



**2024**



# State of the City

*Charles V. Patricelli*  
*Mayor*





# State of the City 2024



## Introduction

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 a privilege to serve as your mayor for another four years. In 2020 when I was elected as Mayor for my first term, my number one priority was to move the City into a stable financial climate. We're proud of achieving that goal and although new goals are ahead of us in this second term, we will continue to keep that financial stability as our top priority.

I need to make something very clear - leading our city is not a one man show. I may be the one delivering this presentation, but I could not accomplish any of these achievements 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 prosper. Our general manager, Joe LaCivita, our department heads, and their teams work closely together to implement and ensure success.

We may not always agree on every solution or priority, but we all agree we want the best for this city, and we strive as a unit to make that happen. I am extremely proud of the progress we have made for the residents of this city.

## Water/Sewer

Under the supervision of our water department foreman Dave Dressel, we continue to work on several ongoing projects. Filtration plant improvements were made, such as the fence around the plant,

the installation of a generator and a new heating system. This year we will work on the remaining improvements at the plant such as new flocculator mechanicals and the epoxy lining of the basins. Also, late last year we went out to bid on a new computer system that monitors the filtration plant and all its instruments, flows, and processed water. As a result of these bids, we secured a contract and placed an order for the new system. We're aiming to have the system installed by summer. New flash boards were installed at the reservoir after needing years of repair from floating debris and ice that accumulates on the boards. The boards were desperately in need of replacement and will now provide a higher water level at the reservoir to generate more electricity in the hydro plant, thus producing more revenue.

A major accomplishment was the separation and elimination of two of our combined storm/sanitary sewer lines. This project took place along 12th Street, 8th Avenue, Avenue A, and 6th Street this past summer. We now have storm water going directly to the river and sewage going directly to the county sewer treatment plant instead of mixing during rain events and going into the river. We have three more to complete and are currently in the design phase for construction this year.

The City of Watervliet Water Department has until October 2024 to conduct an inventory of all service lines (or laterals) that are connected to each individual property. To complete this task, the Water Department employees will need to gain access to property basements. The process typically takes 10 minutes and does not require anything from homeowners/residents apart from access to your basement. We will continue to seek funding to assist homeowners in the replacement of any lead lines found on their property.

Under our street paving program, we chose to replace a main water line on 1st street before the road was paved. This, of course, will provide better and more stable water service to our residents in that area and avoid the possibility of digging up the newly paved road for a possible water break.

## **DPW/Sanitation**

Our Department of Public Works consists of the highway and sanitation crew, and they work hand in hand with the water department. We continue to monitor their needs so that they can perform the tasks required. We aim to improve the department structure to provide a higher level of service and we hope to accomplish this in the next few months. Three years ago, our street paving program was developed and reviewed by our engineer to identify those streets with the highest priority for repaving. We requested our engineer to review the program again to reassess if the priority of each street is still appropriate. Over the past few years, we have paved more streets than previous administrations and have taken steps to make necessary repairs and obtain our goal to provide the best possible roadways for our residents and visitors.

Our city trash pickup process has improved but has a long way to go to change the “old ways” of keeping our city clean. We plan to work on educating our residents as to how trash should be handled and ensure greater oversight of all DPW employees. We have implemented new policies as to how our trash will be picked up and we will continue to work on this program moving forward. We are hoping that an increase in education and appropriate enforcement will help reduce the problems we still face.

We will work with landlords and tenants to keep our city presentable. We have developed and implemented a new non-owner trash policy. Any owner of a property that does not live at the property, must provide a tipper can for each unit. We have other ideas to help like working on sharing the cost of recycling tippers instead of the exposed bins that allowed items to be blown around.

We will continue to push 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 \$5 million. We will be working with their engineers to get this on the fast track.

The plan I outlined in my last State of the City address involved DPW painting the crosswalks around the city and we also plan on starting an alley clean-up program. Unfortunately, this goal was not accomplished this past year, but will be targeted again as a high priority. 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.

Another major change this year will be to relocate the stop light signal on 6th Ave and 19th St to 5th Ave. The traffic pattern has changed significantly due to the relocation of Price Chopper. Previously 6th Ave made sense with the location of the St. Patrick's School being located at that intersection.

A reminder to all residents that we offer the Bulk Item pickup program throughout the year for our residents. This program runs from April to December with approximately 30 spots available per month. Last year we sold out every month. We have plans to increase the number of pick up's to help residents with this service. We will continue to offer a free bulk item drop off event at Hudson Shores Park, this year we will hold the event on Friday, March 22nd. In the next couple of months, we will announce the date for our electronic disposal date as well.

## **Public Safety**

### **Police**

It is with pride and gratitude that I commend our dedicated police department for their outstanding service over the past year. Our city has been the beneficiary of their steady commitment to ensuring the safety and well-being of our community.

