"I want to say a quick word to everyone who ran in this election—and really to all of us. In my years in Somerville government, I’ve seen many candidates win and lose hard-fought campaigns. According to politics, these opponents should now be enemies, but so often, I’ve seen instead how their love for this city made them compatriots. So to each of you—and everyone—I say, let us also show that same dedication. Let our commitment to working together while valuing our differences be our strength as we strive toward our community’s shared goals going forward.

When it comes to those shared goals and our city’s challenges, there are many. From creating more affordable housing, family housing, and workforce housing to investing in our schools and the future of our children; from addressing the challenges of the opioid crisis to doing our part to slow climate change; from supporting our small businesses, artists, and makers to enriching the lives of our seniors; from growing our open space to connecting our veterans to services; from updating our infrastructure to creating quality jobs; the list is long. We have much to do, and we got confirmation of that and more from all of you.

That’s because we just got through a busy election season during which many of us here knocked on a lot of doors. Yet one of the most moving conversations I had came on a day when someone knocked on my door.

It was a young woman with a family who had to move to Medford. She moved there because they got priced out of Somerville. She told me she loved living here, and she had great things to say about the city. She wanted to stay. She wanted to raise her family here.

She wasn’t there to speak just for herself. She came to my door to ask me to do everything I can to help as many people like her as possible. She wasn’t angry. She wasn’t yelling. She just wanted me to know her story.

Frankly, it broke my heart. Who wouldn’t want someone like that as a neighbor? Who wouldn’t want her as part of their community? But the only sensible decision for her family was she had to move out of the city she loved. And the only sensible response from all of us is to do everything we possibly can to keep this same story from playing out for others.

Our work is cut out for us.

But thankfully, together we’ve been picking up the pace and laying the groundwork for progress. Our city has added more than three times as many affordable units in just the past six years than we did in the previous 20. And we’re on course to meet our SomerVision housing goals. But still it is not enough. So fortunately, that’s just the beginning.

Thanks to our residents, we are on the verge of a historic wave of new community-envisioned development that will greatly accelerate affordable housing creation—and housing creation overall. Thanks to our advocates, who insisted that raising the inclusionary housing percentage shouldn’t have to wait on approval of the entire zoning overhaul, we’ve already raised our inclusionary housing requirement to the highest percentage in the state. Thanks to our Housing Department and the Somerville Community Corporation, our 100 homes program is buying property, keeping it out of the hands of speculators, and keeping it permanently affordable, and as of this month, we are roughly halfway toward that 100 Homes goal.  And again, it's not enough.

As we make strides forward within Somerville, we must keep our eye on the housing dynamics outside Somerville.  Greater Boston needs 435,000 new housing units by 2040 to catch supply up to demand. It’s a number so massive that some would rather ignore it and just hope it goes away—which is why I keep bringing it up. In his annual report card on housing, Northeastern University professor Barry Bluestone recently said, "Unless we can get housing supply to match housing demand, there's not much we can do to keep prices from continuing to escalate."

Somerville can’t tackle that alone. But in the face of this, we must not give up.

So what can we do? What can we do together as a community?

I say, We can stand *for* things. I’m talking about standing for big things, bold things, things other communities haven’t dared to consider but that we all need to do, things that break this region out of its parochial and provincial mindset. If you take only one thought with you from my words tonight this is it: We must be FOR solutions. We need to listen to the boldest, most abnormal ideas and put the good ones into action. We don’t just need to disrupt the status quo on housing, we need to reinvent it.

That means we’ve got to start finding ways to say, “Yes, in my backyard.” Because to combat a housing shortage and address affordability, we need to be *for* building new housing. We also need new commercial development so new businesses can come here, pay taxes, and allow us to slow the growth of residential taxes without cutting needed services -- because taxes are a key part of the affordability equation. And we need to figure out more ways to preserve existing lower-cost housing and then, we need to be *for* the legislative solutions that can achieve that.

If we find a way to be for those things, if we start those ripples of action right here, we can help build the wave of progress needed regionally. The good news is we have a new tool for that. Last month, we announced the Metropolitan Mayors Coalition regional housing partnership. Boston Mayor Marty Walsh and I will co-chair, and I can tell you, we are determined not just to set the specific housing production goals and strategies that our region needs—we will fight to make them happen.

The Baker Administration understands the magnitude of the affordability challenge as well, which is why they are providing resources and assistance and recently launched the Housing Choice Initiative. They’ve also filed legislation to spur more housing production throughout the Commonwealth. Thank you, Governor, for using your position of leadership to move the dial on housing—as each elected official on this stage should.

Every one of us being sworn in tonight ran, at least in some part, on affordability. We now have more than a mandate to act on this issue. We have a responsibility. And, we have an opportunity. For our part, my administration has ten targeted initiatives we’re ready to bring forward. They are neither our first efforts on affordability, nor will they be the last. Some of these ideas come straight from you. Others we've borrowed from cities that have shown they can work. Some we've been discussing in the community for some time, and others are brand new. With them, we’re looking to push the envelope as much as humanly possible. I look forward to working with all of you and the Board to refine and advance them swiftly—just as I look forward to the other ideas and proposals that will come from the community and the Board, as well.

