

Mayor Ethan K. Strimling: 2017 State of the City Address

Councilors, distinguished guests and fellow Portlanders, thank you for joining me as I report on the state of our city and lay out a vision for our future.

What I love most about this city and its people is how we challenge each other and lift each other up. Nothing inspires me more than when I speak to a father in North Dering who wants us to protect tenants from being evicted in Parkside. Or when a business owner in the Old Port voluntarily puts solar panels on his garage. Or an artist on Munjoy Hill whose child goes to a brand new school, advocates for the kids at Presumpscot to get the same. Or when a mom in Bayside shows her neighbors you can grow a healthy garden without using harmful pesticides. Or when a senior citizen in East Deering wants to make sure public health services are protected on India Street. Or when an immigrant who abuts Payson Park votes to protect Congress Square. Or when a high school student loses a peer to suicide and decides to plant tulips to remind us how we must prioritize mental health services. Or the veteran who has already offered so much quietly contributes in another way we may never know. Or when a fire last week left 13 immigrants without a home, and people from all over the city reached out to see how they could help.

This speech is for them and for the countless others who strive to make Portland the best it can be. It is their vision, and I'm honored to share it with you.

Ladies and gentlemen, the state of our city is strong. Businesses in every corner are hiring and our unemployment rate is hovering around three percent. Over 100,000 cruise ship passengers entered our port last year and within a few years that number is projected to double. Our schools and our communities are becoming more diverse, with new immigrants enriching our neighborhoods. Nearly 1200 units of housing have been approved by the planning board over the last year, with 652 built or under construction.

Our commitment to sustainability is becoming a model for other cities. Overall crime is down twelve and a half percent from last year. We are home to first rate institutions of higher learning with USM, MECA and UNE all growing. Our progressive wage laws make Portland an attractive place for job seekers. And our bustling economy makes us desirable for job creators. And our city is cleaner and our government more responsive and efficient than it has been in years thanks to our remarkable staff who every day go to work for every one of us and give the city much more than they receive. Could we please take a moment and thank our public employees with the applause they deserve.

But we also have to be careful that the rising tide of wealth and opportunity in Portland does not drown out our middle class neighbors.

While unemployment is low, we have far too many families working two and three jobs to survive. While cranes dot our landscape, too many cannot afford to fulfill their dream of homeownership in our city. We have more public transit options than ever, but parking issues for small businesses are as tight as ever. Half of our kids attend brand new elementary schools, but the other half have to attend classes in rusted trailers and hallways. We have seen immigration add to the rich fabric of our society, but those same individuals often lack access to the tools they need to forge paths into the middle class. Our activity surrounding startups and small businesses is electric, but growth for these new entrepreneurs is as hard as ever. And then we have an issue to which there is no offsetting virtue and knows no class boundary: the number of our neighbors struggling with addiction. While there's the universal will to address both the causes and effects of substance use disorders, we have so far failed to make meaningful headway.

We cannot become a tale of two cities. A Portland that is economically strong and that meets the wants of some, while not yet meeting the needs of so many others.

But I know that this challenge of balancing needs versus wants is something this Council is well equipped to meet. The eight people sitting around me are as capable as any I know. Add to that our City Manager, with extensive experience in both the public and private sector, and I know that together we will set priorities in a way that never diverts our course toward the lower hurdle of what is simply easy.

Because it is when we're striving, straying from our comfort zone and stretching beyond our perceived capabilities that we're at our best. It's when this Council powers a progressive vision with steadfast courage that we set Portland on a path to truly fulfilling the needs of our city and those who live here.

And when we talk about needs, none rise higher to the top than those that involve our children.

As many in this chamber and across this city know, I am a strong advocate for sending a \$70M bond to the voters that will ensure all our elementary schools are equitable for all students. I spent 20 years in education, and I saw first hand the difference a well equipped environment can have on even the most hopeless feeling young person. For far too long, we have deferred the decision to invest in our elementary schools, and now we're at a critical moment where interest rates will not get any lower. We not only have the opportunity to make a difference for families with kids already in the school system, but also to send a message to families who are thinking about staying in Portland or moving here. Subjecting kids to classes in closets is not a selling point.

