

Good evening, City Councilors, School Committee members, City Manager Crowell, Superintendent Dorris, Clerk Carrington, families, and guests.

Thank you to the School Department for welcoming us to the beautiful Donald Gay Performing Arts Center, a space that embodies Auburn's enduring commitment to education and the arts.

A special thank you to Adolphe Ngengele (**ing-gen-geh-leh**) and Calvin Vincent for conducting the ceremony this evening.

I am honored and humbled to have been reelected as mayor and to have the opportunity to serve the people of Auburn for another term. I am looking forward to working cooperatively with the new City Council and School Committee for the next two years in the best interest of the citizens of Auburn.

This November's municipal election saw an impressive turnout with 6,700 Auburn voters taking the time to participate in the democratic process. I want to thank City Clerk Emily Carrington and her team for ensuring a free and fair election that gave Auburn voters confidence that their voices are being heard.

I want to recognize and thank the outgoing city councilors and school committee members, Councilors Stephen Milks, Richard Whiting, Benjamin Weisner, and School Committee Members Pamela Hart and Quinn Gormley. Their dedication, hard work, and commitment to our

community have left a lasting impact. Through their service, they have helped guide important decisions, strengthened our community, and ensured that the voices of our residents were heard. On behalf of the city, I extend my deepest gratitude for the time, energy, and care you have given.

Two years ago, Auburn's residents spoke with clarity about the priorities they expected their local government to pursue. They asked for a government that is civil, respectful, and welcomes public comments. They asked for the protection of our natural resources, a comprehensive recycling program, responsible development, increased housing opportunities, action on homelessness, strong public schools, and economic growth. They also asked that we carefully consider the impact of our decisions on the property tax, especially for those seniors on a fixed income.

Tonight, I am proud to report back on the progress we have made together. These priorities have guided our decisions, shaped our policies, and inspired our actions. They are not just goals on paper; they are commitments we have worked to turn into reality. Let me share with you how we have advanced these priorities, and how we continue to build a stronger, more vibrant Auburn for all.

When I first spoke with Auburn's residents, they asked for a municipal government that is civil, respectful, and welcoming of public comment. I am proud to say that we have accomplished this. Today, our public meetings are conducted with civility and respect, and citizens are encouraged to share their voices openly. Decisions are made through

constructive dialogue, grounded in facts, and shaped by the perspectives of our community. This change has strengthened trust in local government and ensured that every resident feels comfortable participating in the democratic process.

To protect Auburn's natural resources, especially the quality of our drinking water, we have enacted comprehensive ordinances governing agriculture, forestry, housing, septic systems, and phosphorus management in the Lake Auburn watershed. These measures ensure that the land can be used responsibly while safeguarding the quality of our water supply for generations to come.

On recycling, we have entered into a new agreement for solid waste disposal that supports curbside recycling, will allow us to move to weekly curbside pick-up, expand recyclable products through the adoption of the State Extended Producer Responsibility program, and implement a composting program.

The residents of Auburn asked that we approach growth and development in a thoughtful and responsible manner. To that end we formed a comprehensive plan committee that is working to provide a long-term vision for our community, acting as a blueprint for future growth by guiding land use, development, and public investments in areas like housing, zoning, transportation, and resource conservation, ensuring decisions are consistent with community goals.

Housing affordability and access remain among Auburn's greatest challenges, and we have taken action. We completed a thorough analysis to identify both the number and types of housing needed to meet the needs of current and future residents. At the same time, we streamlined our development review and approval process to ensure that worthwhile projects are not delayed unnecessarily. As a result, over the past two years Auburn has issued a record number of building permits, opening doors to more housing opportunities for families, seniors, and young residents seeking to make Auburn their home.

Regarding homelessness, the new Auburn Resource Center on Mill Street brings together city services and community partners under one roof, ensuring that those facing homelessness, food insecurity, substance abuse, and mental health challenges receive coordinated, compassionate support.

In partnership with MaineHousing and the City of Lewiston we are helping to fund the Alter LA 24-hour warming center in Lewiston that will provide essential shelter to unhoused people in the Lewiston-Auburn area through the winter.

