**2017 State of the City - Mayor's Remarks as Prepared**

Thank you, Council President Stark, for your kind introduction and your partnership over these past ten years.

And thank you, Rick Magler and the Pipefitters Local 455 for hosting us today in this beautiful new training facility. Just walking in the front door, we know why you are so proud of this place and the work you are doing here.

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It is in the pattern of our civic life that we gather twice a year to take stock of our past, discuss our present and plan for our future. Over the past 12 years, we have marked this occasion in times more or less challenging. The recession. The foreclosure crisis. Cuts to local government aid that we depend on to fully fund our first responders. In the most challenging of times, in the face of inaction at the state and federal levels, we necessarily protected our own interests. But we also took on important statewide, national and global challenges.  And we did so boldly, acting in the moment but with a laser focus on the future. The ancient Jewish teacher, Hillel, famously said, “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am for myself alone, what am I? And if not now, when?” Two thousand years later, these timeless words still lay out the fundamental considerations of all people striving to make a better place for themselves and the next generation.

I’m going to talk this afternoon about the challenges we’ve met and those we are planning to take on – for ourselves, and for each other – in order to meet the promise of our future. But first, I want to thank all of you who played important roles in our work in Saint Paul over the past 12 years. I want to thank my family for their love and support – nothing I’ve accomplished as Mayor would’ve been possible without them.

Thank you to all of our City Councilmembers, City employees, department directors, my staff, our state legislators, our business leaders, nonprofit organizations, residents and activists. Thank you to everyone in this room and many more who have shared their ideas for how to make Saint Paul the place it is becoming.

It is fitting to be here with you today in this space. The Saint Paul Pipefitters Local 455, who have been preparing Saint Paul workers for 112 years, turned this building into a state-of-the-art training facility at the tail end of the Great Recession, when our economy was just starting to rebound and many trades workers were still on the bench.  
They had the vision to look ahead and invest in their workers, providing training on cutting edge developments in their field.

So, for that matter, did the Carpenters, the Electrical Workers, the Iron Workers, the Heat and Frost Insulators, the Nurses, SEIU Health Care workers, the Saint Paul regional labor federation and others.  Our partners in organized labor understand – perhaps best of all – the challenges that lie ahead and the importance of a highly trained workforce. We thank them for their commitment to tomorrow’s workers.

Right now, 250 apprentices are in classes in this building alone. Some of them are here today. They will spend five years preparing for jobs as pipe fitters, welders and HVAC technicians. They will earn $70 an hour or more building and maintaining commercial boilers and refrigeration systems in our schools, hospitals, universities and other large facilities. I want every child sitting in a classroom in Saint Paul to have the same opportunities whether they choose to work in construction trades or work for one of the new creative employers increasingly drawn to Saint Paul.

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Thanks to our bold vision and hard work, Saint Paul’s future is bright. Our city is growing—with our population exceeding 300,000 for the first time since 1970. Private sector jobs are back to prerecession levels. People and businesses are investing in all four corners of the city. Families are choosing to live here, work here, go to school here, open their businesses here, and go out to dinner or a game or a show here. Not only did we survive the recession, we came through it stronger than before.

