

One year ago this month in July 2016, I was sworn in as one of the five elected members of Salem City Council. Our citizens elected me to represent and voice concerns as the City conducts business on our behalf reflecting our values and culture. In this first year, I have done that to best of my ability. It is an honor to serve the citizens of Salem.

There are many things about serving on City Council that cannot be foreseen nor taught. These lessons are only and best learned through experience. The pace of Government is slower than most of our daily lives and does not move as fast as for-profit businesses. Initiatives the City began years ago are only now bearing fruit because the economy improved enough to allow the wheels of progress to turn to refresh our best in class expectations for Salem. And, no matter the best efforts, learnings and accomplishments of current City Council and staff, some will not allow public servants to meet expectations with little regard for the incremental progress made at the pace local government allows. True, we in Salem ever strive for and demand excellence. However, seeking the truth and looking in the mirror at our own actual contributions and circumstance are better suited to measure current City performance rather than comparing to past endeavors or perceived greener grass from other times here or elsewhere.

My first-year experience on City Council has confirmed my understanding of our citizens' service expectation, demand of excellence and a sincere willingness to cooperate under the city code and rule of law. I've also learned of the divisive power of misunderstanding and false narratives used to undermine efforts and create confusion and distrust of leadership intentions that exists. Still, I believe we as citizens and workers of Salem make our best effort every day to believe in each other and work toward common goals for mutual success. My belief in Salem will never change, ever.

I've learned that much of what Council does is procedural, allowing and encouraging City employees to function as creative individuals in an environment Council and City Management fosters to successfully execute duties of their departmental processes & services. There are many property zoning, building permit and rights of way changes that regularly come before Council. We also consider tax & fee rates, City employee pay classifications, raises and retirement contributions as the budget allows with all the competing priorities.

As far as providing at least a partial report card of specific City business that was completed over the past year, or is still occurring, the following may help if you haven't been able to make it to Council meetings on the 2nd and 4th Monday of every month at City Hall. In my view, each member of City Council has supported and offered guidance in some way on the projects, progress and issues listed below.

Working with City staff, Council tries to balance our projected revenues with budgeted operational, state mandated and needed capital improvement expenses. As an area of focus, economic development is approached as an overlay that draws from all City resources and initiatives including our Schools Division as part of the narrative in my view. About half of the school division budget comes from our City taxes. As part of an economic development approach, investing in City & Schools Division staff and leadership is key to maintaining and improving the Salem brand including education and city service level expectation. However, in doing that, we must ensure balance of pay scale for comparable staff in leadership and skill level positions across both the city & school divisional workforces. The soon to be finalized, professional consultant led, City staff performance based compensation study should help address to-be identified pay gaps for City staff whose earnings aren't in line with market baseline values nor similar positions within the Schools Division. This study is to identify targeted compensation deficiencies the City can address with already budgeted current-year pay raise funds. The City's improving financial health has allowed this adjustment and balance of pay rates to occur. Salem has been known for having competitive compensation and a genuinely fulfilling workplace. Aging workforce retirement and staff departure decisions due to compensation and/or culture conflicts are critical risks for many customer service-oriented employers like Salem. It is important to me that we invest in existing and new City workers compensation and career fulfilling culture as a leading employer and business partner in our area.

One aspect of capital improvement in Salem that has improved from years past is our beneficial and growing relationship with VDOT. Currently, we have over \$35MM in capital projects and planning studies for improvement project areas ranging from bridge & superstructure (Colorado St & Apperson Dr), East Main St, Downtown/College Av, Greenways, RT419 and Boulevard Safety Corridors & others in Salem. The Community Development Department has and continues to be our champion with VDOT funding.

In many circles, Salem is known for first-class facilities and infrastructure. Nearly every week, emails from the Public Information Office about utility infrastructure work going in the City on are sent out. There have been 70+ email notifications about utility infrastructure projects occurring since last July. While there can and will always be more utility infrastructure repair and maintenance need than funding, we should all thank our utility service leaders & crews for doing the work that is asked of them along with going above and beyond once on the job site. Investment in and repair of City utility infrastructure is occurring.

