

Landmarks 2020 Annual Awards for Achievement in support of Albany's Historic Districts.

Bill Ryals will present the Legacy Award for lifetime achievement in support of our historic districts.

Thank you Kerry and thank you to the counsel for the opportunity to be here tonight. This is our last award for the evening. It is for Legacy. We have never given this award before and likely never will again. This award goes beyond dedication or sacrifice, it is beyond a lifetime achievement, this award is for Legacy. Not only does this person deserve our thanks for a lifetime of work, this person deserves the thanks of generations to come. I think you all know who I am talking about.



I first met Sharon at South Albany High School. We were 15 years old. Seems like only yesterday. I suppose no one at the time would have predicted how profoundly she would change our town and all of our lives with it, but we saw the glimmer, we saw the promise, we knew she was bound for something special, we just didn't know that she would bring us along for the ride. For that, I am eternally grateful.

When Sharon began her work frankly things around here were a mess. Our little town was trapped in a downward spiral, a hollowing out that threatened our very foundations. Common wisdom held that the future belonged to fancy malls and big box stores with oceans of parking. People said we should just let our little historic town die quietly. But not Sharon. She had a different vision. A different idea. She believed our historic town was more than worth saving. That it was who we were.

That our small businesses and restaurants and those old buildings were our true future. The idea that maybe we could find ourselves by honoring our past. Perhaps she was naive, perhaps she didn't realize the magnitude of the battles that ahead of her, perhaps she didn't care. She set to work anyway. From the start she was a breath of fresh air. It wasn't long before we realized that breath was a force of nature. Sharon had vision, she had determination, but more than that she believed in us. And soon we believed in her. She believed that together we could do anything. Anything. We didn't need a Walmart to tell us who we were, or what we could do. All we needed was each other.

Today our little town is breathing new life. The downtown has turned around. Our future is bright. And we have Sharon to thank for it all. To list her accomplishments and accolades would take all night long. So let me sum it up by saying that she served us with a vision and determination that seldom seen in our world. She served with a grace that borders on nobility. Sharon believes in us. All of us. She saved us. She is the best of us. It is with great honor and considerable humility that Landmarks tonight presents the award for Legacy in support of our historic districts to Mayor Sharon Konopa. Madam Mayor, we owe you a debt that can never be paid.

Bill Ryals, Landmarks Commissioner
December 2, 2020