



State of the City



2023

Good evening,

I would like to welcome our distinguished city council members along with the residents of the City of Watervliet and all others who may be watching this evening. It is the privilege of a lifetime to serve as your mayor.

When you elected me mayor in 2020 nothing could have prepared me for the challenges that laid ahead. Leading the city through the global pandemic that hit in the first three months of my term and the fiscal uncertainty that was hanging over the city were both demanding and to be honest, scary. Regardless we continued to provide services to our residents during these challenging times and we have moved the city into a stable financial climate.

To look back on what we accomplished in 2022 also provides us with a roadmap of what we will strive to accomplish in 2023 and beyond.

I want to make something very clear, leading our great city is not a one man show. I may be the one delivering this presentation, but I could not accomplish anything without our dedicated staff. The council and I discuss all issues, laws and regulations that are needed to be put in place to help our city grow and improve. Our general manager Joe LaCivita, our department heads and their teams work closely together to implement and ensure success.

I am extremely proud of the progress we have made for the residents of this city in the first three years.

Let's start with Water/Sewer

Under the supervision of both General Manager Joe LaCivita and Water Supervisor Dave Dressel, this department continued to function in a professional and efficient manner. This year we had several water breaks, and all were handled in house. This puts a tremendous strain on the manpower and the workload. We recently hired two new staff members. One to replace an open position and the other to expand the department's staffing level.

Work has now begun on the water filtration plant, for which we received a \$3 million grant to help with long overdue repairs and upgrades. We installed new security fencing around the plant, a new back-up generator to replace the older unit, and a boiler system to replace the failing one. We are now working on the construction of a garage to house the equipment.

We purchased a specially designed boat to help reduce the water chestnuts at our reservoir. This \$75,000 boat was purchased last year. We can't utilize it without purchasing another boat to help transport the weeds off the water - which we are close to purchasing. With the hiring of two new staff members, this should be a project this summer. With over 40% of the water covered with these weeds, the reservoir was ignored over the last 25 years making the problem worse by the year. This is a long-term solution and a start in the right direction.

Also, late last year we began working on a new computer system that monitors the filtration plant and all its instruments, flows, and processed water. This system

was bid, contracted for and ordered but supply chain issues are affecting its delivery. We are looking to have this installed by summer.

- **We just signed a contract under a \$1.3 million grant for Clean Water Sewer Separation.** This is part of the City's combined sewer overflow to improve water quality in the Hudson River. The goal for Watervliet is to separate our city's overflow so that we won't have to be under DEC's guidelines in the future. Work on two of the sites will begin this spring. This will be Phase I of a two-phase project. The city will send out to the residents a flyer prior to the construction to alert the residents of the impact the construction may have on them.

- **Proud to announce the** Completion of a 5-year process to relicense of the city hydro-electric plant in Guilderland through Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to run at full power. The negotiating process was intense, and our team held fast and felt we accomplished a beneficial plan for all involved.

- Filter plant improvements may allow the city to seek out municipalities who may be looking for another water source and sell water which will increase our revenue and assist any neighboring city.

One of the other issues that my administration inherited was with the Town of Guilderland. The town completed a reassessment of the Watervliet reservoir and increased the assessment 5-fold. We were then forced to litigate the case resulting in a much lower and fair assessment. We felt our team was successful in protecting our residents in this matter.

DPW/Sanitation

DPW includes the highway and sanitation crews and works hand and hand with the water department. We continue to monitor their needs so that they can perform the tasks required.

We recently purchased two new vehicles for highway with plows.

New attachments for the V-track machine to help with snow and leaf removal.

New salters and sanders

A vehicle tracking system to provide residents with a better idea where and when they expect a plow.

Established a schedule for the sweeper so residents can choose to move their vehicles easier on their scheduled day.

- Working with the Capital District Transportation Committee to help ease large vehicle congestion on 25th Street and to repave and rebuild the entire street to the city line. This grant is expected to be about \$5 million. I'll be releasing more information on this project soon. Both the General Manager and I are members of the Capital District Transportation Committee and worked to get this funding for Watervliet.

