**2018 Inaugural Address by The Honorable Sefatia Romeo Theken, Mayor**

Good afternoon and happy New Year everyone! Welcome family, friends and neighbors, former mayors, city councilors and school committee members, police and fire chiefs, CAO Jim Destino and City Clerk Joanne Senos, City staff and department heads, and all special guests.

I would especially like to thank Lt. Governor Polito for stopping by (she was here earlier before we got started) to wish us a Happy New Year and congratulate those being sworn in today.

I would like to thank Ronda Faloon, our emcee today, the Docksiders, the Gloucester High School junior ROTC, Alexandra and Josh, Gordie Baird, Fly and Alan Estes, Charlee and Jack, John Rosenthal, and Senator Bruce Tarr for their participation in today’s event.

Throughout my life, I have been fortunate to come to know many of Gloucester’s people.  Both old and new residents value the culture and services that our community provides.  As a result, they have high expectations for continued benefits in the future.  Maintaining these standards requires that we all work together.

Civic engagement is the lifeblood of all communities.  In the past three years, we have had many volunteers throughout the City come forward to help. That outpouring of support has been amazing but we must keep it up. I would like to take a moment to acknowledge all of our volunteers, especially those who serve on committees, boards and commissions. They choose to take time out of their busy lives to get involved in City government, they work hard to preserve our quality of life in Gloucester, and they deserve our thanks.

I urge all of our residents to continue to get involved.  Whether it is by filling vacancies on City committees, joining or forming a neighborhood group or association, attending public meetings or input sessions, or engaging in other future opportunities.  Our citizens are unique: we are a family; we are thoughtful; we are caring and we are committed.  Our success depends on all of us.  Your government needs your input in order to grow responsibly and in a manner that benefits all residents and businesses while preserving our unique character.

Today, we look back at the challenges we have faced and we take a moment to appreciate the remarkable way that the people of Gloucester have responded over the past three years.  While we have achieved much, there is much left to do.  We must continue to work hard to build a bright future for our beloved City.  To that end, I would like to touch on a few of the issues that we will be working on together in the next two years.

Success in City government begins with the budget—effective City growth needs financial stability.  My finance team’s efforts continue the pledge we made to you three years ago: stop careless spending and borrowing and save for the future needs of our community.  Our policy on committing free cash into the stabilization funds for the maintenance of our facilities and future capital needs is working.  Our reserves are much stronger than they were when we came into office and our reliance on one-time money to balance our operating budget continues to decrease. Together with proper capital planning, we will finally be able to depend on less borrowing to fund our capital projects.  In doing so, we can continue to establish a solid foundation for moving the City forward while ensuring growth and stability for years to come.  As the stewards of your tax dollars, my administration is committed to making City government work responsibly for you and we are doing just that.

As we enter into the next phase of the MSBA evaluation for a potential new elementary school to serve East Gloucester, we must take a close look at all of our building assets and develop a long-term plan for these facilities. This plan must prioritize and justify the investment we are making in our City’s future while optimizing opportunities for growth, regionalization or consolidation.  Such a strategy will allow the City to protect and preserve these assets while creating the most effective and efficient places for learning, teaching and working.  In the coming months, I will instruct the Department of Public Works to engage an architectural firm to evaluate all public buildings including our public schools.  This evaluation will support the goals and objectives of the community while addressing the existing conditions of the buildings and making recommendations on programmatic and educational space. This plan will become the framework for a twenty-year prioritizationplan.

My administration is committed to addressing the need for affordable housing in Gloucester.  In 2017, we completed work on our Housing Production Plan.  Approved by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development, the City Council, and the Planning Board, this Housing Production Plan is a holistic approach to addressing the ongoing affordable housing needs in Gloucester.  It provides goals and strategies to address the gaps in our current housing stock through preservation of what we have and increased accessibility to future housing.  In the next two years, there is much work to be done.

First, we plan to allocate local, state and federal resources to support necessary community projects that include HOME funds to support the Cameron’s project, as well as funding to increase the number of housing units we are able to preserve and support through our Housing Rehabilitation program.

Second, we plan to minimize the barriers to housing within the zoning ordinance as part of a comprehensive ordinance review in order to encourage multi-family and mixed use, where appropriate.

Third, we plan to promote safe and healthy housing through increased outreach related to programs that help homeowners make improvements to their property and save money an increased number of properties served through the City’s lead removal program and an increased number of households who take advantage of MassSave and other energy efficiency cost-reducing programs.

Climate change is real and we are already seeing its impacts here in the Northeast which has one of the fastest changing climates on the planet.

Coastal resilience will be an issue that we will be dealing with as a community for generations to come.  During the past three years, this administration has taken a proactive approach to addressing climate change and coastal vulnerability. Our goal is to figure out how best to provide resources to support local efforts that encourage innovation and economic diversification on our coastline.  We have been actively assessing our infrastructure and prioritizing the work that is most critical.  In the next two years, we will begin implementation of this important work through the utilization of grant funding that includes a grant that provides the City with funding to design and complete infrastructure improvements at five of the City’s most vulnerable sewer pump stations.  These pump station projects and future design work will evaluate and incorporate necessary design and adaptation measures to accommodate and protect them from future flooding predictions.

And an additional grant to assist the City in taking the necessary steps to qualify for the “MVP” designation by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and to develop an action-oriented resiliency plan, which will allow us to engage the community in the process of Community Resilience Building.

I would like to conclude by thanking my husband Matthew, my children and my brother and sisters, for their continued support - I could not have done this without you.  I would like to thank everyone here for your support, as well.  We are all fortunate to be a part of this amazing community and I look forward to serving you, as your Mayor, and working to move Gloucester into a brighter future.

I know you are counting on me and I will not disappoint you. Thank you and have a Happy New Year!