This past year…

* We opened the doors of the Palace Theatre to thousands of music lovers. The project brought more than 55,000 hours of construction work to Saint Paul, employing hundreds of workers. The Palace joins the new Ordway Concert Hall, the Twin Cities Jazz Festival, the expanding Walker West Music Academy and dozens of other places and events in defining Saint Paul as a community rooted in the arts.
* And down the block from Palace, the former Macy’s building, now known as the Treasure Island Center, will soon welcome the Minnesota Wild, Tria Orthopedics, a new brewery and Minnesota Housing as its first tenants.
* We realized a return of $8.7 million dollars and put a significant development back on the tax rolls thanks to the sale of the Penfield – a project that many decried as too risky at a time private development came to a crashing halt. But we never gave up on moving Saint Paul forward. On top of the incredible return on investment, the development of the Penfield brought an estimated 200 construction jobs to Saint Paul during the recession.
* The East Side has continued its steady progress toward becoming one of the city’s most vibrant communities. On East Seventh Street alone we celebrated  the opening of the Metro State Student Center, Cambric Apartments, Dellwood Gardens and the new business incubator…joining Mississippi Market, the East Side Enterprise Center and multiple small businesses that reflect the rich diversity of the surrounding neighborhood. Though new to the Council, Jane Prince has long been a tireless advocate for her community and these projects are just the beginning for the East Side.
* Higher Ground opened to provide both dignified shelter and affordable housing to more than 450 people. Within days of its opening, 27 of the city’s 100 longest term shelter users finally had a home of their own. We have more work to do, but we are off to a good start.
* We built 15 miles of bike lanes, trails and paths, and have 180 more miles on the drawing board – an investment that benefits our environment and our health – but also our economy. According to the study just released by the Minnesota Department of Transportation, the state’s bike industry produces $780 million in annual economic activity, and nearly 6,000 jobs.
* We’ve made steady progress toward constructing the Gold Line, the Rush Line and the Riverview Corridor—all while the Green Line and A Line exceed ridership projections.
* In another arena, we committed ourselves to a path toward expanded recycling services. In part due to the ambitious scale of the project, and in part due to icy alleys, we got off to a bumpy start. But we are holding Eureka accountable and working with them to ensure collection continues smoothly. Complaints are down and current reports show our collected tonnage up 15 percent from last year. We anticipate achieving our goal of a 35 percent increase in collected recyclables and a 15 percent increase in participation annually.
* While investing $29.1 million in repairing or rebuilding City streets, we also recommitted ourselves to making sure that those streets are safe and welcoming for eight year olds and eighty year olds – pedestrians, bicyclists and drivers. In a few weeks, thanks to the McKnight Foundation and the leadership of Council President Stark, we will have a pedestrian safety coordinator in the Department of Public Works to work with Sgt. Jeremy Ellison and partners across the city to push us toward the day when no one is hurt crossing the street.

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From streets to public safety, we have always focused on providing vital services for residents. When it comes to community policing, Saint Paul sets a national standard. Chief Axtell continues a tradition of departmental leadership that sets a high standard for his professional colleagues in Minnesota and throughout the country.

During a year that tested the relationship between our Police and the communities they serve – a difficult and emotional year – I am proud to say that, thanks to the work our officers do every day in all of our communities, we kept our footing atop a foundation of trust. We don’t for a minute take that trust for granted.

While they are very few, every instance of deadly force is a time to pause and reflect—for the sake of both the family and community impacted and the officers involved. Under Chief Axtell’s leadership, we have both supported officers who have demonstrated uncommon bravery and held those accountable who have tarnished their badge and let down their fellow officers. In both instances, we have had the difficult conversations so that we can all do better together.

This past year, we held more than a dozen Safe Summer Nights events across the city, where uniformed Police Officers served thousands of meals to kids and families, getting to know one another as people – connecting during a time of community instead of crisis. We created a Community Engagement Unit aimed specifically at increasing our proactive outreach to all communities in our city. Each of our officers completed racial equity and implicit bias training. We continued to work with community ambassadors to redirect our youth out of trouble and into after school programs and other activities. We continued to invest in building a department that reflects the community it serves, bringing 20 new officers of color onto the force this past year.

And earlier this month, the Saint Paul Police Department launched a new website to share its 21st Century Policing Report. The report focuses on the department’s efforts to improve transparency, build trust and strengthen relationships, in compliance with President Obama’s task force on 21st Century Policing. Saint Paul is the first police department in the country to demonstrate such a high commitment to increased transparency around these efforts.

While Councilmember and former Police Sergeant Dan Bostrom knows a police department is more than just numbers, his support for increased officers (growing from 576 to an historic 620 over the last decade) allows us to have a more engaged, proactive department working across all four corners of Saint Paul.