Soon, when the Ad Hoc committee finishes its work, we will formally ask this Council to vote in support of sending to the voters a package that will ensure that our children are spending their most formative years in 21st century learning environments. The bond must fully meet the needs of all four schools - Reiche, Lyseth, Longfellow and

Presumpscot. No one gets left behind. We must ensure that a child's address does not dictate his or her educational experience.

Look, no one is satisfied with our current reality. No one meant to create these inequities. But they exist and we must now act. Augusta has made clear they will not provide funding for any of these four schools, plus we have over \$300M in other needs we must ask Augusta to assist with. It is time to finally give the voters in Portland their say, because I believe they will overwhelmingly vote in support of rebuilding these four schools. And I believe they will hold every one of us accountable if we do not give them that chance.

Another basic need we must meet in our schools is ensuring that families have access to high quality Pre-K. I applaud the board of education's practice of adding an additional Pre-K class per year. But I hope the school board, and this body, will quicken that pace so we can achieve universal all day Pre-K within five years. I have heard from parent after parent that investing in universal all day Pre-K will not only benefit the educational needs of their child, it will address the childcare costs and access issues that will help them stay in Portland or even move back.

But the needs of our schools are not simply bricks and mortar and extended time in the classroom. We must also diversify and individualize the educational experience for our kids. Over the next few years, I plan to work with the school board to see how I can help them explore the concept of theme-based magnet schools. This is an idea that board member morrione brought to my attention and new board chair trevorrow embraces.

It's a model that works elsewhere. Academies with a focused theme and aligned curricula around topic areas like the environment, music and the arts, STEM, world languages and social science can give parents the opportunity to send their children to

schools that create a hands-on minds-on learning environment that inspires greater learning in kids.

In fact, today, right on Peaks Island, our remarkable principal Rene Bourgoine-Serio and her staff are creating an environmental curriculum that could become a cornerstone for parents who want their children to learn in a setting structured around sustainability. This kind of creativity is what parents look for as they look for the right school for their child and we should have them throughout the city with all the choices we can imagine.

I also want to take a moment to share my appreciation to our teachers, administrators and staff at Portland public schools. I want to specifically thank our school board and our new superintendent, Xavier Botana. The partnership between the Mayor's office and the school department has never been stronger.

Finally, in regard to education, I must also make mention that a healthy city benefits from great institutions of higher learning, and Portland's success is intrinsically linked to the success and growth of our universities. The talent, vitality and diversity that USM, MECA and UNE inject into our community can be seen and felt in every corner of our city. And speaking of growth, I am particularly excited about USM's commitment to expand its presence in Portland. I support their plan to strengthen their Portland campus with new facilities and new dorms, which will both provide more affordable living options for students and at the same time, free up additional rental housing in Portland.

Now let's turn to our economy and its needs. First and foremost, as we grow we must aim for high quality responsible development. Let's make future generations proud of our vision and the city we built with our collective investments. But let's make sure those collective investments do not socialize the burden, while privatizing the benefit. Let's make sure our collective investments benefit all of us.

For instance, last year the Council voted unanimously to ask the economic development committee to review our city's tax Increment financing, or TIF, policy. As this body makes decisions to provide public dollars via tax incentives for business, we should maximize the mutual benefit. We should act to ensure that businesses employ Portlanders, including women, veterans and people of color whenever possible. We should mandate that the jobs tied to all aspects of the project pay a good wage. We should ensure that the jobs created are a part of a job training or apprenticeship program so that we are working to pave a path to a career for our residents.

Perhaps one such apprenticeship program is the one Councilor Ali has been developing that I fully support. He wants to partner young people with local businesses and facilitate internships in an attempt to reverse the tide of Portland losing our best and brightest as they graduate from high school and college.

