*Here’s a copy of Mayor Ruthanne Fuller’s first State of the City address delivered Feb. 20, 2018 at Newton City Hall.*

Good Evening.

To President Laredo, Vice President Kalis, President Emeritus Baker, members of the City Council and the School Committee, everyone here at City Hall or watching at home, good evening.

I last stood here seven weeks ago when I had the honor of taking a solemn oath of office. On Inauguration Day, I pledged “to build a greater, better and more beautiful Newton to transmit to our children and grandchildren – grounded in our sense of civic duty, inspired by our shared vision, and fueled by our tradition of working together.”

Tonight, I’m here to re-affirm that building a greater, better, more beautiful Newton will be this administration’s unwavering goal, and, that the truest means for accomplishing that, is working together.

Seven weeks into my term, I am more convinced than ever that we will achieve that goal because I have already seen so many do so much to make our city great. And I have seen them do it by working together.

Since January 1st, at City Hall and in our schools, we have worked together to successfully contend with 1 blizzard and 11 snow events that dropped over 40 inches of snow. We have faced 2 two-alarm fires. We’ve helped 8,581 people when they called customer service. We’ve filled 723 potholes.

Since January 1st, our educators have worked with 12,750 students in our 23 schools on 31 school days even as we all thanked Superintendent Fleishman for the 2 snow days on January 4th and 5th.

My appreciation for our police officers and fire fighters grows every time I listen to the police and fire scanner in the car I inherited from Mayor Warren.

No matter the hour, our emergency responders are answering calls for help – alarms, accidents, crimes, and medical emergencies, one after another.

On the afternoon of January 18th, when the call came in that there was a fire on the 9th floor at the Sheraton Crown Plaza in Newton Corner, our fire fighters left their station in one minute. They didn’t know whether they would find guests trapped in a fast-moving blaze. But, as always, they left the station prepared for anything, and working together as a team, secured the scene.

On the morning of February 9th, a car going the wrong direction crashed into the guardrail on the Exit 16 off-ramp to the Mass Pike in West Newton. Three people fled on foot. Newton Police officers, working together with State Troopers, K-9s and a helicopter, searched the area until they were satisfied that no residents were in danger.

We live in one of the safest cities in the country precisely because these women and men prepare ahead of time for whatever emergencies may arise and are ready and willing to put themselves in dangerous situations. That kind of preparation and bravery fills me with deep pride and enormous gratitude. Thank you to all who serve.

And every day I’ve seen examples of so many of my colleagues working together, going the extra mile for our residents, and making Newton great.

* Kim Ritcey and the sixteen men on the Department of Public Works team who worked through dangerously cold weather to repair a broken watermain while staying in constant communication with the resident whose home was flooded and encased in ice.
* Alexandra McAndrew in the Human Resource Department who got her Dad to babysit her little boy home sick from pre-school so she could lead an orientation for new employees.
* Jini Fairley, our ADA Coordinator, who helped a disabled, 94-year-old woman whose home health aides needed off-street winter parking so they could continue working through the night.

It is this kind of dedication, this sense of civic duty, that has made me even more convinced that, working together, we can, and will, fulfill our mission to transmit our city to our children and grandchildren greater, better and more beautiful than it was transmitted to us.

And I must give a shout-out to our department heads.

They are an extraordinary group of people whose talent, expertise, and dedication keep this City running smoothly.

That’s why you don’t see them here tonight. As a small gesture of my appreciation, I made sure they took the evening off. They are home having dinner and an evening with their families. Please join me in thanking them for all they do.

There’s one person who’s not home with her family, however. I’m so pleased to introduce you to Karen Glasgow, who I am putting forward to be our Human Resource Director.

One of my first priorities as Mayor was to fill that open position because people are our most important resource. Karen comes to Newton with deep experience in labor relations and human resources for the City of Boston in their Law, Fire and Public School Departments. You will soon find that she is strong and smart, warm and wise.

