



## **CITY OF SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS**

Dominick Pangallo  
Mayor

### **2024 State of the City Address**

January 1, 2024, 10:00 a.m.  
Salem City Hall

Congratulation, President Hapworth. City Councillors and School Committee members, District Attorney Tucker, Senator Lovely, Representative Cruz, City department heads, guests, and fellow Salemites – thank you for being here.

Before my remarks, I'm going to bring up a special guest. A few months ago, we challenged our middle school scholars at Collins Middle School and Saltonstall to create a poem celebrating Salem. We received many remarkable pieces, and I hope you'll take home the booklet my staff has put together featuring their work. Of the finalist poems submitted, one was selected to be shared on this special occasion, with all of you.

Liana Galvin is an 8th grade scholar at Collins. Liana, please come up and share with all of us your poem, *Sidewalks of Salem*.

#### **Sidewalks of Salem** **by Liana Galvin**

No matter where you walk, there's a way  
There's a path  
Cracked concrete, backed with memories of the past  
Of horses trampling, or maybe the weather  
Of shoes against the concrete, running off for the better  
Pursuing a new hope, this city of peace  
Known for the people and the legends and myths and the peace  
You are not defined by your past, O Salem,  
Look around and see how you're steadily healing!  
Too many different sidewalks to count, so I shout,  
"Communities about, let's stand together,  
Passing through the future without a shadow of doubt,  
Come join in the path of love, and we'll soon find out--"  
Where our future comes from, here resides,  
The people of Salem, so magnified,

The autumn leaves blow about by October,  
The winds of change are never so sober,  
You can't give up hope here, with something to say,  
A word of kindness, hope, or a glorious day  
In Salem lie the depths of an early history,  
Something so deep, something so heavy, BUT  
Nothing too irreversible, nothing too horrible,  
Light outshines the darkness, call the people and communities:  
Different ways of life, different skin tones, and walk next to me—  
Take a journey through the streets of Salem!  
See how the choices, the legacy of the past stands here  
Today  
On an ever brightening path  
Make a choice now, as you step on the cracks—  
Look up, there's hope when you look for it:  
Oh Salem, you're a blessing, you're so golden  
With your people, kind hearts-- again, communities,  
I stand on the sidewalks and lovingly remember the unity  
Of people walking here, side by side  
On the sidewalks of beauty, people unified.

Thank you, Liana, for sharing your words and your creativity with all of us. I'm also grateful to the dozens of other Salem middle school students who took the time and the effort to craft poetry in response to their City's call for creativity. Their efforts have created a foundation for Salem's first Poet Laureate initiative.

As a City with a deep commitment to the arts, with our far-reaching public art ordinance, commission, staff, and master plan, it's only fitting that we celebrate the art of the spoken word, as much as we do other forms of artistic expression. So, each year, my administration – and hopefully future ones – will elevate writers whose words celebrate who we are, what we've endured, and where we aspire to go.

Now is our moment to dream anew and to use our words to capture those visions for our future – I hope you'll join me in celebrating and elevating this effort, as we announce details about it in the next few months.

To the newly elected members of our City government, now entering its 188th year: congratulations on today's swearing in and thank you for stepping up to serve our community.

There's something very special about serving this city. So often, when we hear folks talk about Salem, the focus is on our past: Books and blogs are written about our historic events, and times and people gone by. Museums have been built around our lore and legends. Our past is the fixation of so many. But you and I, we stepped up to these roles – not because of what Salem *was* – but because of what we all know Salem *can* be. We

stepped up because we, and the people who sent us here, know that, while the past is always present in Salem, the future is our own to write. We stepped up because of a shared hope for an even brighter future for this City.

Salem has long been served by those who looked to our horizons, not just our history, for our north star.

In 1958, Senator John F. Kennedy, addressing a homecoming celebration here, remarked on Salem's glorious past. "But," he said, "the 'good old days' are not always what they seem – and I think this occasion should not be one of yearning for an age gone by, but one of expressing our gratitude and satisfaction with the blessings we enjoy today, and our determination to retain them and improve them in the future."

