

## Inaugural Address, Mayor Jeffrey Harmon. December 14, 2023

Good evening, City Councilors, members of the School Committee, City Manager Crowell, Superintendent Brown, Clerk Clements-Dallaire, families and guests.

I would like to thank the School Department for hosting us in this beautiful new facility. And a special thank you to Nora and Brayden for conducting the ceremony this evening.

I am honored and humbled to have been elected as mayor and to have the opportunity to serve the people of Auburn. 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.

The November election had one of the highest voter turnouts for a municipal election in recent history with almost 6,300 Auburn voters taking the time to participate in the democratic process. I want to thank the City Clerk, Sue Clements-Dallaire and her election team for the excellent job they did in organizing and running the municipal election. She ensured that there was a free and fair election that afforded the voters the opportunity to elect members of their community that would best represent their interest. This is how democracy works.

Last month, Auburn voters sent a clear message - they want new leadership with a new leadership style, and a change in the way we govern Auburn. Most importantly they want a government they can trust, one that is open, transparent, and invites and respects citizen participation in local governance.

Like all municipal governments, Auburn faces many challenges, challenges that did not change as the result of the election. What did change was the expectation, expressed by the voters, that we employ different strategies to address these challenges. I intend on taking an active role in leading the City Council as we develop the best possible responses and actions to address these challenges. Responses and actions that are made with the goal of furthering the common good.

During the past five months I personally visited more than 3,800 homes in Auburn and listened to over 1,200 Auburn citizens who expressed their thoughts and aspirations for Auburn. Here is some of what they told me:

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First, and most importantly: They want a local government that is open and transparent, one that is civil, respectful, and welcomes public comment. A government that makes decisions based on factual information. A government whose elected officials engage in constructive public discussions about issues facing the community and develop policies that have the support of the community.

As Mayor it will be my responsibility to ensure that all public meetings welcome public comment and are respectful and civil, so all citizens feel comfortable participating in their local government. Further, I will implement a public policy process where issues before the city can be openly and fully discussed so a wide range of options can be explored before decisions are made. It is only when we listen to a wide range of opinions from different perspectives that we can make the best decisions.

Second: They want Auburn's natural resources protected – particularly the quality of the drinking water in Lake Auburn.

I will work with the City Council to take actions and implement policies that protect the quality of the drinking water in Lake Auburn. These actions will be taken in collaboration with other stakeholders that have an interest in water quality. I will work with the City Council, and other interested parties, to protect the natural resources that support agriculture, forestry, and recreational land uses in Auburn.

Third: They want a curbside recycling program in Auburn, and they want the program to be comprehensive, convenient, and effective.

The citizens of Auburn believe that recycling is part of our moral responsibility to protect and improve our environment today and for generations to come. In the coming weeks I will work with the City Council, city administration, and Sustainability and Natural Resources Board to develop a plan to transition from the current interim solution to a more permanent solution while ensuring that Auburn's solid waste disposal program meets these goals.

Fourth: They want thoughtful and responsible development and land use policies that promote growth, but which also consider the impacts of growth on neighborhoods and the community.

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We have a responsibility to provide forward-looking policies that will provide equitable opportunities for housing, jobs, and recreation for our current residents and those that would join our community. During the coming months I will work with the City Council and administration, and in active engagement with the community, to carefully review these policies to ensure these goals are achieved.

Fifth: They are very concerned that the costs and access to housing is a serious problem for nearly everyone.

It is clear that the current costs of housing, whether one is purchasing a home or renting an apartment, is unattainable for the majority of the people in Auburn. Far too many people are spending more on a place to live than they can reasonably afford, placing an unsustainable burden on their household budgets.

The housing problem has far reaching impact on individuals, families, and the community as a whole. Consequently, at the first meeting of the City Council I will be announcing the formation of a Mayor's Ad hoc housing committee that will be charged with making recommendations to the City Council on the creation of a comprehensive housing strategy. A strategy that will identify the housing needs in the community, both the types and number of housing units needed, to provide housing opportunities for individuals and families of all ages, and incomes, for both current residents of our city, and those that will join our community in the coming years.

Sixth: They have a deep concern and empathy for individuals, families, and students who are without adequate shelter, especially during the winter months.

People living outdoors or facing housing insecurity in Auburn is a real and serious problem that will only continue to get worse without coordinated intervention. It is far past time for action to be taken to address this problem. I will be requesting recommendations from the city administration, in coordination with local service providers, on what actions can be taken immediately to assist people living outdoors this winter.

Further, at the first City Council meeting I will announce the formation of a Mayor's Ad hoc committee on homelessness. The Committee will be charged with making recommendations to the City Council on policies and actions to address the issue of homelessness and housing

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insecurity, as well as the related issues of substance abuse and mental health issues, in collaboration with other governmental and non-profit organizations.

Seventh: That a high-quality education system is important.

Access to a high-quality public education system is essential for student growth, to provide them with the knowledge and skills for a productive and successful life, and to prepare them for future training and education.

From an economic perspective, education is a key driver of growth and prosperity, as it prepares individuals for the workforce and helps them achieve higher wages and better job opportunities. Ultimately, access to quality education is essential for building a better future, both for individuals and the community as a whole. That is why I am a strong supporter of education and a quality local public school system.

Therefore, I will be appointing City Councilor Adam Platz to be my representative on the Auburn School Committee. Adam shares my commitment to strong public schools. He is a graduate of Edward Little High School, was an outstanding student, and served as a student representative on the School Committee when in High School. Further, Adam has recently become a new father and wants his daughter to enjoy the same educational opportunities he had when he was a student.

Eighth: That economic growth and prosperity is an important responsibility of local government today.

We must use all the tools available to us to support, retain, grow, and attract businesses in Auburn. I am committed to working with the City Council and city administration to increase all aspects of economic opportunity and prosperity for everyone looking for a better future for themselves and their families.

In closing I want to emphasize that an overarching priority of my administration is the practice of good government. That means building trust in local government.

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We need to enhance our current practices to increase the openness and transparency with which the municipal government operates. A more collaborative and participatory decision-making process will help us make better decisions. We need to do a better job engaging the citizens of Auburn and being responsive to them. We need to treat everyone with dignity and respect, listening to people's ideas, opinions, and advice so that informed decisions can be made in the best interest of the community.

Building a better community together means we need everyone to participate, working for the common good in a spirit of goodwill. Governing a municipality of Auburn's size requires addressing many complex challenges. The Mayor and City Council cannot possibly be experts on every challenge that we face. We cannot achieve the best results alone. Offer your ideas, your talents, your knowledge, and your experience. Step forward to serve on one of the many boards and committees that are working to improve our community. By working together, we can build the best future for our city.

I appreciate the support of Auburn voters, am honored to serve as your mayor, and look forward to working with the City Council and School Committee to build a brighter future for Auburn.

Thank you.