

Madam President, Madam Vice-President, Members of the City Council, people of Superior,

How do you talk about our city? When people visit, or you tell someone where you're from, what do you say about Superior? What are the stories you tell? What are you most proud of? I've been asking myself that question for several weeks now because the answer can build a pretty great policy agenda. As I said last year, it's too easy to reduce government to just the basics like taxes, streets, and utilities. We obviously must meet those obligations, and I think we've built a pretty great reputation here for doing that. But government can do more, much more, if we look at our city with vision and pride. Because the City of Superior and the Superior City Council is not just some public corporation, some business providing basic service. Citizens trusted us to take care of their home, and to make it better. I think the best way to do that is to really think about what's already great here, what keeps us here, and what makes this place home and then invest in those things. As we move from tonight into our budget process and the policy year ahead, I want you to keep this question in mind: If you entertained a visitor to our city tomorrow, or a year from now, or ten years from now, what would you show them? What would you brag about? What would they remember? Whatever that story is, let's invest in it and build it together.

I promised you a shorter speech this year, and then that promise ran in the newspaper so I'll try to keep this quick. But it's been another great year and I wanted to highlight a few things and try to set a vision for the year to come.

The City of Superior made a lot of news in the last year. We created at least 30 new childcare openings by issuing grants to 10 childcare providers. We created a broadband utility to deliver faster, cheaper internet for everyone. We issued grants to nonprofits, namely churches, that usually wouldn't be eligible for government grants. We lowered the city wastewater fee. We introduced paid family leave for city employees. We hired a new grants consultant to pursue a \$20 million Climate Justice grant. We launched the city's first composting program. We lit up East End at Christmas.

Some of you may have already caught the pattern here. None of these achievements began with me or with the administration. They were all the initiatives of city councilors. This list isn't complete but even if this were all we did, this would still be the most productive city council I've seen in over 15 years with local government. You did it by working with each other, with me, and with our staff. Even now, many of you are actively pursuing new policies and initiatives that will improve our city and justify the trust our citizens placed in us.

I know I'm leaving out a lot of your work. I'm leaving out nearly all of mine as well. We know what we've done together. I think the public knows too. But I want you to see and remember just how effective we can be when we work together to make our city a better place. What it looks like when we take each other seriously, even if someone's idea is novel, or seems impossible, or even if it seems irresponsible. I think we owe it to each other to just listen and ask ourselves, "what if?". What if my colleague is right? What if we tried something new? What if we just took a few risks?"

This City has eleven elected leaders, not one. When we trust each other, when we follow each other's lead, we accomplish more than any one of us would have ever been able to achieve alone. Councilors, we've had a great year because you have worked harder than ever before and your work is paying off. You have my gratitude for your ideas and your vision, but

more importantly, you have my support. My commitment to you then, in the year ahead, is to say “yes” to you as often as I can. Bring me more ideas. Bring me lofty goals. Bring me the nearly impossible. I’m committing to you now that my staff and I will do everything we can to help you achieve your goals for this city.

You’ve already brought me several ideas and, for the year ahead, I have a few of my own.

We created the Connect Superior Broadband utility. Now it’s time to hook people up. The RFP for construction of phase one is out right now. We hope to beta test the network by connecting the first batch of customers this year and fully launch the network by spring of 2025. By that point, I hope to also tell you how we’ll fund and develop phase two and beyond so that every citizen and business in Superior has access to a fast, reliable, and affordable connection.

We’ve nearly completed the public input stage for our skatepark rebuild. We plan to release the preliminary design this summer and the final design this fall but, having met with skaters of all ages and heard their input, I can already tell you that this will be the best municipal skatepark in the upper Midwest.

We are going to finally launch our new public art grants, giving citizen artists the chance to beautify their own city.

We are going to open Woodstock Bay Park, an all new waterfront experience in the city’s west end and a major step toward my goal to integrate water into every neighborhood in Superior.

We will, literally, grow the city by adding new green infrastructure elements to every park and public works project, protecting our lake and rivers and adding beauty and life to every neighborhood.

We are going to propose, and hopefully pass, strong new laws against vaping and vape shops in our city. These products and their dealers have caused an epidemic in our schools, threatening the health and lives of children. This stuff is poisoning kids. I hope you’ll all stand with me and pass the toughest rules in our state.

We are also going to protect our whole city, especially kids, from the dangers of lead water lines. This year we will begin the process of replacing every single lead pipe in the city.

We are going to re-write our entire zoning code, legalizing diversity and growth while protecting the character of our neighborhoods and our built heritage.

