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Kirkland Chamber of Commerce

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Thank you for that wonderful introduction. It's my great honor to be your Mayor and it is my privilege to be before the Chamber to deliver the State of the City Address.

Once again on behalf of the City Council I want to thank you each of you for locating your businesses in Kirkland. We know others would love to have you, and we're deeply grateful that you continue to do business in Kirkland. It's our job as your elected officials to continue providing the quality of life and the business climate that ensures you will keep choosing us.

Last year I told you that the foundation of our community rests on three pillars – engaged neighborhoods, decisive, responsive government, and flourishing business. Your flourishing businesses generate critical revenues that keep general taxes low and allow the City to invest in police, fire, streets and parks. The jobs you create and the goods and services you produce are essential to fulfilling Kirkland's mission of providing our residents the best place in the region to live, work and play. Thank you.

Next Monday is Presidents Day. It's a time when we as a nation reflect on the contributions of our past leaders who made the United States one of the greatest nations in history. It seems fitting to me that we look to these leaders for inspiration on how Kirkland can remain one of the most livable cities in America.

Thomas Jefferson said that "The care of human life and happiness is the first and only object of good government." We agree. The safety and well-being of our residents and businesses are the top priorities of this Council and our staff. And for Kirkland, good government is decisive, responsive government. Government that listens carefully and then solves problems. Over the past few months an emotional debate has taken place, first regarding the Aquatic, Recreation and Community Center, and now considering transit options on the Cross Kirkland Corridor. Central to this debate is the role of City government when residents feel strongly about an issue. When should the Council be decisive on behalf of our residents and the future, and when should it be responsive? I don't see these terms as mutually exclusive. The Council has been responsive in hearing the entire community as we have planned for Kirkland in 2035. And as Barack

Obama said, “We did not come here to fear the future, we came here to shape it.” We on the Council were elected to make tough decisions. To shape the future our residents have envisioned, we must continue to be decisive in implementing those plans.

This decisive, responsive government has led to some remarkable achievements in 2015. We listened to the needs of our community, and we have responded. And because we have responded, I am proud to tell you that the State of the City is thriving.

In December, after nearly two years of work shaped by thousands of comments from our residents and businesses, we adopted some of the most progressive and innovative land use and transportation plans in the state. The Chamber has been with us every step of the way, advocating for the needs of business and helping make our plans better. I want to thank the Chamber for standing up and supporting the Comprehensive Plan, the Transportation Master Plan and most recently, for your reaffirmation of the vision of the Cross Kirkland Corridor Master Plan to include transit as well as trails. That is true community leadership. The Council also adopted a Capital Improvement Project list that invests over 200 million dollars over the next five years in water, sewer, roads, sidewalks, cross walks, flashing beacons, bike lanes, parks and fire stations. These projects include completion of sidewalks on all community identified school walk routes in the former City, while also setting aside millions to fund school walk route priorities in the new neighborhoods. We allocated over ten million to start building new fire stations and renovate old ones so that everyone in the City is only four minutes away from aid cars and fire engines should they have an emergency. Park Lane was finished and 85th Street was completed. I’m so very proud of both of these projects. These streets are now inviting for pedestrians as well as cars and will catalyze economic development. Waverly Beach Park is under renovation and Edith Moulton Park will be rebuilt into a spectacular regional jewel. Residents concerned about weed-filled medians on Market and Central saw the City replace them with beautiful, low maintenance landscaping. Businesses requesting downtown parking solutions witnessed the Council adopting new policies and allocating over one million dollars to create capacity, culminating in a new parking lot south of City Hall that will open this summer. And we did all of this while keeping our Price of Government at 3.5%, well below the 5% that signifies best in class.

Internally our organization adopted the Healthy Kirkland Initiative in 2015 to improve the health of our employees and reduce the costs of healthcare. The majority of our employees joined us in this innovative and pioneering effort that combined a high deductible health care plan with a near site employee clinic operated by the private sector. Our Healthy Kirkland Plan has succeeded beyond our wildest expectations. While most jurisdictions were seeing an average 4% increase in health care costs, Kirkland's 2016 rates actually dropped 4% below 2015, saving taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars and allowing us to once again add more money to reserve accounts. Kirkland was also recognized by the State Auditor with the 2015 Stewardship Award for the City's "culture of accountability" acknowledging the responsiveness, openness, and professionalism of City staff throughout the audits conducted during the year. Programs like the Healthy Kirkland Initiative, the Auditor's award, healthy reserves and other sound financial practices resulted in Kirkland retaining our AAA credit rating for 2016 and beyond.

At the state level, City Council partnered with our state legislators on the 2015 transportation package and delivered 75 million dollars to build new I-405 ramps into Totem Lake at NE 132nd Street as well as over a million dollars to connect the CKC to Lake Washington Blvd with sidewalks at NE 52nd Street. With laser focus during the last few years, we have achieved success in securing grants for our projects unprecedented in the history of this city.

