

Welcome to the 2020 State of the City Address.

First, I want to report that:

- The City of Portland is working hard.
  - The City of Portland is responding to unforeseen and unforeseeable challenges.
  - We are working together. Your city government is working collaboratively.
  - And, I recognize we have work to do regarding public engagement that feels meaningful and inclusive for *all* Portland citizens.
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My goal is to work with the community, and my colleagues - both the City Council and City Staff - to achieve good outcomes for Portland, this city we love.

And although these days are providing an especially challenging environment for unanimous consent regarding the merits of outcomes, I can assure you that this is a City Council, and a municipal staff that is dedicated to:

Rising to challenges; and

Pivoting consistently to a changing environment that requires optimism, flexibility, innovation and persistence.

The City Council oversees three employees: The City Manager Jon Jennings, Corporation Counsel Danielle West-Chuhta, and City Clerk Kathy Jones.

These people are on call 24/7; and I'll venture to say that the 24/7 phrase has never felt so real as it has over the past seven months.

I extend, early in this address, my gratitude to these three, and to all city staff who work so hard to serve Portland's residents, businesses, and visitors. City services are very personal, from business licensing, to building permits, to weekly trash and recycling, road work, snow removal and so much more. These things touch individuals, families and businesses every day - and I know that staff takes their customer service role very seriously.

When I was elected, task #1 was to respond to the city's charter by "convening and leading an annual workshop session of the city council to discuss and identify the city's goals and priorities in order to provide guidance for the city manager and to inform the public".

We did that work in early-December, and we agreed to four central goals that would guide our work:

Number One: Increase access to rental and home ownership that is safe, affordable, and accessible;

Number Two: Continue efforts to reduce homelessness, and assist people experiencing homelessness through city, regional and state efforts;

Number Three: Increase public transit infrastructure and capacity in the city; and

Number four: Seek to address the high property tax burden in Portland by passing an affordable combined school/city budget and by pursuing other revenue sources.

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Now, before I launch in, I'll ask you to bear with me as I offer some sequencing.

I want to, and will talk about work and progress against our Council Goals established in December.

However, first, I'd like to provide some context to this unusual year's State of the City Address. Because, after all, it's 2020.

When I was elected in November 2019, and sworn in a month later, I could never have predicted what my first year serving as Mayor of Portland would look like.

Even under more normal circumstances, one can never know.

One thing I can say with certainty is that we were all caught by surprise as February turned to March, and our world changed dramatically.

We have been learning and changing pretty much every day since.

It may seem like a very long time ago that we were reading stories of balcony singing in Italy.

Governor Cuomo's daily updates watched by so many across the whole country as New York managed through spikes and critical shortages in PPE, hospital beds, respirators, and so much more. Some people wiped down all of their groceries before bringing them inside. Some people changed out of "grocery store clothes" before walking into their homes. We debated the merits of masks, of whether they protected you or me, now we know it's both! We have come a long way since March and widespread Stay At Home Orders. And, the fact is, we're continuing to learn every day about how to keep ourselves and each other safe.

I send my deep thanks to everyone who is working hard to protect our public safety. To health care providers, to people and families, to businesses navigating the seemingly impossible at times terrain to stay open, but stay safe, and of course to Governor Mills and Dr. Shah. I am daily grateful to live in a state where science prevails and leadership is transparent, accessible and rational.

Our frame, in terms of goals, priorities, and issues to address, has expanded in ways we could never have predicted. Covid-19 quickly and dramatically changed our city, our state, and the world. On Friday, March 13th at an afternoon press conference, the City Manager, several Councilors and I stood in City Council Chambers (our last time there, I will add) to declare a State of Emergency, and to impose a city-wide curfew in advance of St. Patrick's Day. We were learning more every minute it seemed during the early days of March, but by March 13th we knew that crowds of people gathered indoors was a bad idea; and it remains so.

From that day, we have retained our Local Emergency Order, and we have aligned with the State's Emergency Order.