We are going to design new fire halls for the East End and North End neighborhoods. They’ll be the most efficient, modern, and adaptable fire halls in the state and, hopefully, make their neighborhoods a little nicer.

Late last year, I declared Superior a “Halloween City” and, quite frankly, the people loved it. So I think we ought to lean in. This year I’m proposing... Actually, you know what? I think we’ll just let that one be a surprise. See you in October.

I asked you to save the Princess, and you did. We have a lot of work ahead of us before we bring a working theater back to downtown but, as a reward and a thank you for taking a chance on the arts, we are going to throw a bit of a party at the site of the theater this summer and fill our downtown with art and music.

But we won’t forget the basics either. We can still do the boring stuff. We can keep taxes and fees low. We can invest more in our streets and sidewalks. We can finish our property revaluation. We can improve our utilities. We can keep our parks and trails and beaches and our

lake clean. We don't have to sacrifice anything just because we choose to invest in innovation. Cities can do more than one thing. The cities that challenge themselves to do many things, for many people, are the cities that grow and thrive.

This list isn't complete. You can each name something I've either left off or that you'd like to add. That's okay, because we've got the time and resources to accomplish a lot, but only by working together. If every single city councilor would commit to a single project or policy or initiative this year, we can make next year's State of the City speech even easier to write than this one.

Every year, I use this speech to show us what we accomplished in the year before and set some goals for the year ahead. But the point of this event is to take stock of where we are right now. What is the State of our City, today?

Now, you know what I'm going to say. The same thing I always say. The state of our city is strong, stronger than it's ever been. I admit though, I am something of a biased source and, if you love this city as much as I do, you are too. I think we are all quite proud of where we live, at least I hope so. But I'm pleased to tell you that the rest of the world is starting to take notice too. There's a reason the President has been here twice, including the day after his State of the Union address. There's a reason the Governor has been here twenty times, and named us in his State of the State address. In my first State of the City address I called us a city on the rise. Since then, our population has grown, countless businesses have opened, housing has expanded, tourism has flourished, and, just a month ago, Standard and Poor's upgraded our economic outlook from "weak" to "strong". Some of us always knew this was a great city. Tonight, I'm proud to tell you everyone else knows it too.

Great cities have great stories to tell. Great stories are built around great characters. That's why I've closed each State of the City speech with a Citizen of the Year. I've never had strict criteria and I don't accept nominations, but I know them when I see them. I've typically looked for someone that's more than a volunteer or a public servant. I look for someone who's whole life and work have made our city better, or helped define who we are. I'm trying to find the legends among us. Considering the past awards have gone to Barb Certa-Warner, John Nousainne, Larry Quam, Will Mowchan, and Butch Liebaert, I'd say I've done a pretty good job so far.

Legends are stories. They are the way we describe ourselves, to ourselves, and to the people that will come after us. We honor the people that show us at our best. We want people to look at folks like Chief Osaugie or Major Bong or Lew Martin or Peter Rich so that we can say, "That's who Superior is. That's the kind of people we are". And that's the kind of person I'm looking for when I choose a citizen of the year.

Our next citizen of the year is not just our finest citizen today, but one of our greatest ever. She is a teacher, a musician, a historian, an artist, and a storyteller. She attracts visitors and admirers from around the world. She already has a building named for her. And many of you may not have even met her. So it is therefore my great pleasure to introduce you to our 2024 citizen of the year, The Legendary, Dr. Helmi Harrington.

Dr. Harrington is the founder and curator of the Harrington Arts Center on Hammond Ave and Belknap Street which at any given time may be the world's largest collection of accordion-family instruments. From the heart of Superior she runs a global institution that not

only collects and repairs these instruments, but also houses an incomparable library of art and music. Her "World of Accordions" museum attracts performers and fans from all over the world. She herself continues to teach and perform while constantly, indefatigably working to improve her museum and protect it for future generations. Thanks to her, Superior, Wisconsin is nationally and globally recognized as a center of art, music, learning, and timeless beauty. She is, quite possibly, our greatest storyteller and now counts among the least of her lifetime honors the title: Citizen of the Year.

If you find yourself entertaining a visitor this summer, Dr. Harrington has given you at least one truly unique thing to show them that they won't see anywhere else in the world. She's given us all something to be proud of. So what's next? What else should we be proud of? Where else will we take our guests so that they tell stories about Superior after they leave? That's what I hope to hear from all of you in the weeks ahead. Tell me what makes this city great and what would make it better. Then let's invest in those things. Let's preserve, expand, grow, protect, and build a city that makes us all proud. A city with great streets, with great parks, with beautiful woods and waters. A city with great people. A city with great stories to tell.

Thank you.