Another example of meeting the needs of sharing the benefit is when this body acted on the City Manager's recommendation to streamline our permitting process and made it easier for all residents and businesses to work with City Hall. Today, I am told, permitting for smaller projects has been cut from 17 days to just seven. That is real progress made possible by our remarkable staff. But even with this progress, I know the City Manager and I share the sense that more can be done. I spoke to a developer last week who told me that some of his peers are still starting construction prior to getting a permit, because there is too much financial loss in the wait. Recently another business owner told me that it took seven weeks to change the lettering on their awning. We need to do more and I know we will.

From what I can see, the energy surrounding startups and small businesses in Portland is so robust that others would only hope to match our level of activity. That speaks to our being both a source of home-grown innovation and a destination for entrepreneurs. But I also know that for small businesses striving to grow, we must find ways to link

startups and small businesses with the technical assistance they need to flourish. We must move forward towards action on long-running discussions about creating a business incubator in Portland. Or establishing a building trades job training facility on the peninsula.

Maybe this incubator or the job training facility could go in the Maine State Pier? I know finding a way to utilize the 100,000 sq. ft. of empty space is a top priority for Councilor Brenerman and I look forward to supporting his efforts to lead a public conversation on how this pier can most benefit the community at large.

Now let's talk income and expenses. Or more accurately, wages and taxes. No group is feeling the pinch of a rising tax rate more than our senior citizens on fixed incomes. Our elders, many of whom literally built our city, are seeing increases in costs without an accompanying increase in their pocketbooks. Just this past week I spoke to Anita Talbot, the matriarch of one of our proudest Portland families. She told me that at age 81 she is still having to work part time to meet the family expenses, including a \$4,000 tax bill. That is why I am looking forward to working with Councilor Mavodones, chair of the Council's Finance Committee, to revisit and revive a plan similar to the one he supported several years ago that targeted financial assistance to seniors. It is time for Portland to join municipalities like South Portland and Cumberland in providing this much needed relief.

I also want to work with Councilor Mavodones to make sure our overall tax rate does not rise exponentially. Last year the Council set a goal to keep any increase below 2.5%. He and I will be looking for the same this year and I hope the Council will again commit to this ceiling.

And then there are wages. While our wages are certainly still not high enough, one of the reasons Portland is such an attractive place to work is due to the work of my

predecessor Michael Brennan, he led this body to raise our minimum wage to its current \$10.68, One of the highest in the country. And recently, 72 percent of Portland voters chose to raise the wage to \$12 in the coming years and eliminate the sub-minimum wage for tipped workers. Let me state unequivocally - if Augusta rolls back any portion of the law that impacts those working in our service industry, four out of five of whom are women, I will ask this Council to swiftly vote to eliminate the sub-minimum wage in Portland, as affirmed by over 27,000 of our people at the ballot box.

But wages aren't the only factor that will meet the needs of our employees. We also have an opportunity to make our city an even more attractive place to work by ensuring that workers in Portland earn paid sick time off. Earned paid sick time that they can use due to illness, medical appointments, or to address critical safety issues, including domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking. Thousands of workers in Portland can't earn even one paid day off to care for their own medical well being or that of their child. When you are barely able to make ends meet—the financial reality for many in our city—missing even one day of pay can send a family into a spiral of economic instability.

Making sure that all Portland workers can earn paid sick days is a basic need that will reduce the spread of contagious illness, reduce emergency room visits by workers who can't see a doctor during work hours, reduce turnover, and boost employee productivity. In 2017, I will call upon this Council to follow the lead of states around the country, including Massachusetts, Vermont and Connecticut and dozens of municipalities nationwide to work with the business community to implement an earned paid sick day policy for anyone who works in our city.

I've often said that one of my goals is to meet people where they are. Last year I implemented a sidewalk office hours program that we named "Strimling on the Street." It was an effort to connect with folks as they go about their daily lives by bringing a part of City Hall to their neighborhood. From conversations about our stormwater fees to

regulating short term rentals, to trash bag prices to the lack of affordable housing, to protecting open space to waterfront development my experience over the past year tells me that if you give people the opportunity to engage with policymakers, the thoughtful conversations that follow help us better understand each other and our common needs.

