

STATE OF THE CITY
2018

President Viscelli, members of the Common Council, citizens of the City of Rome, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the 2018 State of the City presentation here at Mohawk Valley Community College. I would like to especially welcome and thank President Randy VanWagoner and Rome Campus Dean Franca Armstrong for continuing their commitment to make these campus facilities available to the community. MVCC has hosted many, many different events since opening and this weekend they continue to assist our community organizations by hosting the Rome Catholic School festival fundraiser.

On your way in you passed by two of our newest public safety vehicles. The Rome Police Department has added its new motorcycle to the fleet, which will not only be used for ceremonial purposes, but will be on patrol with certified operators. It is a beautiful cruiser and we are extremely pleased that we are adding another law enforcement tool to our Police Department. With a grant from Assemblyman Brindisi, the Fire Department added an all-terrain vehicle specifically outfitted for EMS response along our extensive trail system. This vehicle is a great addition to our emergency rescue operations.

Joining us this afternoon are representatives from Senator Griffo's office, County Executive Anthony Picente's office and Allison Nowak from Empire State Development.

Each day I am still honored and humbled to serve our great city as your Mayor. We have been very fortunate to make many significant strides towards a busier, more vibrant city than when we first started this term in 2016. We continue to receive inquiries and visits from business people interested in learning more about our city and where they might be able to fit into our future plans.

Economic development remains at the top of our agenda each and every day, and our hard work is beginning to pay off. Our most important win was the \$10 million prize for the Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI). The Local Planning Committee (LPC) got right to work and produced the final project list in six months to meet the State's priority project funding deadline. We will soon learn the final funding decisions for the projects submitted, and we are excited get going. DRI activity will dominate 2018 and 2019. The LPC took the blueprint laid out by our Community and Economic Development Department and Mohawk Valley EDGE and settled the final project submissions along with our consultant, Bergmann Associates. We hope to demolish the crumbling Liberty/George Street parking garage to allow us to seek a developer to create much needed downtown housing. Significant improvements will be made to the Capitol Theatre, the REACH Center, the City Hall green and the Liberty/James Street parking garage, along with a business redevelopment fund, a new transfer station for Centro, and a second apartment facility on our remaining infill lot.

Some work has already started in the DRI area with the Capitol Theatre's commercial façade just completed with beautiful new awnings, lighting and message boards announcing upcoming movies at the

Capitol Cinema. The Neighborhood Center was able to install new energy efficient windows and doors on the front façade facing W. Dominick Street as well as upper story commercial windows on the Erie Blvd façade. The REACH Center will also update their Erie Blvd. façade with new cut-in windows to enhance the art gallery experience on the interior as well as improve the streetscape on the exterior with lower story awnings. These façade projects are consistent with the Administration's emphasis to enhance the visual aesthetics' of Erie Blvd.

Interior repairs and cosmetic improvements continue at City Hall. Bids have been received and accepted for masonry work to begin on both facades of the building. This much needed attention and care will correct leaking, deterioration and safety issues with the brick facades. This is being made possible through grants obtained through Senator Griffo, Assemblyman Brindisi, County Executive Tony Picente and the Board of Legislators, and we thank them for assisting us to maintain this important asset in our DRI footprint.

We identified the western side of our downtown footprint as having been ignored for many years, and last year we began efforts along with the Community Development Advisory Committee (CDAC) to address the 400-600 blocks of W. Dominick Street completing a \$400,000 SMART Walk sidewalk reconstruction program. We have also allocated another \$100,000 through the CDAC for commercial/residential façade improvements in this area. This venture will be administered with the assistance of The Home Ownership Center. Very shortly, the SMART Walk program will move into the 300 block of W. Dominick Street utilizing a \$640,000 Consolidated Funding Application (CFA) for green infrastructure, pedestrian and bicycle improvements, aesthetic enhancements, safety upgrades and \$250,000 from National Grid for public placemaking enhancements for the monumented Upper Landing.

Two more important initiatives will take place on our west side. The DRI offered us the opportunity to assist a local company to relocate and expand to Ridge Street on the former Rome Cable Building 3 complex remediated site to more than double their space with a new, state of the art advanced manufacturing 50,000 square foot building retaining approximately 35 employees with 15 new hires upon relocation. Dubbed Project BlueCrab the DRI was able to allocate \$900,000 and extend its footprint to bring this company and its workforce within the DRI target area. Shortly after submitting the completed DRI Strategic Investment Plan we learned that the City of Rome would receive a \$1 million RESTORE grant to finally allow us to remove the rest of the former Rome Cable blight. These two projects will incorporate many partners including DEC, Rome Industrial Development Corporation, EDGE, Rome Community Brownfield Restoration Corporation and OCIDA, but because of the foresight of the LPC's decision to extend the DRI footprint west to Erie Blvd, Project BlueCrab takes on the added significance as the catalyst project for this new industrial area on the west side of our downtown center.