Throughout the challenges faced in the past year, our police department has exemplified professionalism, courage, and a deep sense of duty. Their tireless efforts have not only maintained public safety but have fostered a sense of security and unity among our residents. The department's proactive approach to community

policing has forged strong bonds between law enforcement and the neighborhoods they serve. I want to express my heartfelt appreciation to each officer for their diligence, sacrifice, and the sacrifices made by their families. Your commitment has not gone unnoticed and the positive impact on our city is considerable. Together, we will continue to build a safer and more vibrant Watervliet for all.

The police department will continue with their incentive for community outreach through programs like “Coffee with a Cop” and the “Night Out” event which the residents really enjoyed. We will continue to be approachable and develop a community minded approach to policing.

The School Resource Officer (SRO) program was reinstated, in partnership with the Watervliet City School District administration. To date, due to staffing the SRO program is temporarily paused but will continue once staffing is able to accommodate for the manpower we need on the street and the assurance to cover both.

Currently, we do have a full police staff number, which includes some in the academy and some out on injury. Please offer each officer patience as they respond to your needs, many are working lengthy shifts to provide coverage for those on the force that are unable to be in service currently.

It is important to note that times have changed. We can't compare current times to the 50's or 60's or fault any past or current administrations for these changes. All we can do is take what we have and move forward with open-minded thinking. I agree that our laws and how children were raised is not what it used to be across the entire nation. The respect for authority has decreased, in the home, the schools, and towards police enforcing the laws. We will continue to assist in every way possible to work with the schools, police and code enforcement, but it cannot be changed overnight, it will improve one drop at a time.

For the 7th year in a row, I have organized the child safety seat program to ensure all our residents with child safety seats have them installed correctly and safely. This program has proven to be

invaluable in that 99% of the seats that are inspected are incorrectly installed or out of compliance. This event will once again be held in the parking lot of the Watervliet Elementary School in cooperation with the Albany County Sheriff's office.

The city continues to work with area agencies to look for new and innovative programs to help residents dealing with domestic violence and mental health issues. We are working again with the County Mental Health Department having our officers trained in recognizing these issues and using a case worker assigned from Catholic Charities to help these individuals avoid court or even jail.

A new program that we agreed to several months ago was to help prevent drivers from passing a stopped school bus with their red lights on. We have joined with the school district to work with a vendor called "Bus Patrol" that will install cameras on all city school and private buses used by the school to record and send violation notices with a fee for passing any stopped school bus. This is simply a safety prevention measure for students that could be injured or killed because of this senseless violation. Everybody has heard of the most recent incident that occurred in Rensselaer county where a driver drove right past a stopped school bus and nearly missed a child from serious injury.

Police Chief, Joseph Centanni, has prepared a 2023 summary report on his department in detail and it will be attached to this report and available to be viewed on-line later today.

## **Fire**

Our Fire Department continues to handle the daily calls and provides both a professional and high level of service. Two new firefighters were hired in March of 2023 will begin paramedic school in February.

In September, Chief Tom Garrett and the City of Watervliet Fire Department announced their new public access Automated External Defibrillator (AED) and Stop the Bleed Program. The fire department installed life-saving AED's and Stop the Bleed kits

inside 8 City-owned properties. In addition, as part of this program, the Watervliet Fire Department will be offering the City's 93 full time employees CPR and bleeding control training at no cost.

Last year we acquired some new vehicles that were badly needed. We purchased two ambulances, one used and another new vehicle. In addition, we purchased a used pumper truck from Brunswick and placed an order for a new one that takes 3 years to arrive. I applaud the Fire Department and our administration for recognizing the needs of the department to continue to provide top quality assistance and safety for the residents.

According to Chief Garrett, the Watervliet Fire Department responded to a total of 2,900 calls for service in 2023.

## **Building and Code Enforcement**

Our General Manager and Code Enforcement Officials continue to strengthen our procedures and policies of the department and work closely with our police department to be able to see violations that may not be seen from the outside of a building. This has allowed the department to take control of several homes that were determined to have severe code violations or offenses and presented major health and safety risks to residents. The building department has reported:

MDOP/ROPs - 192

RUCC inspections - 419

annual fire safety/commercial fire inspections - 26

permits issued - 244

violations issued - 710

## **Parks & Recreation**

We continue to improve our parks - both in equipment upgrades and appearance and still have so much to do including work on



some much-needed repairs/upgrades to the pool house roof. We will continue to look at ways to make our facilities something we are proud of. Last year we put the sale of the pool passes on-line. We sold 1,722 passes, unlike in previous years, prior to the water park, around 200 were sold. We have also added some amenities, such as vending machines, more picnic tables, and umbrellas. Additional improvements are planned to make it a attractive alternative to the higher priced paid parks.