On Inauguration Day, I also pledged to work doggedly so every resident feels part of our community – equally – where the concerns of all citizens are listened to and acted on. And I meant it when I asked for your help, your ideas, and your input.

I am so grateful to the hundreds of you who have shown your sense of civic duty by:

* Coming to the open office hours here at City Hall and Mayoral meet-ups in Oak Hill Park, Upper Falls or at the John M. Barry Boys & Girls Club;
* Celebrating with me as we cut the ribbon when a new office opened in Nonantum or on Rt. 9;
* Joining me at the library or at our MLK citywide celebration to hear our high school students talk eloquently about race and racism;
* Enjoying the Chinese New Year’s celebrations at Bigelow and Zervas or the art opening outside the City Council chamber;
* And, yes, giving me advice in the grocery store aisle.

I am listening.

I am learning.

With the help of 3,000 teammates at City Hall and in our schools, we are responding, working hard to make Newton the best it can be for all our residents.

Most importantly, working together, we are getting in front of the issues, planning the work, and taking action.

Working together also means working closely with the School Committee and City Council to move Newton into the future.

Having met with all 24 of you, the City Councilors, in the Mayor’s office across the hall during my first weeks in office, I can say confidently that all of us appreciate three important truths.

First, the state of the city is strong.

Excellent schools. Low crime rates. Outstanding services. Financial stability with triple A bond ratings. New school buildings and firehouses. A wonderful community.

Second, the future is coming and with it comes change. We need to take charge of our future.

Third, we face challenges.

* Home prices are rising. Our children too often can’t afford to live here. We can no longer say that no matter your income or your age, you have a chance to move here or stay here.
* Traffic congestion is growing on our major arteries, while cars are speeding through our neighborhoods, and the maintenance of too many streets and sidewalks is lagging. Drivers, cyclists and walkers often feel frustrated or unsafe.
* Threats to the environment are mounting and preserving open space is challenging.

But where others may see only problems on the horizon, I see opportunities.

Where others see a housing affordability problem, I see an opportunity, working together, to diversify our housing stock so that people of all incomes can live here.

That’s why I’ve already proposed hiring a firm with a history of successful community-driven master planning to help us take charge of the Washington Street corridor from West Newton Square to Newton Corner.

It’s also why we are updating our zoning ordinances together, identifying where to preserve the scale and look and feel of our neighborhoods – and where to have more diversity of housing types, more opportunities for art and culture, new environmental protections, additional green spaces and gathering spots, and better walking experiences even as we support our existing businesses and create opportunities for a better mix of restaurants, retail stores and offices.

We are on track as promised to deliver a base zoning code to the City Council in the fall. Together, we’ll continue to work on it in the coming years, refining it as we do additional master plans for areas like the Washington Street corridor and Newton Centre.

Where others see traffic congestion and deteriorating streets, I see an opportunity to improve safety and traffic flow, upgrade our roads, and enhance conditions so more people walk, bike or take transit.

Working together with our residents, our businesses and our interdepartmental Complete Streets team, we’ll fix our streets and sidewalks. We’ll put in state of the art traffic signals that can adapt to changing traffic conditions. We’ll paint the lines more often so we can see where to go. We’ll help get people out of cars with better, safer bike lanes and a bike share system. In this regard, I’m pleased to announce that working with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, the state, and other communities, a new dockless bike share system will soon be a reality.

I’ve already met with Secretary of Transportation Stephanie Pollock here at City Hall to advocate so our commuter rail stations, green line stops and buses are more accessible, reliable, and frequent.

Thank you Representatives Ruth Balser and Kay Khan for partnering with us on both the Newton Highland Green Line accessibility project and the commuter rail upgrade.

Nowhere are the stakes higher and the opportunity for improvement greater than in meeting the challenge of protecting Newton’s environment and open space. My pledge “to build a greater, better and more beautiful Newton to transmit to our children and grandchildren” begins here.