Early on we managed through what it meant to be an "Essential Business" versus a "Non Essential" business. This was not an easy stretch of days as many will recall. We struggled to strike the right balance between guidance to Stay At Home, and calls to Support Local Business. With the help and engagement of local business owners, as well as organizations like: the Chamber, Portland Downtown, and Buy Local, we addressed changes that needed to be made - changes that, rightly, supported Portland's small and local businesses. This process was an important lesson for me, and I believe for many, as we sought to balance public health with community well being.

We also transitioned to a largely work-from-home model which put Zoom front and center. And while Zoom meetings have allowed for the continuation of work while providing for public input safely, it is likely here to stay - for many reasons - including the civic engagement it allows people. We have learned that zooming in to provide public comment, attend a meeting, and engage in civic discourse is made a lot easier when people can do so from their homes. No babysitter, parking or late nights in Council Chambers required!

I'll take just a minute to talk about some of the elements of the ever-changing landscape the City of Portland has navigated:

Starting in May, we have had street closures intended to help local businesses operate with access to the outdoors, and to help pedestrians achieve physical distance.

The City of Portland has issued:

- 17 Sidewalk/Street Sales Permits (Outdoor Retail)
- 141 Outdoor Dining permits issued since our program began (June 1)
  - 45 on Private Property
  - 22 in Parklets/Parking Spaces
  - 71 on Public property, and
  - 3 in Parks

A Business Grants program was developed by the Portland Development Corporation, and it continues to evolve to respond to needs, ie: cold weather needs.

The City of Portland established a Rental Housing Relief Program, which, like the Business Grants Program continues to operate, has received a new round of funding, and seeks to respond to urgent needs as a result of Covid-19.

On May 26th our country witnessed the horrific killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis. Mr. Floyd's death, on the heels of so very many senseless deaths of black people in America before that, triggered Black Lives Matter Protests across the country, and here in Portland. Our country's critical obligation to address systems that promote and advance racial inequities is on all of us.

One, initial way, that the Portland City Council sought to respond to calls for reallocation of resources and changes to systems that oppress, was to develop and pass a RESOLUTION ESTABLISHING A RACIAL EQUITY STEERING COMMITTEE TO DEVELOP RECOMMENDATIONS IN RESPONSE TO SYSTEMIC INEQUITIES.

The Resolution asks the 13 people who have been named to the Steering Committee to

- Examine the ever expanding role we, as a City, have asked the police to play in our community;

- The way(s) in which the City interacts with area agencies, organizations, and non-profits in the name of public safety and how these partnerships can best work to enhance public safety; and
- To recommend changes, as necessary, to various policies, structures, and procedures related to public safety that may disproportionately impact Black people and other persons of color with the specific aim of improving community relations, establishing mutual trust and respect, and rooting out and ending systemic racism

This work, along with the development of a series of community conversations, the management of public art offerings, and an independent review of protest response and management is one part of our community's work to engage stakeholders meaningfully, with support, receive recommendations for change, and respond.

I send my sincere thanks to all of the people who offered to serve on the Racial Equity Steering Committee. And, to the thirteen who are hard at work - I think they're meeting weekly - thank you. Your time and commitment to this work is greatly appreciated.

On July 14th we experienced our first covid-era election. This was a postponed election date because of so much uncertainty. Nothing about contemplating our voting process while needing to accommodate so many safety concerns was easy.

I'm so happy to report that all Portland polling locations were open, and absentee voting was strong (and a precursor to November!).

My thanks to the City Clerk, and her tremendous staff - as well as a ton of volunteers, many of whom were last minute sign ups in response to an urgent need if we wanted to see all locations open!

Among many outcomes, of local note, Portland voters approved the creation of a Charter Commission. The City Council, in response to state statute, got to work quickly to respond to a 30-day provision to solicit interest in, and name three appointed members to the Commission. We also established the voting method. And, the date of the election will coincide with the June 2021 special election. Again - so many thanks to many people who raised their hand to be one of the Council appointees to the Commission. All applicants would have been strong appointees, and I look forward to a full ballot in the spring.

I'll take this opportunity to pledge my support and enthusiasm for our community's decision to create a Charter Commission. I will do everything I can to support and engage in this work, as appropriate.

