Good evening and Happy New Year! I'd like to welcome the members of our State delegation as well as President White, Vice President Ballantyne, Chairperson Normand and Vice Chairperson Bockelman; Honorable Members of the Board of Aldermen and School Committee; Superintendent Skipper; and all our Honored Guests, Friends, and Family, as well as my fellow public servants and my fellow residents of Somerville.

To our newest colleagues, incoming Ward 6 Alderman Lance Davis, Ward 4 School Committee member Andre Green, and Ward 3 School Committee member Lee Palmer, congratulations on your election and thank you for your commitment to serve our community.

To those elected officials leaving office, departing Ward 6 Alderman Rebekah Gewirtz, Ward 4 School Committee member Christine Rafal, and Ward 3 School Committee member Adam Sweeting, I and this city owe you a debt of gratitude for your service. Thank you for your dedication to our city.

I'd like to also thank my wife Nancy and our four sons Cosmo, Joey, Patrick and James who are here tonight and there for me every day.

Thank you also to this evening's emcees, Sassy and Sergio Estany, who are inspiring examples of individuals who truly give back to our community and particularly our youth. As teenagers, both worked for the Center for Teen Empowerment. They also served on our nationwide Police Chief Selection panels. Most recently, they were two of the leading forces behind the City's 2015 All-America City Award win.

That's right, in 2015, Somerville won the prestigious All America City Award for the third time. Let's have a round of applause for all of the youth and community members involved and for ourselves for once again achieving this honor.

Tonight marks my seventh inaugural address as Mayor of Somerville, and you'd think I'd be used to it by now. I'm not. I still feel like someone needs to pinch me every time I stand before you, like it can't be real. I'm just a kid from Somerville who grew up over on Prospect Hill. When somebody says, "There goes the Mayor," I still look around for Gene Brune.

I love this city to my core. I love that every day I get to work on making Somerville the best it can be. That I am the mayor of this amazing, creative, hard-working city humbles me. I am so thankful for this opportunity and I know better than anyone that the people of Somerville don't send you to City Hall to rest on your laurels.

So I commit tonight to serve you and our city faithfully in the coming term, to take on our challenges with resourcefulness and creativity, and to pursue our greatest hopes with unwavering determination.

Often when newly elected officials make speeches, they promise change. I too want to talk to you about change, but not in the same way.

In Somerville, the topic of change is complex, and emotions around it are different for each of us. But one thing is clear: Change is on many of our minds.

Some are excited about new successes and possibilities for the city. Others-and sometimes the very same people-are just as concerned about unwanted impacts of the change happening in our region and our city.

This sense of rapid transition, may feel like it's unique to Somerville today, but a quick look back at our history makes clear that it is not.

Some of our great grandparents witnessed that change early on. They saw the extraordinary transformation of our city that came with the industrial boom in the early 20th century. They watched as double- and triple-deckers sprouted up across our hillsides and our population mushroomed right past 100,000.

Others saw the churn created by the urban flight of the mid-20th century and watched as highways cut through our neighborhoods and friends and family fled for the suburbs.

Even in my own lifetime, I've seen attitudes about Somerville flip 180 degrees. When I was a kid, Somerville pride was fierce, but it still seemed like everyone's big dream was to move out of town to greener pastures-like Billerica. Today, it seems nearly everyone is determined to stay.

But there is something unique about our Somerville, and the type of change we are experiencing today.

Somerville today is not content to just watch as change happens to us. Instead, we are determined to envision and shape our own future amid that change. And we ARE shaping our future.

Through our SomerVision Comprehensive Plan, we have set forth value-driven community goals from diversity to sustainability to job creation, affordability, open space, and more

Through public process and extensive community input on everything from the zoning overhaul to Winter Hill to Union Square, we are taking those goals from intentions to action.

We are shaping our future, as we regularly attempt the extraordinary: to pull together as a community of nearly 80,000 and decide what we want to be when we grow up.

That's no simple task. The hardest thing to do in government is to achieve long-term changes and goals. Community-based decision making also takes time and sometimes difficult compromise. Meanwhile, there's no shortage of daily issues, financial challenges, and roadblocks to progress of every variety.

Yet I am proud to say, that when Somerville runs into obstacles we clear them like we're a pack of American Ninja Warriors (sorry, as a father of four young sons, you have to mention Ninja Warriors at least once in your inaugural speech).

Seriously though, other cities marvel at how much we get done. We have played the long game, and it is paying off.

Before we talk about where we are going, let's look back at the tremendous work that we have done together.

The students graduating from Somerville High this year were in kindergarten when I first took office.

In that time, investment in our schools has increased 35% since 2004, meaning we are now investing $16 million dollars more per year in education than in 2004.

That money has funded programs in science, technology, engineering, and math. It is enriching music programs, career and technical education, new technology, afterschool support, and stronger reading and writing programs.