Nearly seven decades later, I believe Senator Kennedy's forward-looking spirit must continue to epitomize our approach to serving the people of Salem. It must be the central premise driving every question that we ask ourselves, as self-reflective and thoughtful leaders for this city.

How are we, together, laying the foundation for the future we want to make reality in this place that we all love?

What are we, collectively, doing to ensure that Salem tomorrow is more livable and more affordable than it is today? What steps are we taking to improve how we deliver city services? To ensure we're responsible fiscal stewards of the monies entrusted to our use? How are we preparing for a changing climate? For new neighbors? How are we centering equity, transparency, and professionalism in all of our decisions – even the small ones?

We know the answers to these questions can't be found in partisanship or a resistance to consensus-building. That may be what characterizes national politics and the gridlock that now defines Washington D.C. But it's not how we should conduct ourselves here in Salem. We know the solutions won't be found by rushing headlong without engaging with and listening to community members who will be most impacted by the decisions we make.

We know that solutions come through thoughtful collaboration. Its hallmarks are inclusion and intention and professionalism. It's the path to a successful future for everyone in our community, whether they voted for us or not.

So, what's on that horizon?

A city that works for everyone is a city where every neighbor has a home, and one that they can afford. Last year in Massachusetts, there were 2.5 new housing permits issued

for every 1,000 residents – the 9<sup>th</sup> lowest rate in America and half the nationwide average. In Salem that figure was 1.1. If Salem were a state, we would be 49<sup>th</sup>.

Meanwhile, Salem Public Schools are teaching 247 homeless students in our classrooms, over 100 more than this time last year. 104 families, close to 350 people – including homeless infants and toddlers – are living in former dorms at Salem State University. Neighbors are living in cars, in tents, in crisis.

You and I – we represent everyone in this city, whether they have a roof over their head or not – they're *our* constituents and we have a shared responsibility to help them.

In this coming year, I hope to work together with you to advance regulations for single occupancy units and to allow builders more leeway to create housing instead of chronically unused parking spaces. We can shape pathways for low barrier housing for the unhoused and increase direct outreach to those in need. We'll try a new approach to enforcing our short-term rental rules with greater intentionality – paid for by short term rental owners, not taxpayers – and, as soon as our special act passes in the state legislature, we will fully implement our condo conversion regulations. We'll make our housing stability coordinator position permanent, finalize our new human services task force, and launch a universal basic income micro-pilot to help our neediest neighbors just get a little breathing room.

And, speaking of breathing room, in the year ahead Salem will take real, meaningful action in response to the climate crisis. By this time next year, the offshore wind terminal at our deep-water port will be heading toward completion, ready to create generations of good-paying, clean energy jobs, expand our commercial tax base, and do our part to contribute to the green energy revolution our nation and our planet require.

In the coming year we'll achieve the Commonwealth's Climate Leader designation as a City, furthering Salem's existing commitment to meeting our shared climate goals. We'll get our municipal building and fleet conversion projects started and install more EV and micro-mobility infrastructure. And we'll push to move the South Salem train station from 0% design to the 30% design milestone, its furthest forward progress in decades – all to lessen our collective vehicle emissions.

Despite this work, though, we also must prepare for the reality of climate change and its negative, life-changing impacts on our community. We'll invest in resiliency projects along our coast and in our infrastructure, to ensure our city is best situated to weather the coming storms – both metaphorically and literally.

A strong foundation for our future also means excellence in our public schools.

Last year, we started along the path to create a new high school – a building that better serves our students and our educators. That important, transformative project will only

pick up pace in the year ahead as the Building Committee finalizes the feasibility study and begins the design phase. Our high school Career and Technical Education offerings, already a hallmark of the Salem High School program, will grow in the year ahead, with expansions to younger grade levels and new partnerships through the offshore wind industry.

At the middle school level, we'll take the remarkable success of our hands-on, experiential learning pilot program and expand it so even more Middle School students can take part. It shouldn't be a "pilot" any longer – its successes are clear, and it should just become how we teach Middle School in Salem and prepare these scholars for a successful future.

We'll reconvene our Children's Cabinet and build permanency for our innovative Pre-K Partnership. Early education and care are critically important, not only to our kids' future academic achievement, but also to ensure the strength and equity of our local workforce and economy.