At the end of July, and on the heels of so much unrest in Portland, including interruption to independent nonprofit services for our unhoused neighbors, Portland became home to a Homeless Encampment, at first in Deering Oaks Park, and then at City Hall Plaza. The sleep-out demonstration brought to the fore so many issues of critical concern, and while the encampment dispersed after a couple of weeks, the issues and lessons are top of mind for the Council and City Staff as we continue our uninterrupted services to meet needs. I'll address more specifics in just a bit; but suffice it to say, Portland is responding to the urgent needs of many, we thank so many area partner organizations who are, too - and we are eager to continue and deepen our work - together with the region and the state - to address homelessness and its root causes.

As earlier mentioned - some streets, sidewalks, parking spots, and other locations have been closed off to support restaurant and retail use of the outdoors. As the cold weather approaches, as it always seems to do this time of year, some changes will need to be made to accommodate snow removal and safety. However - the City is working with the business community to keep some outdoor options available into January. Stay tuned to our Council meeting this evening to learn more!

And finally, at least for this summary review of some of the changes and challenges since March, the November Election is nearly upon us. All Polling Locations will be open on November 3rd. There is a newly installed 24/7 Ballot Drop Box affixed to City Hall on the Myrtle Street side. The City Clerk's office is offering some evening & weekend voting. And, you can vote every day, Monday-Friday between now and October 30th at Merrill 9-430 at Merrill Auditorium.

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Despite the need to react constantly to challenges and opportunities associated with Covid-19, the Council and City Staff have persisted regarding work to address goals.

As I mentioned, the Council came together last December to establish priority goals - to inform the public, to provide guidance to the City Manager, and to focus our work.

Work against our goals largely begins in Council Committees.

Council Committee Work is a cornerstone of our representative Council's work. It's the place where elected officials work closely on issues and ideas, with both city staff, and the public - to explore, question, consider, and recommend.

Our committees are critical vehicles - they're the place from which a small group of Councilors can take time, engage content area expertise, stakeholders, the public - and make recommendations with the full weight of that background, to the full body.

Work against goal #1, to Increase access to rental and home ownership that is safe, affordable, and accessible has resulted in:

Investment of City resources reviewed and approved by the Housing Committee:

- including affordable housing tax increment financing;
- The investment of City HOME or Housing Trust funds; and
- Utilizing city owned property for the creation of housing.

There are ten projects that, when complete, will create or renovate 890 units of housing.

The projects are at:

45 Brown Street = 265 units,

337 Cumberland = 60 units,

200 Valley Street = 60 units,

83 Middle Street = 50 units,

104 Grant Street = 23 units (homeownership),

577 Washington Avenue Washington Gardens = 100 units,

44/52 Hanover Street = 171 units,

21 Randall Street Proposal =13 units,

43 & 91 Douglass Street (two proposals) = 90 to 108 units,

165 Lambert Street (one proposal) = up to 46 units.

The way I see it, we have an opportunity and obligation to create a municipal environment that: Increases density where appropriate, locates feasible sites for housing development, creates new financing mechanisms, produces mixed income housing, addresses workforce

homeownership, encourages transportation oriented development, incentivizes more developers to participate in housing development.

**My thanks to Councilor Duson, and Housing and Community Director, Mary Davis, for your leadership.**

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Work against goal #2, to continue efforts to reduce homelessness, assist people experiencing homelessness through city, regional and state efforts, has been focused largely by the impacts of COVID-19 especially as it relates to emergency shelter needs and responses.

The City of Portland has not scaled back or suspended services since March. In fact, it's been the opposite - the city has been expanding efforts to meet needs.

- Oxford Street Shelter remains open, with a reduced capacity in order to comply with CDC guidance. Recent nightly average is 64.
- The Expo has been operating as a temporary emergency shelter since late July, and has had a nightly average occupancy of 39.
- The city is currently transitioning people from the Expo to a County facility with 44 beds, an arrangement that will see us through April.
- The Family Shelter has a recent nightly average of 153 people.
- There are 93 individuals in family units staying at hotels utilizing General Assistance.
- And, there are 215 individuals who have been housed in hotels over the past month.

As we all know, not all who experience homelessness seek shelter. And, we also know that some local support for people experiencing homelessness, or needing support has been suspended, leaving gaps in services and spaces available - especially during the daytime.

