

Inaugural Address
Mayor Kimberley Driscoll
Peabody Essex Museum, Salem
January 1, 2018

Good morning and Happy New Year. I am so thrilled and honored to be with you all this morning as we embark on a new term in city government, a new year of possibilities and opportunities to realize our city's full potential. To make Salem the best it can be.

I'm excited to be joined in that effort by my colleagues in local government, particularly those being sworn into office for their first term. I want to offer my best wishes and thanks to ALL of you. If you're doing this kind of work, it's because you love where you live and I feel grateful to have such a talented and dedicated group of people to work with on a pro-Salem agenda.

I'd like to recognize some dignitaries who have joined us this morning: Rep. Paul Tucker, Essex County Sheriff Kevin Copping, and my friend and colleague Beverly Mayor Mike Cahill. I'd also like to thank our Sergeant-at-Arms Jean Guy Martineau.

I also ask for your indulgence and allow me to thank my family for not only being here today, but for being so supportive throughout my term in office.

When I started in this job, Nick and I had three young kids, who were 3, 5, and 8. It was all we could do to contain them through their Mom's first inaugural speech. Young Nicky was squirming in the front row because he didn't like sitting on his dad's lap. Today, at 15, 17, and 20 years old Nick and I are blessed with two teenagers and one millennial...who are probably still itching to get out of here – 10am is considered too early to be up on a holiday. There's no way I can do the work that I do without your support, love, and sacrifices. I'm so proud of you and grateful for all your help.

I want to also recognize my parents, Bob and Joy, and my sister Chrystal, who are here this morning having flown in from much warmer places. Most of you are here because you care about Salem, they are here because they care about me. I love you dearly and thank you for coming up and braving these cold temps.

It's truly a privilege and an honor to stand before you today, in this remarkable place. The roots of the Peabody Essex Museum date back to 1799, when a collection of Salem sea captains formed the East India Marine Society and decided they needed a building to display the objects and curiosities they brought back from their journeys to Asia, Africa, India and beyond. Fast forward to 200 years to 2002, when the Peabody Essex Museum unveiled this soaring and open space designed by Moshe Safdie. I think it's fair to say those sea captains who originated this institution would be pretty impressed.

This beautiful space would not have been possible without the cooperation and forbearance of community leaders and museum officials – working together; compromising when not in agreement and always sharing a common concern for Salem. Today, the Peabody Essex Museum is in the midst of another expansion. By May of next year there will be another 40,000 square feet added to this magnificent museum campus, which will allow for additional gallery space to showcase even more from their remarkable collections.

As we think about Salem as an inclusive city, as a city that opens itself to the cultures and diversity of the world around us, there seems no more appropriate place than here for us to mark today's occasion. Even as we continue the conversation with PEM about their role as one of the caretakers of our city's history, we know how fortunate we are to have this asset and institution within our city's 8 square miles.

In many respects, what's happening here at PEM – growing for the future while linking to the past - is symbolic of the transition happening throughout our community. Just like here at PEM, our amazing and rich history is at the center of our growth and transformation. And, as you can imagine, in a nearly 400-year-old city, growth and transformation presents both a challenge and an obligation. We must remain true to the best of our past, while staying open to new and unique opportunities, cultures, and innovations.

Jane Jacobs, the great urban planner and activist, once observed that “cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody.”

In her time, that meant regardless of race or income. Today, in Salem and in any vibrant city, when we say “everybody” we extend that definition to include ability, age, gender identity, immigration status, and even how long you've lived here. Jacobs talked about the city having the capability of “providing something for everybody.” When we think about Salem today, that really means three critical things: where we live, how we get around, and how our children learn and grow.

Housing – where we live – is one of the greatest challenges facing Salem, our region, and our Commonwealth today. It is far too easy for those of us fortunate enough to have a roof above our heads to dismiss this challenge. But it impacts us, as well. When housing demand is high and supply is not keeping pace, prices rise, rents rise, and values rise. And as values rise, taxes do, as well.

This is one reason we must continue to look to new housing opportunities for people on all points of the economic spectrum. Well-designed, taking into consideration the context of neighborhoods and impacts on traffic and services, yes – but not writing it off out of hand.

We know, as well, that the demand for new housing isn't even just about meeting the needs of people who want to move to Salem. It's about meeting the needs of our neighbors living here now. The Housing Needs Analysis we completed just over a year ago makes it clear that the pressure for housing is coming from many different fronts. It includes the Salem senior who wants to stay here, but downsize to a smaller place with single-floor living. And the young adult who grew up here and poured your coffee this morning or your beer the night before. It's from the young couple renting a one-bedroom apartment, who want to have kids and stay right here in Salem or the family that's worked hard, saved enough to buy and is already invested in and part of our community. We want folks to be able to start here and stay here.

