

Majority Leader Speech  
Common Council, 6 February 2018  
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One of the first lessons in political science is that “politics is the art of the possible.” And the Kingston Common Council, working with the Mayor, has made a lot of good things possible over the last two years.

Positive Developments:

- Our policies are helping to attract new businesses. We have seen a significant rise in the number of Tech Companies; growing numbers of new restaurants and stores; and the exciting arrival of the Kingston Stockade soccer team.
- The Common Council has kept a close eye on the City budget and, working closely with Mayor Noble and City Comptroller John Tuey, we have reduced the City’s tax rate each of the past two years
- Our oversight has helped put the City in excellent financial shape. We have a healthy fund balance, low debt, a good credit rating, and no worries of any deficit spending—although, just to be on the safe side, we have set aside close to a million dollars just in case some catastrophe happens.
- Our policies are helping to attract new residents from across the country and even from around the world.
- We have inaugurated a new parking program of kiosks in municipal lots and easier-to-use parking meters. We have sold almost \$50,000 worth of annual parking permits so far this year and are bringing in many thousands more with the monthly permits. We are discussing plans to plow much of this money back into the three main business districts in town, allowing stakeholders to decide how the money should be spent.
- We are continuing to improve our infrastructure. There will be a new and far more usable Broadway in the next year or so. Construction on the 587-Albany Avenue roundabout is slated to begin in 2019 and this will provide us an opportunity to save money: the state will open up the ground allowing the Kingston Water Department to replace the underlying infrastructure at a significant cost savings.
- The Washington Avenue sink hole was finally repaired. Although this good news was diminished by the discovery of shoddy workmanship that we are currently repairing.
- We have worked to keep costs low for recreation and senior programs in the City.
- We have worked to attract and keep committed and effective City employees.
- We are also a very attractive recipient of a wide array of grants due to the stellar work of the Economic Development office and the exemplary commitment to excellence of Brenna Robinson and Kristin Wilson. The \$10 million DRI award is only the most evident result of their dedication to the city.
- Worked with the Mayor to institute a new alternate-side-of-the-street parking plan during snow emergencies. Now residents with cars but no driveway do not have walk blocks and blocks to find their cars in distant off-street parking lots during severe winter weather.

- We would like to thank the heads of City Departments for their diligent work over the past two years:
  - Assessor Dan Baker,
  - Tom Tiano at Building Safety,
  - City Clerk Carly Winny,
  - Corporation Counsel Kevin Bryant and Dan Gartenstein,
  - City engineers Ralph Swenson and Allen Adin;
  - Fire Chief Mark Brown,
  - Parks and Recreation director Kevin Gilfeather,
  - Planner Sue Cahill,
  - Police Chief Egidio Tinti,
  - Purchaser Brian Woltman,
  - Public Works director Joe Chenier
  - The Waste Water Treatment facility's Allen Winchell,
  - Water Department Superintendent Judy Hansen.
- We would also like to thank the many volunteers who have contributed their time, energy, and wisdom to the City's Boards and Commissions.

Clearly, because of all the good work of these people, the City is thriving in many areas. We on the Common Council are proud to be a part of this good work.

Just over a year ago we passed one of the most important items in our recent history: the Welcoming and Inclusive City Resolution. We carefully reviewed it to ensure it was consistent with state and federal law and, after a healthy debate, we passed it. We understood that new business and new residents are crucial to both our economic health and our cultural vitality. And since the passage of the resolution we have seen our local economy grow. We currently have, for example, some \$250 million in development either just getting under way or soon to start. Some of us feared what might come of declaring ourselves welcoming to new comers and inclusive of all who want to live with us, work with us, and celebrate with us—but those fears have come to naught.

We have achieved all of these accomplishments because the members of this Common Council represent a diverse community. Eight of the Alderfolks may be from the same party, but we bring wonderfully different skills and experiences to our work here.

Bill, Doug, and Jeffrey have long experience in the world of business. Steve worked in social services for—how long was it Steve? Well over a century a century? Rita is paralegal. Andrea is an award-winning musician. Tony, Patrick, Doug, Andrea, and I are educators. All have been long committed to public service. We come from many places: other countries, other states, and right here in Kingston. We are different ages, genders, sexual orientations, races, ethnicities, and religions. This is our power. Just as the mixing of such elements as copper, tin, and zinc makes a stronger metal than any of the elements alone, the diversity of the current Council members creates greater strength and wisdom than any one of us alone. I would like to personally thank each of them for the patience, knowledge, and good humor they have shown me.

