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Mayor: Somerville will be 'America's greatest urban living experience'

By Dan Atkinson
Wicked Local Somerville
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Somerville — Mayor Joe Curtatone and other city leaders celebrated past accomplishments and promised even more in the future during the 2013 State of the City address.

"We will build America's greatest urban living experience – Somerville, Massachusetts," Curtatone told a packed and cheering aldermanic chamber on Jan. 8.

Curtatone promised a more walkable city and said 2013 would see the end of the Waste Management transfer station in Brickbottom and the beginning of "the process of bringing down" the McGrath overpass. East Somerville in general would see renovation in the coming year, he said.

"For years, we've invested heavily in West Somerville while the eastern part of our city soldiered on as a great but underfunded neighborhood," Curtatone said. "I am here tonight to declare quite unequivocally, it's East Somerville's turn."

Much of Curtatone's speech looked back on prior achievements, like groundbreaking at Assembly Square and the beginning of the Union Square urban renewal project. He said long-term projects like those, coupled with reliance on public transportation, would serve the city better than "quick fixes" like casinos.

"We believe the Green Line extension will help unleash hundreds of millions of dollars in private investment and provide us with tens of millions of dollars in new tax revenues," Curtatone said.

And Curtatone spent time referring to outsiders' favorable perceptions of Somerville, referring to high rankings from Boston Magazine and the Phoenix on their lists of places to live as well as coverage in the Guardian and the Washington Post. However, he also referred to challenges ahead, like making poor neighborhoods richer "without pushing out our hardworking neighbors."

And one of the greatest challenges facing the city, Curtatone said, is improving education. While he had praise for the city's schools, Curtatone called for parents and officials to work together to make sure children in struggling households were able to reach their full potential.

New School Committee Chair Mary Jo Rossetti also spoke of all participants in the educational system working for the greater good.

"At our core, what makes us great is our character and our belief that we are all in this together. Those are the values that inspire our students and the values we need for the next generation of leaders in our country," she said. "That kind of civic engagement is personified by our active staff and parents as together they work to create learning institutions those students, staff and families want to attend."

Overall, the evening was full of pride in Somerville's growth. New Board of Aldermen President Bill White spoke out against people who denigrate the city with a familiar insult.

"We all should get angry whenever we read or hear someone say how this city was once known as Slummerville," White said to applause. "Our city was never known as Slummerville. That was a derogatory term used by people in the suburbs who turned their noses up at working class folks who were first or second generation immigrants.

"The word is an insult to the tens of thousands of honest, hardworking men and women who contributed to our city and have passed away," White said later. "Whenever we read or hear that term, we should immediately tell that person in no uncertain terms never to use that again."

Many former city officials attended the ceremony. Former mayor Eugene Brune recalled all the ceremonies he has attended in the chamber in his day as alderman and mayor and commented on the change that has taken place.

"I think the future of Somerville looks great and bright," he said. 'I remember the days when the people sitting here did not care like they do today. It's a major change and good for the city."

Former Dorothy Kelly Gay, whom Curtatone defeated in 2003, said she was happy to be in the chamber as a proud citizen.

"The city is in great shape and I feel I had a hand in that," she said. It is great to be back!"

--Auditi Guha contributed to this report

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hey mayor joe where do you buy your wacky weed i need a new connection

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