The City of Portland recognizes the need for more Restroom Facilities. In fact, during our FY22 Budget deliberations, the Council allocated funds, and asked the City Manager to address both short and long term needs for more public restroom facilities.

- Staff recently placed two portable toilets at the Castle parking lot in Deering Oaks, as well as a third on Portland Street near Alder.

Permanent Facilities exist at:

- Spring Street Garage facilities
- Oxford Street Shelter (in courtyard)

And, seasonal Portable Toilets are made available by the City of Portland in 13 other locations around the city. They are operational until November.

While a new Homeless Services Center facility in the City of Portland remains a top priority for the Council, and stands on significant committee and community work, it has become evident that state and regional partnership and support is needed as we plan for investments in a sustainable path forward.

**My thanks to Councilor Ray and Health and Human Services Director, Kristen Dow, for your leadership.**

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Work against goal #3, to increase public transit infrastructure and capacity in the city, includes both our work as a municipality to create an environment that provides for access to public transit options, and to invest in METRO's work to provide a robust regional system that responds to people's needs to make their way around Portland, and beyond.

As an essential service, METRO has continued to operate uninterrupted throughout the pandemic.

A long list of safety protocols allowed the agency to safely provide mobility for essential workers and residents needing to take essential trips.

There was some service reduction, but there was also a temporary suspension of fares.

Along with METRO leadership, the City of Portland is grateful to the FRONT-LINE WORKERS, including bus operators, fleet cleaning crews and mechanics who have kept public transit running throughout this crisis.

METRO plays an essential role in connecting people to housing and jobs while also helping Portland to achieve its energy goals and reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

METRO will continue with safety protocols including enhanced cleaning, contactless fare collection, mask requirements, and social distancing.

And yes, you heard that right. There is now an automated fare payment system as of October 1st called DiriGO Touchpass. This fare payment system allows transit passengers to use one fare payment platform to ride bus routes operated by METRO, the City of South Portland Bus Service, and the Biddeford-Saco-Old Orchard Beach Transit System.

The “pay-as-you-go” and “fare-capping” features of the DiriGO Touchpassm make access to price discounts more equitable, and improve affordability for those who use transit the most.

There’s so much going on in the world of public transit in and around Portland. Please learn more about METRO, please attend a Sustainability and Transportation Committee Meeting. And please take note of Creative Portland’s incredible Bus Stop Art installations that are the result of incredible community collaboration led by Portland’s own Dinah Minot

**My thanks to Councilor Ray who serves as the METRO Board President, and METRO Executive Director, Greg Jordan, for your leadership.**

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Our goal #4, to address the high property tax burden in Portland by passing an affordable combined school/city budget and by pursuing other revenue sources, has been achieved, to a greater degree than we could have imagined. Holding the tax rate flat is especially significant given the ongoing COVID19 pandemic and the hardships experienced by so many City residents and businesses.

Although it was a process filled with many difficult decisions, the Finance Committee led an extended FY21 budget review process which, for the first time in nearly 25 years, resulted in no increase to both the City and the School portion of the mil rate.

The Finance Committee also led the review of a fiscally responsible Capital Improvement Plan, which will result in over 100 major improvements to City and school facilities and equipment, with no additional debt service burden to the general fund operating budget. (The amount of

funds being borrowed to fund the plan was targeted to simply offset existing debt service being retired.)

The capital improvement plan includes badly needed ADA improvements at over two dozen locations across the City, including 7 schools, and the replacement of critical fleet vehicles including plow trucks and ambulances, improvements and smart city enhancements to traffic signals, major paving and resurfacing of our City roads, and much more.

Our city's budget articulates our priorities. The top priorities, funded by local taxpayer dollars/General Fund dollars, are:

- Public Education
- Health & Human Services, including Public Health
- Employee Pensions
- Public Safety including Police and Fire
- Parks and Recreation, and
- Public Works

The FY21 Budget process was delayed. Final approval and implementation happened 3 months later than usual, yielding a 9-month budget. Believe it or not, the FY22 Budget process is right around the corner.

**My thanks to Councilor Mavodones and Director of Finance, Brendan O'Connor, for your leadership.**

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While the Council's four priority goals focused in just a few Council Committees, there was a lot of important work happening in these committees:

The **Economic Development Committee** worked jointly with the Health & Human Services Committee to propose Marijuana regulations.

