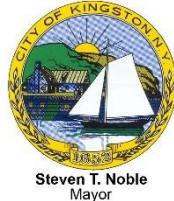


**State of the City
January 5, 2021
Presented by Mayor Steven T. Noble**



Good evening. Thank you to President Shaut and the Common Council for inviting me here to deliver my annual State of the City address.

First, I want to speak directly to the people of Kingston. I want to thank each of you for your resilience and perseverance over the past year. Thank you to all of the healthcare workers who have persisted in the face of the pandemic, who put your own health and that of your family on the line. Thank you to all of the frontline workers who kept our grocery stores, pharmacies, restaurants, and banks open. Thank you to our teachers who have adapted to a constantly changing landscape and continued to educate our students. Thank you to the City of Kingston employees - the police officers and firefighters who kept us safe; the men and women of DPW who kept our city clean; the Parks and Recreation staff who cared for our children; the City Hall employees who kept our city running; and the Water department who protected our clean water. Thank you to our local businesses who scrambled to find and afford protective equipment, who tackled the evolving Covid-19 protocols, and ensured their customers were safe and comfortable. Thank you to everyone who checked on your neighbor, who made a mask for a friend, and who kept their family members safe by making the smart, yet difficult choice to stay apart.

Our city, like our nation, is in pain. We have suffered hardships, unemployment, illness, and the loss of loved ones. What we hoped would be a short inconvenience in March has proven to be the greatest tragedy of a generation. At the time of this address, over 350,000 people have died in the U.S. We know that it will take a great deal of time and patience to find peace in this loss, to forge a new economic recovery, and heal from the isolation we have all endured.

Though it may feel distant, there is hope on the horizon. Widespread distribution of the Covid-19 vaccine will be available in the coming months. We thank Ulster County Executive Pat Ryan for his leadership and his team for their work on local vaccine distribution. I know it is difficult, but we all have to hold on just a little bit longer. Help is on the way.

And while the pandemic has resulted in a loss of State Aid and sales tax revenue, the financial outlook for Kingston is still bright. We came into 2020 in excellent fiscal standing. Through smart financial planning, robust grant funding support, and sound budgetary management, we were prepared to weather this storm. I was proud to deliver a 2021 City budget with no layoffs, no tax increases, and no loss of service. Because at a time when our residents and local businesses are struggling, we must do everything possible to lessen the burden.

Food Security

While the pandemic has dealt us a great deal of pain and sorrow, it has also shown us who we are as a community. Within days of declaring our local state of emergency, dozens of organizations and hundreds of individuals were hard at work through the newly formed Kingston Emergency Food Collaborative, ensuring thousands of meals got to our local families in need. Volunteers and City Staff worked side by side, responding to the emergency food hotline, delivering groceries from People's Place, preparing and packaging meals at the Everette Hodge Community Center, and coordinating pickups and deliveries in the YMCA parking lot. In this moment, it didn't matter who you were, what entity you represented, or position you held. All that mattered was that you showed up. And there is no doubt about it - Kingston showed up.

Communications

As Mayor, my highest priority has always been the health and safety of all residents. In early March, my office organized a citywide mailing in English and Spanish to make sure everyone understood the gravity and severity of the virus. We started daily briefings on Radio Kingston to inform the public of the evolving situation. We sent out multiple newsletters a week and created web pages for business and community resources. In every instance, we have sought to be clear and honest in our communications, even when it was simply to say 'I don't know yet.' I thank the public for their trust during this time of great uncertainty, when what we knew to be true changed from minute to minute and we all had to find grace in the unknown.

Public Safety

In the midst of a pandemic and a deeply polarized political climate, we also experienced a national reckoning on racial injustice. In May, with the death of George Floyd at the hands of police officers in Minneapolis, the whole world was awakened to the ways in which people of color experience violence in America.