In that time, we have seen MCAS scores at the high school rise by leaps and bounds. So I'm going to recite some numbers now, and they are impressive numbers that we made happen. So pay close attention-and feel free to applaud our kids, our schools, and our community.

We now rank in the top 15% of the state in Student Growth Percentile, and we are the number 1 urban district for growth.

Proficient and advanced scores in English/Language Arts have risen dramatically from 50% to 85%.

Math scores rose from 46% to 73%. Science scores made an enormous jump from 12% all the way up to 70%. The number of Somerville High School graduates going on to higher and further education has risen from 59% to 80%.

We did that. We are transforming the quality of our children's education. We are shaping a better future for them.

The past 12 years also have brought dramatic changes in our local business climate. Somerville has seen a 14.9% increase in jobs, a 23% rise in nonprofit local businesses, and the assessed value of our commercial sector has increased 81% to more than one billion dollars.

Some people think you can only achieve that sort of business and jobs growth by slashing taxes and eliminating government from the equation. That thinking is wrong.

We did it by having government play a vital role in advocating for mass transit, redesigning our streetscapes, investing in our roads and utilities, making our city squares more walkable and bikeable, planting more trees, building more parks and playgrounds, and working hand-in-hand with small businesses that want to make Somerville their home.

We're incredibly proud to rank 7th in the nation for walkability and 4th in bike commuting. But this is Somerville, so we won't stop there. Mark my words: Somerville will be number one.

And in the midst of national turmoil around policing in our nation, I have to take a moment to commend our police force for continuing to embrace true community policing. We vastly expanded outreach programs, honed skills in de-escalation, and built trust in the community. The Somerville Police Department is now a model for progressive policing because we police for results with compassion. As a result, over the last 12 years, violent crime is down 31% and property crime is down 11%. It is well-deserved that Chief Fallon is nominated as a White House Champion for Change, and I thank him.

Another feather in the community's cap, we passed the Community Preservation Act with one of the highest majorities in the state. We just cut the ribbon on the first project, the Prospect Hill Tower, and thanks to this community's generosity, more vital projects are to come.

Oh, and by the way, we opened up the first new T station in a generation. That enabled us to build a new neighborhood in Assembly Square, which is now home to software companies, LegoLand and, soon, Partners Healthcare.

Think about that, the biggest employer in New England is opening offices for roughly 4,500 employees in Somerville. If I had promised that 12 years ago, people would have accused me of being crazy ... and they might have been right.

But not only is Partners coming, Somerville is now home to a burgeoning innovation and creative economy. GreenTown Labs, the largest clean tech startup incubator in the nation-and soon the world-is here and expanding. Cutting edge technology and new economy companies from TechHub to Grommet to Echo Nest and SmartBear set up not in Cambridge or Boston, but right here.

Meanwhile, true to our creative roots, Artisans' Asylum is now one of the largest maker spaces in the country supporting makers and artists of every variety. At the same time, small, independent businesses from craft brewers to design firms, bakeries, and salons are popping up all along our streets and in our squares.

Somerville has seen an increase of 247 net new businesses in the past two years alone. The lesson is, when you make bold moves with a long-term vision, extraordinary things can happen.

That's not change that happened by accident, that's change we orchestrated-together.

However, as we strive toward our community's many deeply held values and goals, there are regional pressures, national concerns, and global factors that are bringing competing change and challenges that we must also address.

We face the crucible of our region's rapidly rising housing prices. We have inherited aging infrastructure, in need of significant repairs. We are already seeing the impacts of global climate change. We have not been spared from the tragic consequences of the national heroin epidemic. These are just some of the difficult changes and challenges of our time that Somerville must address.

But the key word in that sentence is Somerville. In Somerville, we have, we can, and we will take on these challenges and do our damnedest to shape the change that comes with them. I won't kid you. It won't be easy. None have simple solutions. But we are hard at work.

One clear challenge is housing. Right now, rent and home sale prices are being driven by a massive housing shortage in Greater Boston. Demand far outstrips supply. Estimates are that our region needs to add 435,000 new housing units by 2040 to restore balance. In Somerville alone, our share is 9,000 units if we want to maintain affordability FOR ALL.

This issue hits me at a personal level. I grew up in Somerville as the son of two Italian immigrants. My father and mother both worked in factories. My dad cut hair and drove a snow plow for extra money. My mom also worked as a cook. They raised three children, put a good roof over our heads and sent us to college. But is the door still open for a family like mine here in Somerville? It needs to be.

We need to be a city that is as much a home to the people who are working their way up as it is for those who have already made it. We need to remain a city welcoming to immigrants trying to get a hold on the American dream just as our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents did. Ensuring we keep that kind of diversity is an extremely complicated, long-term challenge facing all of Greater Boston.

This region will be defined by how well we band together to meet this challenge. And none of us can fix this alone.

