a safe, stable, and thriving city.”

Now...let's get back to work!