



CITY OF SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS

Kimberley Driscoll

Mayor

Salem Mayor Kim Driscoll's 2020 State of the City Address

January 9, 2020

Salem City Hall

Honorable Councillors Representative Tucker, Senator Lovely, and other distinguished guests, it's a privilege to address you this evening, as we mark the start of a new decade and another year of progress and success for the city we all love.

I want to extend congratulations to our new and returning Councillors here with us today and to our new and returning School Committee members-who were sworn in on Monday night. It took a bit longer to get here this evening, but we're moving forward and we won't let the delay in getting sworn in diminish our enthusiasm or deter us from starting this new term out strong, united, and ready to lead.

The Salem voters chose each and every one of us to work on their behalf. Some of us represent specific neighborhoods, some are elected at large; we each bring different strengths, skill sets, and ideas to this Chamber. We are individual players, but we all play for the same home team - the City of Salem. Our opponents are the challenges that our city faces, not each other. Thank you for being willing to step up, get engaged, and help our City thrive.

Salem is vibrant, strong, and growing, thanks to the efforts of many of the people in this room and many others who are not with us today. In past years we made hard decisions that, while they generated heat at the time, are now bearing out: Successes in our classrooms with students who had been struggling, stabilization of property tax increases because we intentionally grew our tax base and allowed for responsible development to take place, and record bond ratings and reserve funds thanks to a conservative budgeting and forward-looking approach to managing City finances. The work of this coming year promises to be just as important, just as challenging, and, hopefully, just as successful.

Housing & Transportation

I expect housing to be front and center this year, as we work to meet the growing housing demand within Salem. We know we have challenges with respect to the availability of housing in all forms – market rate, workforce, subsidized – housing for young adults, working families, and seniors.

We expect to put forward a package of measures intended to expand Salem residents' access to housing, from affordable to market-rate. Some of these will be familiar, others will be coming before you for the first time. All of them are designed to work in concert. To be clear: no one single measure or change alone will help address the need for housing or the price of housing. But, taken together, we can begin to move the needle on this critical issue.

As we engage in this work, let's be mindful and pro-active about hearing from all corners of our community – renters as well as homeowners, younger residents and seniors alike, workers and the unemployed, and people who reflect the full diversity of our community.

Far too often the only voices around the table in these discussions are of those who are already comfortably housed. It's our responsibility to make a space for the full array of our constituents at that table – let's commit ourselves to that.

You can't talk about housing, without recognizing that many are justifiably concerned about its impact on traffic and parking. Much of our housing need is to help people who are already living here and driving on our roads – and many of our proposed housing units are going on properties where there were once people sometimes working multiple shifts a day, at old factories and tanneries. Nevertheless, it's a concern absolutely worth focusing upon, both due to traffic concerns and to climate change impacts from motor vehicles.

And I'm happy to say we've been doing just that. This year we'll launch our community car share program and a new on-demand City shuttle service. These services are being subsidized by both new developments' and cannabis retailers' payments to our Transportation Enhance Fund. We're partnering with surrounding cities and towns to create a regional micro-mobility network, to encourage and make non-car transportation easier to choose.

The procurement of our second ferry is nearly complete. In the coming months, we'll see the completion of new off-street paths and trails, including the final phase of the Mayor Salvo bike path to Marblehead, the construction of the new Harbor Path Connector linking the Derby Street neighborhood and Collins Cove, and pathways better linking Blubber Hollow to the commuter rail station and downtown.

Working with our partners at Salem Hospital, Salem State, and the Salem Partnership, we're continuing to push for the new South Salem commuter rail station. This one project could have an enormous and positive effect in reducing congestion, especially on busy Route 1A and Route 107, as well as Loring Avenue and Highland Avenue.

We estimate that over 15,000 people every weekday come into Salem to work or attend school. Transportation, housing, and economic development and jobs are all inextricably linked. We know that. As a vibrant community, all three matter. If don properly, we believe that it's possible to *reduce* car traffic and increase jobs through smart housing.

