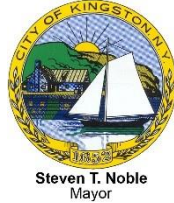


**State of the City  
January 1, 2020  
Presented by Mayor Steven T. Noble**



Good afternoon. Thank you all for coming on this beautiful New Year's Day!

In particular, I would like to welcome our New York State Comptroller, Tom DiNapoli, who made the trip to Kingston to be a part of our special day. Thank you, Tom, for all of your support of the work we are doing here in Kingston!

Before we get started, I want to congratulate our newly elected Common Council. This year's Council is made up of new and returning members, all of whom bring with them tremendous experience, expertise, and a commitment to uphold the values of our city every day. I also want to welcome our new Alderwoman-at-Large, Andrea Shaut! This is a historic moment for our city and I look forward to working with you, Andrea!

I also want to take a moment to thank my family - especially my wife Julie and my son Matthew - who supported me through my first term as Mayor, as well as two hard-fought campaigns. The patience and grace that Julie has demonstrated every day is a testament to who she is. What most people don't realize is how much she has sacrificed for me to stand before you today. Despite all that she has contributed to our city, she is often referred to simply as the "Mayor's wife." She is far more than the Mayor's wife. She is one of the most hard-working, dedicated civil servants, fighting each and every day to protect our environment and build a resilient city in the face of climate change. She is the best person I know and I would be honored to be referred to as the Sustainability Coordinator's husband.

And finally, I want to thank everyone who participated in our most recent local election. For those of you who voted for me, thank you for believing in our shared vision and allowing me the opportunity to continue to serve the city I love. For those who did not, I promise that I will work every day to be the Mayor you need me to be.

As I stand here on January 1st, the beginning of a new decade, I can't help but reflect back on how far we've come. When I first took office in 2016, I had already worked for the City for 10 years and knew firsthand what was working and what wasn't. I knew that with more capacity and the right leadership, we could do better. Starting in 2016, we began to grow our team of professionals. We established new offices and departments, including Health and Wellness, Communications, Grants Management, Arts & Cultural Affairs, Sustainability, and the Kingston City Land Bank. We built an incredible team to advance our ambitious vision and we did this without raising taxes one penny. I am also proud that today, we have more bilingual employees and women in leadership than ever before.

In every instance we have made progress, we have also found new challenges to overcome. When I first started in 2016, I established the Communications Department to address what I saw as a serious disconnect between the public and its government. We sought to create a new model for communication and public engagement. In fact, we are currently the only municipality north of New York City hosting a Participatory Budgeting program. But if we are to truly improve the way government communicates, we need the right tools. That is why I am excited to announce that we will be partnering with Radio Kingston and the NoVo Foundation to establish a brand new website for the City of Kingston this coming year. The website will ensure that the public has access to vital information, as well as video and audio recordings from meetings and events. I want to thank Radio Kingston and NoVo for joining us in this important effort and for everything you are doing to support and empower our community.

When I first took office, I knew that we needed more than just organizational restructuring. Our city was suffering from failing infrastructure, an ineffective transit system, and limited economic opportunities.

I am incredibly proud of the long way we've come in repairing our roads, service lines, and bridges. Since 2016, we have paved over 70 roads and replaced thousands of feet of underground utilities and infrastructure at the same time. As part of our effort to rebuild our city without burdening local taxpayers, we created the Office of Grants Management, which is currently managing a portfolio of over \$40 million in infrastructure, transportation, parks, and sustainability grants.

I am also proud that after decades of delay, we successfully merged our declining bus system with Ulster County. This merger, which will be supported by a \$400,000 grant we recently secured from New York State, has reduced service wait times, increased ridership, and saved taxpayers money.

And our once stagnant economy is now steadily growing every day. Our local businesses are flourishing and expanding. Just recently, Exago, a thriving tech firm, relocated to a bigger space in Midtown to accommodate more employees. New businesses are popping up every day, as more and more people learn of the high quality of life we can offer here in the City of Kingston.

But the success of our city should not be quantified simply by how many roads we paved or how many grants we've won. Even as we reflect on all that we have accomplished together, I carry on my shoulders the moments we have fallen short. I remember a particularly difficult time a few years ago. While walking down the street one morning, I came across a poster with my picture on it, which read, "Welcome to Kingston- home of the Mayor who turned his back on the police." Later that same day, a protest was held on the steps of City Hall, demanding transparency and better police accountability. It was a stark reminder of the long road ahead of us...and a clear statement to me that we needed to do better.

Since 2016, we have made a lot of progress to build trust in our community. Over the past four years, we have purchased body cameras for all of our officers, adopted the Right to Know Act, and implemented new policies to review any instances of use of force. We also adopted a resolution to reaffirm Kingston as a welcoming and inclusive community, which was intended to ensure that every individual in our city knew, regardless of immigration status, that they were safe here, that they had a place in our community, and that we would not misuse our local resources to exercise the will of the federal government.

In the coming months, we will build upon this work and will roll out a series of proposals based on community input and best practices enacted in other cities. These will include the

establishment of a 9-member Police Advisory Board, appointed by the Common Council, who will be tasked with reviewing all complaints and making recommendations to the Police Commission. We will also be working with our community partners to develop a series of mandatory trainings for new and existing Police Commissioners.

