



City of Auburn, Maine

Mayor Jason J. Levesque

60 Court Street | Auburn, Maine 04210

www.auburnmaine.gov | 207.333.6601

INAUGURAL ADDRESS | December 13, 2021

Good evening and thank you so much for being here this evening.

Inaugurations like this one serve as a reminder that the work of representation is never “finished.” A reminder that there is an ongoing process of commitment, service, dedication, and adherence to the laws of our Nation, State and City; that will pass from one group to another until the end of time.

That is true in Washington DC, in Augusta, and right here in Auburn, Maine.

It has been my absolute privilege to represent the City of Auburn for the last four years, I am honored to continue leading our city for the next two years, on a journey filled with possibilities and opportunities for all its residents.

As we begin to look toward the next two years, it’s important for us to acknowledge the accomplishments of the outgoing City Council. This exceptional group: reviewed our charter, updated our comprehensive plan, helped implement Auburn’s Strategic Plan, as well as critically important zoning and ordinance changes that have led to significant prosperity within our city.

They kept property taxes in check, hosted *massive* community events that drew people from throughout Maine to Auburn. And let’s not forget the countless daily events and actions – from ribbon cuttings and neighborhood meetings, to volunteering at food banks. You know, the things that might not make the news, but are critically important and highlight the very best of Auburn.

Most of their work was done while dealing with a worldwide pandemic, one that has no equal in modern history. Together we faced the unknown, the fear, the mortality, and an ever-changing flow of information, mandates, and orders. Through it all, we put service to others above our own needs and emotions.

So, to the outgoing Councilors, on behalf of the entire City of Auburn, THANK YOU for contributing so much to our great city.

I would also like to extend a sincere thank you for your service, to Mayor Marc Cayer from the city of Lewiston. Mayor Cayer, we have worked closely over the last two years, on policy initiatives – both locally and in Augusta – and sometimes we’ve just bounced ideas off each other. Thank you for your work, your integrity, and your time. And no, I’m not deleting your cell number from my “favorites” list just yet.

To Mayor-elect Sheline of Lewiston, I look forward to working with you and the other Mayors of Maine to make our communities and our state a better, place.

Tonight, I am feeling a sense of hope, of optimism, and more importantly, confidence in the City of Auburn. I hope you each feel it too.

The City Council and School Committee will start this new term, supported by a dedicated and exceedingly competent staff, led by our city manager Phil Crowell and our School Superintendent Dr. Cornelia Brown. Please join me in thanking them for everything they – and their teams – have done over the last two years. I can’t wait to see what we can accomplish in the years ahead.

I’d also like to thank my family for their tireless support, encouragement and especially for their understanding. Holding this office makes me proud and it offers many incredible moments and achievements, but it also means missed family meals, endless meetings, calls and text messages – 7 days a week – and not an insignificant amount of stress. My family has endured a lot, and it does not go unnoticed or unappreciated.

Now, as we look to the future, let’s embrace a collective vision, one that will guide us forward as we finish those tasks that need our attention, tackle challenges head on, and do the hard work necessary to be successful.

Every successful organization has a vision. At a recent retreat with this incoming council, our vision became clear:

“Auburn will embrace possibilities and create opportunities.”

Simply put, this vision proclaims that we will continue to pursue policies that encourage new and innovative ideas. Ideas that come from our strongest, most precious asset...the people of Auburn, with their unique backgrounds, experiences, and philosophies.

This vision proclaims that our future lies not in outdated and restrictive regulations and attitudes, but that it's possible to forge a new way forward. It proclaims that by being open to possibilities, we will naturally create opportunities for our current and future residents and for our city.

This vision is both worthy of our city and deserving of our support.

To be successful, we also need goals that support our vision. Goals that are measurable, trackable, and attainable. So, as a governing body, let's embrace these five possibilities in this Council term:

First, it's time to Reclaim our streets. We will prioritize livability by enhancing and expanding safety measures that will slow down, and redirect vehicle traffic away from our neighborhoods, to make our streets safe for residents, pedestrians, and bicyclists. Let's support community-focused public safety, work to eliminate blight, and reinvest in our downtown and neighborhoods throughout Auburn.