No group of nine people, of course, could ever represent all the wonderful diversity of a City of Kingston's size. The members of this Common Council are all too aware that our strength can

quickly become a weakness. If we fall into hubris, petty bickering, or short-sighted thinking the bonds that hold us together will break.

The way to guard against this is to dedicate ourselves to listening. We believe wholeheartedly in the power of active listening no matter your political party, your personal background, your wealth. We dedicate ourselves to listening and working with all of our constituents. We cannot promise perfection, but we do dedicate ourselves to pursuing it.

For the most part the privilege of being a member of the Common Council is a great joy. Speaking personally, in my two years on the Common Council I have met so many wonderful people. In walking the ward, in holding ward gatherings at Papi's Pizza, at constituents' homes, in my own back yard, in attending Committee meetings and forums and parades, in running into people at the Uptown Farmers Market, the Hooley on the Hudson, the Fourth of July fireworks, at cafes and diners from the Rondout to the Esopus, I have been overwhelmed at how many warm, caring, and inspiring people live in our city.

How can we not appreciate our great good luck benefitting from neighbors such as

- Ron Woods who has given so much to the young people of this city.
- Paula Wisnewsli who has diligently worked to register voters at Stuyvesant Gardens and given tirelessly at People's Place
- Ed Ford, who has been so dedicated to keeping alive Kingston's history he has become the embodiment of that history as he prepares to celebrate his 100<sup>th</sup> year as a proud Kingstonian
- Rebecca Martin who has demonstrated the power of honorable commitment to high ideals.
- Charles Pollaco who has served the City faithfully on the Planning Board and as a stalwart of the Republican Party.
- Tay Fisher, who has turned his amazing basketball skills into such loving events as the Breast Cancer Awareness Game and his free Christmas basketball clinic.
- Sharon Chisholm who provides housing, meals, and emotional support to all the residents of Chiz's Heart Street.
- Sari Botton and Eva Tenuto of the TMI Project who have given so many of our neighbors and friends the power to find new powers within themselves.
- Brad and Todd Jordan who have generously supported youth recreation and the Boys and Girls Club.
- Not to mention the selfless and truly inspiring work of our police officers, fire fighters, public works employees, and teachers.
- And so many more who just do good things:
  - A ninth ward resident who took care of the lawn of a sick neighbor,
  - some fourth-ward residents who organized food and care for a neighbor whose husband had a heart transplant,
  - a seventh-ward resident who looked after a neighbor's child when she was unexpectedly called into extra hours at her job;
  - or third ward residents who were concerned about the number of feral cats on Marius Street and had them neutered at their own expense.

We have worked with many of these folks to face difficult challenges and the great majority of these experiences, while anxiety provoking—how much have we had to spend on the sink hole?—have led to good working experiences and positive outcomes.

There have been other experiences in which some of our friends and neighbors have approached their concerns in ways that seem to me counterproductive.

- I don't understand why these few think yelling will help others hear them.
- I don't understand why these few think making up facts will convince others to believe them.
- I don't understand why these few think insulting others and spreading rumors will lead to the outcomes for which they advocate.

This problem is hardly limited to Kingston. Just turn on the TV, go online, or attend partisan political rallies, and you will soon find the same sort of unproductive actions. Goodness knows that our experience of government over the past forty years has given us good cause to be skeptical. Americans in general and many of our fellow Kingston neighbors have come to see government as a pirate—as some sort of alien, illegitimate force that takes our hard-earned money and throws it away in the warehouses of waste and the saloons of corruption. There's no doubt that elected officials and government workers sometimes make bad decisions. And there's no doubt that sometimes the institutions of government act in illegitimate and unjust ways. The long and sordid history of American government support for racist practices such as red-lining is a powerful case in point. But to condemn all government is nonsense.

The time is now to change the way we think about each other and our connections. Across the country Americans are throwing off the old ways: destructive competition, unfulfilling work, and divisive politics. We are striving for the purpose-driven life. We are working for greater causes than our individual selves. We understand that deep and lasting happiness comes from working with others and for others. This attitude is shared by all the members of the Kingston Common Council. We are dedicated to always improving our great city. And we have big-hearted neighbors who inspire us at every step of the way.

Given the challenges that face us, we will need these neighbors and many more besides to help us lay in a large supply of effective solutions.