I am proud of our department – not because it is perfect – no department is. But under Chief Axtell and Chiefs before him, the Saint Paul Police Department constantly strives to be the best. And we must never stop striving.

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As I’ve said before, Saint Paul must be an economic anchor for the East Metro. As we look to the future, we must continue to support the growth of private sector jobs. Supporting traditional labor and trades jobs is critical. But we must also support growth in the tech and innovation sectors. Nationally, growth in the tech and innovation sectors is outpacing overall job growth by 200 percent per year.

Saint Paul needs to attract its share of that growth. We have the track record, going back to the early days of 3M. Leading science and technology companies such as Granicus, formerly GovDelivery, and Ecolab are just two examples of great companies that call Saint Paul home. We have young people eager to work.  We have the colleges, universities and training centers. We need to build the pipelines where graduates from our high schools and our colleges and universities find good, high-paying tech jobs right here in Saint Paul.

To realize this vision, Councilmember Chris Tolbert and I brought together a group of leaders in Saint Paul’s tech and innovation sectors to be part of an Innovation Cabinet, that has come together to discuss ways to attract, retain and expand tech and innovation jobs in our city. They will be releasing an action plan in July with specific recommendations. I want to thank Scott Burns, Councilmember Tolbert and the entire cabinet for their leadership in this important work.

Pursuing jobs in the innovation economy does not mean abandoning others. The City of Saint Paul is proud to work with our labor partners to make sure youth and young adults are able to navigate towards construction as a career choice. This past year, we secured $2 million in funding for the Construction Careers Pathway Initiative, with the help of the Saint Paul Building Trades, Right Track and the Construction Careers foundation.  Providing work-based learning exposure to young people, particularly to females, veterans, and members of historically underrepresented communities in the industry, is the work that is needed to ensure good paying careers are attainable for all in our community.

While times are relatively good right now for many workers, we can’t forget the Great Recession of a few short years ago. Then, unemployment in the construction trades often exceeded 50 percent. But here in Saint Paul we took bold steps to invest in workers. When construction trades workers were on the bench, we invested in projects like the Penfield, to get folks back to work. They came from every corner of Saint Paul and beyond – from towns like North Branch and Cannon Falls. We preserved high-paying, union steelworker jobs at RockTenn and Gerdau. And by investing in our workers, we saw strong returns.

We must act to ensure that there is a steady stream of work now and into the future. I am calling on the state legislature to pass Governor Dayton’s construction bonding bill. We must make the same bold investments across Minnesota that we’ve made right here in Saint Paul.

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One of the most significant threats to current employers in Minnesota is a workforce shortage. As we look to bring jobs to Saint Paul, we must also look to build the future workforce to meet the needs of a changing economy.

Here in Saint Paul, we have led the way to ensure that our children are given every chance to succeed – both inside and outside the classroom. Our Sprockets Network connects families to free, after school and summer programming across the city. Our incredible work in our Saint Paul Promise Neighborhoods has led to more kids ready for kindergarten and improved reading skills among our most vulnerable populations of kids. And most recently, we launched the Library Go initiative, putting free digital library cards in the hands of every student in Saint Paul’s public schools.

We have focused on this work because we know that to ensure a strong future workforce, it begins with our children’s education – and doesn’t end when the school bell rings. The administration in Washington may think early education, after school programming and youth jobs initiatives aren’t effective, but if you ask a mom who sends her kids to the Createch studio at the Arlington Hills Community Center after school; or the family that uses Sprockets to find free activities over the summer for their children; or the kid who received homework help after class at Rondo Library; or the teenager working at a Right Track internship so they can learn professional skills and still bring home money to help support their family – to all of these people and so many more – these programs are invaluable. We must continue working hard to protect them so that our kids and families have a leg up, and a fair chance at a good-paying job.