But the point is that we must make it as easy as possible for the people of Portland to interact with their government - to communicate and engage. To meet their needs. This is a goal the city manager and I share. And we know we can always do more. For example, on more than one occasion, I've walked out of the building to hop on my scooter and head to a 5pm meeting and witnessed an individual or entire family dashing towards the door of City Hall. Sadly, I always have to break the news to them that the building closed at 4:30. I'm told that this building used to hold evening hours one day a week. This year, I want to work with our City Manager to see if we can reinstate those extended hours.

Another great idea on this front comes from Councilor Costa, a new member of the Finance Committee. He has told me he wants to find a way to gather community input prior to the City Manager developing a budget that reflects the Council's values. Perhaps a hearing in front of the whole Council or community meetings in neighborhoods. I will leave it to the committee to find the best way, but I wholeheartedly support his initiative to bring community voices into the budgeting process as early as possible.

And from expanding that access via Sidewalk Office Hours, my having lunch on the steps of City Hall, walking home from work, attending events and visiting neighborhoods, I hear many requests, suggestions, criticisms, and, believe it or not, even a few compliments. As I reflect on those hundreds of conversations I'm struck by the requests about what I call simple "quality of life" needs that, with a little attention, can make a real difference. Things such as more and safer curb cuts for wheelchairs

and better-timed lights to help with traffic. I've been asked for more public art, more public restrooms on peaks and to ensure that we put money into Congress Square. Spurred by an idea developed during a visioning statement exercise by the students at Casco Bay High School, I plan to ask the City Manager to create a gender neutral bathroom in City Hall, the same as we have in all our public schools, because no one should enter a bathroom in fear that someone will question their gender. Especially in a public building. These "quality of life" issues are the ones that our City Manager has proven to be so adept at addressing. Fulfilling them will go a long way in meeting the needs of our community.

From a practical standpoint, meeting our public health needs is something we must not short-change. During last year's budget discussions, the Council made critical adjustments and a firm commitment to preserving core services at the India Street Clinic. After the people spoke out, the Council listened and ensured that the needle exchange, HIV/STD testing and the Free Clinic will remain at its longstanding location at the base of Munjoy Hill. In this year's budget, I will push to further reinforce the clinic by ensuring it has the human and capital resources it requires. I look forward to partnering with Councilor Ray, newly appointed chair of the Council's Health & Human Services Committee, and Councilor Batson, himself a healthcare professional who made the protection of India Street a cornerstone of his campaign, to ensure that our residents have continued access to these lifesaving services at the health care home they trust most.

As I said earlier, one of our most dire needs is confronting the impact that substance use disorders have had on our families and our community. I am urging us to find ways to streamline the process and add to the currently too few residential treatment beds. For those who don't know, we only have 16 beds in Portland, indeed in all of Maine, for those who want detox treatment. God bless Milestone, but they need help and we must step up.

As we work to remove barriers to treatment, we must also remove barriers to immediate, emergency care. We know that the chances of saving a life after an overdose diminish with the passage of time. We have also been told of stories of reluctant 911 callers who witness an overdose but may also be on, or in possession of, controlled substances. Studies show that the most common reason for not calling 911 during an overdose is fear of police involvement. I will call upon us to join jurisdictions around the country by instituting good samaritan laws that shield a caller from such a situation. If we find that statewide action is more appropriate, I will urge this Council to offer their support for that effort. Because we know that while our police do not make it a priority to arrest in these cases, solidifying the policy in ordinance will set a very public example that picking up the phone and calling 911 is about saving a life, not incarceration.

Our police department is a source of great pride in Portland. And judging from my conversations with residents throughout the city, our community policing strategy, in particular, has made a real difference. When I was director of Learningworks, we helped bring community policing to the West End. We need to find a way in coming budgets to make sure this program grows even further.

