
State of the City Address
by Mayor Nora Radest

January 5, 2016

I am honored and deeply grateful for the opportunity to be Mayor of our great city. I would like to begin by recognizing Mayor Dickson for her nine years of service to our city government; her belief in and love for our city has never wavered. Thank you, Ellen. I would also like to recognize departing council members Rich Madden, Al Dill and Greg Drummond. All of them have given generously of their time and talents. A sincere thank you for their dedication and tradition of service. I would also like to recognize our new council members, David Naidu, Mary Ogden and Richard Sun, as well as our incumbents, Mike McTernan, Sandy Lizza, Robert Rubino, and Pat Hurley. I look forward to working with all of you.

My campaign was based on my belief that a strong mayor is a good listener, a clear communicator, and a hands-on presence in the community. As I worked through the appointment process, I looked for volunteers who embodied these important values. These are not Democrat or Republican values; these are Summit values. I have seen them in action over and over again, in the bi-partisan presence on all of our volunteer boards and committees. I could not be more proud of this. True synergy depends on finding the best person to fit each job. Summit thrives when we incorporate the wisdom and experience of every sector of the city in its governance.

Over the past year I spoke with many voters about communication and effective listening, and how every resident in town should have an opportunity to be heard. Communication is a two-way street. I intend to do my part to make sure residents are informed about matters which affect them. In addition, I have given much thought to specific ways in which I can encourage Summit residents to share their ideas and concerns with me. I will have office hours at City Hall during the day and in the evening each week. Also, I will begin a monthly weekend open-house, in various public locations around the city, that I am calling "Meet the Mayor." I encourage

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everyone, young and old, to join me at these open houses. I hope to begin a dialogue that will last throughout my term as Mayor, bringing out themes that need to be addressed, and inspiring those sitting on the sidelines to consider how they can get involved. Finally, to further improve communication, the city is rolling out a new more user-friendly city website in February, which will allow for easy contact with city departments and personnel. I applaud the vision and efforts of the recent council and city officials in making this change.

My first order of substantive business will be to work with the Planning Board to initiate a re-examination of our Master Plan. State law requires that a re-examination occur every 10 years; the last time was in 2006. We must take action this year, and use this opportunity to think outside the box — envisioning a community that enjoys and thoroughly uses its public spaces, and that provides housing options for each stage of life.

Taking the right bold steps now will propel Summit into a new age of prosperity, if we have the foresight and political will to do it. For this process to be truly productive, it requires a concerted, community-wide effort. One of Summit's most valuable resources is its people, and we need to harness this intellectual capital, as we create a blueprint for Summit's next century of intelligent growth.

As for the state of the City right now, it will be no surprise to hear that we are very, very fortunate. We have one of the safest cities in New Jersey, perhaps the United States, and our police officers and fire fighters are trained for every eventuality. Our Nixle and Swift Reach safety alert systems are effective, and widely used. Our challenge is to make sure that we get every single citizen signed up. If you haven't signed up for emergency alerts, please go to the City's website where you can access the registration page. I encourage residents to reach out to neighbors, especially the elderly, and spread the word.

Our schools, thanks to the tireless efforts of our Board of Education, Superintendent Chang and a stellar faculty and staff, continue to excel. Our major responsibility at the moment is to continue to work, in a fiscally responsible manner, toward a goal of universal full-day kindergarten. Investment in education pays off not just in the lives of our children, but in the

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health and vibrancy of our community—as we can see by one of our newly elected council members, whose inspiration to service began in high school. In addition, if not most obviously, a reputation for educational excellence has an enormous impact on our property values. But we need to reinvest in our schools not only to keep pace with neighboring districts. We have been entrusted with the responsibility to prepare our students to meet future challenges in a complex and rapidly changing world. Absent an investment in quality programs that generate strong results, we will fall behind and fail our best resource, our children.

Our fiscal health is strong. We have benefited from decades of prudent stewardship by our able City Administrators. We have also benefited from the efforts of my predecessors in encouraging shared services with surrounding municipalities. The Joint Dispatch Service among Summit, Millburn and New Providence is successfully underway. A new opportunity for reducing expenses and taking advantage of economies of scale may be found in the Public Works Department, and I intend to pursue this possibility vigorously.

Of course our city also, inevitably, faces some challenges. Our downtown merchants are struggling, due to online competition and the proximity of the Short Hills Mall. Summit Downtown, Inc., recognizing that the downtown needs a new look at its marketing, has hired a retail recruiter. But more needs to be done. With vision, leadership, and genuine cooperation, our business community will play a hugely constructive role, advancing its own interests as well as our collective community desire for a vibrant downtown. The permitting process at the Department of Community Services needs to be smoother and more efficient, and I'm happy to say that work has begun. Last, but not least, we must settle the parking issue. In reading prior state of the city addresses, parking is mentioned as an issue to be solved every year - let's finally do something other than commission another study. I may not have the answer, but I am determined to bring stakeholders together in an open and transparent manner and find one. Let's have a contest of ideas and may the best idea win.

And along with challenges come opportunities. During the campaign I talked about creating a citizen's task force to study our fiscal relationship with Union County. It is my goal to make sure the County recognizes Summit as the strong and influential city it is, rather than as an open

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checkbook. To accomplish this, I intend to take a two-pronged approach. I will strengthen the lines of communication with the Union County freeholders, building and maintaining working relationships by meeting with them on a regular basis. And I will build a coalition of like-minded Union County communities, committed to working together to control the County's ever-increasing tax demands.

Finally, we need to consider the thorny subject of property values. Our last reassessment was more than twenty years ago, and our values are out of date. Defending tax appeals is costly, and overall we have a general fairness issue across the community that needs to be addressed. In addition, we need to put into place a rolling mechanism that will keep our values current and equitable, and prevent us from having to incur the expense and controversy that accompanies every reassessment effort.

In conclusion, my heartfelt thanks to the city staff that have been welcoming and so generous with their time and talents, helping me get up to speed during this transition period. I'm looking forward to working with you. The more intimately I get to know Summit, the more I understand how special it is. We are its stewards, and we must do everything in our power to leave it better than we found it. We have to make sure everyone in Summit feels that they have a strong voice in our community. These things are possible. I am committed to do my best to build upon the accomplishments of the past, and to work hard on your behalf for the future.

Thank you, and happy new year.