Also under threat today is our VISTA program that places young people in agencies across the city working to eliminate racial disparities in education.  Since President Kennedy’s creation of the Peace Corps in 1961, national and international service has become a cornerstone of what is special about our country. Connie and I have seen it first hand as our daughter Molly served as an AmeriCorps volunteer in New York City Public Schools. Not only did her service enrich the lives of her students, but it changed her.  Today she is law school bound with plans to prepare for a career in community advocacy—a choice that will make our country stronger. I know that this is a subject close to Councilmember Noecker’s heart as her passion for service was shaped by Teach for America and Teach for India. I thank her for living out that passion here in our community.

You know how proud I am of the Right Track program, but it is always worth mentioning, particularly as I stand here and reflect on the programs and initiatives we must protect for the future of Saint Paul. Since the program began in 2014, more than 2,000 low-income Saint Paul students have received good-paying internships with local businesses. These students have earned a total of nearly $2.5 million in wages. Thanks to the partnership of our business community, these young people are learning professionalism, hard work and valuable skills, setting them up for success – and hopefully encouraging them to seek employment here in Saint Paul, whether at Wells Fargo, a tech startup, or the Science Museum.

There are too many success stories coming out of this program to share them all with you – and I’ve done my best over the years to introduce you to the young people who are now adults contributing to our city thanks to their hard work as Right Track interns. But I do want to share the story of Mai See Her, a fire inspector here at the City of Saint Paul who began her career at the city as a Right Track intern while she was attending Johnson High School. She is here with us today. She has risen through the ranks and is excelling as the first female Hmong fire inspector in the state of Minnesota.

Today, I am calling on our Saint Paul business community to partner with the city yet again, to hire a record number of Right Track interns in the coming year. To do so, we need employers to commit to hiring 230 interns this summer. We’ve already reached 191 internships, but we’re nearing the deadline. To our partners in the business community – it’s not too late to help us reach our goal, so we can keep telling more and more stories like Mai See’s.

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And while we do have many success stories to tell, I know that the economic recovery has been uneven—that the global economic restructuring has left whole segments of our community behind. And that the painful legacy of racism continues to keep us all from achieving our dream of a community rooted in fairness. Where no one’s path is defined by their zip code or constrained by race or income.

Saint Paul’s concentrated areas of poverty have grown. This is unacceptable, not only for those who are struggling to rise out of poverty, but for us all. We share a common destiny. If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am for myself alone, what am I? We must continue to work hard to provide opportunities that allow people to lift themselves out of poverty. If not now, when? I want to thank Councilmember - and HRA Chair – Amy Brendmoen for her leadership on Inspiring Communities, a program that rehabs and rebuilds foreclosed houses to resell to low-income families, creating more opportunities for the people of Saint Paul to succeed. To date, 243 housing units have been rehabbed or rebuilt through this program.

It has been a goal of my administration to ensure a fair and equitable community, and to do that, it is imperative that City government reflects the residents it serves. Last year, I set the goal that by the end of 2017, 23 percent of city employees would be people of color. I am proud to tell you today that we have already exceeded that goal. We’ve also worked hard in my office to do the same for the city’s boards and commissions – several of which are now comprised of more than 40 percent people of color. Every resident of Saint Paul must have a stake in our community. I’m proud of the work we’ve done, and it is important that we keep striving toward a more diverse workforce.

Yet, while we commit ourselves to squaring our values with our reality, we continue to be tested by those seeking to divide us along lines of race, religion, sexual orientation, or national origin. Chief Axtell and I spoke to hundreds of Saint Paul residents at Skyline Towers after the President’s Executive Orders on travel and refugees were released. Each one a parent, or a sibling, or a family member worried about the fate of their loved ones. In the face of threats to hurt innocent children at our Jewish Community Center or hostility toward East African immigrants, we will continue to stand together.

We have pushed back on the purveyors of hate, and will continue to do so with every resource at our disposal.  It is important, however, to not amplify their voices by suggesting that they are more significant than they are.  At the end of the day, Saint Paul is not defined by the few. We are defined by the generations of people who have welcomed immigrants—and who do so today.

