

STATE OF THE CITY, 2022

Good evening,

I thank you for taking the time to listen to my 3rd State of the City address. I am excited to deliver the news of projects and improvements planned over the next year, but first I must give credit to those that helped get us to where we are now. City council and city employees worked hard through another strenuous year of Covid-19. Despite the obstacles, we accomplished many noteworthy achievements for the city and residents in 2021 and they need to be recognized for their hard work and commitment.

Let's talk about

FINANCIAL

The financial summary of 2021 was a positive one, which is a tremendous accomplishment considering a few years ago the City of Watervliet was listed by the state Comptroller's Office as one of the most financially distressed municipalities in the state. Today, I am delighted to state that we expect surpluses in all three operating funds. The surpluses are a result of responsible budgeting and tough decisions that were in the best interest for the city and its residents.

Revenue generated from 2021 was significantly higher than expected, primarily due to sales tax. We budgeted to receive \$3.45M in sales tax and received more than \$4.2M. We budgeted for \$970K in state aid but received \$1.4M, which included the residual aid from the 2020 pandemic year. Responsible budgeting – not wishful or hopeful budgeting – will keep the city's finances in order and off the most distressed list and more importantly a 0% tax increase.

We are still working with the New York State Financial Review Board (FRB) to receive grant funding for our accounting system. The appropriate adjustments were made when the FRB met in late 2020 to allow us to continue moving forward with the grant.

In the coming year, we look to continue with the FRB to purchase the City's streetlights and convert all city lighting to LED. If we can accomplish this, the FRB will grant the city up to \$340,000. This conversion will not only save taxpayers money but will result in a more energy efficient city. We just received proposals and will select a company to help guide us through the purchase of the streetlights and the installation of new LED lights. We will work in partnership to ensure we are leading and advocating in the fight against climate change and more importantly energy savings for future years to come.

Lets talk BUSINESS

We have dedicated a higher focus on our businesses, which were forced to deal with unique challenges because of the pandemic. This focus will continue to help support, encourage, and ensure their survival and growth. We partnered with the City of Troy in the development of the Congress Street bridge study. That effort will link the downtown growth in Troy with our area and attractions, such as Hudson Shores Park, the bike trail, and our restaurants. Our General Manager has been in ongoing discussions with potential developers to purchase vacant buildings for development. Stay tuned to hear more about the former Selby gas station, Luk Oil and Papa's Restaurant.

This year will mark the 2nd Annual Restaurant Week in Watervliet. City restaurant owners stated that last year's event was a tremendous success; and we look forward to working with them again to continue that success for years to come. Check out the city web site for updates on Restaurant Week

CODE Enforcement is very important to the health of our community

Our building code is now under review for improvements. The city reached out to a consultant to review and make recommendations that will strengthen our control of neglected and troubled properties. These changes will contribute to the stabilization of our neighborhoods. The city hired a Code Inspector with intentions for a second inspector to be hired to help keep up with the apartment inspection programs. 380 apartments were inspected for occupancy, and 492 violations were filed in 2021. The city strives to continue to work with building owners to seek resolution rather than impose fines but, when necessary, will do so to ensure the safety of the neighborhood. The same principle is intended for garbage violations. Appearance is important to the quality of life, health and well-being of our residents and visitors; and we will continue to work to improve our appearance. With help from DPW, we remediated 32 issues to maintain vacant properties, secure buildings and remove debris. 239 building permits were issued.

DPW

Thanks to the help of Albany County DPW, we have been assessing our equipment needs and reviewing our fleet. To date, 2 trucks, a snow pusher for our tractor, as well as attachments for the Ventrac machine have been added to improve our fleet. We recently hired 2 new members to support our fleet in 2022. The city also plans to join with the Town of Colonie for assistance in repaving 8th Avenue. This is another great example of working together with our adjoining municipalities to get the jobs done.

This year that our bulk day at Hudson Shores Park will be held in May as well as an Electronic Recycling Day. Further details will be announced on the city website.

ENERGY

The city of Watervliet has always considered the environment a high priority. The administration plans to refocus on areas where both expenses and energy can be saved. Our monthly bills are being analyzed to identify fluctuations to aid in reduction of our energy consumption. It was identified that our solar panels were not operational and have been working to get them resurrected to perform as intended. As previously mentioned, we recently bid for our streetlight purchase and will continue with this endeavor. Electric vehicles, from all indications, is the wave of the future and Watervliet is now part of that plan. 12 electric stations were installed in 3 locations and now are now operational. The city also intends to acquire an electric vehicle for our fleet as well in the near future.

FIRE DEPARTMENT

Our fire department proudly continued to operate effectively and professionally over the past year. They responded to 2,571 calls, including 5 structure fires, and assisted in calls for mutual aid 18 times. Thanks to a Federal Assistance to Firefighter's Grant, we were able to send three firefighters to paramedic school at no cost to the city. The department will continue to support

the efforts to fight Covid-19 with response to virus related calls. Our fleet is currently at full occupancy, making up 25 men. In 2021, the city had a rare major structure fire resulting in the loss of 3 homes and displaced 12 individuals. Fortunately, no one was injured and those that lost their homes have been relocated. The city administration was able to raise nearly \$20,000 that was disbursed to those residents to help with their loss.

POLICE DEPARTMENT

In 2021 we welcomed Police Chief Centanni to our team, and he was sworn in this past March and diligently leads the department of 26 men with the addition of 3 new men to the ranks. Chief Centanni released his departmental report, indicating the number of calls and activity for the department showing a strong emphasis on safety. As you are aware there has been an increase in violence among all of our neighboring communities. We are not exempt from this senseless violence. Efforts are being made to ensure safety to the best of our ability. In 2021, WPD removed 13 firearms from the streets, the majority resulting from vehicle stops. The city's first gun buyback program was held with the assistance of the Attorney General's office and neighboring police agencies taking another 30 guns off the streets. We continued to show our support to public safety by purchasing two new police vehicles and just recently started the process to purchase Body Cameras for our men.

The Watervliet School District and Police Department worked together to reinstitute the school resource officer. This role is intended to reconnect our youth and community through encouragement and communication. Communication between our WPD and residents will always remain a high priority, to strengthen that focus, a Public Information Officer has been added to the team.

The police department and city council worked together to offer a bike registration program that will be available in the spring. This will enable residents to register their bicycles and by receiving a tag and a photo, it will assist in the recovery of a lost or stolen bicycle.

A full copy of the WPD annual report will be attached, and we appreciate their many efforts in making our community better and safer.

WATER/SEWER

I believe one of the most important assets to our city residents is our water reservoir. To improve our reservoir's water quality, we purchased a harvester to help reduce water chestnuts clogging up our reservoir. This will begin in June and continue through September. Our reservoir has a hydroelectric plant that needs Federal government licensing, the effort to gain license has been going on for over 2 years. This ongoing effort is expected to be completed next month which will secure the city with a 40-year license. A few years ago, the Town of Guilderland increased our tax assessment in 2019 over 5 times the original value so we filed a grievance and then a subsequent lawsuit, to fight this increase. Despite the increase in the tax expense, we maintained a zero increase in both Water/Sewer rates.

The final engineering design phase are currently being reviewed for Phase 1 of the two phase sewer separation project. This project includes \$1.2 million in grant with a \$3.5 million in-house share. We have hopes for construction of Phase 1 this year and plan for Phase 2 next year.

A filter plant grant is currently underway with engineering and expected to begin construction this spring/summer. This includes a new computer monitoring system, boiler, fencing, new garage for our vehicles and other mechanical improvement items.

Our team is reviewing applications of those residents who applied to have their lead water lines replaced and we expect award those homeowners in early spring. Priority is for homes with children under 6 years old.

