

January 2016

Annual Message delivered by Steve Noble, January 1, 2016

I would like to wish everyone a Happy New Year. I know it may seem a little early for some of us on New Year's Day, so thank you for being here. For myself and my family, this is a day we have worked towards for so long, it's hard to believe we finally made it. I am truly thankful to be here, in front of all of you, with my wife Julie, my son Matthew, and my entire family who stood by my side, even when we weren't sure what January 1st would look like for us.

When I first announced I was running for Mayor, you can only imagine the types of reactions I witnessed. Some people were genuinely excited, others concerned or nervous, and others were confused. I suppose I'm not what some of you think of when you picture what a Mayor of Kingston should look like.

I'm young (though not the youngest Mayor!) and I don't have a background in politics. But I believe, and it seems, so do you, that it is time for a change.

I spent the past year on the campaign trail visiting as many of your doorsteps as possible, to hear from all of you and to share with you who I am and what my vision is for the future of our great city. I listened to you and learned about who you are and what matters to you.

Through this process, I think we found that we share many similarities. Like many of you, I grew up in Kingston. After attending the College of Environmental Science and Forestry, I married my high school sweetheart, Julie, and moved back to Kingston, with both of us eager to find work and begin our lives together in our hometown. What we found was that Kingston wasn't the easiest place to find employment, especially in the environmental field.

While some of our fellow graduates were finding success in larger, more progressive cities, we couldn't bear the thought of leaving our hometown. We firmly believed that Kingston would benefit from the types of programs and policy change we could bring.

So instead of running away, we stood up and made our cases. It seems to be a recurring theme in my life. By showing previous administrations the value of environmental education, stewardship and our city's natural resources, and identifying and securing grant funding for our positions, we were successful.

Ten years later, Kingston has become a model in the areas of sustainability, resiliency, and environmental education. One of the many highlights of my career in Parks and Recreation has been my work at the Everette Hodge Community Center in Midtown Kingston. In this role, I managed a large group of partners to create a free, accessible and very successful after school program for at-risk children and teens in our community. While I still haven't mastered the art of jump roping, I have gained more insight into the needs of our youth and families.

While I am honored to stand in front of you today, I do not stand alone.

I want to congratulate Alderman at Large Jim Noble and the newly sworn in members of the Common Council.

I am humbled to serve alongside such dedicated public servants, each of whom come from different backgrounds and possess unique skill sets. The vast knowledge found in this group of Common Council members is one of its greatest strengths. On this council, we have professionals in the fields of education, healthcare, business, and management. My administration and our community will benefit from the Council's experience and expertise.

While I don't expect us to always agree, I am committed to establishing and maintaining a respectful and productive dialogue at all times. I believe it is through our differences that we will grow, and through our shared passion to move Kingston forward that we will succeed.

While we celebrate today, with hope and community spirit, we know that we will have some challenges ahead of us:

- Our infrastructure, the backbone of our city, is failing; our pipes bursting, our roads crumbling at their weakest points.

- Our economy, while growing in some areas, has not recovered. Many residents still lack access to living wage jobs, often struggling to make ends meet and provide for themselves and their families.
- Safe and quality housing is not available to all residents, with too many of our neighbors living in substandard and dangerous conditions.
- We lack a coordinated and accessible transportation system that meets the needs of its residents, businesses and tourists
- We have sought to strengthen our business districts and yet have not addressed our parking infrastructure or policies, thereby limiting our economic growth.
- We are engaged in a variety of legal proceedings, some of which could have substantial costs to Kingston taxpayers

I believe that through strategic planning and cooperation, we have the ability to overcome these great challenges and the others that lie ahead. I hope that our Comprehensive Plan is one of the first documents I get to sign into law in the coming months.

What makes Kingston special?

Kingston is a small city, steeped in history, and is home to a number of amenities and attractions that make it a great place to live. We have a new SUNY Ulster campus, right in our very own backyard, providing our local youth a chance for higher education that they can walk to. Our park system, is unique in its size, diversity and sheer number of

participants and has provided quality green spaces to generations of Kingston residents. Our local economy is being built by small and unique businesses in the arts, technology and service industries, many of whom invest in this city because of our quality of life.

I believe the greatest resource our city has is its people. Within Kingston lies a community, one which wants to be engaged and one which has shown time and time again, when our community mourns, we mourn together, when our community thrives, we all thrive, and when our community comes together to celebrate, well, let's just say we know how to have a good time here in Kingston, NY.

Per the City Charter, the Mayor and Common Council are required to provide a state of the city address to the community. The public should not have to wait a year to know the State of our City. My administration is going to completely change the way the city communicates with our residents.

Under my direction, each department will be tasked with setting goals with specific outcomes and deadlines, and we will report these successes and challenges to the community on a regular basis.

- We will use traditional and new forms of media to reach the public at large. This will include a review and update of social media policies and training, revisions to the city website, and regular newsletters, press conferences, releases and contacts.
- We will work with the City Clerk's office and the Common Council to create improved access to municipal meeting agendas, minutes and, when possible, recordings

- We will solicit input from residents through focus groups and neighborhood meetings that are accessible and convenient to the community.
- We will work to provide more interpretation and translation services to meet the needs of our community
- We will increase the city's involvement in community coalitions and initiatives related to the well-being and success of the City of Kingston
- We will create a systematic approach to recruit, train and retain volunteers to assist in various quality of life projects around the city

For the past 6 weeks I have been meeting with my department heads to analyze the strengths and challenges of each department. Common issues have included the need for more staff time, training, equipment, as well as an improvement in staff morale

Each department is currently being evaluated. In early 2016, the Office of Economic Development will be revised to better meet the needs of our business community and support our grants management resources. Anticipated changes include the establishment of a Grants Manager who will be responsible for all grant research, applications and reporting and a Business Services Manager who will be responsible for providing support to new and existing local businesses and coordinating efforts with the county's business offices. Additional staffing pattern changes are anticipated in other departments and will be brought forth to the Common Council in early 2016.

- I am going to strive to foster a culture in which employees are proud of their work and are able to successfully report they are getting things done effectively and efficiently

- I will be distributing to all city staff, an employee handbook, which was approved in 2011 and never distributed in an effort to professionalize our interactions with the public and each other
- A formalized performance review and supervision tool will be created to better support staff development
- A revised method of employment recruitment will be instituted for all open positions. A pilot was implemented for the positions of Secretary and Corporation Counsel, with significant success. More work will be done to further open the process and reach qualified candidates who are often disconnected from the current process. A similar process will be done for volunteer boards and commissions with an overall effort to make sure our city workforce is representative of our community.

Reciting this oath today is reminiscent of my wedding vows, which i did 11 and a half years ago on an absolute beautiful, though warmer day than this. I am committing to also holding this oath in the highest regard. In doing so, I am committing to this city, its residents, businesses, and all who call Kingston their own, that I will lead from a place of integrity, transparency, and professionalism.

I have no intention of making empty promises. The issues we are facing will not be solved overnight and like all other Mayors before me, I will inherit issues, problems and projects that I did not previously manage. It will take time, perseverance, strategy and

patience to be successful and so in place of empty promises, I will offer this pledge instead:

- 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.

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. Let's get to work