Thank you. Happy New Year. Let us hope Atlantic Highlands residents, businesses, and visitors have a safe, peaceful, prosperous, and healthy year ahead. New Years Day is a time to reset and reflect.

There will likely be times when I sit in this seat and tear up a bit. Probably in about thirty seconds. It will definitely happen when I talk about specific people in this room. Or if I catch eyes with my family, who are all here. I get it from them. And my dear and incredibly supportive husband made me cut the parts about him, so that will help for today. Let me assure you that I will always be my professional and authentic self as your mayor. I am so humbled to have been elected to this position and will put my all into this role. I will serve all residents with empathy, passion for the community, and as the South Pacific song goes, cockeyed optimism. That’s who I am.

I would like to acknowledge Congressman Pallone who took the time to attend today and to swear me in along with Council members Crowley and Forbes. Thank you for being both an outstanding representative for the people of our district, but especially for being a friend to me and particularly devoted to Atlantic Highlands. Other dignitaries?

I couldn’t be happier to look in this direction to see who is sitting in the seat I sat in for nearly six years. Council Member Forbes, welcome to the council. You have proven yourself to be an excellent partner and absolutely committed to considering the needs and best interests of all residents, visitors, business owners, and other stakeholders. Council Member Crowley has been an outstanding council member who has achieved so much during his time on council. He has been my partner on this dais since day one and I know he will continue to work on special projects in the years ahead that improve quality of life in Atlantic Highlands. Thanks also to each of the continuing council members Vito Colasurdo, Eileen Cusack, and Jimmy Murphy for your continued service, and to Council President Brian Dougherty for assuming this important role as Council President. This year will bring accomplishments and unforeseen challenges and I am confident we will always work together to move Atlantic Highlands forward while honoring the traditions that make our town so special.

There have been many folks who have served and in many cases continue to serve our town in a variety of roles. First, I want to thank every volunteer who has or continues to dedicate your time in service of our community. I am honored so many of you have come today to participate in this transition of leadership. Thank you to Community volunteers who are completing their terms and those who are returning or beginning their service.

I ask that the former members of the governing body that are in attendance today please stand? Thank you for your service.

And now will current and former members of our committees and commissions, and emergency services departments join them in standing? Thank you for service.

Your investment of time is a testament to your love for community.

Look at this show of support and community service. It’s pretty awesome, isn’t it? This is Atlantic Highlands.

I have to stop here to say how much I learned from our former Borough Administrator, Adam Hubeny. I believe when I joined the council, Adam learned the definition of dear Congressman John Lewis’s term “good trouble”. Adam couldn’t be here today, but I am so grateful for the knowledge I gained from him when I was starting on council. Thank you, Adam, for your candor, leadership, and friendship. I continue to value it today.

We will be honoring Mayor Gluckstein at our first regular meeting of the year and I hope everyone will fill the room with gratitude for her love for Atlantic Highlands and her many years of service not only as mayor but in a variety of other roles. Thank you Loretta for your friendship and for being here today. It means a lot.

I am very grateful for the service of those who have served alongside me and have helped me learn so much on the job. I continue to rely on past members of council for advice and institutional knowledge. Wow, do I continue to miss former council member Chuck Lero, who was always available for a wickedly placed comment at just the right time. Like now. His sense of humor was singular and he brought everyone together. I hope to be someone that does that, too. Vito, in the best way you remind me of Chuck sometimes.

I’ve quoted the iconic Genevieve Hawley so many times. We are neighbors, before, during and after elections and being good neighbors must be everyone’s priority if we are to be the Jewel of the Bayshore.

Speaking of those we have lost, I want to acknowledge the loss of two of our community’s leaders last year. In September we lost Past Mayor Helen Marchetti, who told me more than once to never promise anyone, anything. It’s very good advice and I try to follow it whenever possible. In July, the patriarch of the Curry family, Walter Curry, passed away. The Curry family’s generations of service to Atlantic Highlands is legendary and literally reaches every area, committee, and commission in town. I look forward to visiting Helen Marchetti Park as it is reimagined and standing alongside the Curry family when we dedicate memorial sites in his name.

During my six years on council, we have accomplished so much, laying the groundwork for our vision moving forward. We have made sure visitors and residents know we are a welcoming, inclusive town and will raise the bar on these celebrations moving forward. Thank you particularly to my dear friends at Garden State Equality, especially Lauren Albrecht, for your support and guidance. Atlantic Highlands is a welcoming place for our LGBTQIA+ family and friends and we strive to be a truly diverse community celebrating all the many things that make us different and yet neighbors. We have so many new residents that have embraced our town and are making it home. Welcome. We have enough resources to share.