In the coming year we'll undertake major energy efficiency upgrades in school buildings and work to move our alternative high schools into facilities more suitable to their unique needs. We'll continue efforts to bring the Family Resource Center out of the Collins Middle School basement and into the community, in an improved facility in Palmer Cove Park. We'll work collaboratively with our teachers to negotiate a new contract that supports them and the important work that they do for our kids every day. And, with our new Strategic Plan as the roadmap, with the leadership of our School Committee, our district will engage with the community with clear priorities and initiatives centered around academic success, belonging, and equity.

And on that note, this new year will bring a renewed commitment to our equity work more broadly, as well – including acting on the findings of our municipal equity audit, working for greater diversity in our City workforce and board membership, and issuing a new Language Access Policy. It will also bring greater transparency and inclusiveness to our operations at City Hall. Innovations piloted over the first few months of this administration, and those still in development, will be rolled out to connect even more community members to the services and programs that their City has to offer.

In the face of all this, though, we also must be clear-eyed about the challenges ahead, particularly when it comes to Salem's city finances. While we're grateful for assistance from the state, net aid this past fiscal year increased by just \$48,000 – that's about two one-hundredths of a percent in our overall City budget. On top of that, new statutes now prevent us from collecting the same cannabis revenues we have in the past, and our federal ARPA and ESSER funding will soon come to an end. The state's own most recent revenue benchmarks have fallen short of anticipated levels and state leaders have said they and local leaders should prepare for difficult times ahead.

Into these crosswinds, we also expect to settle new contracts in this coming year with most of our bargaining units, we face increasing interest rates for existing debt – as well as new debt for critical capital needs – and we must continue the work of providing high quality services for our community. The fiscal pressure is real and it's just one of the reasons why responsible growth to our tax base and aligned goals are so important.

These pressures demand of us bold and collaborative action. They demand a vision that honors and builds on our past but isn't stuck there. A shared vision focused on our city's true needs and our opportunities for the future; one that's optimistic and innovative and forward-looking.

In just two short years, Salem turns 400 years old. The efforts of our quadricentennial initiative – Salem 400+ – are ramping up to mark this historic occasion, through partnerships to amplify existing events planned for that year and align them with core values, through civic engagement and volunteerism initiatives; and through our Century Tree and Signature Park investments, which will continue strong into 2026 to enhance some of our most beloved, and heavily used, public spaces. And – of course – we'll have a party. In August 2026 we'll celebrate the return of the Heritage Days Parade, as we center the festivities that summer around this special place that we all love.

Salem 400+ is our opportunity to put that hopeful, forward-looking vision for our community into action – to commemorate a unique city, where the past is always present, and the future is ours to define.

During that 1958 visit to Salem, Senator Kennedy closed with this observation: "Perhaps there is little left of the Salem of old, in terms of its merchant fleet and unfurled sails. But the greatness of the people of Salem, their integrity and industry, their loyalty and perseverance – all of these remain to this very day – and it is here that we find the greatness of Salem." Kennedy continued: "Salem may no longer export codfish and lumber... [But] the people of Salem are exporting by word and deed the precious commodity known as the generosity of free peoples."

Today's address is traditionally referred to as the "state of the city." It's customary for the person at this podium to say something like, "the state of our city is strong!" But I'm not a fan of cliches. So, to those who look to this address – this moment – to understand how this place that we call home is faring, I'll offer this: Salem wants solutions. Solutions for affordable, livable neighborhoods, for a vibrant economy, safe streets for all, and great schools. For sustainability, resilience, and equity.

But we're optimistic, and our people are still filled with that industry and perseverance that Senator Kennedy recognized all those decades ago, as well as that generosity of spirit that, today, compassionately welcomes newcomers and supports our neighbors in times of hardship.

Like Liana said in her poem: “the legacy of the past stands here today on an ever-brightening path...look up, there’s hope when you look for it.”

So, the state of our City is hopeful. Hopeful for local leadership that works, collaboratively and constructively, for everyone. Hopeful for a community that all can afford to call home if they wish to. Hopeful to ensure we remain a city that is welcoming, thriving, and vibrant.

I’m ready to get to work in that cause – and I hope you are, too. Thank you!