And while we are fostering mutual trust and support between the police and the community, I urge us to review some of the formal ways in which we partner. It is my hope that over the next year, we can have a conversation about the Police Citizen Review Subcommittee. It has been over a decade since we put this board in place. It is now time for the Council to formally review how well it has worked from both the community perspective and law enforcement's perspective.

I also want to reiterate my support for the use of body cameras. I hope in 2017 we can have an open and thoughtful conversation that leads to their use and the policies

needed to make them effective for our community. In the end, we know this technology can serve to both protect law enforcement personnel as well as the community.

Now let's talk housing. Last year, we created a five member committee to address critical issues surrounding housing in our city. That committee, ably led by Councilor Duson, made gains in addressing the needs around rental insecurity by extending the time a landlord must give before raising the rent and making sure all tenants are aware of what it means to be at-will. I look forward to this Council building upon last year's work. In particular, I will ask the Council to again review Councilor Thibodeau's compassionate "Leeway" program that puts in place a mechanism to provide renters with adequate notice before eviction - or compensation if certain notice conditions are not able to be met. I will also ask this body to again consider protecting renters from discrimination based on their use of housing assistance. Last year we came within one vote of implementing this meaningful change. This year, I will work to win that final vote on behalf of those families who are being turned away by landlords simply because they accept the public assistance they so desperately need.

For those who are solely relying upon a market-based solution to our housing crisis, the numbers unfortunately are telling us a different story. We know that units are coming onto the market - I mentioned the 652 that were built or in the pipeline over the last year. But while more housing is helpful, the question is, how many Of those 652 units are affordable to a middle class family? The answer is, not enough. So while I am calling for more supply by increasing building density and height along our corridors and in our urban core, we also need to lock-in a substantial number of new or renovated units as affordable to our average working families. To that end, Councilor Batson, the newest member of our Housing Committee, and I plan to call upon this Council to increase our Inclusionary Zoning requirement from the 10 percent that is currently in statute to 20 percent. Boston is at 18. Some jurisdictions are at 30. But clearly ours is too low to offset the amount of luxury housing coming on the market. We must also

explore the definition of what “affordable” means in our policy. Are we really making it easier for a middle class family to live here? The answer to that must be yes. And if it’s not, we must further amend our policy.

And no conversation about housing can occur without understanding the great needs of, and strains on, our current shelter system. We already have hard data on a tool that is proven to reduce the number of chronically homeless. That tool is the “Housing First” model. And we have the opportunity to work with our nonprofit sector in building more “Housing First” units to meet the needs of our most vulnerable Portlanders. We cannot underestimate the benefit that four walls of one’s own can have on a neighbor, on our community and on our society. Last year, this was one of the top priorities of the Council, but unfortunately we made little progress. This year, as part of the budget, I will work with the city manager to include funding to support ongoing efforts at expanding “Housing First.”

With regard to our shelters, we have heard rumors of the possibility of exploring a residency requirement, a cap on beds or somehow changing our longstanding policy that no one gets turned away. I pledge to you today that I will not support - and will be a loud and consistent voice against - any ordinance or policy change that will limit the accessibility of these life-saving services to someone in need. Because no matter where you are from, or how you got here, or whether we need to find one more cot, we have a responsibility to care for each other.

That said, I do plan to explore ways to partner with our neighboring jurisdictions so that we all can share in the responsibility of providing shelter. I will be reaching out to Westbrook, Scarborough, South Portland, Cape Elizabeth, Falmouth and others to ask them to consider paying for our services or creating small shelters of their own. Because in the past five years, I am told over 800 people who stayed in our shelter came from one of these communities. Yes, even Cape Elizabeth. We all have a vested

interest in helping our most vulnerable residents get that first foot on the rung of the ladder to stability. It's incumbent on all of us to take hold of that ladder and steady it as they climb.

It is also important that we understand that the shelter system we have in place today is not working, regardless of who pays for it. That is why I have told Councilor Ray that I fully support her efforts to develop the zoning changes necessary to diversify the locations of our shelters as well as build a new facility. For far too long, we have simply allowed these services to be clustered in one or two neighborhoods and have warehoused our homeless population in inadequate buildings.