In the last year, more than 50 percent of the refugees who came to Minnesota settled first in Ramsey County. That’s twice as many as the next county. Because that’s who we are. That’s who we’ve always been, from the time Neighborhood House welcomed Eastern European immigrants to the West Side at the turn of the last century or when my grandmother arrived by train in the 1920s, having fled war-torn Ireland. We have landlords who provide housing. We have schools who welcome children and families needing to learn English. We have support services designed for and delivered by the refugees who arrived in earlier decades. This significant number of new arrivals creates a statistical impact on our rates of poverty. But our history as a nation of immigrants teaches us that trend won’t last. That the immigrant story – much like Saint Paul’s story – has never been about the past, or the present, but about striving for a better future, a better life for one’s family.

To the refugees and other immigrants in our midst: just like generations before you, don’t let anyone tell you that you should “go home.” You are home. You are welcome here. We want you to put down roots, buy homes, build businesses, create jobs, run for office. We share a common destiny and we need you to help us build the future of this community that we all love.

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So, if our call is to act for the future, what should we be doing amidst the uncertainty of this time?

In the absence of leadership from Washington on the significant issues of the day—climate change, crumbling infrastructure, veterans homelessness and on and on – I am proud to say that Saint Paul—and cities and towns across this country – have stepped up. And we must continue to fight to build the kind of communities that reflect our values.

The proposed deep cuts in housing and health care, education and economic development, transit and basic services all threaten to undercut a social contract that has defined this country for generations.

We are seeing, on a national and state level, tremendous interference with local governments and our ability to make decisions based on what is best for our community and to provide essential services for our residents. Cities have been – and always will be – incubators of change. But we are under attack.  Local Government Aid remains underfunded for all cities from Virginia to Albert Lea to Warroad and Worthington. Devastating cuts followed by a lack of investment has cost cities across Minnesota millions.  Instead of investing in local communities, state legislators this session have proposed dozens of bills intended to prevent local governments from effectively acting to serve our local communities.

That is why I am calling for legislators at the Capitol to remember that they come from these communities too – communities that have expressed their own needs and expect their local elected representatives to fulfill those needs.

For years, I’ve heard legislators argue that the government closest to the people it serves – local government – is best situated to make local decisions. Right here in Saint Paul, our local community called for Earned Sick and Safe Time. No woman who has been the victim of domestic violence should be forced to choose between taking out a restraining order and losing her job. Before legislators mess with what our residents need, they should first forge a state-wide solution to address the issues we face. In the absence of a broader solution, let local government continue to be responsive to our residents, as local governments throughout Minnesota strive to be.

Because after more than a decade of conversations with Mayors across the state, from the mining communities on the Iron Range to the farmlands in southwestern Minnesota, I can safely and strongly say that we are one Minnesota. Legislators who seek to pit Greater Minnesota against the Metro area are engaging in a cynical game of politics that does not reflect the needs of real Minnesotans.

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The absence of leadership on the Federal level is perhaps most striking when it comes to climate change – a very real issue that is affecting cities and towns across Minnesota and across the globe in very real ways.

Here in Saint Paul, we are national leaders in this work. We have spent the last decade working together to do our part to lower our impact on the environment. In the past 10 years, we have reduced our emissions by 27 percent.

In Saint Paul, average temperatures warmed by 3.2 degrees Fahrenheit in the last 60 years, with temperatures expected to rise another 3-5 degrees by mid-century. Our total precipitation increased by 20.7 percent in this same timeframe, leading to more frequent floods.

In 2015, I joined the leaders of more than 500 cities at the Climate Summit gathering in Paris to sign the Compact of Mayors, pledging to take collective action against climate change. Since then, we have completed a full inventory of greenhouse gas emissions in the City of Saint Paul. From that we’ve learned that on-road transportation accounts for 27 percent of all emissions in Saint Paul, with 5.5 million miles being driven in Saint Paul each day. Now, we are working with all of you in the community to put together a Climate Action Plan for lowering our emissions even further.

We have set a bold goal of becoming carbon neutral by the year 2050, and thanks to our inventory, we know where we can target our efforts to make the biggest impact.