**One:** We will create an Office of Housing Stability dedicated to helping our most vulnerable residents stay in our community. When our residents need help navigating housing programs or the complex housing market, we must be there for them.

**Two:** We will seek a home rule petition for a Transfer Charge on real estate speculation, which could net us millions of dollars a year to pursue new affordable housing projects.

**Three:** We will establish a community-based, independent Housing Land Trust that can buy property and declare it permanently affordable. This will give us a vital tool to fight back against runaway market forces.

**Four:** We will file a stronger Condo Conversion Ordinance because the current legislation does not empower us to protect tenants the way they should be.

**Five:**  We went out and just got a $2M grant for our Lead Paint Removal Program and let me tell you why this matters for housing. We must ensure that more landlords can make units safe for families with children, so that more families will be able to stay here. We will be aggressively relaunching this program to do just that.

**Six:** This month, we will submit the new Comprehensive Zoning Code to the Board that our community has worked so hard to develop. We have been refining the proposal for years, and we have a progressive plan to foster open space, affordable housing, our vitally important artist/maker community, and more. It all starts with better zoning that helps us achieve the things we stand for.

**Seven:** We will establish an emergency rent stabilization program to fight displacement of our low- and moderate-income residents.

**Eight:** We will seek sensible regulations around home sharing, like Airbnb, with a mind to affordability. This issue cuts both ways. Some rely on home-sharing to help make their rent or mortgage, but speculators are also buying up multi-families for this, which takes homes off the market. We must find a balance.

**Nine:** I am calling for a DIF for affordable housing to create more units to meet community needs. This is uncharted territory.  No other city in the State has done it.  But we are determined to find a way.

**Ten:** We will submit Home Rule legislation to establish a Right-to-Purchase program for tenants. If we want to help people stay in their homes while respecting the right of landlords to sell, it makes all the sense in the world to support the ability of tenants to be the ones who buy.

We also need to remember that affordability extends beyond housing. When we can help our residents reduce other expenses and seize new opportunities, we can give them more pathways to afford the rent or mortgage. Somerville will be the first city with an integrated strategy on affordability. We must recognize that factors such as transportation, wage inequality, job training, healthcare access, and more, affect whether our residents have a real opportunity to live here. Alongside this Board, I look forward to addressing affordability holistically and from a systems approach by tackling needs ranging from job training and food access to energy efficiency. But we have to work together and be for things to make it happen.

We will also need to multi-task.

As I mentioned at the start, we have much to do in 2018. And while I won’t mention them all, I do want to address a few of our other top priorities. That starts with our schools.

Standing up for things based on our community values is what we do best here in Somerville. Nowhere will you find a better example than in our schools. Somerville has a majority minority school system where 68% of our student population comes from lower income families. Our schools are the primary city service used by our minority, immigrant, and economically disadvantaged residents. Our schools are also where every child gets the foundation that sets the course for their future. Our parents are counting on us to do right by their children, and I’m proud to say we strive every day to rise to that challenge.

We have the only urban high school in Massachusetts to earn a Level 1 designation the past five years running. We’ve approved a new high school to serve our students deep into the 21st century. Our graduation rate is at an all-time high. And we are nearing our goal of achieving universal, high-quality pre-k access through a collaborative system of providers. There is of course, still more to do.

In 2018, our focus on the whole child, our commitment to equity, and our investments in critical STEM, arts, language, and vocational programs will not waver. We will continue to drive significant resources into early childhood education. We will also launch a community-wide out-of-school initiative because too many parents are struggling to fill that gap. We want to create one-stop shopping for out-of-school needs in a city where you know there is a safety net for you and your children—and you can find it.

Our schools have also played a key role in helping immigrant families navigate the increasingly treacherous immigration landscape. In the past year, they have worked in conjunction with the City’s SomerViva program, as well as other City staff, community organizations, and advocates, to help hundreds connect with free legal help, understand their rights, and decipher changing policies and regulations.

It is some of the most critical work taking place in our city. It may start with remaining a Sanctuary City, but it certainly doesn’t end there. Many immigrant families have been plunged into fear and chaos and we have rallied to support them. I want to say to anyone who finds themselves or a loved one or someone they know fighting against the cold-hearted and craven immigration policies of our current President - contact us. You are not alone. We will do everything in our power to help you.

On this note, some have tried to call me out for paying too much attention to what’s taking place in Washington. Yet what happens in D.C. has real consequences here in Somerville, and we don’t need to look far to see that.

Just consider the nationwide opioid epidemic. Failed federal policies around big pharma have helped fuel this crisis, but its ravages are felt most acutely at the local level, in our neighborhoods, our homes, and our families. We’ve spent the past several years building up our Community Outreach, Help, and Recovery Office, as well as increasing police crisis intervention training. And we’re starting to see some hopeful results from that. But let me be clear, one life lost to this disease is one too many. We will continue to martial our resources to support individuals and families who are suffering. But we must also stand up alongside other communities to fight big pharma – and we will. Somerville will be joining the fight against big pharma in the courts.