For this reason, we have joined a new Regional Compact with Boston, Cambridge, and other cities to work on the housing issue along with transportation, sustainability and economic development. We must solve the housing shortage regionally. And we need you to raise your voices on this one.

We fought for the Green Line for decades-and it mattered. We need community voices to also start calling for a coordinated, regional effort on housing as well-because it matters. The math is simple. If the region does not build the housing we need, and if Somerville does not build the 9,000 units we need, no amount of affordable housing programs alone will be able to keep the cost of a home or rent reasonable for ALL of us.

At the same time, we'll keep going full bore at this problem at the local level. This year, we launched our 100 Homes initiative with our partner, the Somerville Community Corporation. Rather than watching speculators gobble up homes, we are buying them ourselves, renovating them, and renting them out at affordable rates. We will transform 100 new units in the first three years, and I'm happy to announce that we just closed on the first property and we have a second under agreement.

Meanwhile, new Community Preservation Act funds are flowing into affordable housing. New linkage fees on larger developments are raising even more affordable housing funds. And last year, we worked with our honorable Board and State Delegation to raise our residential property tax exemption from 30% to 35%. We now offer the largest exemption in the state and that helps maintain affordability, especially for long-time home owners like our seniors.

It's important to remember that living wages and career opportunities create access to housing. So, as new jobs come to Somerville, our residents must be prepared to fill them. For this reason, we worked with the Board on a jobs linkage fee home rule petition that is now before the state. We will use those funds to support job training programs. Why? Because in Somerville we leverage development for the greater good.

We are also collaborating with Tufts University to develop an ambitious housing strategy to provide more student housing on their campus and transition larger neighborhood units from student housing back to family housing. We are honored to have the university as our partner.

Finally, to build on our ongoing affordability efforts, I called together the Sustainable Neighborhoods Working Group. I sought out the city's brightest and most determined minds and challenged them to come up with bold ideas on affordability.

Tonight, I announce to you, we now have the Working Group's recommendations and the ideas are big and bold. They include a 1% real estate transfer fee, new tenants' purchase rights and support, and an increase beyond our current SomerVision goal of 6,000 new housing units. The proposals also envision new 20% citywide inclusionary zoning and new financial supports for low-income tenants in affordable units.

I want to be clear: getting from excellent ideas to achievable, leading-edge initiatives is always the hard part. So I will put every staff hour and every resource needed behind this effort to move it to the next phase-and do so swiftly. Somerville will lead the way on affordability.

The Working Group is also calling for overhaul of the zoning code, which we have been advocating for. Zoning may not be the most interesting topic, but it is crucial for social equity. Somerville prides itself on its progressive values, but our zoning code does not reflect those progressive values.

We need zoning that is as good as our intentions-that incentivizes the housing, the independent and job-producing businesses, the artist spaces and the open space that we want.

So let's get this done this year. Let's get zoning done in 2016. The community deserves this.

Change is often progress, but to meet our community standards-and my standards as your mayor-that progress must include social progress. It's not progress if we shut the door and leave anyone behind.

We cannot lose track of these fundamentals: we must always keep an eye toward who gets to participate in our economy, our democracy, our community, and our opportunities. We need to ask ourselves who has access, who has education, who has job training, who is getting hired, who gets fair and equal treatment? It is for these reasons that some of the actions that I will take in the next term will include the following:

I will work with the Board on clean elections and greater civic access for the underrepresented. From our coming diversity plan, to new opportunities for civic participation, to voting rights access, I will call for a community task force to gather the best ideas. The Board and I have already put forth anti pay-to-play legislation to ensure the integrity of local elections and together, we'll get that passed. Next, we'll be collaborating on a home rule petition to the State for public financing of elections. Somerville will lead the way on local election reform.

I will continue to listen to the voices of the most vulnerable among us and will champion their concerns whether speaking up for sanctuary cities, demanding immigration reform, calling out vile hate speech for what it is, or calling attention to issues such as Black Lives Matter, living wages, LGBTQ rights, or the need for new enlightened approaches to treat opioid addiction not as a crime but as the disease that it is. Because when you bring communities together, and not just respect but VALUE and CHERISH the diversity of our city, you create a better, more vibrant, and safer community for everyone.

Through our work with Harvard and MIT, we will also become the first city in North America to measure social progress not just economic progress because we must measure what matters. We must measure our impacts on quality of life and opportunities for our residents.

I will continue to pursue the strategic, community-driven development outlined in SomerVision that will bring us the jobs, the open space, the family housing, theaffordable housing, the attainable housing for the middle class, and the new commercial tax revenues that we seek-because we can't get to most of these goals if we can't fund them or attract investment to build them.

We will double down on our efforts to become carbon neutral by 2050 because cities must lead the way in addressing climate change and its damaging effects.