When hundreds of people marched down Broadway in protest of police brutality and in solidarity with those who have suffered from systems steeped in oppression, something shifted in many of us. As local leaders, we had a responsibility to answer this call and to declare, unequivocally, that Black Lives Matter. I want to thank the Common Council for moving forward on legislation, which enacted a series of important changes, including guidelines for a transparent appointment process of Police Commissioners; training requirements for the Commissioners; and improvements to the officer complaint process.

So when Governor Cuomo issued an Executive Order for every municipality to grapple with police reform, we were ready. The Re-envision Public Safety Task force has been meeting since September to produce 12 recommendations for improving police accountability, examining use of force, alternatives to police intervention, and recruitment. The task force will soon be presenting their research and recommendations to the Common Council. My 2021 budget allocates \$100,000 to fund some of the initiatives that the task force puts forward so that we can actually begin to implement these community-sourced recommendations.

I want to thank the Kingston Police Department, who was re-accredited this year, and continues to be a leader in training and practices. In 2020, the Kingston Police Department instituted

walking patrols, so that each officer is interacting with the community and meeting neighbors. We have further to go in rebuilding trust in the community, but I know how dedicated these officers are, and how much they want to support their City.

I would like to thank Chief Tinti, the volunteers of both the Police Commission and the Re- envision Public Safety Task Force, and all of the men and women of the City of Kingston Police Department for their dedication to their community.

Our City has had its share of violence in the last year. We know that a confluence of factors gave rise to crime in communities across the Country, in ways we haven't experienced before, and Kingston was no exception. I would like us all to take a moment to reflect on - not only our monumental losses -- but the ways in which we came together in the face of these tragedies. In our darkest time, we found light in one another, solace in our community. The outpouring of love and support and advocacy has been heartening and brings us closer to healing.

Infrastructure

It may have felt like the world grinded to a halt in 2020, but we were able to keep a variety of major infrastructure projects moving forward. The massive Broadway Streetscape project is well underway. While the full project is not yet complete, the new sidewalks installed along the south side of the street are already being well-used. Finally, individuals in wheelchairs or children in strollers can safely travel along the majority of the Broadway corridor.

The I-587 Roundabout project has made significant advances this year. Construction has paused for the winter months, but will pick back up in the spring. The traffic pattern is already much improved and once the roundabout is complete, it will be landscaped to create a beautiful gateway into Kingston.

I am proud to announce that despite the pandemic, both of these roadway projects will be completed by fall 2021. There will be many more projects advancing this year, including the Schwenk Drive/Clinton Avenue traffic improvements, sidewalk projects on Henry Street, Franklin Street, Flatbush and Foxhall, and the Broadway/Grand intersection realignment.

I'm not going to sugarcoat it, there will continue to be detours and inconveniences as these projects unfold, but once they are completed, we will have an inclusive, accessible and beautiful City to show for it. I thank you all for your patience.

Parks

In 2020, we gained a new appreciation for our local parks and greenspaces. During a time when socializing became a walk with a friend along the rail trail and dinner with extended family resulted in a picnic at Kingston Point Beach, our safest respite during the pandemic was outdoors. Even with the increased use of our beloved parks, we were able to complete a number of important parks improvement projects, including ADA-compliant upgrades at Kingston Point Beach, new pavilions at Hasbrouck and Forsyth Parks among many others.

And just a few days ago, the Hudson River Brickyard trail became open to the public, with an official grand opening planned for this spring. Our section of the Empire State Trail, which runs through the 500-acre Scenic Hudson property now called Quarry Waters, is some of the most

spectacular scenery along the 750-mile state-spanning trail and will be a welcome addition to Kingston's impressive parks and trails network.

With more parks improvements planned for 2021, including opening the renovated Andretta Pool with a new splash pad and new amenities at Rickel Knox and Barmann parks. I want to acknowledge and thank the many City staff who help make these infrastructure and parks projects a reality – including the Parks & Rec Department, Department of Public Works, with assistance from our Engineering, Community Development and Grants departments.

