

The First 100 days ...

When I look back at the last 100 days, which included the beginning of this global pandemic, I am reminded of something my Uncle Pat once said “Charles, the first 100 years are the hardest”. I think we would all agree that the first 100 days were hard, hopefully they were the hardest days this community and nation will ever experience. While it would have been impossible to predict the impact this novel coronavirus would have on us, but I’m proud that we responded the best we could. Throughout this pandemic, our Police and Fire Departments have continued to demonstrate their dedication to our community and ability to respond to emergencies. . Please join together and commend our Police and Fire for their outstanding performance and support for the residents of Watervliet.

It is difficult for me every day to see our parks and building closed, but it was a necessary decision to keep our city residents and employees safe and healthy. I wouldn't hesitate to make the same decision again because everyone’s safety comes first, although I hope no one has to make that decision ever again.

Our normal ways of working with city businesses have been affected from city hall being closed and employees working from home, but we have still succeeded in providing basic services to city residents. Garbage and yard waste have continued to be collected weekly along with the efforts of DPW and water that are also working to keep the city in order. I commend them for doing their jobs so well and making a difference during this pandemic.

In our first three months in office, I’m proud of what we have accomplished thus far. In January, at our first council meeting Councilman Peter Torncello and I appointed Councilwoman Barbara Diamond, who has made a wonderful addition to our team. .

The council and I have worked on several initiatives throughout the first 100 days of this new administration, some with positive results and others still in progress.

We proposed an extensive list of projects to provide support to our community and the city staff are working daily on completing them at an impressive rate. Below are a few project updates to share:

- The New York State Fiscal Restructuring Board (FRB) recommendation to purchase the streetlights throughout our city is nearing an agreement. Once completed, we will be able to install energy saving LED lights which will help reduce our energy costs and save money on the National Grid maintenance charge. The FRB will provide the city with substantial grant funding to assist us in proceeding with this project.
- The FRB also recommended, in a review of the city’s electronic technology, that we purchase new financial and administrative data systems to run our daily operations of the city. Once purchased, the city will receive a payment from the Board to help cover the cost.

- The Anaerobic Digester program has been in existence for several years and has produced little or no benefit to the city or the environment. In theory it is a great program and idea but needs to be restructured and marketed to produce the results to justify its continuation. Prior to this pandemic the target date was September to either make those changes or terminate the program. This of course, may be set back but it is on the radar for closer review.
- Our technology has been updated to allow several of our employees to work from home to provide support to our residents during this time. City Hall has also streamed our City Council meetings and placed them on our city website. This is a part of an initiative to continue to increase resident viewership even after we return into the office.
- Although a small improvement but again perception, lobby furniture was purchased to make both the library and senior center more inviting and professional to the general public. This was a joint venture with the expenses being shared with the city, library and senior center.
- We are waiting to hear a response on a grant application filed for the installation of Electric Vehicle charging stations. In addition we are preparing an application to purchase two electric vehicles for the usage of the city fleet. The applications support the movement of a responsible municipality by protecting the environment and being part of the ever-changing world we live in.
- To assist our residents and staff when repair issues arise, we have instituted a work order system that allows us to monitor and organize items that need to be addressed (ex. Potholes needing repaired). This system will allow the city to maintain our vehicles maintenance fleet and establish a preventive maintenance system. This will also allow us to better plan for replacement and budgeting.
- The Building Department is reviewing city-owned buildings and developing an estimated life expectancy of each component to allow us to perform maintenance on all our buildings in a timely fashion.
- The Council appointed David Wheatley as our new City Clerk. In unison with other staff members, we have developed a new method to monitor insurance payments and benefits along with a new health care provider now showing thousands of dollars in savings. We believe that with more eyes on the various city benefit packages established and available to utilize, we can further reduce our operating expenses without a reduction of benefits to our staff.
- 2020 is the year we take our national census. A census committee was established back as early as December to prepare us to have Watervliet counted. So much depends on every city to have all their residents counted. Federal, state, county dollars are all calculated on

your population of your city as well as representation in all levels of government. Unfortunately the census has taken a back seat due to the pandemic but we'll continue to educate and promote all residents to participate and respond.

- Last year an official dog park committee was formed and was renewed this past January to establish a dog park on the south end of Clinton Park. Final plans have been drawn and estimates have been received to install the fence and signage. It is intended to have the park completed by early summer.
- One project that has been in the working for a few years is the new Bike path route. This path extends from the 4th St tunnel to Hudson Shores Park. This project was delayed due to the overall cost. NYS Dept. of Transportation was able to contribute more to the project and bids were received in December. The new city administration made a few minor adjustments and with the help of the Tree committee, we agreed to a 2-1 replacement for those trees that were removed.
- Staff has been working on the replacement of a water line main from 16th St to 19th St. This project will replace one of the oldest lines in the city. While working on this replacement line we'll also include the replacement of any LEAD water line lateral to any of the homes along the street. This project should begin May/June of this year. Following the line replacement the entire road will be repaved.
- The City is working with Albany County to share the knowledge and experience of the staffs of both the city and the county. We are currently exploring areas to share work assignments with Albany County Comptroller Sue Rizzo's office.
- We have been working with consultants, Gomez & Sullivan to complete the FERC re-licensing process so that we may continue to operate the city-owned dam and reservoir located in Guilderland. This re-licensing is mandated by the federal government and it is not a simple process. The city has been working on this process for over a year now, and it is anticipated that it will take at least one more year to complete. This license needs to be renewed every 30-50 years.