Given Project BlueCrab and the RESTORE grant, the City and EDGE quickly went to work outlining a new development strategy for the former Rome Cable site. Post demolition and remediation activities, we are proposing to designate a PILOT Incremental Financing (PIF) district area on the former Rome Cable site to begin encumbering a portion of the taxes collected to be used strictly towards the many municipal site improvements that will allow for further business development and growth such as water and sewer extensions, new roads and extension of new utilities. We thank the DEC and ESD for recognizing the need to remove these blighted structures, remediate the contamination and reestablish this area for future

industrial development. All of these projects are in keeping with our Brownfield Opportunity Initiative (BOA) which seeks to eliminate property eyesores, provide remediation strategies for contaminated facilities and planning of neighborhood revitalization and site development for the Erie Boulevard sector.

Plans are progressing for DePaul Properties to begin the task of demolishing the former Dewitt Clinton School to make way for an 80 unit mixed development of much needed midmarket rate apartments and townhouses. This \$25 million project will continue our efforts to revitalize our neighborhoods in South Rome and support rehabilitation work on the nearby waterfront. This development also fits nicely with our recently completed \$780,000 planning grant for the waterfront where we will seek to continue our investment with placemaking enhancements, unearthing and rewatering of the historic Clinton's Ditch and invest in pedestrian connections and bicycle facility improvements along the waterfront district.

2018 will mark the first full year of operation for the recently completed Navigation Center. The Navigation Center will be operational during the Barge Canal season this year beginning on May 15. In addition to increased water access enhancements as well as visitor amenities such as benches and swings, we will be adding a full time employee to service the entirety of the Bellamy Harbor Complex assisting with daily maintenance, general groundskeeping and the availability of someone to answer questions of boaters who are dropping anchor in Rome. A highlight this season will be a tour stop by the Corning Glass Barge on Thursday, July 5th.

Moving east, remediation activity will begin at the former Rome Turney Radiator site. The City will begin implementing a \$200,000 EPA grant and finalize the plans for a \$500,000 RESTORE NY project on this site. The goal is to completely clear this approximately 3 acre site of its blighted structures and open it for future development on an integral entry corridor to the City's downtown area.

On our E. Dominick Street entry corridor, we completed the remediation and demolition of the former 1333 E. Dominick Street parcel opening an approximately 3 acre corner site. Marketing signs have been installed announcing this parcel ready for redevelopment. This project was made possible utilizing a \$200,000 EPA cleanup grant, Community Development Block grant funds, and an investment by National Grid and the City of Rome.

The demolition of the blighted structures encompassing the Woodhaven housing complex was completed by 2017 year's end as part of a \$1.5 million Empire State Development grant and a significant additional investment of almost \$550,000 by the City allowing removal of the old housing leaving only the concrete slabs. Working with our consultant, C.T. Male, our Community and Economic Development Department along with Mohawk Valley EDGE is putting the finishing touches on the Master Plan and SEQR readying for an RFP notification to potential developers.

As evidenced by the recent awards of substantial new contracts to technology companies associated with the Department of Defense, contractor activity at AFRL, the re-designation of the Griffiss UAS test facility for an additional six years with the accompanying \$50 million drone corridor between Griffiss and Syracuse, the continued growth of MVCC and the increasing job opportunities available in our advanced manufacturing sector, housing is becoming more and more of a critical issue in the City of Rome. 2017 was an excellent year for our real estate market and we expect another robust year in 2018. With our

existing housing stock turning over at a rapid pace, the Delta Luxury Apartments added two 8 unit apartment buildings to their housing project on Merrick Road. However, to meet future business sector growth we must secure additional midmarket/market rate housing to capture future employees and their families. The Woodhaven, Floyd Avenue, Route 825 corridor will become more important as a growth area for new mixed use commercial and residential offerings, and we are working diligently with EDGE to identify potential development partners, both local and regional. Concurrently, we are exploring possible new initiatives to incentivize new residential home development.

To the North, work will begin soon extending the Mohawk River Trail. Phase 2 will close the gap from Chestnut Street to Wright Settlement with paved connections, respite areas and signage utilizing a \$1.4 million dollar federal grant administered by NYS DOT.