- Working with the Town of Colonie, we worked together to pave 8th Ave from 1st Street to 8th Street. This partnership helped save each municipality significant

funding which allowed us to add additional streets in our community. I'm very pleased to announce that we will again, jointly pave 1st St with Colonie.

This year we were able to pave over 1.2 miles of roads here in the city. The 2023 Paving Schedule will be the largest in our history. The city has partnered with Albany County to include the costs of roadway material in a collaborative bid, which once again will save our community additional funding to be allocated elsewhere throughout our budget.

Sanitation Dept needs a new garbage truck. We continue to work on our collection program and concentrate on compliance. Of all the complaints from residents, strewn garbage not properly placed has been the largest issue and rightly so. We are hoping that an increase in education and when necessary, enforcement will help reduce the problem. We will work with both landlords and tenants to keep our city presentable. With the recent hiring of two new code employees we will pick up from where we had to suspend due to covid.

This year, we had DPW paint the crosswalks around the city, something that hasn't happened in years. We also plan on starting an alley cleanup program. This will be a long-term project, but we intend to establish this program to help improve both the appearance and functionality of the alleys.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Police

Last year we received a grant from Assemblyman John McDonald to purchase and install additional city-wide cameras. Several cameras were installed in key intersections to help record and document traffic and be able to identify areas where issues may occur. Additionally, cameras were also installed in our parks to further enhance safety. Several cameras were also installed in the pool area, again to document any incidents that may occur.

- **We Have** - Increased city police force to 26 members. This increase hasn't been achieved in over 15 years, if not more. Having additional staff will help reduce overtime and allow more time to be devoted to working on issues that may have been sidelined.
- New weapons and light systems to keep police officers and city residents safe were purchased.
- New body worn cameras to keep police officers safe and demonstrate department transparency were obtained.
- In partnership with School administration we brought back our school resource officer at city schools which has strengthened our partnership with the school district.

For the 6th year in a row, we will again have a Child seat safety check held again in the parking lot of the Elementary school.

In keeping with making our streets safer our 1st gun buyback event was held last year removing over 100 guns off the streets.

I'm proud to announce that again, this April, we'll have another gun buyback event, again in cooperation with the Attorney General's office.

The city will continue to work with area agencies to look for new and innovative programs to help residents dealing with domestic violence and mental health issues.

In 2022 we had 23,119 calls for service a increase of 23% over 2021 and had over 741 arrests. With the increased number of traffic stops, 6,015, we seized 19 firearms with 14 resulting in an arrest. This is an outstanding accomplishment and a credit to the commitment our officers have for keeping our city safe.

In addition, the department increased DWI enforcement. Specifically, they made 47 DWI arrests and 10 DWAI arrests last year.

The police chief prepared a 2023 report on his department that goes into more detail and will be attached to this report.

Fire

Our Fire Department continues to handle the daily call volumes that increase year-to-year. Total call volume for Fire and EMS during 2022 was 2,849, of which 1683 were logged under EMS. There were 15 active fires last year and had 2 active fires during the month of January.

This coming March we will be bringing on two new members to our force in addition to a lateral transfer this past year, keeping our force at the staffing level needed, something our neighboring cities has been struggling to maintain.

Members make up the most important part of the department, but they need the equipment to help them perform their job. This year we:

- Purchased a new ambulance for the fire department which should be received within 2023 at a cost of \$350,000. Also due to the overall need for ambulance service, we have also purchased a used ambulance from Malta that is being used as a backup at a cost of \$15,000.

Also purchased was a 2012 pumper with only 13,000 miles to add to our fleet. Thanks to Chief Garrett for thinking outside the box as this pumper was added due to the need to upgrade one of our pumpers at a cost of \$340,000

The city council has demonstrated that we are in full support of the needs of all our departments to provide the best possible services to our residents.

Finally, the City Administration, Chief Garrett and the medical director of REMO recognized members of the WFD for outstanding contribution to the emergency

medical needs for 2 cardiac arrest reversals. Congratulations on a job well done and well deserved.

