



CITY OF SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS

Kimberley Driscoll
Mayor

State of the City Mayor Kimberley Driscoll January 4, 2016

Honorable Councillors and School Committee members, Representative Tucker, Senator Lovely, District Attorney Blodgett, and guests, it's a privilege to address you this morning, as we mark the start of another year for each of us as individuals and for our city.

I want to extend congratulations to our new and returning councilors and school committee members. Some of you are both new and returning. It's no small feat to win an election, but it's an even harder task to serve in the role and I want to thank you for stepping up to take a turn at helping our city grow and prosper.

As excited as I am about the start of the new year and the many projects and initiatives underway in Salem, I'd be remiss if I failed to acknowledge the absence of one of Salem's most dedicated public servants: our late colleague Joe O'Keefe. I still half expect to have him show up in my office, sucking on a lollipop, telling me he didn't need to speak with me as he proceeded to take a seat at the conference table in my office. Those who knew Councillor O'Keefe knew that, while he was warm and jovial in person, he did love protocol. An occasion such as this – as we mark the 100th year under our current City Charter – this would be something he'd have enjoyed. I truly hope we can live up to Joe's high expectations and values as we set out on the work ahead in 2016.

I'm truly honored and feel very fortunate to be Mayor of our city and I'm grateful for the work we take on together here in this chamber, as well as down the street in the school committee chambers. I also want to acknowledge and thank our many city employees for the work they take on day in and day out to make our city better.

I'm pleased to offer that, thanks to the collaboration and partnership shared between elected leaders in Salem, the state of our City is strong. Our small businesses and our local economy are thriving. We are closing the achievement gap at our schools. Our stabilization fund and our bond rating are at record levels. We've had the largest amount of new growth certified since 2007, helping to stabilize residential tax bills. Salem is continuing its forward progress as an attractive place to live, to learn, to start a business, and to visit.

While we are proud of the recognition Salem has received, we are not resting on any laurels! We have much to do and I look forward to working to achieving even more together.

Just a few things on that agenda include the formation of the new Salem Harbor Port Authority and transformation of our waterfront and our cruise port through a unique public/private partnership. Improvements in the Derby Street neighborhood and along the National Grid Cable Project route. Revitalization of the derelict brownfields in the North River Canal Corridor neighborhood and the strengthening of the surrounding neighborhoods in Gallows Hill, Mack Park, and Federal Street. In South Salem, completion of enhancements to the Canal Street corridor, including South Salem drainage improvements and new road, bike, pedestrian and hopefully transit upgrades. Park upgrades of every manner from seaside locations at Salem Willows and Winter Island to tiny McGlew Park in North Salem and Mary Jane Lee Park in the Point, to name just a few of our recreation improvements that we expect to get underway.

And, perhaps most important of all, leveraging the accomplishments we've seen in our schools to date to achieve even greater gains in the years ahead. There is no more important mission for our city than ensuring that all of our students receive a first class education that provides them an opportunity to be successful in today's global economy.

There is no doubt our city is growing. We have momentum. Together, we are nurturing a strong city, building on our strengths, while celebrating our history and our diversity. But we want more than just a fiscally strong community, in order to sustain a high quality of life for residents and small business owners, we need to strengthen and invest in our municipal systems and operations. We need our work in city government – be it public services, public safety, or public schools – to be aligned with our core mission: to provide open, honest, and pro-active services effectively and efficiently, focusing on the needs of today, with a vision for the future. It's simple really: open, honest, pro-active, effective and efficient, focused on the needs of today, with a vision for the future. In 2016, we'll work diligently to ensure that we put that vision into action in all that we do. And I invite you – Councillors, School Committee members, and legislators – to be partners in that effort.

Eleven years ago I was first elected Mayor on a platform of professionalizing local government. We've made enormous strides in achieving that goal in the last decade, but that work still continues. While we can be proud of our accomplishments, we know we can do so much more to celebrate Salem.

We all are here because we love this city. We all know that Salem is a place that others fall in love with too. And while I take tremendous pride in calling Salem home, I want us to be a city that strives to get better each and every day. Because making government work smarter is not an end point: it's a process. A process of continual improvement.