Among our future challenges:

- Repairing Cooper Dam
- Repairing the Pike Plan canopy (again!)
- Constructing the new Broadway and the 587 Roundabout
- Improving storm-water runoff
- Finding creative ways to encourage development without suffering the pitfalls of gentrification.
- Driving out the drug dealers and healing those addicted to illicit drugs.
- Renovating Dietz stadium.
- Encouraging promising development projects, such as the Kingstonian.

The recent nose-dive of the Stock Market should give us pause. The City is in good financial shape, but we are all too aware that many of our neighbors are worried about what their

individual futures may bring. We know that the seniors in Yosman Towers and the Governor Clinton are concerned that their homes may be sold to a private developer who will turn them out. We know that our friends and colleagues on Van Buren Street fear that the City raises up barriers to the improvement of their neighborhood. We know that many home owners worry that their taxes are too high. We know that residents across the City are desperately looking for work and higher wages.

We know and we are listening and we are seeking solutions. During the debates last year over rezoning 300 Flatbush Avenue, for example, we heard from many residents who wanted to see the development of “jobs that will keep our children here.” This phrase helped us to clarify a major problem in Kingston—we have a high rate of employment but much of it is in low-paying and largely unfulfilling jobs. So we are encouraging the development of both higher-skilled jobs and education for them in schools, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training. We are fortunate to have models such as Tech Valley Startup and the Metro project that provide innovative possibilities.

A crucial task ahead of us is to improve the way the City communicates to residents and the ways residents communicate to one another.

- We need to improve the City’s website to make it more attractive, more informative, and more useful.
- We need to better publicize the effective work that the Department of Public Works does around the City. We also need to better appreciate our DPW employees—next time you see them picking up trash and recycling, climbing out of a manhole, laying down steaming asphalt, please take a moment to say “thank you.”
- We should consider developing city-wide broadband.
- Let’s create City-supported mediation services so that neighbors can civilly hash out disagreements without taking up the valuable time of the Kingston Police Department.
- The City must do a better job of explaining the tools and practices of local government. Take Payment in Lieu of Taxes—or PILOT—agreements for example. There are good PILOT agreements and there are bad ones. How can we ensure that all our residents understand that these agreements can be vital tools for improving our local economy creating jobs, and provided essential services?
- We should also clarify how different City boards and commissions work so that communication between residents, government, and developers can be improved. There are two recent examples. While there are significant differences between RUPCO’s Landmark project and Central Hudson’s proposal to build a new natural gas regulator in a residential neighborhood, both have one central similarity: the neighbors to the projects have not felt heard or properly included in the process.

Let us all dedicate ourselves to ensuring that the City works for all of our residents. Wealth doesn’t trickle down, it bubbles up. If we ensure that the least among us can find good jobs, opportunities for self-improvement, and a simple sense of well-being, then we will all find ourselves doing well. We must work to create sound housing policies in Kingston that ensure our neighbors all have decent homes. We must create the conditions for a growing economy in Kingston—growth that ensures an improving jobs outlook and new developments that increase the City’s tax revenues while avoiding tax hikes. While we cannot guarantee equality of

outcomes, we can fight to provide a floor so that all of our neighbors can create for themselves a good life.

We know we can meet difficult challenges because it is our history. Politics may be the art of the possible—but what is possible depends on the size of our dreams. Time and time again our forebears dreamed big and expanded the realm of the possible.

- Sojourner Truth went to court to force the return of her illegally sold son in 1827.
- Abraham Hasbrouck volunteered his services for Truth's legal battle—and they won.
- Charles Lang Freer became the founder of the Smithsonian Institution's Museum of Asian Art
- Robert H. Dietz learned the power of self-sacrifice here in Kingston and won the highest military honors for his service in World War II.
- Ben Wigfall developed a vibrant community of the arts
- Vera and Leonard Van Dyke fought to advance the cause of Civil Rights here in Kingston.
- The Friends of Historic Kingston have saved our heritage from the ravages of time and ill-conceived development.
- Billy Costello trained and trained and won the WBC welterweight world championship.

These Kingstonians have shown us the way. The art of the possible is not just about what is right before our faces. It is even more about what we dream. If we dream big, what is possible becomes all the grander and empowers us to rise farther.

When we help the least among us to pick themselves up, then together we rise.

When we see the goodness in each of us and offer our gratitude for work well done, then together we rise.

When we look past our differences to see what bonds we share, then together we rise.

And when we rise together, we make Kingston great and greater still.