Building and Code Enforcement

As with every other city agency, once covid hit, most of the inspections of units were suspended. Regardless, we continued performing the tasks at hand. Like with every other business or municipality, COVID hindered the recruitment of qualified individuals. As of today, I'm pleased to announce we have four full-time certified code enforcement officials on staff, the highest ever.

Our General Manager and Code Enforcement Officials continue to strengthen our procedures and policies. With that they continue to work with our Police department as they enter a property and see violations where Code would not normally see from the outside. They have taken control of several homes thus far and shut down those with severe code violations or offenses.

651 code complaints were logged and written during 2022 and 2572 inspections were completed, with 223 building permits being issue throughout the year.

Our General Manager and Building Department Manager have formed a Round-Table group with the Cities of Cohoes, Troy, and Albany along with Town of Colonie and Village of Green Island. They are looking towards shared services where each community can rely on each other when the need may rise for staffing assistance and look to share ideas that will improve the overall operation of each city's code department.

Parks & Recreation

We continue to improve our parks - both in equipment upgrades and appearance; and this year was one of the biggest ever. This year we purchased two new playsets - one at Clinton Park and the other at 15th Street Park. Both were donated by the Watervliet Charitable Foundation. We have also ordered another for the 7th Street Park which will be delivered this spring for a total cost of \$120,000 in new playground sets.

We continue to look at relocating the basketball court at Brotherhood to under the bridge next to 787. The reason for this is to separate the older kids playing basketball with those younger kids that use the ballfield, the splash pool and the play units at the park. Parks are designed to draw children of certain ages to the equipment supports those age groups. Mixing older kids with younger kids is not the best design. This is no different to the way schools separates the younger grades in elementary school from older high school buildings.

It will be a challenge to top the over half a million-dollar splash pad donated by Scott Earl for our swimming pool. We had over 2,000 children and adults come to the pool this summer, and I'm so both happy and proud we did so both with efficiency and professionalism. My goal was to have the same appearance as some of the high-end water parks but priced for our residents to enjoy. Again, to make it a pleasant appearance rather than something we were "used to". We still have so much to do and will continue to look at ways to make our facilities something we are proud of.

We obtained a \$15,000 grant from National Grid to replace the few remaining rotted bollards at Red's Field and purchase wood for 15 picnic tables that an Eagle Scout and his volunteers built. These tables were used at Hudson Shores Park and the pool, again at no cost to the city. All pieces of a large puzzle to make our city look the best it can be and more.

Something for everyone is so important to our sense of community. We installed 4 pickleball courts at the Dome and several around the city on the existing basketball ball courts. This allows our older population to enjoy the sport right here in their hometown or visitors to come and enjoy as well and see what a great community we have. Nets for the pickleball courts were again donated by the Watervliet Charitable Foundation for \$800.

As part of economic development, we will again hold two car shows in 2023. One will be held at Hudson Shores Park in the spring and the other will be in July located on the south side of the city, like last year's event in August. These car shows brought in hundreds of visitors to show off what Watervliet truly has to offer.

Plans are currently underway at Hudson Shores Park to repave the road, parking areas and walkway and to install some healthy recreational units for children to play and enjoy. We have bids going out soon and hopefully construction will begin in the spring.

In addition to that, plans are being drawn up for a restaurant to be constructed at the park to replace the barge. Our intention is to make the park operational almost year around with a place residents and visitors can enjoy.

We're not stopping there! We signed a contract with a tour boat company that will run tours up and down the Hudson beginning this spring. We are planning on installing additional docks for recreational and business use. Currently we have RPI using the southern docks for their crew teams, and we now have an agreement with Emma Willard to have their crew teams also operate out of our park.

Last February we had a Fire & Ice event at the park and to nobody's surprise it was the coldest day of the year, but many enjoyed the opportunity to sit around a fire and enjoy the night. We will again have our Fire & Ice event the end of February and we're hoping for just a little warmer weather.