And when talking about our needs, we must not forget our environment. During my campaign for this office, I set the goal of having 25 percent of Portland's homes and businesses utilizing solar power within 10 years. It is indeed a lofty goal and one we must achieve. In 2016, we took some very positive steps. I was proud to join my colleagues as well as the Sierra Club and the Portland Climate Action Team in supporting the Ocean Avenue solar project. Once online, it will generate enough energy to power City Hall solely by the sun.

In 2007 and 2008, led in major part by the work of then-Mayor Duson, the city developed a climate action plan that set specific goals around policy and behaviors that were designed to lead us to a culture of sustainability. In fact, one of their recommendations 10 years ago was LED street lights. How's that for forward thinking? I look forward to working with Councilor Thibodeau, Chair of the Sustainability and Transportation Committee, to dust off that plan and update its goals, as I know this is one of his top priorities for 2017. One such goal I will ask him to include in the new plan is for our city to be 100 percent clean energy by 2040.

In order to meet the needs of our environmental health, it is going to take a concerted effort from all sectors of our society. We can reach it by continuing to expand our solar capabilities through community solar array projects like the one in development on Peaks Island. We must always keep in mind opportunities at energy efficiency as we modernize and construct new government buildings - including our schools and public safety buildings. But we can also implement private sector incentives like a reduction in permit fees for the development of innovative clean energy projects like the "passive house" Waynflete is exploring.

We can explore innovative, outside the box ideas like the one developed by the students at Casco Bay High School to put a solar panel on each light pole. Or, as they also stated, provide incentives for businesses and nonprofits that encourage the use of public transit via the issuance of bus passes and coordinated carpooling programs. We should study the viability of wind as well as geothermal to diversify our renewable portfolio. We must always remind ourselves that when ensuring a sustainable future, we will not get there by conventional thinking and traditional methods. And we must always look at the long range benefits. I urge us to think big and develop new approaches, while at the same time exploring the approaches taken by our contemporaries across the nation.

We can also lead by example, as we did at Ocean Avenue. I will ask this Council and the City Manager to expand the city's fleet of electric vehicles, create more charging stations in our garages and achieve one of Councilor Thibodeau's goals: creating the city's first protected bike lane.

And we can also meet the needs of our environment and our neighborhoods by finishing the work of a task force we formed last year to address the issues of pesticide use in Portland. I commend Councilor Mavodones, chair of that task force, for a thorough process that is nearing completion. I am calling on this Council to take the information

ultimately provided and enact a comprehensive loophole-free synthetic pesticide ordinance that fully protects Portland's families and children. And once we get that done, we must look at the fertilizer side of the equation.

As I near conclusion of this speech, let me talk about one of the issues nearest to my heart. In my first year as Mayor, I have probably met with more Portland residents than anyone in this city. But of all of my meetings, the one that I'm perhaps the proudest of is what I call the New Mainers Roundtable. These meetings, held monthly as I do with numerous groups, are held with women and men, from dozens of countries around the world. It provides a forum for dialogue about the challenges and triumphs of our first and second generation neighbors.

As I say to anyone who will listen, without immigrants, our city would stagnate and regress. We would be forced to close schools. Businesses would struggle to fill their workforce. We would be without the rich and diverse culture that is, and has always been, the foundation of Portland.

That is why when I ran to lead this city, I advocated for an office to ensure that immigrants and people of color can get the help they need to fully contribute to - and benefit from - our vibrant economy. Led by Councilor Brenerman, the Council unanimously actualized this vision and took the steps necessary to create an Office of Economic Opportunity: *servicing immigrants, people of color and other underserved populations*. I urge this Council to keep a sharp focus on this shared goal and I look forward to seeing how our City Manager turns this framework into function in 2017.