Attempting to have something for everyone is so important for our sense of community. We installed 6 pickleball courts at the Dome in 2022 and several around the city on the existing basketball ball courts. This allows our older population and young to enjoy the sport right here in their hometown or visitors to come and enjoy it as well and see what a great community we have to offer. Nets for the pickleball courts were again donated by the Watervliet Charitable Foundation for \$400 each. This city is very fortunate to have so many willing individuals to help purchase these amenities. This sport has provided a place to play and keep it affordable. The fees we receive from the use of pickleball will go back into supplement, not replace, any recreational improvements to our parks. This will ensure that our parks are not only properly maintained but enhanced.

We will again hold two car shows in 2024. One will be held at Hudson Shores Park on May 11th, and the other will be in the summer at the gazebo park in Port Schuyler. These car shows brought in hundreds of visitors to showcase what Watervliet has to offer and hopefully a chance for our business to profit from these events.

Through the efforts of a volunteer group this committee put together and brought back the Summer Concert Series. The 2023 series was a huge success which kicked off with the Refrigerators – a local favorite! Stay tuned for this year's lineup as we plan to expand on last year's success!

The entire road, parking area was repaved and the walkway will be repaved at Hudson Shores Park this spring, along with other improvements. The GM did an awesome job in having the overgrowth cut along the banks so you can view the river.

As you know, Watervliet has roots going back to the industrial revolution. Our great grandfathers worked in foundries along the Erie Canal that made this region what it is today. Many worked at the steel mills, arsenal or even in the textile industry. This is why we are trying to save some of what put us on the map by restoring and showcasing the Meneely bells throughout the city. Now 3 new bells are being placed around the city, all funded by the generosity of the Watervliet Charitable foundation so it will always be a reminder of what made our community so great.

Due to current ongoing activities and construction we decided to hold off on the Fire & Ice event this year, but hope to bring it back next year. We also plan to install some healthy recreational units for children to play and enjoy. We have bids going out soon and hopefully construction will begin this spring. In addition, cameras were added to provide greater security and comfort to the park. It's been 5 years since the barge broke loose and we lost an asset to not only the park but also the city. A high priority for our general manager this year is to execute the plans we have in place 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. The city needs an events coordinator to help with events but this has been shelved for my past administration so that we could allocate the tax dollars in other needed areas. Time is running short and we need to address this issue.

## **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 but equally as significant were increases in our expenses, especially in our health and other insurances. I'm asking that our GM provide an update at our next council meeting of an overall cash/debit position the city is in as of the end of an unaudited 2023.

### **Economic Development**

Although not funded, we continue to improve and submit an annual application for the Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) The \$10 million dollar funding associated with this grant will be a game changer for Watervliet, and we continue to gather ideas and suggestions from residents, businesses, and consultants to assist in looking to the future of our city. This grant will transform the 19th St corridor to be an attractive gateway to our community. Currently we are discussing ways to strengthen our staffing to help ensure that we file an application that will be favorable to the state and help develop our business district.

My office is once again organizing "Restaurant Week" in Watervliet. The 4th Annual "Restaurant Week" will be held the week of February 25th. Look at social media and the City's website for participants and menus This event promotes city restaurants to show off their menu not only for city residents, but residents from nearby communities as well. The goal of this administration is to assist in the promotion of our local businesses.

### **Grant Awards and Programs**

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, something that was not previously considered important. In 2023, 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. I'm happy to report the work is complete! While City Hall was getting a facelift, we turned our attention to the work needed at the Dutch Reformed Church/Museum. With a \$300,000 Community Development Block Grant Public Facilities program we were able to replace the roof, install a new heating system along with a handicap front entrance ramp, an electric chair lift to go up a few steps once inside the building, upgrade the electrical system and installed security cameras both in and outside the building. The building is now being cleaned and getting ready for its primary purpose as a multi-purpose community center. We intend to hold meetings, even concerts to help promote programs we have in the city. We are intending to have our ribbon cutting in May of this year.

For 2024, we have hopes to seek grants for the installation of an elevator at City Hall. I would also like to equip the senior center with an emergency generator and upgrade our existing generator that currently covers only the police to include all of City Hall as well. The goal is to be able to use these facilities 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. We need to BE PREPARED.

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.

### **Looking Toward the Future**

As you can see, we have been able to accomplish so much in 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 I am personally videotaping our city meetings so residents can view them from their home. I believe education and awareness is vital to everyone that wants to feel that they are informed and aware of what is going on in and around their homes. We will not be beaten down by keyboard warriors but are always looking for suggestive input. We encourage those to provide practical solutions and we need to look at the big picture. 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.

### **Closing**

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 humbled that you had the faith in me to do this job. I also would still 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 I believe that it shows that the city council and I are in full support of the needs of all our departments to assist them in providing the best possible services to our residents. Without hesitation I am proud to say 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.

*Charles V. Patricelli*