Right now Kirkland has over seven hundred thousand square feet of commercial space, six hundred thousand square feet of retail space and over 2600 units of housing in our development services pipeline. Commercial vacancy rates are at historic lows of less than 5%. Next week the LEED Platinum Google Phase II will open and SRM, the developer who built it, says that Kirkland is the best government they have ever worked with. Next month Kirkland Urban will break ground and CenterCal's Villages at Totem Lake will soon follow. These three projects will bring thousands of new jobs and hundreds of new housing units to Kirkland. The city's Capital Improvement Plans have attracted and complemented these private investments. The accomplishments of 2015 and early 2016 truly demonstrate a thriving City and I am proud of this Council, proud of our professional City staff and proud of our community for these achievements.

But Thomas Jefferson also said that "I like the dreams of the future better than the history of the past." I would like to share with you two of my biggest dreams for Kirkland in 2016. The first is that we accomplish more, to help provide

shelter for those who are less fortunate than we. Jimmy Carter tells us that “The measure of a society is found in how they treat their weakest and most helpless citizens.” Despite increasing our contributions to human service agencies and A Regional Coalition for Housing, Kirkland has still not made a dent in the problem of homelessness, and the challenge of housing affordability continues to grow. Kirkland is a just and compassionate City. The need is huge and the challenge is hard. It would be easy to give up, or leave the problem to future leaders. But as Abraham Lincoln said, “You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today.” Someone must act. And that someone should be us.

The City Council has set a goal of siting an emergency women’s shelter in Kirkland in 2016. Lives depend on our success. And we will succeed. But we must do even more than that. We need to come together as a community to address the growing crisis of Housing Affordability. The people that raised their families here should not be priced out of their homes. Our kids should be able to move out on their own. Our employees should be able to live close by work. I’ll be asking my colleagues to join me in creating a Kirkland Home Affordability Task Force in 2016. If they agree I will be inviting the Chamber, the Kirkland Alliance of Neighborhoods, churches, service providers like Attain Housing and Hopelink, realtors, developers, and many more to join with the City. We have the talents and resources in this community to tackle this problem and lead the way. We will not evade the problem of housing but will solve it – together.

My second dream is that we work together to keep civility at the forefront of our discourse in Kirkland. There have been times during the ARC and Sound Transit discussions that civility has been lost. Some disagreed with the Council on these topics. Most expressed that disagreement in ways that were thoughtful and insightful, and with the commitment to making Kirkland better. But in the world of blogs, twitter, Facebook, Next Door and Be Neighborly, questioning the integrity and character of those with whom we disagree is being far too common. As a community we must reverse this trend. The word “civil” is from the Latin root “civis”, which means citizen. It is also the root word for civilization. For the Romans, civil discourse was the hallmark of good citizenship, set them apart from the barbarian tribes, and was the foundation of a civilized society. What makes us able to solve problems as a local government is our ability to work together even when we disagree. What makes Olympia and Washington DC gridlocked is partisanship and vitriol. That is the path divisiveness, and inaction, and we cannot allow it to overcome our conversations. Fortunately, that is not who we are.

Kirkland is a community that prides itself on mutual respect, common goals and finding solutions together. Once again lessons can be found in the words of our Presidents. Dwight D. Eisenhower said “Never question another person’s motives. His wisdom, yes, but not his motives.” Woodrow Wilson said that the energy of disagreement should “add light, and not heat” to the arguments. The lesson from both of these past leaders is that we can disagree without bitterness and rancor if we have respect for the motives and perspectives of each other. This year I will be calling on community leaders from all walks of life and every corner of our City to help me develop a civility action plan and perhaps even an aspirational code of conduct that we can all share. Again, we have the opportunity and the resources to lead the way. Every one of us cares deeply for Kirkland. We all are strongly committed to keeping Kirkland the livable, walkable, green and vibrant City we all love. We may have differing views on how to achieve those goals. But if we remember what we share in common, we can discuss our differences in a manner that appeals to the best of us. And from those discussions may come compromise and new solutions that we can’t yet see today.

Most of you know that I ended the first two State of the City addresses with references to the mottos of Ford Motor Company since my husband and I own Ford of Kirkland. In that spirit, today I will conclude with some words of wisdom from our 38th President, the man who said on his inauguration “I am a Ford not a Lincoln” - President Gerald R. Ford. President Ford was the recipient of both the Congressional Gold Medal and the John F. Kennedy Profiles in Courage Award. When addressing Congress he said “I have always believed that most people are mostly good, most of the time. I have never mistaken moderation for weakness, nor civility for surrender. As far as I'm concerned, there are no enemies in politics--just temporary opponents who might vote with you on the next Roll Call.” During his Kennedy Award acceptance speech President Ford said “there is no way we can go forward except together and no way anybody can win except by serving the people's needs. We cannot stand still or slip backwards. We must go forward now together.”

I pledge to always follow Gerald Ford’s example. To keep civility at the forefront in Kirkland. To have no enemies and to keep serving the people’s needs. And to keep going forward together. I ask that you all join me. Together we will accomplish even more remarkable things and keep Kirkland the most livable city in America. Thank you.