



## State of the City Address 2021

2020. What a year! For many of us, the year couldn't end soon enough.

The cascade of crises—the pandemic, homelessness, racial justice, climate change, wildfires, and economic recession—awakened us to the need for urgent action; alarmed us about our future; and, in some cases, deepened the divisions among us. It has also highlighted the work, the courage, the fortitude, and the creativity that has enabled our community to carry on.

I dedicate this speech to all of you who continued to attend board and commission meetings, gather in neighborhood associations, and volunteer for nonprofits; to the businesses that transformed themselves to keep their doors open and their employees working; to the unsung heroes who continue to make sure we have gas and groceries and everything else we need to stay home; to the arts and cultural organizations that live-streamed performances and posted art online; to our teachers and school districts working overtime to teach and support their students and families; to our nonprofits who fed the hungry and sheltered homeless people; to our healthcare workers, fire fighters, police, and first responders who persevered to save lives in the most difficult and relentless of conditions; and to our city staff who ran this huge public agency through crisis after crisis, delivering essential services and more to the community. We are resilient. And the extraordinary good work that you all have done in 2020 will carry forward in 2021. THANK YOU!

We're entering a new year, with a new sense of hope and possibility. We have an opportunity this year, as we recover and adapt to a new post-pandemic normal, to carry the sense of common purpose and compassion into our immediate, local responses. We have an opportunity to become more inclusive, to see people for who they are, to respect their perspectives, and listen not only to their words, but also their intent.

Our nation was founded on the principles of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—principles to which we continue to aspire. Living safely in this country, being free to speak and worship, to build and benefit from opportunities to pursue happiness—these things have not been enjoyed equally by all Americans. The challenge of living up to that high-minded vision is reflected in historic struggles towards a more just and inclusive world—civil rights, women's rights, immigrant rights, the environmental movement, and struggles for racial and economic justice all arose from that challenge. Our successes and failures can be seen in policies affecting housing, land use, transportation, health care, and education. Now is OUR time to take the next big steps toward a more equitable and sustainable nation. The crises of 2020 make it abundantly clear that our connectedness to each other is integral to our progress.

Looking forward to this year, the very fact of that we are meeting in a virtual format speaks directly to where we are as a community—we are still in a pandemic. And yet, it also speaks to who we are as a community. We are still gathered. We're still showing up for one another.

You have just seen the City's video describing the enormous range of city investments and accomplishments in our community this year. What I hope you take away from that viewing is this: throughout this year, the city has maintained essential services, innovated in response to changing and emerging needs, and reached out to include new voices—remarkable accomplishments in any year.

Our responses to the crises of 2020 reflect a commitment to equity. We know that people in poverty and people of color are disproportionately impacted by the public health crisis, by the loss of jobs, and by the degradation of the environment.

Actions by council and city government have reflected that recognition. I am especially excited that in 2020 we have taken significant steps to bring new voices to the table to help guide us today and into the future. If we are to build more equity, we must start with meaningful seats at the table and real agency for those new voices.

In response to the Black Lives Matter protests, we've stepped up to engage people from the Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) and LGBTQ communities in reviewing and reassessing our public safety systems. We convened a broad range of community members to improve our Climate Action Plan, and have worked collaboratively with advocates, providers and the unhoused to address our need for shelter and housing.

Moving into 2021, we have convened a Youth Advisory Board, which met for the first time in December. The city has long needed an institutionalized, consistent pathway for youth in our community to advise and frame the issues before us. The Board comprises students from every high school in the city, in every grade, and of a diversity of backgrounds. They are smart, able, insightful, and eager to do this work for our community. It is their future, their planet, that we are impacting right now, so, of course, they deserve a meaningful say in charting our course.

Resiliency is logistical and psychological. Each new crisis this year has washed over the on-going crises in a thundering cascade. Homelessness was already skyrocketing and overwhelming, then COVID-19 deepened that crisis; and then fires and smoky air added to the suffering. Repeated assaults on our sense of well-being trigger protective instincts to pull back from one another. But we are all buffeted by the same traumas. It has been said of 2020 that we were on the same rough seas together, each of us in boats of different sizes and seaworthiness. I am pleased and grateful to say that the City of Eugene this year strove mightily, and relentlessly, to help all boats stay afloat, and to help us navigate, collectively, to safer waters.

A number of people have commented to me lately, "You didn't have to run for a second term...." implying that the challenges of the job and the era are not so attractive this time around. I will say to you, as I have said to them, there's no other place I would rather be than in this role, in this city, at this time. It is an honor to work with all of you, and to work on behalf of our wonderful community.

No single person carries the burden, the power to remedy, or the responsibility to recover. Reaching out together with our strengths, skills, wisdom, and energy will help us all take the next steps. Our foundational values are strong: we believe that everyone in our community should live safely and well, with the liberty that enables them to pursue happiness and more. As you all have demonstrated in 2020, it takes courage, respect, open-mindedness, and determination to live up to those ideals. In 2021, our foremost obligation is to expand our understanding of "we" to include the lived reality of all Eugeniens. Because we are, after all, in this together.