In addition to immediate steps to assist those without shelter, we are building long-term solutions. In partnership with the State, the Auburn Housing Authority, Spurwink, and the Developers Collaborative, we are constructing a 30-unit Home for Good facility. This development will provide permanent supportive housing, with onsite services, designed to help individuals experiencing chronic homelessness stabilize their lives and regain dignity. By combining housing with critical support,

Auburn is taking meaningful action to address homelessness in a compassionate and sustainable way.

Our residents told us that a strong public education system is essential for Auburn's future, and we have acted on that priority. We have worked closely with the School Committee to ensure that our schools have the resources and support they need to provide high-quality education. By appointing City Councilor Adam Platz as my representative to the School Committee, we have strengthened the partnership between the city government and our schools. Together, we are advancing policies that expand opportunity, support teachers, and prepare every student for future success.

To advance economic growth, we have forged active partnerships with our manufacturing sector, providing workforce navigation and transportation that connect local businesses with the talent they need. We established the Forest Bioproducts Advanced Manufacturing District to attract and support innovative bioproducts companies, positioning Auburn as a leader in innovation and ensuring our economy grows with good jobs for the future. At the same time, we have strengthened our investments in both air and rail transportation, ensuring the infrastructure that drives growth is ready to meet the needs of our future.

Recognizing the burden of property taxes on seniors, we implemented a senior property tax relief program that builds upon existing State assistance. This initiative helps residents with fixed incomes remain in

their homes, ensuring that longtime members of our community can continue to live in their homes with security and dignity.

Over the past two years, we have achieved much together, yet important work still lies ahead. Auburn's future will be shaped by our commitment to responsible growth, ensuring that progress strengthens our community while preserving the character and values that make our city strong.

We will expand housing opportunities so that every Auburn resident can find an affordable, welcoming place to call home. Completing the comprehensive plan and aligning zoning regulations will ensure that growth reflects our community's vision. We will pursue the sale of city-owned land to support development for underserved housing types, including low to moderate-income housing, senior housing, and first-time homeownership. Having sufficient housing that is not cost burdened is essential to support economic and community growth.

Auburn will continue to respond compassionately and effectively to the needs of our most vulnerable residents by strengthening partnerships to address homelessness, food insecurity, and housing instability. We will continue to prioritize long-term housing solutions that have proven effective at reducing chronic homelessness. Collaborating with community partners we will continue to support the low barrier warming center and emergency shelter that provides short term shelter for those in crisis. Through coordination with service providers, we will seek to provide services that return those that become homeless to stable housing as rapidly as possible.

We will work to improve our public safety outcomes. This will include efforts to consolidate 911 and emergency dispatch services, strengthen our emergency response services for mental health related incidents, and increased efforts to improve traffic safety.

Strong public schools are the foundation of a strong community, and Auburn is committed to building that foundation for the future. We will continue to support our schools so that every student graduates prepared for post-secondary education, entry into the workforce, and civic life. At the same time, we will deepen partnerships with local businesses and nonprofits to strengthen our workforce, ensuring that Auburn's economy grows with good jobs and pathways for advancement.

We must invest in roads, public spaces, and municipal buildings. These long-delayed improvements are essential for services, safety, and economic growth. We will continue to undertake priority projects, understanding that capital improvements will be one of the largest fiscal challenges for the city.

As we do this work, we will remain mindful of the impact on property taxes. Given recent changes in federal funding priorities, Auburn, like other municipalities, will face difficult choices as programs and services are pushed towards greater reliance on local property tax. We will continue to advocate, both at the state and federal level, for policies that reduce reliance on the city and county property tax and shift programs and services to more equitable broad-based taxes. At a time

when we have significant infrastructure and service needs, we will work to ensure that the property taxes are applied equitably and that Auburn eliminates the use of its property tax revenue to fund services used primarily by residents of other communities. There will be difficult choices to make, but we must get the most value for our tax dollars and balance the need for municipal services with our residents' ability to pay increased property taxes.

As we begin this new chapter, let us move forward with confidence and hope. Auburn's strength lies not only in the progress we have made, but in the spirit of its people who are resilient, generous, and determined.

Together, we will build a city that honors its past while embracing its future. A city where every voice is valued, every family has opportunity, and every resident feels at home.

With unity and purpose, Auburn will continue to shine as a community of promise, compassion, and possibility.

Thank you.