In 2017, I will also ask us to re-start the conversation we had in Portland seven years ago around allowing legal immigrants who are not yet citizens to vote in municipal elections. In 2010, 47% of our city voted to join jurisdictions around the country in affording legal immigrants the right to vote for local officials in the city that is now their

home. I am willing to bet that Portland has come a long way over the past seven years in our resolve to guarantee that inclusivity. Allowing neighbors who are already full-fledged tax-paying members of our society a voice in their local government is not only fair and just, but it is vital to our truly being a democracy that is representative of the entirety of its population.

Coming on the heels of the most divisive Presidential election in my lifetime, we must also redouble our efforts to ensure that we stand together in the face of attempts to divide us. Portland has never been about us versus them. We have a long history of celebrating the diversity woven into the tapestry of our community. When Donald Trump, then a Presidential candidate, came to our backyard and tried to scapegoat members of our Somali community, hundreds of us gathered together and said with one voice that we will not tolerate the intolerant. We will never be silent while our neighbors are targeted and attacked. □□

But while standing together sends a powerful message, deeds and actions speak even louder. When the state threatened to cut off funding for asylum seekers, this body acted. When North Carolina outlawed transgender bathrooms, we banned city-sponsored travel to their state and codified into our own rules that transgender employees will have full access to meet their health care needs. And back in 2003, after the tragedy of 9/11, there was an unfortunate backlash against many of our innocent neighbors, perceived as wanting to do harm to country solely based on the color of their skin or the house of worship where they prayed. This Council bravely acted to put in place an ordinance that ensured Portland police would not check someone's papers as they walked down the street. That a shelter worker would not ask someone's immigration status if a person needed a place to sleep. They ensured that anyone in our city could call any city worker, police officer or firefighter for help, without fear of being deported. Thankfully, that law still stands today.

And while I have reviewed the ordinance with immigration experts and am satisfied we have strong protections in place for our community, in 2003 none of us imagined we might elect a President calling for the registration of muslims and the deportation of 11 million of our neighbors and family members.

That is why I am joining with Councilor Ali in calling on us as a city to take a hard look at what more we might be able to do to make sure that our friends and neighbors feel secure. Maybe we need to strengthen our ordinance. Maybe our new Office of Economic Opportunity can organize legal aid sessions to make sure people know their rights train bystanders, so people know best how to respond if they witness harassment. Or perhaps we can assist a growing movement among Portland businesses to create “Hate Free Zones,” alerting people that they will be safe in the store if they feel threatened. One small step all of us tonight can embrace tonight is to shop in Muslim-owned stores this Saturday. This effort has been organized in response to the smashing of the Ahram Halal market windows a couple of weeks ago on Forest Avenue.

In the end, honestly, I don’t care if politicians try to label us a “Sanctuary City” or not. I only care that our residents know that Portland provides the sanctuary, with a small “s,” that allows all of us to feel safe. All of us. Because even in the face of threats from Washington, DC, we must not retreat from the values we hold so dear.

So, during our time together this evening, we have talked about Portlanders from all walks of life who care deeply about their city. The father in North Deering fighting against rental insecurity. The businessperson in the Old Port who is leading by example. The East End parent advocating for Presumpscot. The mom in Bayside who is fighting for a clean environment. The teenager who raises awareness about mental health and depression. The senior citizen concerned about substance use disorders. The veteran who volunteers at the soup kitchen.

What do all these Portlanders have in common? They are all fighting not only for themselves, but for what our city needs. Because, every day, fueled by the voices of those we work for, we make choices. And as we debate those choices in 2017, I will always be asking the question: “Does this policy fulfill a want or a need?” And when we frame it that way, when we keep in mind the common good, the common need, that question always answers itself.

Are 21st century schools a want or are they a need? Is the ability to see a doctor without losing a day’s pay a want or is it a need? Is keeping our seniors in their homes a want or a need? Is protecting families from being evicted without adequate notice a want or a need? Or building more middle class housing? Or protecting and enfranchising immigrants? Or helping small businesses grow? Are they wants or are they needs? The people of Portland say they are needs.

And when we have to make choices, let’s make sure our needs are met first. Because when our needs are met, I daresay we will actually have achieved what we want.

Thank you. Now, let’s get to work.