I want to thank Chief Tinti and the sworn members of the Kingston Police Department for your commitment to excellence and willingness to go above and beyond every day for our community.

### **Infrastructure & Transportation**

Nearly a decade in the making, we are ready to begin construction on one of the largest municipal investments in Midtown Kingston in a generation. I can think of no better example of our broad, ambitious vision coming into focus than the upcoming groundbreaking of the Broadway Streetscape Project. Over the next two years, we will be replacing all of the sidewalks along Broadway between Chandler Drive and Grand St. We will be realigning the traffic pattern so that making a left is no longer a daily gamble. We will be synchronizing the traffic lights because we know that your time is precious and we want you to get home to your loved ones faster and safer. We will be installing a bike lane because whether you drive a car, walk, jog, use a wheelchair, skateboard, or ride a bike, this Broadway will be built for everyone.

Redesigning Broadway is just the beginning of our next phase of infrastructure improvements and investments. Starting in 2020, we will also be embarking on a series of sidewalk reconstruction and accessibility projects in neighborhoods surrounding Broadway, including Henry St., Franklin St., and Flatbush and Foxhall Avenues, along with the realignment of the Grand St. and Broadway intersection.

Our infrastructure upgrades will extend to our parks and play spaces as well. In 2020, we will launch our multi-million dollar capital plan to reinvigorate one of Kingston's greatest assets. 70 years after opening to the public, we will be bringing our beloved Dietz stadium up to date for a new generation. In the past 3 years, we have secured over \$5 million in State funding for the first series of improvements and expect the initial construction at the Andretta Pool to break ground this Spring. Also in 2020, we will make major enhancements to one of our most treasured parks, Kingston Point Park and Beach, which will include a new parking lot, soccer field, accessible bathrooms and changing facilities.

Each of these projects cost time and money to plan and construct. I want to acknowledge my incredible staff, including our Director of Grants Management, Kristen Wilson, our City Engineer, John Schultheis, our Superintendent of Public Works, Ed Norman, and all of our partners and staff who have been working to secure funding, negotiate with contractors, and get the job done.

Thank you for all of your hard work. I would like to thank Governor Andrew Cuomo and his administration for caring deeply about our upstate city and for working hard to support our community and my administration. Finally, I want to thank our state representatives, including Assemblyman Kevin Cahill, who has worked to secure funding for major projects that will richly benefit our city, including the upcoming \$37+ million restoration of the historic Wurts St. Bridge and the intersection realignment at Broadway and Grand St.

Even with these large scale projects moving forward, I know we can do more. I believe that every individual of every ability should be able to access all the city has to offer. I believe each of you should be able to walk in your neighborhood, to your home, to your grocery store, and to your child's school. But right now, our sidewalks are crumbling and many property owners do not have the resources to repair them. And so later this year, with the support of the Complete

Streets Advisory Council, I will be unveiling our Access for All plan for consideration by the public and Common Council to replace every single sidewalk in the City of Kingston in the next 30 years.

As our many infrastructure and accessibility projects move forward, we must find ways to get the job done while limiting, as much as possible, the impact on the general public. As each of these projects unfold, it may feel at some points like we're living in a construction zone throughout our city, with detours around each corner. I promise you, it will be worth it in the end. But in the meantime, we're all going to have to have some patience and add some travel time along our commutes. Every time we see a construction sign, let's just imagine it says 'Progress, straight ahead'.

I recognize that some of the other impacts of these projects may be more challenging to our community. As a dedicated environmentalist, I have struggled with the fact that we must remove many trees in order for our accessibility and infrastructure projects to move forward. But I can guarantee that in every instance, thoughtful consideration has been given and every alternative has been explored. For each tree that must be removed to make way for an ADA compliant sidewalk or the replacement of hundred year old infrastructure, we will be replanting with the right kind of trees for their environment. This effort will be aided by our recently completed city-wide Tree Inventory and Tree Management Plan. In 2020, we will be dedicating resources for care and upkeep of existing trees by hiring a Tree Maintenance technician. In addition to replacing each tree that must be removed, today I am making a commitment to plant 1,000 new trees in the next 10 years.

### **Economic Development**

Upgrading our infrastructure has been a necessary stepping stone in supporting stronger economic development. For years, our community struggled to realize its economic potential. But a new decade is here, one where small businesses are the epicenter of our success and when major milestones in our city's history will be made. Look around and you will see a community on the rise. The groundbreaking on the \$92 million WMC Health Alliance Hospital expansion took place just around the corner from Kingston High School's recent \$137 million capital improvement project. And down the street, the new, net zero Energy Square from RUPCO will not only add 57 mixed income apartments in the heart of our city, it will also serve as the new home of the Center for Creative Education. Our \$10 million Downtown Revitalization Initiative in the Stockade District is underway, anchored by the planned \$52 million mixed use project, the Kingstonian, along with investments in facade improvements, historic preservation, traffic reconfiguration, and \$2.5 million in DRI funds dedicated to our Dietz Stadium capital plan. Our efforts to develop public/private partnerships extend to our Downtown, where we are working with local organizations and investors to improve access to our waterfront, stabilize our shoreline, and invite new and exciting attractions, housing, and commerce to our Rondout area.