Finally, I want to thank the Recreation staff and our non-profit partners who helped to establish free programming for children throughout the City of Kingston at a time when our young people needed support the most. Thanks to this collaboration, the Rondout Neighborhood Center, Everette Hodge Community Center, Boys and Girls Club, and the Center for Creative Education have been able to safely provide free summer and school year programming to hundreds of local youth.

Housing

Even before the pandemic, we knew we were suffering a housing shortage, despite the results of the City's first vacancy study. And while our attention has had to temporarily shift to advocating for the extension of the eviction moratorium and providing emergency rental assistance in the face of the worsening pandemic, we cannot lose sight of our long-term housing goals. We need housing at all income levels so that we are able to keep up with the growing demand while ensuring that no one loses their home.

I urge the members of the Common Council to reconsider my proposal and support a city-wide form-based rezoning effort. Our current zoning code is needlessly complicated and hasn't been updated since the 1960s. Form-based zoning has been extremely effective in spurring economic development and smart growth while encouraging the creation of much-needed housing. The sooner we adopt this code, the faster we make new housing a reality.

The Council has voiced a commitment to passing meaningful housing legislation, and I am proposing that they consider recommendations outlined in the Pattern for Progress Vacant Buildings report as a part of their housing initiatives.

I also ask the Council to consider my recent proposal to convert two city-owned properties in Midtown for the creation of affordable housing. These centrally-located under-utilized properties could be homes for community members in danger of displacement.

In 2021, we will implement strategies to curb displacement to further ensure that every single person in our community is housed.

Sustainability:

In 2020, the Common Council adopted the Open Space Plan, which aims to preserve Kingston's unique resources and to protect our air, water, wildlife and land. Some of the actions include: more public access to the Hudson and Rondout Creek, a thousand new trees planted, and the establishment of community gardens and a Midtown park. It's a plan that truly understands Kingston's goals and helps to make them reality.

In just a few days, on January 14th, we are launching the Climate Action Plan 2030, a blueprint for building a more sustainable and resilient community over the next 10 years. The public will be a major partner in the planning process and in the end will serve as a co-author of this ambitious pledge. At a time when so much seems out of our control and our nation's leadership is transitioning, I am excited to work with all of you at the local level to determine our own future.

Economic Recovery/Brighter Path Forward

Despite our strong financial standing coming into 2020, our economic recovery will not happen overnight.

Last year, my administration commissioned a study - a sweeping review of our progress in implementing our City's Comprehensive Plan. The report, completed by Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress, offers a snapshot of where we are in our efforts to strengthen our economic and community development at the 5-year benchmark, including where we have made progress and improvements and where there is still work to be done. In the coming days, we will release the report with an analysis of how we will continue to reach these goals.

Each year when I give my State of the City address, I give a long list of accomplishments by City staff last year. Instead, this week, my office will be releasing an Annual Report document detailing each department's achievements, developments and goals for 2021.

I know that there is very little I can say that will ease the burden of this moment. I address you all tonight, not to put a spin on this difficult year or simply tout a series of achievements. Instead, I ask all of us to rethink how we will move forward.

Will we recover? Yes, of course. We have done so before.

Will we rebuild what has fallen? Absolutely. We know what it takes to rebuild this city from the ground up.

But instead of simply rebuilding what once was, we can do better. We must do better. It is not lost on me that too many of our residents are struggling, despite the fact that we are living in a moment in history when everything we could ever possibly want or need lies in abundance. There is no doubt in my mind that Kingston will flourish once more, but without addressing the deepening inequality in our community, our future will continue to be shaped by those who wish to profit from our city, who measure success by the height of the stock market or the price of our homes. We, Kingston's leadership, must work together to alter this path and mend the division within, for the good of our city.

It was a long year, but 2020 is finally over. The City of Kingston may be hurting right now, but our harshest days will soon soften and these new scars will fade with time. So let us reimagine a new path, where brighter futures lie ahead and those we love are finally within reach. Have faith. We will be there soon.

Thank you. I look forward to delivering next year's address in the Council Chambers of our great City Hall. Goodnight.