Guided by our ADA Transition Plan and our Capital Investment Plan, we will continue our steady and methodical efforts to address our critical infrastructure needs-from our buildings to flooding prevention to our roadways and especially for increasing accessibility for persons with disabilities.

And so importantly, we will continue to invest in our schools-our most fundamental gateway to social equity.

We will provide our high school students with a 21st century high school so that they are prepared for the new opportunities in our global economy.

We will continue to grow our universal kindergarten readiness initiative in collaboration with providers citywide. And this year, we will launch a new Community Cabinet that will harness all city resources, both municipal and school district, to expand opportunities for student growth and success.

As I mentioned, Somerville deservedly won another All-America City award this past year. We were awarded this honorable distinction because we represent the best version of what America can and should be.

Far too many are currently running away from the pillar of our values as a nation-equal representation, equal rights, and equal opportunity for all. Somerville, under our watch, will hold that pillar tall. We know that diversity-economic, social, and religious-is our greatest strength. This is why so many of us are so proud to call Somerville home.

We hold that dear, and we will create the opportunity for all that our nation was founded upon. And we will do so by harnessing change.

Yes, change causes fear and anxiety, but it is also an opportunity. It brings new possibilities- if we seize them.

Nowhere is this more visible than in Union Square. This is where our SomerVision community plan really comes to bear.

What we want is community-first development. We want walkability, bikeability, transit access, green space, sustainability, affordable housing, family housing, middle income housing, artist and maker spaces, jobs at every level, office space and innovative new companies. Frankly, we want it all and that takes creativity.

So just like our thriving maker community, we're working to handcraft our future. We're striving to make Union Square a one-of-a-kind original.

We're going to do this the Somerville way, by coming together, balancing competing interests and doing something so extraordinary the rest of Greater Boston sits up and takes notice.

Vital to all our Union Square plans and the Commonwealth is, of course, the Green Line extension. This project received the highest federal contribution for a project of its kind in the history of the state because the Feds understand the vital economic growth it will spur. Estimated tax revenues alone from that growth are roughly $4 to $6 billion dollars by 2040.

Despite this, I know some of you are wondering if the Green Line will be built.

Well, the overwhelming environmental, economic and social justice benefits from the Green Line have not changed one iota.

The State's legal obligation to build the Green Line has not changed one iota.

We have waited long enough.

So let there be no doubt: We will work with the State to ensure the Green Line gets to the finish line.

The Green Line will be completed.

We have that same kind of determination when it comes to innovation both inside government and in our local economy.

Somerville is known for leading the way in innovative policy and service delivery. That's why a Washington Post poll of cities ranked us as the 14th most influential city in the country-and we were the only small-sized city to receive that honor.

At the same time, we're fostering that spirit of innovation in our local economy. Here's just one example: We just signed an agreement with Audi for them to establish a Mobility Lab in Somerville and make us their first U.S. testing ground for self-parking cars. I know that may sound like a silly sci-fi gimmick. But it's estimated that self-parking cars could make parking structures 62% more efficient, which means we could devote less space to parked cars and more to people or green space. Now that's innovation we need.

Another area where we find ourselves out front in innovation is in green technology. I was proud to join with Governor Baker recently to announce the expansion of Greentown Labs. The next- generation ideas that are going to help us combat global climate change

and rethink how we produce and use energy are being dreamed up right here in Somerville.

And we're not going to settle for an innovation district. Somerville is and will be the innovation city. We are the innovation city because we cultivate our passion for curiosity. We proudly tout our willingness to be abnormal. We understand that if you create an environment that enables collaborative creativity, magic happens, jobs happen, positive change happens.

Innovation takes many forms. Perhaps you build a giant airborne turbine that harnesses energy from the wind as innovators at Greentown Labs did. Or perhaps you envision a neighborhood and not a strip mall in Assembly Square as the Mystic View Task Force did. Or maybe you believe in Somerville and stake a claim as a small business long before it was cool to do so, as Ken Kelly did.

I want to take a moment now to remember a great friend and business owner, local restaurant entrepreneur and innovator Ken Kelly, who we lost two weeks ago. What Ken did for Somerville is indispensable, and we would not be the city that we are today without him. He believed in Somerville, in its people and its character. He was a champion for small business, and played a key role in the revitalization of Union Square, and in the growth of other economic centers in Somerville. He was a kind and selfless man, and he will be missed by us all. He also represents what is great about Somerville.

Somerville stands out from the crowd because we innovate. We stand out because we are striving to take control of our destiny. We do it bigger. We do it better. We do it smarter. Most of all we never forget that we're supposed to have each other's backs when change happens. We're in this together. That's what keeps me coming back to serve as your mayor.

When people from other places ask me how did you do all that cool stuff? How did you make all those positive changes? My answer is: because I'm the Mayor of Somerville and I'm the luckiest guy in the world.

Thank you.