I myself also feel deeply connected to the long-time families who built our beautiful borough and honor their contributions. When I moved here nearly twenty years ago now, I bought a house built by the Moylans, rented a house from the Gressits, spent time living in a home built in 1918 (I remember this because as a Yankee fan sitting in the Section 39 bleachers at Yankee stadium for years, we always chanted that when the Red Sox were in town, among other things- my Red Sox fan husband wanted me to take that part out, too. Sorry Paul.). Now my husband and I (and the dogs that outnumber us) live in our house within steps of our iconic Stone Bridge. My point is, everyone who lives here chose Atlantic Highlands. We choose to live here, stay here, return here, and as neighbors make this Borough the best place to live.

Speaking of those dogs, another great piece of advice that was given to me recently is that every day I will make decisions that almost certainly will not please everyone. But when I get home, my dogs will still love me. I’ve really taken that to heart.

My plan is to be both practical and aspirational. We need to think long-term and this council will undertake steps to do strategic planning that addresses climate change, our aging infrastructure, and making our Borough a place where our seniors and other vulnerable populations thrive. We will also work to promote the arts community through public art installations. To improve communications, we will continue Council office hours this week on Thursdays and I will personally have weekly office hours on Mondays beginning January 22nd. We will also bring back the monthly newsletter in electronic form and delivered in paper form for those who request it and we will have schoolhouse rock-style workshop items on the agenda that ensure the public understands how local government works.

All of this will be in partnership with the outstanding employees of our Borough led by Borough Administrator Rob Ferragina. We are truly blessed to have a wonderful team of employees within Borough Hall who handle the daily business of running our town. There isn’t a team that works harder and they deserve acknowledgement for the long hours they keep. Michelle Clark, Beth Merkel, Katherine Pooler, Nancy Tran, Rich Colangelo, Ric Lanos, Janice Swaggerty, Jim Phillips, Lou Fligor, Marty Hawley and the Borough employees of the Harbor, Public Works, and the Water/Sewer department deserve our thanks. We have the best police department I dare say in the state of NJ led by Chief Scott Reinert and his officers. And of course we owe a huge debt to the dedicated volunteers of our First Aid Squad and Fire Departments for their service.

I want to additionally thank our clerk, Michelle Clark, for making this day flawless and truly a celebration. You are the glue, Michelle.

We are almost there. It is important for us to acknowledge that the land on which we stand is the ancestral territory of the Lenape People. Please join me in paying respect to Indigenous people throughout the Lenape diaspora–past, present, and future–and honor those that have been historically and systemically disenfranchised. Our town was settled first by the Lenape People and let us now live in harmony with the nature and land they left for us. Thank you, lifelong resident Elaine Egidio, for reminding me of the important connection we have with our ancestors.

My husband, Paul Anselmo, did some research and it turns out that if the partner of a female-identifying mayor is a man, he shall be called First Consort. Paul would apparently like to be called Mr. Consort as it is a bit more casual. So, ~~Mr. Consort, you are my whole world. You make all of this possible.~~ It is important to both of us that our family be a family of service to the community both publicly and privately. My parents and my sister have all been public servants and volunteers every year of our lives. I come from strong stock, folks. And very strong women, in particular. That’s why having so many young girls encouraging me- my biggest cheerleaders- makes me so committed to doing the best job possible for you, for them, for our community.

As I finish this message to my community, and transition to Pastor Brian Rawls, whose church yesterday gave me the warmest welcome I have ever experienced- let’s agree that the faith community in Atlantic Highlands is strong. Thank you also to Pastor Nicole Hamilton for your beautiful invocation. My visit to St. Paul’s yesterday actually overwhelmed me with the love and support that was so authentic and grounded. Thank you for the invitation. I can’t wait to continue our partnership. I want to steal a little of Rev. Dr. Natalie Mitchem’s incredible sermon where she tells us that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. And while many of us are not religious, the spirit still works. For all.

To close, I will quote the very wise Leslie Knope of Parks and Recreation fame. She had some good ones. One of my favorites is,

“What I hear when I’m being yelled at is people caring really loudly at me.” Thank you!

But the one that resonates now is this.

"Now go find your team. Get to work. Whatever that work is that you find worth doing. Do it, and find some people to love who'll do it with you."

We have a town built on history and tradition. Let’s honor our past while acknowledging that we need to constantly reinvest in what we have. Thank you for trusting me to be your Mayor.