

Inaugural Address

Monday, December 1, 2008

Comments of the Honorable Jill C. Duson, given on the occasion of her inauguration to the Office of Mayor, City of Portland, Maine

Thank you, Ed and Thank you Councilor Cohen.

Mayor Suslovic made serving the city his number one priority during his time on Council. Please join me in thanking him and his family for his hard work and incredible generosity. Thank you.

[Presentation of gifts to former Mayor.]

Thank you to my family, Tai & Nate and to my mother and sisters who were not physically able to make the trip from Pennsylvania and Delaware to be with us here today.

[Other Thanks....]

As many of you know, I have been privileged to devote my spare time to serving the people of the City of Portland, as a member and then Chair of the School Committee, and as an at-large member of this Council. Thank you, [I think] to my council colleagues, new and seasoned, for this opportunity to serve as Chair of the Council and Mayor of this great city for a second time.

I am honored to join you all here this afternoon.

As some of you know, in the less public part of my life, I serve as the Director of the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) within the Maine Department of Labor. I thank the Commissioner of the Maine Department of Labor and my colleagues and staff at the Bureau for the partnership that has allowed us to achieve great things at my day job, my dream job.

BRS is charged with enabling persons with significant disabilities to obtain and retain employment and to sustain their independence. At BRS, we are responsible for an annual budget of 27 million dollars. I am honored to lead a staff of 140+ incredibly dedicated state employees who work out of offices in communities all around the state.

As we begin this council year, we are all keenly aware of the challenging times ahead for our city, our state and our nation. This Council has shown that it is more than up to those challenges and I look forward to working with each of you in the coming year.

I am optimistic about what we can do together because; I believe that there is such a thing as good government. And, I am confident that in times like these, the people who have dedicated their careers to serving this great city will shine.

People like Joseph Gray, Gary Wood, Linda Cohen, committed people from our front line workers to our heads of department, these people help to make the Portland we love. Please join in me in recognizing the dedicated workforce of the City of Portland for what they done and thanking them in advance for what they will do to keep us on track during the challenging times ahead.

Yup, call me Pollyanna, but I believe in good government. I believe in an America where anything is possible. I believe in an America and a Portland that is full of opportunity and possibility. And, I believe that we, the members of the Portland City Council, can come together and work toward the shared goals of sustaining a vibrant city where business succeeds and where people and neighborhoods thrive.

It takes a village to fail a child; it takes a village to leave a child behind. **This** village will do neither. I am confident that **this** village will meet the challenges of today and tomorrow. I am confident that we will sustain a community where our children grow strong in body and spirit, our elders do more than survive and the sandwich generations live connected lives.

We will not start out in agreement on many concerns. My idea of success is not that we agree or reach some milk toast, vaporous, consensus on the direction to go with every issue. But, if we commit to listen for understanding, and we share (briefly) the life lessons behind our thoughts and ideas, and we work together for the good of this city we all love, we will create collaborative and unique solutions to the issues that confront Portland.

As I began thinking about what to say this afternoon, I looked back to the inauguration four years ago. And I was struck by the progress realized in our city. Just like a relay race, each Mayor has passed the baton to the next along with priority issues and concerns for focus. When I last delivered mayoral comments, the council I was addressing included 5 former Mayors. Today's Council include 5 former School Committee Chairs, and that put us well on our way to handling some of the thorniest of financial and educational issues.

Priority One: Economic Development

Portland continues to be recognized nationally for its focus on environmental concerns; its great strides in the development of public spaces; its restaurants; the performing arts and many, many other **WOW** factors. And while, these factors may not be enough to divert the attention of our local press from overblown and sometimes manufactured squabbles, the fact is we can, we have and we will continue to work to together for Portland.

We have worked together to build our economy, to keep our city safe and clean, to take care of those who need help, to protect our water, to rebuild our housing stock, to reduce our carbon footprint ... and so on and so on. The point is that when we act together, we achieve the remarkable. We rebuild neighborhoods; expand parks and playgrounds, and we blaze trails...

So it is with great enthusiasm that I accept the baton from Mayor Suslovic and continue the work of a long line of Mayors. Together, we will keep the baton moving.

Just look at Bayside. In 2004, I spoke about the importance of good planning and development in the Bayside and on the Eastern Waterfront. In four years we have seen some remarkable progress. Bayside is a new revitalized neighborhood. We have a parking garage, a student housing facility, and a number of medical and office buildings along Marginal Way. Companies have chosen to move to Bayside including AAA, Gorham Savings Bank, Portland Foot and Ankle, Planet Fitness, Planet Dog, EMS, Intermed, Whole Foods, and the law firm of Drummond Woodsum.

The historic Miss Portland Diner has been rehabilitated and relocated to a central location and other projects like the residences at Chestnut Street Lofts have contributed to this burgeoning new community. We will soon see retail businesses begin to fill in the new storefronts along Marginal Way.

We also have the expansion of the city's trail system connecting the Eastern Promenade with Deering Oaks, the relocation of a scrap metal recycling facility, and construction of a 98,000 square foot office building and conference facility, to look forward to. This is progress we can all be proud of as a city and as a council.