Working together, we must think globally but act locally.

That means reducing emissions of CO₂. We’ve received state funding to help with the purchase of three zero-emission electric vehicles to add to the City’s fleet, and together we will fund more. We’ll also install more electric vehicle charging stations in the city.

It means improving the energy efficiency of our City buildings and installing solar panels on more of them.

It means moving toward sustainable energy. Municipal electricity aggregation, called Newton Power Choice, is on the way. Working together, we will choose an energy supplier, give our residents and businesses options, stabilize prices, increase the amount of green and clean renewable energy, and try to lower energy costs. Ann Berwick, our Sustainability Director, has an ambitious goal of conducting 100 community meetings in the coming months so keep your ears open for an opportunity to hear directly about Newton Power Choice.

It means reducing our solid waste, our trash. Two hundred residents in Auburndale won the lottery on Friday and are piloting a food composting collection program.

And it’s why I’ve already put together a Webster Woods Advisory Panel, and together we will make sure that important parcel stays as open space in perpetuity for all of us.

Building a greater Newton for the next generation means supporting those who did so much to build a greater Newton for us. We are working together with the seniors to make a new facility a reality. A working group that includes City Councilor John Rice has been launched.  Earlier this month, I also got some great news from Senator Cindy Creem who was able to get $6 million in funding toward that facility included in a state bond bill. There’s still a long way to go before that money makes its way to Newton, but it’s a huge first step. Thank you Senator Creem.

If we are to ensure that an even greater Newton endures into the future then the inheritors of that Newton must be ready to lead. That is why providing our children with the best education will always be a high priority.

Regardless of their learning styles, the language spoken at home, the color of their skin, the extracurriculars they prefer, the income of their households, or whether they call home Newton or Boston, all of the children in the Newton Public Schools deserve a high-quality education. I join the School Committee and the Superintendent in saying we need to both narrow achievement gaps with respect to race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status and maintain our deep commitment to ensuring that students with disabilities make meaningful progress in our schools.  One critical step that I support towards both academic excellence and educational equity is full day Kindergarten.

I am so proud that our educators are taking the lead on ensuring our students become knowledgeable, responsible, caring and contributing members of our society, as they focus on both academic and social & emotional teaching and learning from preschool through high school.

Spreading and reinforcing the core principles of respect, diversity, and acceptance from the halls of our schools to every corner of our city is our shared mission.

Seven weeks in, I see more clearly that we are not immune here from prejudice and bigotry.

Look no further than Newton Highlands, where Moe Khalaj, the owner of Walnut Market and an immigrant from Iran, was told to go back to his country of origin by a hateful customer.

But, I am so proud to be the Mayor of Newton where neighbors in Newton Highlands led by Belle Halpern and Mitch Rosenberg came together to embrace our differences, to stand up to fight the darkness, and to rally together for inclusion, and to surround Moe with empathy.

Seven weeks in, I also see more clearly that we are not immune from the public health issues that confront communities across America. So many of our family members, friends and neighbors are struggling with mental health issues, social isolation and addiction. The scourge of opioids is an equal-opportunity epidemic, striking rich and poor, young and old, families and individuals.

I believe that local governments, including the City of Newton, need to be on the front line in helping individuals and families with loved ones in the grip of depression, anxiety and opioid addiction. We’ll meet the challenge as a community with information, education and increased trained personnel in our schools, police cruisers, Senior Center and at City Hall.

So, seven weeks after Inauguration Day, with our great team of educators and public employees, elected officials and residents, with our goals for an even better Newton, and a community committed to respect, diversity, and acceptance, I can tell you with confidence:

The state of our city is strong and the future is bright.

I look toward that future with hope:

* To working together to break down barriers – whether social, religious, cultural or interpersonal, and
* To turning all the opportunities to build a greater, better and more beautiful Newton into actions.

I’m once again asking all of us to work together, to link arms, and to take charge of the bright future of this city we love.

Thank you and good night.