In addition to sustaining the underground and overhead network of utility services we all depend on daily, other City amenities also require regular maintenance to meet our expectation of excellence. In the past year, new mowing tractor, excavator and a dump truck with snow plow capability equipment was purchased. Improvements & needed repairs have been made to Salem Stadium and Salem Memorial Baseball Stadium that added greatly to the successful 2017 Carolina League All-Star Classic held there this year. And, Longwood park restroom facilities have been addressed with ideas for future upgrades. New police equipment including two patrol SUVs (one for DUI task force) and a detective vehicle has been acquired. We also have the new Fire Engine Truck 1 and a new ambulance being obtained. These are purchased with a combination of City and grant funding. There is certainly more facility renovation & improvement work to do in our parks, stadiums, concession areas, civic center, high school etc. but, I can report genuine willingness and improving revenue resources to creatively address our needs. We will continue to have top-notch facilities.

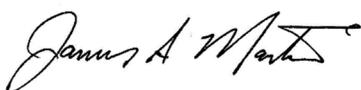
Economic development is a process. There are many moving parts and pieces to align public & private investment capital & incentives, available land in the most suitable locality, business supply & demand feasibility studies, building conceptual design or redevelopment, public expectations & sentiment and of course the will of public officers and private investors to execute. Along the way, personality conflicts, legal constraints and an ever-changing business climate creates many new challenges and opportunities until the deals are closed. While our local neighbors have had significant economic announcements (medical research, breweries, auto parts manufactures, etc.), we in Salem are seeing our own economic upgrade. Both large and small economic investments & existing business growth is occurring in Salem. Some are well documented but many are confidential among private investors with only some including the City. Many are looking forward to the very real 3+ apartment buildings, 2+ breweries, 4+ restaurants, a hotel and new grocery store building plans to name a few. Our existing industrial manufacturers are also said to be expanding workforces and a large industrial development opportunity with the former Valleydale property has new marketable life of its own. The larger opportunity with our 100+ acre investment along I-81 with the other City and Roanoke County is actively being worked by the Roanoke Regional Partnership to land the next big thing for our region. Although challenges and transitioning of brick & mortar storefronts are a concern in Salem and nationally, there is much to be encouraged about economically that will eventually create new revenue for the City to further reinvest in our workforce and other critical assets. As we all know, individual and business financial security is a recurring challenge but I've seen real, positive change and opportunity for Salem in my first year on City Council.

Notwithstanding, there have also been sticky issues for more than a few concerned citizens over the past year such as civic center hotel neighbors, solid waste transfer station sale, farmers market development ideas, temporary Mount Regis treatment center downtown location and even the Oakey's field tree removal for utilities as we prepare for East Main Street improvements. I see much more to be inspired about than to be filled with regret and resentment over these issues or city management styles. For example, the solid waste transfer station sale decision was difficult with many competing factors but has proven to be financially and strategically beneficial for the City that looks to return benefits for many years. We must believe in ourselves to lead & lean forward into what's next, trust & be patient with our neighbors and public servants as we are to ourselves giving nothing but the very best constructive help we have to offer each other and our City right here, right now and for all our children's tomorrows to come.

Lastly, as we celebrate our 241st year of National Independence on July Fourth this week and our 50th year of City Independence this coming December 31st, I'd also like to thank the other members of Salem City Council, City Staff, Citizens, Business Owners, Planning Commission, School Division, Coaches and many others both past & present for the encouragement, guidance and patience they have given me to pursue my role in support our self-government in Salem beginning many years back. I ask that you give the same courtesy, support and prayer for all our civic leaders that are truly trying to make a difference for the betterment of us all as we move forward into our future together.

I look forward to my second year and the remainder of my four-year term as an elected member of Salem City Council. It is a privilege I hold in high regard.

God bless & Go Salem!



James A. Martin, Salem City Council

jmartin@salemva.gov