Salem 400

As plans come together for the celebration of Salem's quadricentennial we'll be formalizing Imagine Salem 400. I'd like to thank the many people who have been working on that effort over the last two years, who have brought us to this point.

In the year 2026, our 400th anniversary – yes, we will have a celebration.

But, more important, we want a plan to bring to life the values and aspirations of Salem residents in a manner that's sustainable and that looks to the future, while celebrating our past.

A critical component of that will be the Salem Signature Parks initiative. Over the last year, City staff and community stakeholders have collaborated on plans for improvements to some of

Salem's most cherished and heavily utilized public spaces: Forest River Park, Salem Willows, Salem Common, Winter Island, Pioneer Village and Camp Naumkeag.

Many of you here have been instrumental in the development of those designs. You know how needed they are. You may also know how expensive they will be.

To carry out the improvements that have been designed and to ensure these treasured spaces are protected and available for future generations of Salem residents to enjoy, our goal is to identify funding for \$26 million worth of capital costs. \$26 million for 2026. Later this year we'll present to the City Council some innovative options to tackle these costs in a manner that seeks to limit the burden to existing property taxpayers. Think of it as our gift to the next generation, to improve these gems.

Salem Public Schools

Lastly, we'll take on the tough but important work ahead to continue the forward momentum in the Salem Public Schools.

We've seen progress in MCAS scores across the district, our communications efforts are improving, and we're now seeing the positive outcomes that came directly from the difficult decision made last year to close the Bowditch School.

In the year ahead our school community will search for and identify a new superintendent – a leader for our district who can continue that forward energy, but also bring their own skills, experiences, and perspectives.

The state's recent approval of new education funding – big thanks to Rep. Tucker and Sen. Lovely for their work and support on that bill – will help us meet critical needs in our classrooms and continue to build out social/emotional supports for Salem kids.

We'll work with our teachers and staff to find new strategies to build mutual trust and respect, reduce faculty turnover, and strengthen our common commitment to our students. We have many of the pieces in place for our schools to really soar and I'm excited to continue this most important and challenging work.

Since the incorporation of our City, 49 other Mayors have stood before Common Councils, Aldermen, and City Councillors right here in this chamber, for almost 200 years. The issues, challenges, and opportunities that lay before them changed greatly from year to year, and from generation to generation. But there was one clear constant through them all: success only came out of collaboration, civility, and teamwork.

Not everyone agreed on every issue – and no one would expect that. But each recognized and called for an approach to governance that respected each other as colleagues, co-equal parts of our city government, and, most importantly, as neighbors.

It was Mayor Levesque, in 1965, who instituted the informal practice of regular meetings between the Mayor and the City Council President. I re-started that tradition when I became Mayor and I think there are ways to expand communication and dialogue among the branches of government that are less formal and even fun.

I'm going to work harder to keep those lines of communication open and transparent, and find ways for us to get together informally, as a means to improve the way we work together in formal fashion. Whether it's attending a workshop or putting together a learning journey to another community, we can find opportunities to connect in a way that will lead to more effective, responsive, and congenial governing.

Five decades ago, Mayor Sam Zoll closed his own annual address to the City Council with words that carry as much weight and value today as they did then:

"In a time," he said, "when crucial innovations must be undertaken in every segment of municipal operation, public officials must not be merely critics of the existing city, but be visionaries of a better one... The confidence, rather than the reluctance, with which we do so will be the measure of our effectiveness... Let us all be strengthened in our conviction that we have the unity, integrity, and deep commitment to find the answers to the complicated problems that plague our times. In such a spirit – on my part and yours – in facing our common difficulties, we shall convert stagnancy into progress."

That same charge now comes to us in 2020, at the start of a new decade, just six short years from Salem's 400th birthday.

It's a charge to which I know we can all rise, but only through that same unity, integrity, and deep commitment that Mayor Zoll called for.

The work ahead of us is hard. We may not always agree. That's OK. As long as we're moving forward in the best interests of the people of Salem, with a commitment to respect each other and our constituents, then I'm ready to get to work. And I know you are, too.

Thank you.