- **We received a \$20,000 donation** to repave and paint the basketball court at Clinton Park — paid for by donations.
- Partnered with Albany County for an improved Parks and Recreation program that will increase programming and activities for city youth such as karate, lacrosse, basketball and now pickleball.
- The Meneely Bell that serenaded the St. Patrick's neighborhood for decades was refurbished and placed at the entrance to the Congress Street Bridge. This all made possible by a donation for \$110,000.

- A smaller Meneely Bell was purchased and donated by a city resident to be placed in the Gazebo Park, located on Third Avenue between 5th and 6th Streets. The bell was dedicated to Richard and Patricia Crinigan.

Finally, just recently we installed 3 professionally sized basketball scoreboards at the DOME again a donation by the charitable Foundation This was a \$20,000 improvement.

Financials

One can measure achievements in many ways, but a true sign of success is when you can run a business without a deficit. First as a councilman, and now as Mayor, we have had significant increases to all three of our operating fund balances, including bringing the sewer fund from negative back into the black. Fund balance is one tool the NYS Comptroller uses to review the financial health of our city. We went from being named the second most fiscally stressed municipality in the state, to not even being mentioned when the list comes out. These things can only be accomplished with a good team and buy-in from all departments on the need to adhere to strict budgets and with experienced individuals in the mix.

Together, as a team, across all departments, we have been working hard to tighten our belts, just like the residents of this City. We understand the impact COVID has had on everyone. Tenants unable to work, couldn't pay their rents and businesses with less traffic unfortunately closed. We are offering as much help as we possibly can, we've facilitated a housing rehab grant for homeowners, offered grants to small businesses here in our city, and something that hits the pockets of every single homeowner - two straight years of no tax increase. This can be a substantial savings, not only to homeowners and tenants, but to business operations and could help them avoid raising prices or rents due to a property tax increase.

All this being said, the city does have some challenges ahead. Most economists believe there will be a recession in 2023. A large portion of our revenue budget relied on sales tax. We might have to tighten our belts even more. While keeping residents in mind with a 0% tax increase, we acknowledge the possibility of using

some of our fund balance. This is one reason we've been working so hard to save. You never know when prices will skyrocket, and we have to dip into that savings.

Another challenge we are facing is health insurance. The city was thrown a curveball in late 2022, with regards to the availability of retiree coverage options. While attempting to balance the need to maintain current coverage and keeping cost in mind, we found a solution but will cost the city, roughly, an additional \$125,000 annually. This will not stop our efforts to find ways to save the taxpayers money. Although a blow to our budget, we were still able to maintain a 0% increase. We are working diligently with the County to move forward with a health insurance consortium which we hope will provide options and saving to employees and the City.

Economic Development

- Conducted a bridge study, with the City of Troy as a partner. This study is to find ways to increase the business attractiveness on both sides of the river. The focus is from 23rd Street, Hudson Shores Park to 16th Street and then up 19th Street to 5th Avenue. The study also focuses on increasing safe access to the bike path.
- Although not funded, we continue to improve and submit an annual application for the Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) This funding will be a game changer, and we continue to work toward ideas and suggestions with residents, businesses, and consultants to look to the future of our city. This will transform 19th St corridor to be an attractive gateway to our community.
- **knowing looks are important we removed** Three abandoned and derelict buildings from the city. We will continue to work with the Albany County Landbank to attract suitable businesses. I totally believe in the “Broken Window Theory”. We need to keep our city looking good because it makes us FEEL good.
- We previously received a grant to install electric vehicle charging stations on city property and will continue to look for ways to reduce our carbon footprint and help with lowering energy consumption.
- **My office** Helped organize two “Restaurant Weeks” in Watervliet in in the process of having another in a few weeks. These events promoted city restaurants

to show off their facilities and unique cuisine not only to city residents, but residents from nearby communities.

- During COVID, we provided grants to businesses that were finding it difficult to keep their doors open. I use my email distribution list to inform businesses of any grant programs or information that they should know to help financially.

