

2018 State of the City Address

Good evening residents, community members, councilmembers and City staff. I am excited to be here this evening, presenting a State of the City message.

I want to share with you some accomplishments from the past year, my vision for the future and highlight some upcoming activities of the City. My primary objective this evening is that you take away a sense of optimism and enthusiasm about the future – because that’s how I feel and why I am so excited to serve.

We have numerous opportunities ahead of us, a firm commitment to get things done well and a desire to try new things along the way.

We live in an amazing place. I know you value our natural setting, and that it is essential to our mountain town character. The Issaquah Alps, Lake Sammamish, Issaquah Creek and surrounding public lands in many ways define our community identity. We are in both an enviable and challenging position at the edge of the urban growth boundary. Our developing urbanism will bring us more opportunities for jobs, entertainment, recreation and services. But, we also face issues of access, affordability, mobility and stewardship. Our unique topography funnels travel from within and outside of our city onto our congested roads, and that threatens to diminish our quality of life and limit access to our amenities.

This past year, we started drafting our Parks Strategic Plan, which will shape the future preservation and enhancement of our parks, open spaces and trails. I am proud of the community’s energetic involvement in this planning effort. I look forward to the public’s and Council’s review of the draft plan this spring and to see the updated plan for future park and trail plan improvements on the valley floor as the character of central Issaquah moves from suburban to urban over these next few decades. I am very excited to start planning a new off-leash dog park in Issaquah and working with residents to site and cooperatively operate this new amenity. In the very near-term, I will proudly participate in the opening of the new turf field at Central Park and all the associated picnic, playground and trail improvements. Going forward, we will also continue to work with our partners to preserve critical tracts of land, restore habitat, protect water quality and improve access to the outdoors, for all users.

During the past year, the City purchased several creek side properties and made improvements to several parks including Confluence and Central Parks, in addition to completing the construction and opening of a new skatepark facility at SR 900 and Newport Way, adjacent to Tibbetts Park. We worked with King County on an innovative trailhead access program and participated in King County’s Land

Conservation Initiative to identify high conservation value lands and trails for preservation. We continue to serve as a proud, founding member of the King County Cities Climate Collaboration or K4C. Through this collaboration, we have established commitments and actions to reduce climate impacts. This past year, our City Council also adopted a Sustainable Building Strategy, designed to put Issaquah back at the forefront of environmental sustainability innovation. At a time when our region is pressured by its popularity, we believe we can provide a vibrant community and have a positive impact on the economy, the environment and the people who call Issaquah home.

We are indeed at a pivotal moment in time, attempting to carefully grow. We have a good foundation of state, regional and local plans and practices that have envisioned growth. We are also a community that is already fortunate to have a mix of services, the beauty of the outdoors, employment opportunities and so much more. However, the pressure is on our city and our region to continue to welcome and house new residents. And so, we need to thoughtfully build upon that foundation. That includes taking care not to displace jobs, commercial spaces, retail amenities, natural gifts like our forested hillsides or our existing neighborhoods' character.

It also includes linking our transportation plans and solutions to the type and size of development that will occur. Thoughtful growth requires analyzing what we need and what we need to advocate for. Issaquah is a remarkable and great place today. We face challenges now, and we will continue to evolve and be different in the future, but we will remain focused on being a great place.

Our plans and actions show that we are changing – from a small town to a more urban city. In the past, our growth was due to annexations and development of raw land. In the future, our growth will be redevelopment - adding density and moving away from single-story buildings and expansive surface parking lots, to mid-sized and mid-rise buildings that are designed for mixed use, and then on to possibly even taller buildings and structured parking. This growth will be focused on the valley floor, both north and south of Interstate 90. We will have new businesses, employers, services and residents. Ultimately, we will grow from a city of 37,000 to a city of 50,000 people. And we are not the only ones. Our region is expected to grow by 1.8 million residents by 2050, that includes ongoing growth in all of Issaquah's neighboring cities.

