

THE CITY OF SUMMIT

N E W J E R S E Y

CITY HALL 512 SPRINGFIELD AVENUE SUMMIT, NJ 07901

News Release

For immediate release

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Common Council Organization Meeting Comments by Council President Greg Vartan SUMMIT, NJ, January 3, 2023

Dear Neighbors,

Last night, at the annual reorganization meeting, I was elected by my colleagues to be President of the Common Council for 2023. I made remarks during which I congratulated new colleague Councilmember Delia Hamlet on her swearing-in and Councilmember Lisa Allen on her re-election. I also congratulated our new President Pro Tem Susan Hairston. She is the first woman of color to hold that position, and I am proud to serve alongside someone who continues to make Summit history. It was wonderful to see the pride in the eyes of the family members and friends who were all present to support all of them.

I also spoke briefly about former Council President Marjorie Fox. Two months into Marjorie's tenure as Council President, the pandemic arrived in our city and posed the most serious threat in the history of this community. Summit's Common Council had to constantly adjust to the ever-shifting federal, state, and local health protocols and continuously adapt the role of government. While she was Council President, we took dozens of actions along with Mayor Radest and our extremely dedicated city staff to protect this city. Closure of Maple Street, parklets, allowing for creative use of public space, and many other initiatives allowed businesses to survive. Now, our Downtown is 99% occupied and has been awarded as one of NJ's Great Places. The vaccine clinic established at the Community Center in partnership with Atlantic Health ensured access to the vaccine for our most vulnerable neighbors, kept the hospital from becoming overwhelmed, and surely saved lives. In other words, Summit came through the most challenging period in our history and is strong today because of how Common Council acted during her time as Council President. I applaud her selflessness and her commitment to duty, I am glad for the opportunity to continue serving alongside her, and it's my pleasure to present her with this ceremonial gavel.

I'm incredibly thankful and truly honored to become Council President. I am most thankful for my wife, Megan, and my family without whose support I would not be able to serve. I am thankful for my fellow council members placing their faith in me. As we move ahead into this year, I want to be upfront with the community about what you can expect, both from me as a leader, and from our city government.

From me, you can expect that I will continue to lead with my values: honesty, respect, courage, and determination. In all things, I will seek a balanced approach. I take my new role and the business of government incredibly seriously, but I am joyful about the opportunities we must make a difference in this community we all love, and I hope you will find that my attitude will be positive and welcoming. I have respect for the intentionally slow and deliberative pace of government, but I believe we should vigorously pursue the initiatives that will make this great community even stronger.

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From our government, you can expect actions we take to fit into one of the following three buckets:

- 1) Ensuring and enhancing health and safety
- 2) Responsibly managing our financial resources
- 3) Pursuing the goals set forth in the Master Plan

Specifically, during this year, before the end of 2023, we will:

- Continue our initiatives to address auto theft
- Work to improve pedestrian safety and the flow of traffic
- Ensure the utility companies fix the roads they have ripped up during necessary upgrades
- Support the efforts of nonprofit groups and city departments to assist our unhoused population
- Adopt a responsible municipal budget
- Bring the Broad Street West Redevelopment through a process that considers all options and to a conclusion that makes sense for the Summit community
- Reach a decision about the future of Maple Street
- Open the dog park at the Transfer Station and plan for the rehabilitation and replacement of playgrounds
- Advance construction of the Park Line trail
- Continue to support the rehabilitation and construction of affordable housing

In addition to these specific actions, we must place emphasis on finding creative sources of funding from grants and other levels of government, increasing our environmental sustainability, improving the resident user experience, and ensuring equity. Councilmembers will need to work with each other, with city staff, with the hundreds of volunteers who give their time and talent on boards and commissions, and with the community-at-large in a collegial and collaborative manner.

You will notice a change in the order of business for council meetings. The public comment period for items that are not on the agenda has been moved to after the consideration of ordinances and resolutions. At the most basic level, the purpose of council meetings is to conduct official city business that has been listed in the agenda and detailed in the packet ahead of time. From a practical standpoint, by discussing, deliberating, and deciding on those known items first, we give councilmembers, staff, and the community the opportunity to fully explain, ask questions, comment, and truly debate actions the government is taking on behalf of the community. There will continue to be opportunities for public comment on every action item. Once that is complete, we will have comments for topics that are not on the agenda. I believe this will increase engagement and foster greater understanding of the work of our municipal government.

I speak for every member of council when I say we want to hear thoughts, concerns, and ideas from members of the community. There are several ways you can contact councilmembers. Our phone numbers, emails, and mailing addresses are all located on the city website. Please reach out! We are happy to forward inquiries to the right department head or committee or respond directly. But I would also like to outline a few new things we'll be doing to increase access:

- Soon, council will have office space in City Hall for meetings and appointments with residents and set office hours
- In small groups (no more than three) councilmembers will host informal Facebook live chats on specific topics that may be of interest and answer questions virtually

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- On a regular basis, during the Council President's report, I will encourage other council members to provide updates on what they're doing in their committees.

I recognize there are challenges we face as a community but am fiercely optimistic that Summit's best days are ahead. Thank you for the incredible honor and pleasure of serving the people of Summit, who know the power of our voice and the value of our vote. I look forward to an excellent year. Thank you.

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