The Economic Development Committee provided recommendations to the City Council on sales/leases of City-owned property and requests for proposals for affordable housing development including: 21 Randall Street, 165 Lambert Street and 43/99 Douglass Street properties.

Also, the Economic Development Committee recommended an amendment to the 52 Hanover Street Purchase and Sale Agreement to change the development program to allow 171 rental apartments with 8,000 sq. ft. of commercial space and surface parking.

The Economic Development Committee also assisted in the closure of City streets and expansion of outdoor seating for restaurants to provide small business support during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**My thanks to Councilor Costa and Director of Economic Development, Greg Mitchell, for your leadership.**

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Among many important paths forward, the **Sustainability and Transportation Committee** oversaw the development of One Climate Future, the collaborative effort with the City of South Portland to develop a climate action and adaptation plan for both cities.

The committee reviewed the plan on September 16 and recommended it to the full City Council for adoption.

The plan charts a course to achieve the City's goals while ensuring Portland remains a thriving community in 2050.

The committee also oversaw the City's participation in a solar energy consortium that will save the City over \$500,000 annually in electricity costs and will help fulfill our commitment to run City operation on 100% renewable energy.

My thanks to Councilor Thibodeau and Sustainability Director, Troy Moon, **for your leadership.**

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The Ad Hoc ReCode Committee has provided a path for Council and community engagement as City Staff and the Planning Board have worked to create a new, unified development code to serve Portland for the 21st century.

The new code will be more user-friendly, will advance the goals of the city's new Comprehensive Plan, *Portland's Plan 2030*, and be better equipped to meet the myriad needs of the city in such areas as housing, design, preservation, conservation, the working waterfront, energy, and transportation.

ReCode will be a multi-phased process.

The first phase includes new regulations for *signs*, updates to the *accessory dwelling unit (ADU)* and parking provisions, and an organizational restructuring of the Code.

Phase 1 of the ReCode is being Workshopped for a second time next Monday, October 26th, and will be voted on at the November 9th Council meeting.

**My thanks to Councilor Cook for your focus on this work, and to Director of Planning & Urban Development Department, Christine Grimando, for your leadership.**

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The Legislative Committee continues to set the City's priority focus areas at the State and Federal level, monitoring legislative activity and its impact on the City of Portland.

For the majority of 2020, the Committee's regular oversight of, and advocacy for the City's policy priorities was set aside as the focus became how governments would respond to COVID-19 and what funding would be made available to municipalities.

With this in mind, the Committee prioritized working closely with the Portland delegation to Augusta to share information related to revenue sharing and the impact of the pandemic on the City and State economies.

**My thanks to Councilor Pious Ali our City Manager, Jon Jennings, Corporation Counsel Danielle West Chuhta, and Assistant to the City Manager, Dena Libner, for your leadership.**

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Although our District 3 representative, Councilor Chong, was not a committee chair this year (with an emphasis on *this* year!), he was a valued first year member (a freshman, along with me!), and an integral voice on the Economic Development Committee, the HHS/PS Committee, and the Charter Commission Ad Hoc Committee. Tae brings a lifetime of Portland experience to the Council. I am grateful for his leadership - and his humor.

As I look around, and assess the State of our City, I see a lot to be optimistic about.

Last winter, Northeastern University announced their expansion of graduate programming to Portland, triggered by a \$100M gift from David & Barbara Roux. And, this gift was matched just recently by the Harold Alfond Foundation. This is an extraordinary addition to Portland's impressive list of education institutions that for the time being will be located within a WEX property on the peninsula.

Just off peninsula the University of Southern Maine is making progress toward expansion that seeks to expand student housing, read: affordable housing, while creating more student amenities, and expansion of learning spaces.

And, just last week I was on Stevens Avenue at the University of New England as they announced their \$30M gift from the Harold Alfond Foundation, and their intent to move their medical school from Biddeford to Portland, clustering all healthcare and medical degree programs geographically while providing space for undergraduate expansion in Biddeford.