That's why we'll continue to work on how we implement SeeClickFix and SalemStat, our service request and performance management tools: to better inform how we devote public resources and improve responsiveness to keep government effective and efficient.

We'll look for innovative partnerships and explore new ways to provide critical services. And so I'm pleased to announce tonight that Salem will be the fifth Massachusetts municipality to join the Kennedy School of Government's Innovation Field Lab. For the rest of this year, we'll work with the Lab to develop new strategies to combat the challenges posed by problem properties. Not only will we continue the highly successful receivership initiative to address abandoned residences, we will improve how we use predictive data to get problem properties fixed before they cause harm to

the quality of life in the surrounding neighborhood and before they reach the costly stage of requiring legal intervention to remedy.

Toward the end of last year we began a formal process for performance appraisals of department heads and senior staff. This will help ensure we're meeting professional goals, both on a departmental and a personal level, and that those goals are reflective of our core mission for the City. In 2016 we will grow and improve that appraisal process, to further develop a culture of professionalism in how we operate. We'll foster renewed input from City staff with a thrice-yearly meeting for all public employees, bringing together Salem's City staff to share ideas and make sure we're all on the same page.

Lastly, openness – transparency – these should be more than just slogans. They should be a value ingrained in every action we take as public officials. Salem has long been a leader on this front. When the Commonwealth adopted an Open Meeting Law, we took it a step further with our Sunshine Ordinance. In 2010, Salem was one of just 90 of over 350 Massachusetts municipalities to earn Common Cause's e-Government with Distinction Award. And just last year we launched a new website – one that is mobile device compatible and even more user-friendly.

This year we'll take our commitment to transparency to even greater lengths. Each week we will post on the website a list of current board and committee vacancies, so interested residents will always know what opportunities are available to them to volunteer and get involved. And this list will be in both English and Spanish. This year we'll begin planning for the Salem Participatory Budgeting initiative – to capitalize on the innovation and enthusiasm of Salem residents by inviting them to propose capital projects to improve our community. In conjunction with the release of the FY17 City budget, we will publish a Visual Budget: a graphical website that quickly and clearly illustrates how and where tax dollars are being invested to deliver services to Salem residents. Even more open source data will be added to our new online GIS mapping tool for public use, including paving history, resident parking zones, public infrastructure, and more.

We will roll out City Hall To Go, bringing important city services out to where residents are – from the Farmer's Market, to block parties, to neighborhood association meetings, to festivals. We want it to be easy to get the services and answers you need. Finally, my office will make available on the City website electronic versions of measures submitted to the City Council. Because when this information is available to residents interested in a particular issue, it can help avoid confusion and misinformation.

To the Council - the new members, especially, but to all of you, I hope you will see my office in the same light I see yours: not simply as two branches of government, but as colleagues in public service. I hope you'll give us the benefit of the doubt when there are questions, pick up the phone or reach out, and be a constructive partner in making sure things are done right for our constituents. Know that my door is always open.

I hope you will view all of the people who work for our City – and they do work hard – as the public servants that they are. For while they may not be elected as we are, they are still as concerned about making this City the best that it can be.

I'll close by quoting Mayor William Hill, from his inaugural remarks in this very chamber in 1883, as he took office as Salem's 23rd Mayor – words still true today. "Our fellow citizens have conferred

upon us full power to levy taxes upon their property, and they will demand of us that money so raised shall be expended honestly, economically, and carefully, with due regard to the legitimate needs of the City... We have assumed these responsibilities voluntarily, and our aim and object should be to faithfully perform them...to advance the interests of our beautiful city...In all our acts, may we have only in view the best interests of our city and an earnest desire to advance its prosperity.”

Mayor Hill’s goal, which we still hold today, as our City enters its 100th year under our current Charter, is reflected in that core mission statement: to provide open, honest, and pro-active services effectively and efficiently, focusing on the needs of today, with a vision for the future.

Thank you all and may the year ahead bring our City nothing but progress and prosperity.