Together, we **will** complete the Bayside vision.

In the same four years, we have witnessed exciting developments along the Eastern Waterfront. Ocean Gateway became the new terminal for the CAT. The new parking garage opened and there are other projects underway. The focused energy that helped us to reclaim the Bayside neighborhood, can and will be a catalyst for continued movement at the Eastern Waterfront.

We have all heard reference to the two Maine's and we've heard Portland described as some "other", different place. Well, as documented in the report produced by the Portland Chamber of Commerce, this city is the economic engine of Southern Maine and in many ways the entire state. The economic health of the City of Portland is a critical factor in the health of Maine. This artificial barrier around Portland serves no one in our state and I intend to tear it down. We need to build better, closer relationships throughout Maine. The opportunities for partnership are endless... tourism, transportation, business exchanges, trade alliances focused on Maine Made crafts and other goods. To better explore the potential of these relationships, as Mayor, I intend to seek a new sister city relationship with a community right here in Maine.

Advancing economic development and creating jobs within the city and contributing to the creation of jobs in the region and the state must be our first priority. A robust economy provides security to the people that live and work within our borders and the pheromones to draw young professionals and blue collar workers, as well as newly starting and retired families back to the city, our schools and our neighborhoods.

We have and always will be a port city, but for us to maintain that core part of our city, we need to fix the Maine State Pier. As Mayor, my first action will be to schedule a Council workshop to review options for getting the pier fixed and spurring development. This discussion will be transparent and public. My intent is that the Council work quickly and diligently towards a decision that best serves the people of Portland.

Together we will fix the Maine State Pier.

Priority One: The Environment

As we look to further economic development, we must do so in the context of sound environmental policies. Portland has received accolades for the early steps taken to sustain our environment and mitigate our carbon footprint.

As you may know, this year, under the guidance of the Energy and Environmental Sustainability Committee and committed city staff, we will enter into agreement with an energy service company which should dramatically reduce Portland's energy consumption and carbon footprint.

The Council Committee on Energy and Environmental Sustainability place the next layer of bricks upon this foundation. We can look for ways to expand clean energy production within our boundaries and pursue solar and wind alternatives for the individual homeowner and businesses, as well as the city.

Paradigm Windows is one example of a local business generating clean energy. We need more businesses like Maine Green Building Supply, a *Buy Local* business focused on bringing sustainable practices to the construction industry. This company supplies environmentally responsible materials, non-toxic finishes and important innovations in energy systems.

I'll support city staff and the Council Committee as they work to develop policies that will build Portland's green economy. We will continue to look for opportunities to partner with businesses that look to reduce the city's carbon footprint or who offer environmentally sound products that help wean us off of our addiction to fossil fuels. Portland should be attractive to businesses looking for a community that supports their green mission and I believe that we can come up with actions to put out the welcome sign for green entrepreneurs.

Priority One: The City's Safety Net

Last but not least, last but in tandem, my third area of focus will be the city safety net. We need to work with community leaders, neighborhood groups and non-profit organizations to help prepare for the challenges ahead – fuels costs have come down, but unemployment is rising, loss of income and job security are worrying most Portlanders, Mainers and Americans.

This is the time for government to step up and shore up the safety net for working families who fall on hard times. Just as we initiate an emergency response team for a natural disaster, we should look to pull together a community emergency response team for this economic crisis. We need to work with the other service centers in the state to ensure that our safety net is without holes. We need to make sure that the state understands the unique and critical role service centers like Portland play in maintaining the health and safety of Mainers in need.

One final reference to my comments four years ago, I closed then and I'll close now with a request to Portland residents to become **Home Town Tourists**. Get out and enjoy our city and see what the folks from away are raving about.

Portland has a lot to offer.

Go tubing at Riverside golf course this winter. Take a boat and bike or walk on one of the islands. Walk through the Arts District on a 1st Friday; Go to the Children's museum; Take in a show at Portland Stage Company; Kick up your feet at Longfellow Square; Enjoy a great performance at the Merrill auditorium; and, make absolutely sure to try a couple of the fantastic restaurants in our city neighborhoods as well as downtown.

Stay tuned for news of exciting plans to expand the city's tourism industry with the creation of an annual winter event, Portland WinteRush – Maine's coolest outdoor festival and marketing efforts to promote Portland as a culinary destination for New England and the rest of the country.

Together, we will keep the baton moving.

The late Congresswoman Barbara Jordan said: “what the people want is very simple...they want an America as good as its promise”. The results of this past national election are evidence of the truth of her words. I repeat this past November, we, you and I, proved her words to be true. We took a leap of faith in our own guiding principals.

Going back to the beginning of these remarks:

I believe in good government. I believe in an America where anything is possible. And, I believe that even we, the members of the Portland City Council, can come together and work toward the shared goals of sustaining a vibrant city where business succeeds and where people and neighborhoods thrive.

Thank you for this opportunity, I look forward to a fun year.