



CITY OF SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS

Kimberley Driscoll
Mayor

Salem Mayor Kim Driscoll's 2022 State of the City Address January 3, 2022

Good morning, everyone, in particular to our newly elected City Councillors and School Committee members. In a city as historic as ours with a lot of firsts, I'm saddened that the times demand that this be our 'first' virtual inauguration. Like so many, we are pivoting the way we usually operate in the interest of our collective public health.

I would like to begin my remarks by acknowledging and honoring that the place where we are meeting (virtually) – like all of Salem – is indigenous land: a place called Naumkeag and home to countless generations of Massachusetts men, women, and children. Even as we approach the 400th anniversary of European arrival here in 1626, let us never lose sight of the important legacy of those who were living here in 1625 and for many generations prior.

As we begin this new term, bereft of being in each other's company, let it not dampen our enthusiasm for the incredible honor entrusted to each of us to represent our fellow Salem neighbors, motivated by goodwill and hope, as we strive to undertake deeds for the greater benefit of our community.

I know it's not lost on any of us that as we take our oath of office, we are still in the midst of a pandemic that has taken the lives of 97 Salem residents and impacted every single one of us in some way. Right now, we have weary health care workers, just down the street at an almost full Salem Hospital, doing all they can to care for those who are ill.

This morning, our youngest residents returned to school from the holiday break while our public educators and school staff undertake extra efforts to keep our schools safe and open - knowing how important this is to the wellbeing of our kids and families. At present, many of our small business owners are weary from the constant pivoting and uncertainties caused by COVID, but they continue to press forward reinventing new ways to serve Salem and secure their livelihoods.

As public servants, today more than ever, we are reminded of the importance of our daily work: to make a safe community for all.

The work of recovering from this pandemic should be our testament to the memories of the lives lost and the extra efforts being made by so many – from nurses and doctors to teachers, custodians, and small business owners – let's not let the past nearly two years of struggle and hardships be for naught.

From improving our vaccination levels to protecting our residents from severe illness and death, to rebuilding our economy and our neighborhoods, this work has been and continues to be critical.

Throughout this pandemic, our city's strong fiscal management and efforts to foster regional collaboration have been key in facing public health, economic and educational challenges.

Our forward thinking COVID preparations have been looked to by other communities as a model in everything from innovative testing and main street recovery programs to early adoption of public health standards and school safety protocols to regional homeless prevention actions – we have led with an esprit de corps and “can do” spirit.

We've been a beacon for our Commonwealth.

And that reputation is not just limited to our response to this pandemic.

It's true for issues like housing, as well. We have been – and will continue to be – driven by one simple idea: everyone has a right to a roof over their head. And we'll keep pushing to help everyone realize that. No one should be excluded from safe, affordable, accessible housing. This is part of what we mean by Salem is for everyone.

It also means maintaining a commitment to an inclusive, equity focused approach to our work. We're excited to bring on board Salem's first ever Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and this work will be supported and deepened through the new Race Equity Commission.

As we take on our COVID recovery efforts, front and center will be investing in ways that improve outcomes tied to the social determinants of health – ensuring that all Salem residents share in our recovery efforts is critical to our community's long-term prosperity. When we ALL do better, we ALL do better.

In that same bucket – important yet challenging – we also must redouble our efforts to face the climate crisis: both preparing for the inevitable impacts of a warming planet and also doing our part to reduce our own local contributions to it. Salem will continue our capital investments in resiliency: seawalls, coastal improvements, flood mitigation, lots more trees, converting existing building into energy efficient green structures and installing rooftop solar everywhere we can. We must broaden our efforts to reduce single passenger vehicle use through initiatives like the Salem Skipper, Bluebikes, and more complete streets and off-street path projects. We must adopt regulations that require sensible and sustainable development, including the forthcoming wetlands protection ordinance and the green infrastructure ordinance.

And, of course, Salem is a ready partner in the Commonwealth Wind project – a transformational opportunity to take what was once a coal power plant, and is now a natural gas plant, and see to it that, into the future, it'll become a major offshore wind energy site. Bringing this new offshore wind industry to Salem will create hundreds of green jobs, substantial growth to our commercial tax base, but – most importantly of all – a significant and positive step forward in ending our Commonwealth's and our country's reliance on fossil fuels.

As we look to that future horizon, our focus also must be upon our students. We should be proud to count Salem's teachers and school staff as among the best in Massachusetts. Salem has one of the strongest teacher contracts in the state, if not *the* strongest. And the steps we've taken – initiating free pre-K for four-year-olds, a robust early college effort for high school students, as well as our City Connects program which serves as the connective tissue between students, families, schools and community partners in helping to meet health, social and emotional needs – *all* of these actions are better preparing our students for success.

That focus and attention on our schools must grow and be reinforced. From the upcoming school facility master plan, the continued high school redesign work, to broadening our early education and multi-lingual learning programs. Every Salem child deserves the opportunity to succeed academically, personally, and socially - and in a safe and supportive school and classroom.

These goals are important – and I know they are achievable.

52 years ago, Mayor Sam Zoll was inaugurated in what was the City's first "unified" inauguration of Mayor, City Council, and School Committee – as, what Mayor Zoll called, "a symbol of our working together in pursuit of progressive solutions."

Those of us fortunate enough to have known former Mayor and Judge Sam Zoll know what a force he was: passionate, forward-looking, with an unapologetic love for this city.

That year, in 1970, as he took office, Mayor Zoll pledged the following:

"I shall not retreat from supporting what must be done. I shall use all the resources of my office to achieve these ends. Yet, I shall be amenable to amendment, as long as the final result is still progressive action for our city...Let our labors always be tempered by the achievement of the attainable when perfection is not obtainable...Characterized by an independence of mind and a devotion to progress, we shall tolerate no paralysis. We shall insist on integrity."

To my colleagues in elected office – both those who continue from previous service and those who newly join us today - let us all bring to this role that independence of mind, that integrity, and that devotion to progress of which Mayor Zoll spoke. Let it define Salem City government.

Because our community – just like our Commonwealth and our country – is at an inflection point.

The climate crisis, pandemic recovery, the changing nature of our economy and work, the cost and availability of housing, the quality of our education system, and the need for more equitable approaches in all our efforts: these are the challenges before us. They are mighty and multi-layered and require action before all of us in public service, at every level and in every corner of our Commonwealth and our nation. This work has never been more important. But, likewise, the opportunity to accomplish meaningful and sustainable good for our neighbors and our neighborhoods has never been more evident.

With resources and a collective desire to adhere to Mayor Zoll's "devotion to progress." I know that we can do our part to act now to advance a bright future for our nearly 400-year-old city.

Congratulations again to all who were sworn in today and thank you to all who put themselves forward to serve our community in every capacity.

Salem has been made more livable, more welcoming, and more vibrant – for everyone – because of those who serve our city. I'm grateful to be in such good company and look forward to our work together. Onward in 2022!

Thank you.