Maine College of Art has just launched their Be Seen campaign - which I find to be so on-point right now in terms of messaging, and practice. MECA is a Congress Street anchor, connecting the arts and creative economy to students and the community.

And finally on the education front is Portland Public Schools, including Portland Adult Education. Our city's public school system is doing herculean work through these challenging times on so many fronts. My gratitude and admiration goes to PPS leadership, staff, and the board. I know you keep students at the center of every decision you make.

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Where do we go from here? I believe we have quite a year ahead.

The economic forecast, indeed real time indicators, promise to challenge our ability to do all we'd like to do in the City of Portland.

And, while we can say that we've been here before, and look back to recent, and not so recent times to find examples of forced austerity, that doesn't help people right now who are hurting.

More than in recent history, businesses and residents are looking not only to the Federal and State Government for new and expanded support, but to their town or city for support and programming that will help with things like small business support and rental assistance.

I am confident that the City of Portland will continue to rise to the challenge to be a problem solver, along with so many others, focused on helping businesses stay afloat, keep people employed, and keep people housed, safe and healthy.

I see that we have opportunities to work more deeply with, and strengthen the role of neighborhoods. The City Manager and I will be presenting a plan for the reinvigoration of the Portland Alliance of Neighborhoods, recognizing the desire by residents, the importance of time at the table, dialogue, information sharing, and problem solving.

It's also critical that we continue and deepen our work with the region and the state. As the Legislature reconvenes, I intend to remain engaged, and to deepen our engagement, both through the work of the Legislative Committee, but also through my work with the Mayors' Coalition - currently a group of 10 Maine service center communities with a mission to advocate for state policies that will grow Maine's economy statewide by providing the infrastructure, skilled workforce, and reasonable tax rates necessary to support such growth.

As I said at the beginning, the State of the City is this:

- The City of Portland is working hard.
- The City of Portland is responding to unforeseen and unforeseeable challenges.
- We are working together. Your city government is working collaboratively.
- And, I recognize we have work to do regarding public engagement that feels meaningful and inclusive for *all* Portland citizens.

There are many challenges that need attention and solutions, and I recognize that there is dissatisfaction with public engagement by some.

Most of you know, I am not a huge fan of social media. That's not to say I don't see the value as an information sharing resource. Rather, I'm leery of one sided lobs that too often feel like stabs versus reaches across a real or perceived ideological divide.

That said, I do try to post to share information, and sometimes I linger.

Last week, I came across this post, which is used with permission, and edited to remove specifics while retaining the broader message.

The writer said this in the context of an advocacy organization, an issue, and our local government:

“There is a lot of passion...but also a lot of anonymous antagonizing and bullying.

Anyone taking a birds eye view can see the broken trust, the hysteria, the Henny-Penny calls...the process is broken.

I wish we could all take a look at that.

The established city authority should reassess its public engagement.

And the public should really address its behavior.

We say the city has so much work to do to reestablish inclusivity and productive outcomes - but maybe we also turn to ourselves to say let's have better conversations - let's be more educated on civic processes and basic decorum - rather than my side versus your side.

This election season is hard enough at the national level - do we need any more tension?

I'd love to see more intelligent and less belligerent dialogue from both sides with a receptive elected body as a partner.”

Again - this was a post about a specific issue. But I see the frustration with all parties, and I focus on the critique of local government, and ask, what can I do to help improve engagement?

As we enter a new Council year, we review and revise our Rules. This is an opportunity.

And as we embark on a Charter Commission process, we have great opportunities to improve.

And, our community has great opportunities to engage, serve on a Board or Commission, a Steering Committee, run for office.

We are in the midst of challenging times. There's no doubt about it. There are a lot of people who are hurting and who are scared. People are insecure about employment and health care, many have already lost jobs and wonder where we go from here as we head into winter.

Uncertainty about so many things has created a baseline of stress for so many, probably for all of us. I urge us to do the best we can as a community to be kind, to be creative, to be innovative, and to be persistent as we make our way through to the other side of Covid-19 and

the accompanying impacts to education, employment, the economy and our collective and individual well being.

Thank you to my colleagues on the Council. Thank you to our intrepid city staff. Thank you to our informed and involved community. My final words to you in this 2020 State of the City are this: Please vote on or before November 3rd.