Second, let's plan for a better future. Let's continue working on land reform, by reviewing and passing the zoning reforms outlined in our updated comprehensive plan. This will provide opportunities for smart and *understandable* growth throughout our city. Let's stay true to the 2019 strategic plan that so many citizens worked on. Let's make smart investments in recreation, arts, and education. Together, we will take a hard look at the socio-economic segregation that exists within Auburn, and strive to be fair, diverse, and inclusive in our decision-making. Let's support and encourage local business, both small and large, understanding their issues and working diligently to help solve them. Through initiatives like our recent "Startup Auburn" contest, and our early pandemic grant support program, we have put words into action and business owners know that their next opportunity is here in Auburn.

Third, we are committed to enriching our neighborhoods. We will do this by proactively working with willing homeowners, landlords and tenants to ensure optimal health, safety, and energy efficiency of their homes. By leveraging financial resources and our community, state, and federal partners, we can support and encourage those who need and want our help. The days of blighted buildings owned by absentee landlords are numbered. Don't expect this city to turn a blind eye...owners should expect swift action to remediate blighted properties.

Fourth, we will enact resilient solutions. We will continue to work on streamlining permits, reducing fees, and eliminating regulatory hurdles, further reinforcing that *Auburn is the home of opportunity.*

We will explore innovative new ways to deliver services to our residents and businesses. We will build systems that are cost effective, easier, and more resilient in the face of challenges and emergencies.

And did I mention sustainability? Auburn will continue to embrace it! From our new high efficiency LED streetlights, electric city vehicles, and six new EV charging stations, to our procurement of clean, local, and *renewable* hydroelectricity to power our city buildings, Auburn is again leading the way in Maine, showing that we can become carbon neutral by 2050 and save money by doing so.

Lastly, let's make housing more attainable. In the past four years, private developers have built - or are currently building - 178 new apartments and single-family homes! Another 176 have been approved for construction early next year and over 350 are currently being proposed for permitting. That's a total of 704 new attainable, market rate homes! 704!!

Two years ago, I set a goal of 2,000 new market rate homes by 2025, and it looks like we are well on our way to hitting that goal! But we still have some work to do to ensure that anyone, regardless of their socio-economic background, can find safe housing of varying types. So, tonight, I want to set a very specific goal of 100 new owner-occupied two- and three-unit homes to be built throughout our city. Homes where young families, retirees, and everyone in between can build wealth, reinvigorate our neighborhoods, and improve the quality of life for their families. We

will work with our partners at Maine State Housing Authority, Auburn Housing, and others to help those who want a better life to achieve it, breaking the chain of generational poverty and strengthening our middle class.

So, here's something a bit new. I am looking forward to taking the mayor's seat on the School Committee this coming term. I will work hard to find cost saving efficiencies between school department and municipal government; promote solid management principals and importantly help bridge the communications gap between our students and their city. I believe that the strength of our community lies in our ability to prepare our youth for the jobs that exist here, today. A stronger educational system will lead to greater growth and prosperity now and in the future. That future belongs to today's youth. We owe it to them to accomplish our goals, and truly make Auburn a city of opportunity.

So, to the council and school committee, I promise you that I will encourage debate and conversation, challenge us to think differently, promote ideas that are new and innovative, and from time to time, probably a bit controversial. I will always help find the point of compromise and I will ensure you have the information needed to make educated decisions, based not on emotion, but on fact. I promise to apply our rules equally to all and to always be the voice of those who have historically not been heard.

In closing, I invite each of you – not just the council and school committee – but every resident, business owner, neighbor, and community partner to embrace our vision for Auburn. Be proud that you are part of this *incredible* city; support and encourage each other; get involved in public service; join us at an event; attend a city meeting...we will ALL benefit.

Remember that when we believe in POSSIBILITIES, set aggressive goals, work hard, and work together...success happens.

Auburn will take "no steps backward." Instead, we will move toward a bright, promising future that embraces possibilities and empowers opportunities!

Thank you.