As anticipated by the Growth Management Act and the City's plans, that growth is happening now, and it is occurring with greater speed than forecasted. We are in rapid learning mode as we now see clearly the challenges and take steps to modify our approach to mitigating growth's impacts. The City recently imposed a moratorium on most types of new development. That moratorium will end soon. The moratorium's pause gave us the opportunity to create stronger requirements for better architectural fit, creative and functional urban design, additional affordable housing as our housing stock grows, planning for vertical mixed uses that allow retail and commercial to be in the same building as residential, and planning for structured or below-grade parking versus surface parking lots.

Even with those adjustments, we need to recognize that redevelopment will be disruptive at times. However, we are committed to meeting that reality with a plan for good growth – including improving

our communication with residents and implementing a strategy of managing contractors and keeping them accountable with our expectations that they be good neighbors.

We are strategizing about how to preserve what we love about our unique neighborhoods. Last year, the Olde Town sub-area plan's completion was delayed while we worked on the moratorium, but we are getting that project back on track so that we can get the results we want and need – like future development that is compatible with what exists now.

Another critical area that requires attention is transportation. My top priority is to make it easier for our residents to get around town. This means we will not prioritize getting pass-through traffic through our city over our own mobility needs, or over our goals to increase the number of options we have for how to get around. We need to better control pass-through traffic and better manage its impact on our community.

Despite that challenge, there are many things to be excited about in the transportation arena. We are entering a phase where we will get ready for light rail. This phase includes learning from those cities that have already received light rail. We are also making progress on major projects that are either in design or construction. These include improvements to Newport Way, the extension of Southeast 62nd Street from East Lake Sammamish Parkway to Lake Drive and the Costco and Pickering areas, and the related re-opening of our beloved Fourth Avenue Northwest undercrossing of I-90.

In 2018, we are also adding new resources to help us shape our transportation future. Those include a Transportation Advisory Board and development of a Mobility Master Plan. I also expect that staff and Council will collaborate this year on options for securing the funding we absolutely need in order to build out our mobility infrastructure, including sidewalks, multi-use trails, intersection improvements, transit facilities, structured parking, refreshed pavement, and traffic calming elements in neighborhoods experiencing issues with speeding.

While our city is in good financial health, demands for our services continue to grow. We need to continue to have discussions about how we will provide for desired and expected service levels into the future. Those tough conversations need to be about the prioritization of programs, services and projects, and the long-term financial plan for each. Transportation is just one of several areas that are going to require thoughtful financial commitment. Not too far out on our horizon, we will begin to have a conversation about the long-term plan for our water system – how to ensure the production of the water we need and how to ensure that water is of the highest quality. This may also require a significant new investment. Additionally, we will discuss how to improve the effectiveness and delivery of our public services through the consolidation, relocation and/or enhancement of our facilities.

With these large conversations and significant decisions on the horizon, I am excited to kick-off our City's strategic planning process this year, a first for our city. Our goal will be to identify and affirm the vision for the city, establish community-based priorities and create a framework for decision-making. We will aim to engage all corners of our community in the dialogue. And, at the end, we will have a measurable, near-term action strategy for how to move us to our desired future. I hope that all of you will stay tuned and seek out ways to be involved in our strategic planning efforts.

In closing this State of the City Address, I want to share what an honor it is to serve this community, my home. It is a joy and a huge responsibility. During my tenure, I have placed a priority on listening and making sure that you feel heard. I will consider different opinions and voices. I will be open to new and additional ways to share your thoughts.

We are going to try some new things, such as a concept I call City Hall Outside. I am eager to come to where you are, not to force you to come to City Hall. We are also working to increase transparency and responsiveness in all things we do. Examples of that will include revamping our public notice process, televising and recording more boards and commission meetings, and adding more interactive and self-service tools for you as a resident and a customer – like the ability to use credit card payments for services and have online access to your transactions with the City.

Change, by its nature, is new and different, but we are working hard to ensure it is also a net positive to you and the community.

Thank you for your attention this evening and for your ongoing engagement in the future of Issaquah.