We also know that almost half of all Salem residents are currently paying nearly one-third or higher of their income on housing. These are our neighbors. Our constituents. And they – rightly – demand our focus, and a commitment that the ‘everybody’ that Jane Jacobs referred to have the opportunity to live and thrive in Salem.

How we get around is the next significant challenge facing our community and it certainly isn't unrelated to housing. Traffic is a four-letter word here and I don't think anyone would dispute that.

As we plan for housing, we're working equally hard to divert people out of their cars and onto bicycles, boats, trains, and sneakers by making it easier and safer to travel in and around Salem by means other than a vehicle.

How to achieve that further means continuing our work securing state and federal grants; leveraging private sector growth to upgrade our busiest corridors and devoting the necessary local capital to improve our neighborhood streets and sidewalks. To that end, we'll complete the off-street paths in Blubber Hollow, along Canal Street, and by Collins Cove over the next year. We'll continue the upgrades on Canal Street, Essex Street, Derby Street, and Boston Street and work with MassDOT on improvements to Highland Avenue.

A feasibility study is now underway that will come to completion this coming year to look at the possibility of a new City shuttle service – an internal circulator. We will expand the installation of smart signal technologies in our traffic lights, implement complete streets striping downtown and on major corridors, and bring additional traffic calming projects to our neighborhoods.

It's important to recognize, however, that over the last decade, while Salem's population increased by 3%, the number of vehicles registered here dropped by almost 2%. Traffic certainly hasn't dropped by 2%, however. What this tells us is that – like with so many challenges – we're actually looking at the local impact of a regional issue. Commuters driving to or through Salem contribute to our traffic challenges. The solution, therefore, must be regionally focused. And that's why we're working with neighboring cities and towns on a regional shuttle study. It's why we're pushing so hard for the South Salem commuter rail station, to give commuters traveling to Salem to go to Salem State or the hospital a convenient alternative to driving.

We'll continue to pursue new and innovative approaches to tackling traffic, as well as parking challenges – working in collaboration with our neighboring communities, as well as our state and local partners in government.

Innovation and collaboration are also fundamental to maintaining the forward progress we're seeing today in Salem's schools.

In the last round of reports from the state department of education we were so pleased to see Salem High School advance from Level 3 to Level 2. Enrollment at Salem High has increased from the previous year and our new college and career readiness redesign efforts are just getting underway.

As a whole, our district is making steady progress toward closing the achievement gap, especially in critical subgroups, like students with disabilities and English language learners.

We know that the parents of Salem students are twice as likely to have a favorable perspective of our schools today than they did even just four years ago, and the share of parents saying they are very satisfied with the schools is up 250%. But that viewpoint and the positive work underway in our schools isn't always seen by our larger community. While there is still work to do, frankly we need everyone to do a better job communicating just how much success our kids and our teachers are achieving every day, in every school, and every classroom across our city.

The launch of "Our Salem, Our Kids," will help toward that end. This citywide systems change is the culmination of nearly two years of work by staff, teachers, community partners, and parents. "Our Salem, Our Kids" is steeped in the belief that education is a community mission. At its outset

there are three core elements.

The first is Salem Connects. This program establishes a dedicated in-school counselor at each of our Kindergarten through 8th grade schools. This tool will help us measure more than reading skills – if kids are hungry, or homeless, or have anxieties, we want to help meet those needs in order to prepare them for success in school.

The second element is a searchable program guide for youth services for kids of all ages, from infants through grade 12, to connect them to all the opportunities our city has to offer. Whether you need to know about swimming lessons or math tutors, this guide will be for all things youth related in our city.

The last element is our community trainings. Through a collaboration with the Mass Mentoring Partnership, we're working to cultivate stronger youth/adult connections. Having a positive role model directly impacts a child's likelihood to stay in school, go on to college, and make better, safer choices. This serves to further our commitment to leveraging all the assets of our community to help our kids succeed.

In truth, the world is changing and our schools, city, and community must work seamlessly together to ensure that all of our kids have the academic, social, emotional, and developmental supports they need to thrive in the 21st century. We are so fortunate to live in a place that is rich with resources — a university that served as a former teachers' college, a world class medical institution, a dynamic and collaborative business community and numerous engaged community organizations, and artistic and cultural treasures. "Our Salem, Our Kids" In its simplest form aligns and expands our community resources to better serve ALL children. Because when we create a community where youth thrive, we all win.

Housing, transportation, schools are three critical areas for our attention in 2018. But, as is always the case, there are far more matters for us to tackle in the year ahead.

