

MELROSE

The 2025 State of the City address

Note: Mayor Jen Grigoraitis taped her 2025 State of the City address recently on MMTV instead of spending money on a traditional ceremony in Memorial Hall. These are her remarks.

Hello Melrose, and thank you for taking the time to tune in to the 2025 State of the City address.

Many thanks also to the team at MMTV for hosting this address.

As I begin my second year as your Mayor, I am honored to serve and lead this community that we all love.

I hope to use this State of the City message to talk with you

about the challenges facing our city and the opportunities to work together for the common good, as well as things we can do to stand up for our shared values and make a difference right here at home in Melrose, in our Commonwealth, and in the nation.

As the Mayor of Melrose, I am pleased to report that in 2025, the state of our city is strong.

However, we also face some challenging fiscal headwinds and political uncertainty, particularly at the federal level, that are cause for concern.

Looking back on the last year,

for a bit of a review, I am proud of the accomplishments of this great City during the first year of my mayoral administration.

With the support of the Melrose City Council, we took steps to tackle a set of connected challenges: affordability and housing. We doubled the cap on the senior property tax work-off exemption, ensuring that older residents can earn up to a \$2,000 property tax abatement in exchange for volunteer work with City departments—staffing, which also

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improves the responsiveness and effectiveness of City government, even during a time in which many of our departments are weathering budget cuts with smaller full-time teams.

During a time of rising rents, median home prices, and mortgage rates, our newly revived Affordable Housing Trust is developing the tools and policies needed to make sure that residents can afford their lives here. The Trust Fund secured an award for direct technical assistance from the Massachusetts Housing Partnership to help identify goals, strategies and necessary procedures to focus the board's efforts as its work begins anew this year.

We renewed the Melrose Community Power competitive electric supply program, which provides more stable energy rates in a time of market turmoil and gives our residents the option to draw from greener power sources in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and lower their carbon footprint.

Thanks to the leadership of our Health and Human Services Department and the Board of Health, Melrose continues to be a regional leader on tobacco control policy. As the manufacturers of tobacco, nicotine and vaping products continue to prey on the health and wealth of our young people, our Nicotine-Free Generation policy drives another nail into the coffin of this predatory industry while protecting our children from addiction and lifelong health problems.

In recognition of the high-quality and reliable work of the Melrose Cultural

Council in support of local arts and culture initiatives, the City directed the \$20,000 available via the Melrose Mesina Fund for the Arts to the Melrose Cultural Council to improve and streamline their common mission of grantmaking for community arts and culture endeavors in the City of Melrose.

Within City Hall and City departments, the highest priority of my administration has been to deliver high-quality, high-impact services to the people of Melrose. We have worked to improve the frequency, quality and clarity of community communications, issuing weekly email newsletters and submissions to our local press, a monthly bulletin on the activities of local non-profit organizations, and regular episodes of our local access show here on MMTV, the Melrose Minute.

We've also made the accessibility of our communications a top priority, adopting new integrated accessibility tools on our city website in advance of a larger review and overhaul of the site.

Our City departments have continued to improve service delivery. The Department of Public Works has increased access to the City Yard for yard waste drop-off, recycling events, and other services based on resident requests and feedback.

The Council on Aging has continued to grow membership rolls and program opportunities at the Milano Senior Center. My office has launched monthly office hours for direct engagement with residents on the issues they hope to address.

These efforts to make the City work better for all would not be possible without important management and oversight work also undertaken by this administration.

Under the leadership of our Chief Financial Officer, the City has received a clean audit report from an independent auditor and delivered balanced and responsible budgets.

Our Human Resources team launched the City's first comprehensive employee handbook in years, setting clear policies and expectations for employee conduct and management.

I have proudly hired or promoted seven Department Heads, which follow retirements or resignations by others, during my first year in office. In gratitude for their excellence and commitment to this community, I would like to acknowledge those individuals:

- City Auditor and Chief Financial Officer Kerri Golden
- Fire Chief John White
- Parks Director Rob Carillo
- Veterans Services Director Gayle-Jean Angelo
- City Clerk Tanji Cifuni
- Director of Planning Lori Massa
- Chief Information Officer Tom Smulligan

But in the finest tradition of New England local government, the most vital members of our City government are the dozens of appointees, elected officials and others who form the civic backbone of our decision-making and government oversight—many of whom serve our shared

community as volunteers, without compensation. I am proud that in the last year, I have made 23 new mayoral appointments and 25 reappointments to our crucial City boards and commissions. These appointments and reappointments resolve backlogs of empty seats and lapsed terms reaching back years.

Above all, our City's greatest resource and accomplishment is our people, especially the people who come to work for us and serve the community each day.

Last year, we settled 18 months of contract negotiations with the union representing the uniformed firefighters of the Melrose Fire Department. The three-year agreement provides increased wages and other benefits for the City's dedicated front-line first responders and equips the City with new tools to address chronic firefighter and paramedic staffing shortages.

And this week, I am proud to announce that the Melrose School Committee reached an important one-year contract extension for teachers and paraprofessionals in our schools. In addition to addressing the cost-of-living crisis facing our educators, this critical agreement ensures that the next school year will not be disrupted by labor actions or contract breakdowns as we have seen in so many other cities and towns.

The City government is nothing without the community it serves, and Melrose City Hall continues to support and promote an incredible number of community events, including the following from the past year: