

Good morning/afternoon/evening

- Welcome to the City of Watervliet – State of City for 2020
- Acknowledgements (dignitaries in attendance)

Tonight, I will be giving the State of the City of Watervliet for 2020. As I stated at my Swearing in Ceremony, “the hard work is just beginning” still holds true and in these past ---- days since we took office it is evident of the work that we have put in. But one of my promises and I hope you see with my continued actions I have shown, is that HONESTY will be my policy for governing this City. I have never sugar coated the City of Watervliet financial position and I never will. I promise to be transparent to the residents with the facts leading to why decisions will be made. Our City’s future depends on us working hard and coming together to build a stronger community.

My goal here is not to blow sunshine and smoke while letting you know the status of the city. Simply stated, there’s work to be done, a lot of work, but this is not an entirely gloom-and-doom update. There are positives in this city. My goal — the city council’s goal — is to increase the positives to make the City of Watervliet attractive to young homeowners and families because they will help determine the future of this city.

A State of the City address is typically an opportunity to celebrate our successes and provide a look toward the future.

When I was elected three years ago as Councilman, the City of Watervliet’s finances were the worst in the city’s history. Hard decisions were not made and were left unchecked. Well we are making end roads to changing the City’s position and will continue to improve the City’s financial position.

Our City has a historical fabric of being a working class community with deep pride and an unwavering sense of community. We may have lost a little of this over time. But I promise you this, we will work to bring this back in a new way and begin to strengthen that pride once again.

I want Watervliet to be a destination where people choose to live and raise their children. That can only happen with a competent city council, a sound financial plan where tax dollars are utilized so everyone in the city benefits.

We will look to begin a revitalization process, discuss the in-fill potential and look to restructuring the zoning code to make it more conducive to business to consider Watervliet which in turn will work to bolster those businesses that exist in the city as well as attract new businesses or services.

Another component for code enforcement will be to strengthen our property management codes. No longer will we close an eye to tall grass, excess debris laying around in yards, siding falling off or unpainted facades. By strengthening our appearance we will be able to attract interest to our City from both the business community and homeownership.

We all like to reminisce about what Watervliet was like when we were kids and how it was an idyllic place to grow up. Such a place can still exist, but not by going backward. We must move forward. That is a necessity for this city to thrive and survive. First impressions do matter.

In order for the city to look, clean and attractive, it must have nuisance and abatement laws that each homeowner must follow to keep our neighborhoods in order. I am telling you tonight there will be no double standard when it comes to these laws. City buildings and property going forward will be held to the same standards as city residents' homes.

There is simply no excuse for the city to neglect and not maintain its buildings for years and then act surprised and have to declare an emergency when a bell tower needs to be removed before it crumbled and maimed or killed someone.

We've already started on our end, sprucing up City Hall, which quite honestly, was filthy and in deplorable condition. We called in professionals to clean the floors, had staff clean all the brass, cleaned out the third floor, which looked like a dumping ground. City hall needs a new roof and windows, which will happen sooner than later so the building isn't condemned or classified as an emergency. We are now in a proactive, rather than reactive mode, when it comes to city buildings, property and equipment.

We are in the process of moving more of the city departments to the first floor of city hall, so residents have easier access. We're also attempting to upgrade our computer system so everything is compatible. We have installed a preventive maintenance program within the DPW to keep our equipment in working order. We're also in the process of creating a work order program for the DPW to keep track of all incoming calls, and keep track of jobs from start to finish. The City, library and seniors have come together to split the cost of new furniture in the lobby of the J. Leo O'Brien building. What was an empty lobby for six months now has a welcoming atmosphere for seniors and library patrons.

The DOME is a great recreational facility for city residents. However, it is underutilized and hasn't been maintained for years. We will be upgrading this facility, mostly minor and cosmetic, but we will turn that facility into something that our rec leagues and city residents may be proud to use. I know people want to talk about heating the building in

the winter, but you have to keep in mind, when first built, the facility was a skating rink. There is no heating system in the building to upgrade or fix. It would be cost prohibitive to heat that facility in the winter.

Now that the city is doing its part maintaining its property, we would like the residents to do the same. We expect property owners to maintain their property and to obey code and nuisance laws. For those who don't, notifications will be sent to property owners and landowners. Those who do not comply will be given points or something similar. We're in the process of developing this system to keep property owners and landlords accountable. This isn't going to be a money-making scheme for the city, but rather a way to improve the city, keep it attractive, neat and orderly. Those who obey codes and nuisance laws will have no problems. Those who refuse to obey will eventually get the message that perhaps it is better to own property in another municipality.

Personally, I think this is an exciting time for the City of Watervliet. We have a new city council, a new police chief as well as a new general manager and deputy general manager. This new blood means new ideas on how to improve this city.

General Manager Joe LaCivita and Deputy GM Mark Spain have been tasked with concentrating on areas where Watervliet needs the most work and having individuals with this skill set and proven experience will move this city forward. We've able to afford and accomplish this by reallocating some staff members to other positions and not filling some vacancies. This administration's top priority is concentrating on planning, development, accountability and increased performance. City jobs are no longer awarded on who you know, but rather who is best

qualified to improve this city with the goal being that every tax dollar spent makes the city better.

There's no denying the business culture in this city needs to change. We may have to revamp the city charter to make it happen, but we will do whatever is needed to attract new businesses to this city and keep the businesses that are located here.

Yes, the city is landlocked. Yes, the Arsenal takes up more than 40 percent of city property and cannot be taxed. Those are obstacles that need to be overcome and no longer can be used as an excuse. This city needs to come up with its own plan, much the way the cities of Cohoes and Troy rehabbed their downtown districts and Green Island is in the process of reinventing its shoreline along the Hudson River, to attract new residents and businesses.

The city needs to develop its own business districts, with help from grants and re-zoning if we want Watervliet to become a destination with a thriving business district, rather than a crossroad people drive through to get to Cohoes, Troy, Albany and Latham. We will do this by constant updates of the city comprehensive plan and our Downtown Revitalization Study. We may possibly develop our riverfront area. New buildings being bought and rehabbed in certain areas of the city will need to be multi-purpose — retail on the first or lower floors and residential on the upper floors. Unlike in the past we will use the skills, talents and experience of our city councilmembers to help lead these efforts and they will be part of the process from day 1. For example councilman Torncello is working on economic development and Councilwomen Diamond is working on water issues. Together as a team

we will be able to accomplish more with a likelihood of a higher rate of success.

We are constantly looking for residents and business to get involved. Please don't wait to be asked, let us know. We recently received 20 residents expressing interest in joining our boards, many I have never had the opportunity to meet but were comfortable enough to step up. We have hundreds of keyboard soldiers that can voice their ideas or even complaints on social media but when it comes time to actually participate in the solution they go MIA...

As I mentioned earlier, this entire report will not be all gloom-and-doom. There are plenty of positive projects happening in this city. I am more than happy to share the good and the bad news with city residents via social media and email. If you have not received my emails, please send an email to my address and I will add you to the list to get up to date news, issues and programs in more detail.

Some of the positive happenings in the city right now are shared services with other local municipalities. Recently, Albany County lent us trucks and drivers to help plow the streets after a heavy snowstorm. The city's sanitation department is working with Colonie to pick up trash in Maplewood. Watervliet receives a fee for this, the use of the truck when needed, and to also use the Colonie dump again as an offsetting fee. In this day and age, dumping fees are astronomical. Every bit of savings helps. While recently attending the State of the State address, we had the opportunity to meet with the governor's policy makers and I had petitioned the state to help us do more regarding the high increase in cost of recycling.

The new police chief has many things on his plate but one of those that I have asked him to keep in the forefront of his duties is the opioid crisis and what we can do to help our residents deal with it.

Another program I have asked the chief to install a landlord notification system. When we have an incident at any particular property and the landlord doesn't live at the property, we need to call and notify the landlord regardless of the time of day or night and let them know.

Making them aware of it will improve communications and awareness of what is happening in their properties.

I will continue to work and support our city agencies such as the civic center, senior center and museum. These agencies, although separate, are part of who and what we are. They serve the needs of the community and we need to support them as much as we can.

The city will also explore and enter into other cost cutting services with local municipalities such as Cohoes, Green Island, Menands and wherever else we can find ways to save money and complete projects in an efficient manner. We need to come up with new ideas when it comes to shared services; think outside the box if you will. If any of you have ideas, my door is always open to talk and explore ways to save the city money. As an example, one way we're looking to save revenue in the future is purchasing electronic vehicles and charging stations when city owned vehicles need to be replaced. This potentially could save the city thousands of dollars in gasoline purchases each year.

Overtime costs have been an issue for the city in recent years, and the new bail reform laws have caused a strain on our police department and finances, but we need to tighten our belt until this issue is addressed on the state level and is rectified. Overtime is being monitored on a weekly

basis to ensure there is no waste of revenue or resources. I will be working closely along with other city personnel to watch very closely where and why we're spending our tax dollars on.

The city applied for 15 grants totaling almost \$9.8 million for 2019. So far it has been approved for 12 grants that will award the city a little more than \$6 million for projects. The city was denied for one grant and two others are pending. Deputy GM Mark Spain identified and discussed these grants at a council meeting in January. I congratulate the efforts of the previous administrations team and now look forward to making them a reality. The grants I am most excited about are the \$3 million for filter plant improvements to improve water quality; almost \$1.3 million for a clean water CSO Separation Grant. The city has paid tens of thousands of dollars as part of the Albany County Combined Sewer Overflow to help improve water quality in the Hudson River. Our goal is to someday separate from the group and handle the overflow on our own to save money and put that revenue back into the community; a \$540,000 grant for lead lateral replacement and we are in the process of relicensing our hydro-electric plant in Guilderland through FERQ; a new waterline replacement on 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue and pave roads which we identify as the worst and are in need of immediate repair.

Both Mayor Manning and I are on the same page as to need to take care of our environment. I intend to carry on these efforts and again build and improve on them to do our part in making our environment better for not only our small city but for the entire plant. The City of Watervliet has successfully renewed its NYS Climate Smart Community designation; and we are now in the beginning stages of pursuing Community Choice Aggregation (CCA) by entering into an agreement with Municipal Electric and Gas Alliance (MEGA). This program would allow an



electricity broker to negotiate better rates with competitive suppliers on behalf of the City's residents and small businesses. Participation in CCA is always voluntary. CCAs have opt-out provisions, meaning when a community begins a program, customers are given advanced notice and have the choice to opt-out of the program and continue to receive electricity from their current supplier. Customers that do not opt-out are automatically enrolled in the program. If you decide to opt out you are always able to opt back in without any penalty. We will continue to keep residents and businesses updated as this study is completed.

We're also working with the state's Financial Restructuring Board, which reviewed Watervliet's structure and finances and looked for areas where we could save money. The FRB backed up their recommendations with incentives to help us out. City government would be remiss and not acting in good faith to its constituents if we did not look into these recommendations to find where we can streamline certain areas while creating additional revenue for other projects.

We are activity working on the purchase of our street lights. We have met with both National Grid and the NYS Power Authority and with the incentive from the restructuring board it looks like a great deal for the residents of Watervliet. The yearly savings being proposed makes this a no brainer of a proposal. We hope to finalize this project within the next month.

Another project that has been talked about for years is the upgrading of our computer system. This is also part of the FRB's recommendations. This will give us up to date software as compared to other municipalities and provide more efficient and cost cutting measures that are needed to help with our operations.

We also closed last year on making Watervliet self-insured for workers compensation. We have protected ourselves with other insurance and hired a risk control provider to help insure our claims are kept as low as possible. Great for our residents and even better for our staff.

I would like to take this time to remind city residents of the importance of the 2020 Census. Please take the time to fill out the form and return it because it impacts city finances. Financial aid we receive from the government is based on population. A poor showing means a loss of funds for the city and affects our representation in federal, state and county elections. So again, please take the time to fill out the form and return so Watervliet will receive the full amount of aid in which the city is entitled.

I saved the city's best asset for last – the city reservoir located in Guilderland. We are currently working on a watershed protection study for the reservoir. The city is in the process of upgrading the electric in Guilderland so we can run the hydro-electric plant at full power. We will also have a maintenance plan in place to help mitigate water chestnut issues as well as clean up around the reservoir to improve the quality of our drinking water. We have recently seen several communities come forward with tainted water sources. Watervliet owns its reservoir. We will improve the filtration plant and improve the water quality in Guilderland – with the potential to sell water to communities looking for a clean water supply. We currently sell water to Guilderland. And speaking of Guilderland, as many of you know, that municipality has recently re-assessed our reservoir, an increase of 850 percent. We are now in litigation with Guilderland concerning those fees. I will give you all the information as it becomes available.

Again, I'm not taking credit for previous administrations programs or ideas but this is a building block approach. What works we'll keep and what doesn't will be removed and changed. Being part of the past administration as a member of the council for 3 years, I know the hard work and dedication the staff had and we will now keep the movement going. I'm very confident that with our new administration you will not be disappointed. We won't be able to please everyone, but with communication I hope you agree our reasons and our decisions are valid, justified and transparent.

Again, my door is always open to converse and engage with residents who have ideas how to improve this city. I again invite residents to get involved with citizen action committees to help take ownership and improve the city they call home. As I have stated, we have plenty of work to do, but we're off to a good start. Government is about making it happen, its service and not excuses.

9/20/2022