In 2018 we'll focus on getting even better at the basics. And that includes how we deliver essential city services – those functions of municipal government that can truly make a positive difference in your daily life. We'll take a hard and close look at how our public works department is structured and organized, and what resources they require to better meet the needs of our busy and dynamic community. Working in partnership with the Board of Health, we'll also study our inspectional services operation to find ways to strengthen our efforts on the public health challenges facing our city – from opioids to youth obesity and everything in between. The city has a positive role to play. We need to determine the best way for us to do just that and then commit ourselves to action.

We're revamping SalemStat, our performance measurement program. We want to make it more useful, cover more city departments, and focus more closely on the types of metrics that truly measure service delivery and quality of life.

We'll work to publish the City Capital Improvement Map – a publicly viewable website showing every public capital project underway or being planned, the phase it's in, the expected completion date, and the scope of work. From schools to parks, from our waterfront to historic preservation, and from roads to trails and sidewalks, all of it will be searchable, transparent, and up to date.

This coming year will see the continued implementation of our critically important "Salem for All

Ages” action plan and the unveiling of our “Imagine Salem” vision for 2026 – Salem’s 400th birthday, now just eight short years away. Both of these efforts have involved thousands of residents and will help ensure that while we focus on the needs of today, we’re navigating toward the promise of tomorrow.

2018 will also bring the completion of several major and long-awaited projects in our city.

The new City Hall Annex building at 90 Washington Street will wrap up, putting an end to one of the last blighted buildings in our downtown. The \$1 billion Footprint power plant project will be finished up this Spring. Then we’ll look ahead to the next opportunity along the waterfront, on the adjacent forty-five acres abutting our deep-water dock for cruise ships and visiting vessels. The re-use of this parcel presents a transformational opportunity for the Derby Street neighborhood and our entire city.

And, of course, we’ll finally cut the ribbon at the Mayor Jean Levesque Community Life Center – a new home for our Council on Aging, Veterans services, and Parks and Recreation offices – a project that literally has been decades in the making.

Even as these projects conclude, though, we know there are future projects on the horizon. The re-use and clean-up of the transfer station property, Forest River Park and pool renovations, the transformation of 289 Derby Street into a vibrant open space and many more. One of the aspects of local government I enjoy the most is that, as soon as you cross one thing off the list, there is no shortage of items added on! These and all the others we’ll face in the coming years present – more than anything else – opportunities for us to be innovative and creative.

I look forward to the work before us. Because I know, that – while we may not always enter into it with the same vision for the outcome - we do enter into it with the same spirit of optimism and only the best of intentions.

Salem can provide something for everybody, because this city – for almost four hundred years – has been built by everybody: pioneers and patriots, sea captains and captains of industry, sailors and laborers. We are one Salem, truly for everybody - we always have been – and we’ll continue to strengthen that resolve and stay on that path.

On May 9, 1836, a considerably less diverse gathering of Salem residents met at the Tabernacle Church, just a few blocks from where we are today. On that sunny day, the first government of Salem as a newly christened City was meeting to organize for the coming year. Leverett Saltonstall, whose portrait hangs in my office, had been elected Salem’s first Mayor just the month prior, receiving 68% of the 1,104 votes cast. On May 9, 1836, Mayor Saltonstall told the newly elected and first City Council of Salem:

“We all owe a duty to the community in which we live, and are bound to do what we can to give our City government the best possible operation...We, to whose care the powers of government are confided, should be faithful to our trusts, and administer the government for the best good of our constituents...To foster and cherish whatever may contribute to the prosperity of Salem – to the comfort, health, peace, and good order of its inhabitants. Let us strive to improve and to adorn our City, to promote kind feelings...Let us use all our influence to cherish every good institution, and encourage every enterprise for the good of our city. Every one may do something. Let each do what he can... Gentlemen of the City Council: We, and those who have honored us by their confidence,

should heartily and zealously cooperate in this great and good work.”

I recognize that serving as Mayor of our nearly 400-year-old city requires a higher obligation. We here today must live up to our history, while also embracing the opportunity to create an amazing future for those who call Salem home now, as well as in the years ahead. Our City government is the foundation upon which we’ve governed ourselves as a community for centuries. A dynamic, ever changing, always hopeful society, with our storied past to ground us, and nothing but the possibilities of the future before our eyes.

I began this morning by thanking you for your service and pledging to work together in Salem’s best interests. As Mayor Saltonstall observed, let us look forward, together – hopeful of the bright prospects and prosperity that awaits. This is the “great and good work” before us as Salem’s elected leaders. In this new year, 2018, let us work together to ensure that Salem is a city that does provide for everybody – a city that is, indeed, created by everybody. The voters have entrusted us with this incredible responsibility and I wish, for all of us, peace and progress in the upcoming year.

Now, let’s get to work.