Aside from the ongoing projects we have undertaken in the first 100 days we have also made a few appointments to our administrative team.

- Joe LaCivita was named General Manager and we believe that Joe's experience will help place Watervliet on a solid foundation. Our administration strongly emphasizes the teamwork approach to decisions that will benefit our community. Before selecting Joe, I sought out members of the community to establish a search committee that included Councilman Peter Tornello even prior to him assuming office and I to interview several candidates and as a group we made the decision to hire Joe to this position. A clear message that teamwork will be the way our city will run.

- Our teamwork approach also decided to appoint Mark Spain, former Police Chief as Deputy General Manager. We believe that this team now forms a solid base of professionalism and experience that will lead our city forward.
- We appointed Amanda Austin to the position of Finance Director after the departure of Mike McNeff who accepted an offer from Albany County.
- The Council and I will be considering other staffing adjustments to make the overall operation more efficient and productive and hope to make those announcements once the pandemic is over.

I believe strongly in first impressions, which means to me, providing quality and attractive parks, buildings and city streets. This is key to resident satisfaction and to retention of residents current and new.

In the past, our parks and city buildings have been neglected. I don't believe in waiting for grants or funding to bail us out. We are responsible for properly maintaining our community and planning to upgrade what we can on a yearly basis.

- We have worked diligently over the past two months to make upgrades to make the DOME a viable option for our city's residents. This included cleaning and clearing out the building, painting the walls and upgrading the bathrooms, installing new flooring and some other minor touchups. We don't need a 5 star facility but I'll settle for a 4 star any day.
- In the coming weeks we will begin work at the pool house. This building is in dire need of cleaning and upgrading. The bleak news is that due to the pandemic we may NOT be able to open the pool this season. In addition to all the work the pool house needs the availability of staffing the pool with lifeguards may be a real issue. Normally students would be attending classes to obtain their lifeguard certificates but due to the Coronavirus all classes have been closed.

Assemblyman John McDonald was instrumental in securing a \$135,000 grant designed to make park improvements. The first phase will be to engage the services of a consultant to develop a city-wide plan for our parks. We will be asking for citizen participation to help develop this plan.

Work has been long overdue for maintenance for City Hall

- To date, we have scrubbed, cleaned and waxed the floors of the entire building and made our conference room a professional setting rather than a storage room.
- The windows are falling out of their frames, storm windows are not working properly, and we have identified that the roof soffits are rotted and in need of replacement.
- The heating system for City Hall is in deplorable condition and will need to be replaced.

- With the help of Assemblyman McDonald, we were able to use money received to reallocate toward the heating system and our Senator Neil Breslin provided us assistance to replace our windows and soffit. Plans and specifications are currently being prepared.

Continuous calls to the police department for issues at the same property can quickly erode the peace and quiet of a neighborhood. Therefore, the Council and I have asked that each time we dispatch an officer to a property for any type of complaint, the owner or landlord is notified immediately. It is the belief that this will allow the owners of the property to take appropriate action before good neighbors move away due to these continued nuisance calls. The police and building departments will work together to ensure that notifications are made immediately and to the proper owners.

The City also works closely with county, state and federal offices to obtain grant funding that can assist us in upgrading many areas throughout the City:

- Lead is a major cause of brain damage and other health conditions. Watervliet, being an older community, has many of these lead water lines. The NYS Department of Health awarded the city a grant for over \$500,000 to replace as many lead water supply lines as possible. Work was to begin late spring/summer, but now, due to the Coronavirus, this has been temporarily delayed. Homeowners will receive a grant to replace their entire waterline if it's a lead pipe. Once the pandemic ends, we will release more information on the grant, including where city homeowners can call for more information.
- The city received Public Facilities funding as part of the Community Development Block Grant program and has been working to make upgrades to the former Dutch Reformed Church which houses the Watervliet Historical Museum.
- Due to issues that were identified by an inspection, the city was forced to remove the bell tower and steeple on the church as it was determined that this structure presented an imminent safety threat to residents and the building structure itself.
- A new roof top was installed, along with masonry work both in and outside of the building and the main roof structure will be patched. The building will also receive a new furnace as part of this grant in the coming weeks and the hope is that this structure will be used for city residents in some capacity in the months and years ahead.

We are also in the process of establishing a community choice aggregation (CCA), also known as municipal aggregation. These programs allow local governments to procure power on behalf of their residents, businesses, and municipal accounts from an alternative supplier while still receiving transmission and distribution service from their existing utility provider. CCAs are an attractive option for communities that want more local control over their electricity sources, more green power than is offered by the default utility, and/or lower electricity prices. By aggregating demand, communities gain leverage to negotiate better rates with competitive suppliers and choose greener power sources.

This by no means is a list of everything we have been working on nor are we looking for a “pat on the back”. We are merely listing for you some of the areas we have focused on in the First 100 days. We’ll continue to work on areas including the upgrades to the filter plant and work at the reservoir in Guilderland. We will continue our fight with Guilderland to arrive at a fair assessment and not be a victim of a callus and unjustified value that will force our residents to bare this burden.

I will continue to provide updates and information via my email distribution list, Facebook, and videos to keep you informed. Thank you for the honor and privilege to serve as your Mayor and I speak on behalf of the entire council, THANK YOU for your support.