The administration’s recent executive order to undo the work of the Environmental Protection Agency is not only a threat to our planet – it is a threat to our economy. We must remember that sustainable infrastructure is both a necessity and also the greatest business opportunity of the 21st Century.

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It has been my honor to be your Mayor for the past 11 years, but I’m not done yet. With nine months to go, there’s a few things I plan to see through before I leave my office in City Hall. First, of course, would be to bring Lord Stanley’s Cup to Saint Paul – although if that doesn’t happen, we can count on at least one team to bring home a championship now that the Lynx have crossed the River.

Second is to see a soccer stadium emerging from the ground at Snelling and University. Thanks to Dr. McGuire, as well as Councilmember Dai Thao and the entire City Council, this completely privately-funded stadium – the first of its kind in the state of Minnesota – will be anchored at the busiest intersection in Saint Paul, bringing incredible opportunity to a site that sat vacant for years. That development and vibrancy will be realized at the surrounding site as well, bringing activity that this neighborhood has never seen before.

This week marked an important milestone for this project, with the announcement of Irgens as the developer at the site surrounding the stadium – a developer who has never entered the Twin Cities market, until now. My goal is to set the stage for that development, bringing job opportunities to the people of Saint Paul and a vibrant destination for residents and visitors alike. The stadium alone is projected to bring 1,900 construction jobs and 200 to 300 long-term jobs to the site.

And finally, I hope to see an incredible, bold vision put in place before the ‘For Sale’ sign is hung on the Ford Site. We have an unparalleled opportunity for the future of Saint Paul and for the entire region at this site. For ten years, we have led a planning process to develop a framework for its redevelopment. Our vision is bold – to take 125 acres of brownfield and build a sustainable, green, transit-connected district. With significant community input, we are working to remake the Ford Site into a 21st century community – an opportunity that exists virtually nowhere in a built, urban environment like Saint Paul, and that could bring 1,500 jobs to the city.

With big, bold vision and even bigger plans come excitement and passion, as well as understandable hesitancy and fear. To ensure that we are meeting the needs of Ford’s neighbors, we have held more than 40 public meetings, sat and listened to you in your living rooms and coffee shops and heard what you were excited about, and what you were nervous about. We have spent hours scouring through feedback and looking at how we can incorporate it into the overall vision. If this bold vision is realized, it will draw people from all over the world seeking to emulate it in their own communities.

But don’t take my word for it. I want to read part of a letter that we received in my office just two weeks ago from a Saint Paul resident. She wrote, “You’ve all done an outstanding job of balancing boldness and introducing true change with listening to the community concerns and fears about change. As almost-retirees…, my husband and I look forward with excitement to what this once in a lifetime opportunity for our city could mean for everyone, and we see ourselves in that picture. Thanks again for all your hard work and commitment to this important project. It’s going to be awesome.”

It is going to be awesome. For this vision to be realized, the same boldness that led to the Green Line, Penfield, professional soccer and CHS Field must also guide us on Ford.

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I am deeply grateful to the people of Saint Paul for these past eleven years, and I stand here dedicated to continuing our work. Next year a new Mayor will stand at this podium. I hope that if there is anything I have imparted to whoever will take the helm, it is that leadership is about taking risks. It’s not about reliving the past, or fixing the present, but focusing on our future.

As Chicago planner Daniel Burnham wrote, “Make no little plans. Aim high in hope and work. Remember that our grandchildren are going to do things that would stagger us.”

Tough economic times or tight budgets or uncertain national politics are not reasons to pull back. They are a call to pull together, dig deeper and commit to ourselves and to one another.

Connie, Molly, Aidan and I have cherished the time we’ve spent in your homes and businesses, your churches and schools and neighborhoods. We have been motivated by your dreams, your hopes for your children and your love for this town. I look forward to spending the rest of 2017 and beyond working with you and for you to build a better future for us all.

For Saint Paul’s future must be bright for ourselves and for each other – and we must build that future now.

Thank you.

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