As outlined in last year's State of the City, this Administration is continuing its commitment to spread economic development from north to south, east to west. None of this would be possible without the leadership and commitment of our Community and Economic Development Department and our continuing strong partnership with Mohawk Valley EDGE. Together, we have been able to implement a city wide strategy encompassing industrial, mixed use and infrastructure development as well as green infrastructure, trail development and adaptive reuse of historic structures in our urban core resulting in 80 requests for legislation in 2017 to the Common Council and Board of Estimate and Contract. Both organizations have been fostering community engagement for the Comprehensive Plan updates to include the BOA Masterplan, Woodhaven Masterplan, sustainability measures and zoning code amendments to coincide with Comp Plan updates.

The Administration is committed to a rigorous program of ridding our city of contaminated, blighted parcels and returning them to the tax rolls. The assistance offered to us to help solve this problem was very much welcomed and appreciated in 2017. For years, we have had deteriorating property sitting idle due to contamination issues. DEC offered their assistance through the cleanup fund to remediate some long vacant parcels. Six cleanup projects were undertaken at 6991 E. Dominick Street, 501 W. Thomas Street, 7008 Oriskany Road, 229 S. James Street, 717-719 W. Dominick Street and 201 Railroad Street at a total savings to the City of well over \$1 million dollars. Our Corporation Counsel's office is working with the Comptroller's office to secure Releases on the now clean sites. When the Releases are obtained, the City will move to foreclosure in an effort to return these properties to the tax roll through our Real Property Committee.

Last year the City joined the six county Land Bank. After almost a year of planning and implementation of policies and procedures by the Land Bank Board with expert guidance provided by our Chief Code Enforcement Officer, Mark Domenico, the City has just completed its first transfer of 4 properties in the area of Fort Stanwix Park to the Land Bank for a rehabilitation project. We look forward to tracking the progress of this initial property offering with the Land Bank.

The City through its Real Property Committee has transferred over half a million dollars of property back to the tax rolls between 2016 and 2017. Additionally, commercial and industrial investment is trending upwards for the years 2016 and 2017 with a total investment of \$8.7 million dollars with the bulk of this construction occurring in 2017.

Retail investment continued to grow with Freedom Plaza improvements which brought T Mobile, Shoe Department, Pet Supply and Rue 21 expansion along with a FASTRAC Café in West Rome. The Stewart's Shop opened on Route 825 at Floyd Avenue and a second Stewart's will be constructed on the corner of Jay Street and Erie Blvd. Just recently the Jones Nursery has relocated to a brand new facility on Ridge Mills Road.

Private sector growth was also realized in the technology and advanced manufacturing sectors. AIS secured its position with two new Defense related contracts. Kris-Tech Wire continues to expand at the Griffiss Park, BNP Machine purchased the former Serway Cabinet building on Railroad Street. Owl Wire, Varflex and Worthington Industries, and many other businesses are all actively hiring new employees.

The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) is an integral component of our economic development strategy. The funding provided by HUD allows us to address neighborhood revitalization, removal of blight, low to moderate job creation, healthcare and social service's needs in the HUD defined target area. We are completing our latest round of projects which included a complete rebuild of the sidewalks and right of way along 5th Street, re-pavement of the Pinti Field fitness trail including the installation of new LED trail lighting, improvements to Steven's Field including replacing the pool pump, installing security lights and repairing the pavilion roof, completely renovating the Municipal Pool restrooms with new partitions and fixtures, new sidewalks along 1st Street, façade improvements to DonNa's Café, The Neighborhood Center, the REACH Center and the Capitol Theatre. Work will begin soon on a pedestrian improvement project on E. Embargo and N. James Street to include ADA compliant pedestrian crosswalks and sidewalks. As mentioned earlier, additional monies were spent in the W. Dominick Street corridor as well as the CDAC supporting a number of different initiatives throughout the community with public service funding for various programs such as Artletics at the Rome Art & Community Center, Little Learner's, Mohawk Valley Community Action's Journey Home, YWCA's Lucy's House and the Teen Center at the YMCA.

New organizations that we are looking forward to supporting are the Rome Community Schools Initiative, with the Rome City School District being one of only three in the United States to receive American Federation of Teachers Innovation Funding to concentrate on project-based learning centered on STEAM initiatives with community partners; the establishment of Abraham House in Rome to service those patients who currently have to travel outside our city for end of life care, and on this Friday the return of Mohawk Valley Community Action to the city with new administrative offices on W. Liberty Street.

Just last week, we received confirmation of our annual CDBG allotment, and I am are pleased to announce that we will receive a little over \$1 million dollars for our 2018 program, an increase for the first time in many years. We are very proud that HUD recognizes the City of Rome as a good steward of their dollars with effective, well thought out programs which are making positive impacts on our infrastructure, commercial façade improvements and public services in low to moderate areas.