PARKS

2021 was another productive year for our city parks and events. Covid-19 impacted some of our routine events, such as the Memorial Day parade, but overall, we were able to continue to host a few of the older and some new events. I want to thank everyone who participated in making them happen. A few key events are listed as follows:

- ✓ The City's Arsenal City Run, with over 200 runners crossing the finish line
- ✓ Hudson Shores Park hosted a successful antique car show
- ✓ WFD, WPD, Arsenal and city leaders gathered for the 9/11 Ceremony at our Elks Club
- ✓ The city pool opened and ran successfully, registering a record number of passes.
- ✓ Thankful for the generous gift of \$500,000 from a former resident and owner of Twin Bridges to build a Splash-Spray pool area for our children. Also, the help and donation of yet another connected resident and owner of Wizard Works for the design work is now underway and we expect it to be open for this pool season.
- ✓ The Dome was very active in 2021. It provided year-round programming for our city residents with the help of Albany County and private renters. The dome generated its highest revenue ever, which was reinvested back into our parks.
- ✓ The Watervliet Charitable Foundation donated over \$100,000 to build a structure at the foot of the Congress Street Bridge to honor the Meneely Bell foundry. This created a gateway to our rich history showing the importance Watervliet played in the industrial revolution. Meneely Foundry produced over 65,000 bells placed all around the world. The foundation is led by again a former resident, John Razzano.
- ✓ Our city benefited from the participation of our area boy scouts who require a project to earn their Eagle Scout rank. One scout chose to paint the fence around the entire city pool that hasn't been painted in over 30 years and another scout purchased and planted shrubs around the new bell memorial on 19th St.
- ✓ A large amount of work was completed on the bike trail in 2021. A minor list of items remains, but the trail has proven to be well used and drawing both city and non-city residents to enjoy.
- ✓ Our tree committee has been busy working to maintain the quality and increase the number of trees here in the city. We received a grant to remove over 100 tree stumps around the city and we also received a grant from National grid to plant 100 additional trees, a value of \$30,000. The committee also conducted a memorial program where 40 residents paid for the cost of tree and will have a plaque installed in memory of their loved one. The money generated will allow additional trees to be placed around the city.
- ✓ National Grid Foundation awarded us \$15,000 to replace the bollards at Red's field and materials to make 15 new picnic benches to be built by yet another boy scout.

- ✓ We also received a gift from the Crinigan family to install a small Meneely bell memorial in honor of their parents at the Gazebo Park, located near the long-time family home, in Port Schuyler section of the city this coming year.

RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT

A key to our success is the support and involvement of our residents. Redemption Church has been a significant supporter by holding bi-monthly food distribution events handing out tons of food and hot meal programs for city residents. Last year, a large group of volunteers gathered at the Dome to make beds for children who live in our city. We joined with the organization *Sleep in Heavenly Peace* and made 45 beds for children in our area. Covid-19 clinics were held with the help of the county and their partners to administer vaccinations for our residents, providing over 1000 shots. We recently sent out a survey to our senior citizens inquiring what services they were lacking. Covid-19 brought forward the recognition to the lack of some of our senior needs. We are currently analyzing the surveys and will be working on increasing services to better support our seniors. We were notified that we received \$500,000 to help our lower-income residents with some needed home repairs. We are currently developing our guidelines and will be awarding approximately 30 or more of our resident's grants with those available funds.

GENERAL

Currently the City is working on several improvement projects on city owned buildings and plan to complete them in 2022. The repair to the soffits at City Hall has been awarded and soon the replacement of windows at City Hall will be going to bid. Both improvements received funding from Assemblyman John McDonald and Senator Neil Breslin.

The waterfront project we're intending to include boat docks, a restaurant, and other amenities for Hudson Shores Park in 2022. We're currently working with a company to provide a tour boat operating out of the park. In 2021, we hired two individuals to help support the overall operations of the city to help in the development of these and future projects. A study has been conducted to see what the possibility would be to move the court room to the church located near the museum. We're currently reviewing these recommendations and decide how to move forward.

We will continue to work on improvements and ideas to help lay the foundation for continued growth here in the city. We are looking forward to working with our residents to provide the best possible living conditions possible, despite Covid-19 throwing a wrench in our efforts. I'm pleased to have a great team both on the City Council and staff to help accomplish our goals. Improving a city is not a race, it's a marathon. I hope you feel as proud as I do on how far we've come. We have more work to do, we are not perfect, and can we improve, of course we can. But I promise you this that we are working constantly to improve not only for the present but for the future of Watervliet.

Thank you for listening and please reach out to any of us if you have any questions.

Thank you.