Those of us in positions of leadership need to stand up for the people of this community on other critical issues too. Attempts are being made to slash health care, education and transportation funding. Congress just passed a tax scam that seeks to further enrich the wealthy and impoverish the poor in the midst of rising income inequality. They want to deny climate change and abandon attempts to curb greenhouse gas emissions, as if somehow what happens to this planet won’t affect everyone who lives on it.

Senators Elizabeth Warren and Ed Markey and Congressman Michael Capuano are fighting tooth-and-nail against these things on our behalf, and they need our support. These are charged political times, and we need to remain engaged with the battles being fought beyond our city limits.

Climate change, for one, knows no boundaries, which is why Somerville is committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2050. It’s true; many climate change solutions are beyond our control. But we can take meaningful local steps, such as decreasing municipal energy usage, which we’ve already reduced by 10% over the past two years. Each of us can and must take part. For example, the Somerville Retirement Board took the bold step to begin divesting from fossil fuels –they are the first Board in the Commonwealth to do so. I’m looking forward to more of your firsts. The White House may have withdrawn from the Paris Climate accord, but Somerville is still in.

The attack on net neutrality is another harmful move out of Washington that requires local action.  We are now entering an era where the Internet can be turned into a toll road, where incentives for equal access for rich and poor will be wiped away, and where the free flow of information that undergirds our democracy is at risk. We cannot allow this threat to free speech to go unchecked. So, once again, cities must lead.

We may not yet know the solutions to preserving net neutrality or ensuring equal access, but I will say it now--we will find them. I am calling for a Task Force on Internet Access to be formed immediately to evaluate every option—be that finding partners to create competition here; laying more municipal fiber conduits, which is something we’ve already started; or even establishing a Somerville internet utility. No idea will be too bold. Our community values economic justice, social justice, and environmental justice. Well the free flow of information is the gatekeeper to every other push toward justice we have. So in Somerville, right here, and right now, we are putting a stake in the ground for Information Justice.

I know it can feel like an impossible task to take on challenges like net neutrality, climate change or affordability. However, I'd like to point out that we have experience in doing the impossible. I’ve lost count of how many times we were told The Green Line Extension was never going to happen.

Well, the federal government has just made the first payment on its billion dollar investment in the Green Line extension and the state has hired the contractor. The Green Line is going to happen.  And guess what, so is the Community Path

And once it’s here, the Green Line will allow tens of thousands of people in Somerville to forgo the expense of owning a car. It will dramatically lower our carbon footprint and improve our air quality. And it will bring common sense mass transit to the most densely-populated city in New England. All of this is in no small part due to the leadership of Governor Baker. So many others along the way have also played a vital role. Let’s have one big hearty cheer for the many hands that made the Green Line Extension and the full Community Path possible.

I could talk about dozens of other things we’ve made possible and initiatives we have underway inside the city, from intensified efforts on job training to the Winter Hill and Brickbottom Neighborhood Plans to ArtFarm. We have parks to renovate, fields to rehabilitate, roads to rebuild, and trees to plant. We have a VisionZero plan to advance and new arts programming to roll out. But I’m not going to delve into each of these now.

What I will say is we know what our biggest challenge is, but we also know we don’t have the luxury of treating it like it’s our only challenge. From completing our SustainaVille Climate Change plan and advancing our racial equity initiatives to supporting our small businesses, expanding bike and pedestrian infrastructure, continuing the expansion of community policing, accomplishing election reform, developing our program to help our seniors age in place, and more, we not only have to keep all these balls in the air, we need to juggle them gracefully and with skill. For those of us in elected office, we can look forward to many long nights. We can also look forward to being held to our promises.

When it comes to affordability, everyone here has made promises. When it comes to schools, crime prevention, open space, and overall quality of life, and many other needs, our community has even more expectations. What has set us apart from other cities is that we keep our promises, and we strive to both hear and meet our community’s expectations. We could have dropped the Green Line Extension a dozen times over when it got hard, but city government, our community partners and the people of Somerville rose to the challenge every time. We could have backed down on our Sanctuary City status or pulled down the Black Lives Matter banner when we were threatened because of them, but we stood firm.

We could have *not* pursued the new high school, or we could have given up trying to turn Assembly Square into something other than a post-industrial wasteland. It’s the easiest thing in the world to quit.

Thing is, we don’t do that.

So even though affordability is going to test us as much as all of that combined, we will remain steadily for the many good ideas we’ll need to help address it. There’s not going to be a single, shining moment where we can claim to have the problem solved. There’s not going to be a single policy or a program that fixes it all. We are going to have to listen to each other, work together and stand *for* things.

We all own this. Just as we all own Somerville’s future on so many fronts. Oddly enough, I’m more excited heading into my eighth term than I was for my first. As a public servant I don’t like anything better than getting things done...and we have promises to keep and solutions to fight for.

It falls on all of us to stand and deliver. I have every confidence we will."

***–Mayor Joseph A. Curtatone***