In 2020, our local strategies will be strengthened thanks to a growing partnership with the Ulster County Office of Economic Development through a new Shared Services Plan, allowing for seamless economic development assistance for new and existing businesses in our community. I would like to take a moment to thank Ulster County Executive Pat Ryan for committing to work with us to bring together our economic development efforts for the benefit of our shared constituents.

As our local economy continues to grow and our high quality of life attracts new residents to our area, we have seen a surge of new investment in our community. In some instances, this investment has contributed exciting amenities to our beautiful city. But unfortunately, we are

seeing other investors purchasing tens of thousands of square feet of prime commercial real estate, only to leave the storefronts vacant. In 2020, I will be asking the Common Council to establish a commercial vacancy tax. These investors need to do better- and we will help them do better by making it harder to hold these properties without developing them.

One of the top priorities of my administration during this term will be the roll out of our upcoming Re-Zone Kingston initiative. I want to thank our local Zoning Task Force, made up of a group of dedicated volunteers from the community who helped create a vision for a new city-wide approach to zoning. We will soon hire a qualified consultant to give Kingston a blueprint for implementing a form-based zoning code. This type of zoning will encourage the development of a more diverse housing stock and remove barriers that separate housing from jobs and essential services like grocery stores and childcare. For too long, zoning was used to segregate communities. Starting in 2020, we will do better. It's time to create a new rulebook for how and where new housing, commerce, and civic space is developed in Kingston.

### **Housing**

As we continue to rebuild our infrastructure, invest in our parks, and encourage new businesses and residents to move to Kingston, we run the risk of contributing to the displacement of the people who have called Kingston home for their whole lives. We need meaningful legislation to protect the rights and well-being of our residents across our city. Like other communities in Ulster County, we are losing priceless units of potential affordable housing to an unregulated short-term rental market. This sharp decrease in available units, coupled with rising housing and utility costs across the city, is unsustainable. We will soon have the findings from our recently completed Vacancy Study, which will legally allow the Council to adopt the Emergency Tenant Protection Act in Kingston. It won't fix our current housing shortage, but it will provide key protections and stability while we develop further housing reforms. I urge the Common Council to act on both short-term rental regulations and tenant protections without delay- before it is too late.

In early 2020, I will be hiring a new Director of Housing Initiatives to lead our Housing Justice Agenda. In addition to advancing the work of the Kingston City Land Bank, the Director will be tasked with developing strategies to attract and build new housing and will advise my administration and the Council on potential opportunities for policy and legislative actions, incentives, and other reforms to disrupt the displacement of our neighbors.

### **Sustainability**

Look at the progress we've made in infrastructure, transportation, housing, and economic development. Our city is evolving. We have a responsibility, not only to ourselves, but to our children and our children's children to prioritize and integrate sustainable practices in our community's planning, design, and construction.

Recognized with the Silver Climate Smart Community certification – the highest level achieved by any municipality in New York State- Kingston is already a model city for environmental stewardship, pioneering best practices now being shared with communities across our nation. We have spent a lot of time and capital over the last four years gathering our resources and preparing a thoughtful, holistic approach to long-term sustainability and resilience.

In early 2020, I will encourage the Common Council to adopt the Open Space Plan, which identifies our natural resources that are most at-risk and gives us a concrete plan for action. Recommendations will include the building of 5 miles of trails, the creation of 10,000 feet of waterfront walkways along the Rondout Creek and Hudson River, and the addition of a new

neighborhood park to our growing roster. I will also be encouraging the Council to approve the Community Preservation Act here in Kingston, which was recently signed into law by Governor Cuomo and supported by NYS Assemblyman Kevin Cahill, so that we can put real funds behind our Open Space Plan's ambitious agenda.

In 2020, we will also be forming a stronger relationship with Scenic Hudson as they engage the community to create a vision for the over 500-acre parcel of land along the Hudson River the organization purchased this past year. We will also continue our partnership with the Kingston Land Trust to bring the long-awaited Kingston Greenline another step closer to fruition. It was an incredible experience to officially open the first phase of the Kingston Point Rail Trail last summer, adding another segment along the network of rail trails, complete streets and linear parks that will make up the Kingston Greenline.

Later this year, we will update our Climate Action Plan that will set new and bolder goals for the decade ahead. This Plan will set ambitious targets to reduce energy use and move Kingston toward being a self-sustaining community. With our federal government walking back environmental protections and conservation policies, now, more than ever before, action at the local level is our best hope.

I believe, wholeheartedly, that our potential is bound only by the hollow limits we set. So as we embark on a new decade, with new opportunities and challenges ahead, I am asking each of you- my friends, my neighbors, and my colleagues- to join me in embracing what is yet to come.

Because while the state of our city remains strong, the undeniable hope and sense of purpose that moves us forward is stronger still. So I say to each of us, let us be clearer in our convictions, bolder in our actions, and better today than we were yesterday.