A goal of this administration is to assist in the promotion of our local businesses by the redesign of our website that will promote what they have to offer. We now have hundreds of visitors visiting us via the bike trail, Dome for sports events and other events at Hudson Shores Park and we want them to stay local. Using the modern-day technology like QR cods and signage we hope to inform and educate our visitors what we have to offer.

City Buildings

The city is no different than any other homeowner, your property is very important and must be taken care of. The key is preventive maintenance. We received over \$600,000 in grants from Assemblyman John McDonald and State Senator Neil Breslin that enabled us to update city hall with a new heating system, new windows and soffits and fascia. These repairs were long overdue. The glass in the windows was literally falling out of the frames and the soffits were barely hanging on to the building being held up by the siding material.

Dutch reformed church study was conducted this past year to determine if the old church could be converted into the new courtroom. We hired a consultant, and it was determined that it was possible but would cost more than \$4 million. Although a great idea it doesn't seem practical and feasible that this would be the best use for city taxpayers.

One goal of mine is to equip the senior center with an emergency generator. We have had specifications drawn up and now looking for funding to install a generator to power the center in the event of a power outage or some catastrophic event so if residents needed a cooling or warming station, we would be ready.

If one thing covid taught us was that we can never be prepared to address every emergency. As you know, I'm an Eagle Scout and the boy scout motto is to BE PREPARED.

Looking Toward the Future

As you can see we have been able to accomplish so much over the first three years of my first term and we are continuing to look for the smartest, most efficient and economical ways to improve our services, reduce our energy costs and make Watervliet a better place for all to live.

We are in constant communication with residents on important events and issues through my email distribution list, social media and whenever possible we are videotaping our city meetings so residents can view them from their home.

In talking with residents throughout the city the energy and overall view is extremely positive, and this motivates our enthusiasm to continue to see our city thrive and succeed. We have received numerous donations from civic groups, businesses and from residents who have moved away and still take pride in their hometown. This alone speaks volumes about our success and their trust in us.

I am pleased to announce this evening that in 2023 we will re-institute the Sidewalk Loan Program for city residents. This program was originally started years ago but was stopped due to the financial issues the city was facing.

Applications for this program will be available through my office at City Hall.

In addition to sidewalks, we can also assist homeowners in the removal of a tree whose roots may be causing issues with the sidewalks.

Our Tree Committee has been an invaluable asset to our city's development over the past few years. The committee has worked to plant over 300 new, non-invasive trees and worked to remove several that posed imminent threats to the community.

We recently received word that our city has been voted the 8th Best Place in the Nation for first time home buyers to purchase a home according to a study done by Realtor.com.

This designation is a statement to where we are headed. Watervliet is a bedroom community with so much to offer our families.

This is exciting news for all of us and I am proud of our team for all of their hard work.

We currently entered into an agreement with the State University Albany to resurrect the anaerobic digester program to help reduce the organic waste here in the city which in turn will provide an economic benefit for all of us.

In 2022 we secured a consultant to assist the city with our street light replacement program. I am pleased to announce that we have entered into an agreement with National Grid to purchase over 600 streetlights and retrofit them with LED bulbs. These bulbs will replace the older style and more expensive lamps. The change in lighting will improve the overall lighting throughout the city which will increase security and at a much lower cost.

Once completed this will save the city an estimated \$125,000 in energy costs and will qualify us to receive over \$300,000 in grant funding from the State Fiscal Restructuring Board.

I would like to close my State of the City address by thanking you all for being engaged in this community. I am blessed to have been born and raised here, met my wife and raised my family in this city and also humbled that you had the faith in me to do this job.

I also would like to call on our younger residents to step up and begin their service to the City of Watervliet by joining a board or committee or volunteering their time at one of our many organizations. We need you to participate to help ensure the City of Watervliet continues to grow and prosper.

I am proud of the work we have accomplished in the past year and can say without hesitation that Watervliet is continuing to move forward.

As I stated when you first elected me to this office, I will always be accessible to all residents, and I will always be accountable for the decisions that are made.

I thank you for listening and I wish you all a good evening.