

Inaugural Address of Mayor Danene Sorace – January 2, 2018

As you round the steps up the second floor of City Hall, a wall of faces – the former Mayors of the City of Lancaster – greet you. I have seen this wall many times, but the other day it stopped me in my tracks.

I thought about the passage of time since John Passmore, our first Mayor, took office in 1818.

My eyes continued to move from left to right across and down each row on this wall of almost exclusively male faces, save one.

In that moment, I recognized that my time, like theirs, is brief. I am but a temporary steward of this perpetual City – and so the question is how, in four short years, can I better the lives of the citizens of Lancaster? How can I continue our positive growth and chip away at the persistent obstacles to strong, safe neighborhoods?

Our city, like all cities, has seen its share of growth and decline: we pass the landmarks of our triumphs everyday. The Fulton Opera House marks a time of rapid expansion in the 1850's. It sits just a short stroll from the home of Thaddeus Stevens and Lydia Hamilton Smith, and an important station on the Underground Railroad, marking Lancaster's history as a refuge for those enslaved. Our Central Market, which has stood the test of time – 275 years and still going.

Moments of decline – in the form of scars – remain, too, fueled by policies of redlining and racism. Lancaster Square's East side in the wake of "urban renewal;" the destruction of entire streets, and whole neighborhoods in the Southeast, which for generations has been the starting place for virtually every culture, ethnicity, religion and language group our City has welcomed.

Against this backdrop of change some things have remained constant – the fundamental work of City government to provide clean drinking water, sewers, street repairs, police and fire protection. To wrestle with how to pay for these services. To ensure affordable and safe housing; and ever since there were cars, where to put them!

I will work tirelessly to make sure that we continue to provide these core services to every resident, with a renewed commitment to exemplary customer service. To continue to navigate the byzantine confines of a Class 3 city and work diligently to bring creativity to delivering these services in partnership with the exceptional individuals who work day and night to keep our city running.

These services, however, mean nothing unless we ensure that every resident knows and is able to utilize the amenities we all pay for. Equity and access matter – for everyone from Palm Street to Plum, and Fremont to Farnum. Together, I know we can tackle the problems we’re aware of, and anticipate the ones lurking around the corner.

This is the baseline. What every Mayor must do, and do well.

While this past decade has been marked by tremendous growth ushered in by the wise and steady leadership of Mayor Gray and his administration, now is not the time for rest.

There can be no rest until all of the City is flourishing: every neighborhood, every corner of every block. There is so much more to our city than a few downtown blocks – as difficult, and hard won as it has been to re-invigorate that core. Fortunately, Lancaster is essentially four square miles, so, it is not an impossible task to think that ALL of our neighborhoods can be as rich with opportunity and connection as they are in history.

I made strong neighborhoods the core of my campaign and strong neighborhoods will remain the centerpiece of my time as mayor. And this means we will be working block-by-block, leveraging the investments that have been made and will continue to be made.

I am so committed to this goal of strengthening our neighborhoods, that I am creating a brand new position that will do nothing but focus on the unique needs of neighborhoods. The Director of Neighborhood Engagement will ensure that my administration remembers that there is no “one-size-fits-all approach.”

Progress in one neighborhood is not going to look the same as in another, nor should it. Our goal is to preserve the diversity and rich history that have made our neighborhoods the core of our cultural life – a part of ONE city, not four separate quadrants.

So we will listen, and we will act, in partnership with the residents of each neighborhood.

However, there is no path forward for strong neighborhoods without addressing the pressing moral and economic crisis of poverty.

While we may be tempted to relegate poverty to the work of the church, the non-profit, or government, we cannot relegate this work to any one entity. It will take all of us, and most especially private industry and entrepreneurs – who may not see the eradication of poverty as relevant to their bottom line. But it is – and here’s why:

We cannot realize a sustainable, enduring regional economy without making sure that everyone is participating. So I will continue to talk about poverty and all of its associated ramifications not just in terms of individual, family lives but also in terms of our community life and our economic life as a City and County. We can’t rest until our business community has the skilled and ready workforce it needs for the future and our residents are realizing their full economic potential.

As my photo joins those of the 40 mayors who served before me, I can pledge to you now that I will not rest. I will work. I will devote the next four years of my life to making Lancaster a better, stronger and more equitable community.

In just a few minutes, our new City Council will be seated. I look forward to administering their oath of office and working with each council member over the next four years.

Additionally tonight, Council will be presented with resolutions to approve the appointments of Charlotte Katzenmoyer, Patrick Hopkins and Randy Patterson, each of whom has contributed selflessly to the City, and will continue to serve in their current capacity under my leadership.

Tomorrow Matt Johnson will take over as my Chief of Staff. I look forward to working with Matt to advance a responsive, transparent administration. Pat Brogan, who has also selflessly served, will assist in this transition through March – and I am grateful to her for her willingness to ensure a seamless transition for both me and Matt.

Additionally, three job descriptions will be posted in the coming week as we begin recruitment efforts for a Director of Neighborhood Engagement, Chief of Fire, and Chief of Police. In the next several months, a dynamic team will emerge of new and experienced staff ready to tackle the work at hand.

Finally, tonight, I want to express my thanks to my family here tonight my mom, Renee, Samantha, Judy, John, Glen, Jamie, Jim, Nora, Susie -- my dear, sweet husband (here's to beginning our 20th year of marriage with a bang!) and our daughter Lia – I am so proud of you.

To Father Wolfe, Rev. Bailey, Bernadette, Bella, Eva, Carlito, Zoe, Max, Delaney, and Ramiro. Thank you. Your gifts of word, music, and inspiration are truly appreciated.

And last, but certainly not least, all of you – dear friends, residents, and voters of the City of Lancaster. We stand at the beginning of a New Year. A new chapter in the history of the perpetual City that is our home. Let us move forward with the courage of our convictions, and hold fast to the firm belief that, for the City of Lancaster and its people, the best is yet to be.