A first impression means everything and we will continue to work with Rome Main Streets Alliance on beautification efforts in our corridors and on the waterfront to present our city as a welcoming, cared for

municipality in which you are proud to live and work. After an initial pilot program in 2017, we will be investing in self watering liners for our planters to cutdown on the amount of watering and labor required by our DPW staff.

Last year we announced the implementation of a romeny311 program furthering our outreach with our residents. Romeny311 was rolled out several months ago as a phone app which allows users to report issues of concern to various city departments including public works, water, sewer, RPD, RFD, parks and many more. It has been extremely successful since implementation and has already resulted in over 100 requests for assistance. We identified a need for a reporting program like this through our “Walks with the Mayor”.

Additionally, we will implement two more programs this year as a result of our “Walk with the Mayor” neighborhood initiative. The number one inquiry we received citywide last year was the condition of sidewalks. As specified in our City Charter, sidewalks are the responsibility of the homeowner and/or commercial property owner. Currently, the Engineering Department administers a Sidewalk Rebate Program first adopted by the Common Council in 2002. Essentially this program provides financial assistance to a property owner who is replacing sidewalks. The Council passed Ordinance 9057 in 2015 to increase the rebate to \$4 per square foot of qualifying replacement. In response to concerns expressed by property owners citywide last year, we will be asking the Common Council to double the rebate to \$8 per square foot for qualifying sidewalk with payment limits increased to \$2800 for a residential lot, \$4000 for a residential corner lot and \$5500 for a commercial corner lot for 2018 only in an effort to assist those property owners who would like to do sidewalk replacement. We hope that many property owners will take advantage of this program.

The second most fielded inquiry concerned tree branches hanging over sidewalks impeding clear walking lanes in the rights of way. Last fall we were able to start some tree trimming and this year we will add a more robust component to our 2018 program. “Walk with the Mayor” is intended to highlight neighborhood issues and then find solutions to those problems. This year’s walks will commence on Monday, June 4th and continue on Monday and Tuesday throughout the summer months.

A \$100,000 electrical project will take place soon at the Rome Art & Community Center. This facility is in need of an electrical circuitry upgrade and those funds were secured through a grant with Senator Griffo. We thank him for his efforts to secure funding for this city owned asset.

We will continue our collaboration with administrators from the Rome City School District, Rome Memorial Hospital, Griffiss Business and Technology Park and Mohawk Valley Community College seeking solutions to community based issues which we began exploring through the Community Needs Assessment (CNA). The CNA helped to identify some service gaps like the lack of urgent care facilities in our city. Rome Memorial Hospital in a partnership with Slocum-Dickson Medical Group established urgent care services last fall, and has gradually increased the days and hours clinic services are available filling a very much needed health service in our community. We thank them for their efforts. Construction is also underway on the corner of N. James Street and Erie Blvd for urgent care and dental offices on a corner lot previously owned by Berkshire Bank.

We will continue to further our investments in tourism through support for Fort Stanwix National Monument participating this year in the new PACT (Parks, Art, Culture, Tourism) program on the first Friday of each month July through October, continue our efforts to establish the city hall green as a four season destination with a spring event, the Downtown Market which begins on Friday, June 15 and continues through Friday, October 5th, the summer concert series which will kick off this year on Monday, July 9 and continue through Monday, August 20th, expansion of our successful Halloween event in October and hopefully soon ice skating. We will continue our community partnership with the Honor America Days Celebration which draws thousands of people to Rome every year. We will continue building upon our Christmas light displays throughout the city in order to reach our goal of becoming a destination city during the Christmas season. Last year, we were able to add Wiggins Park to the west and Griffiss Park to the north.

I believe we are very fortunate to have a very active, very robust Parks and Recreation Department. Our Recreation Department continues to offer a well-rounded slate of programming at our city parks for the summer season. Last year almost 1300 children participated in our events from the opening of the parks the last week of June through August. There was truly something for everyone including a fitness program aimed at 4 year olds to 12 year olds, street hockey, field hockey, tumbling, karate, weight training, rugby, baseball, kayaking, basketball, soccer, tennis, science club, swimming lessons, water polo and our drop in program. In addition to all these program offerings, this year we will add Zumba, and our summer basketball programs will be under the direction of the Head Men's and Women's basketball coaches at SUNY Poly along with a professional ice hockey player leading our street hockey program and a Division I alumnus directing field hockey. Kennedy Arena is certainly busy during the hockey season but you may not realize that the Arena is the home of CNY Roller Derby in the off season, and new for the 2018 off season is CNY Jr. Roller Derby and an adult in line hockey league on Wednesday nights.

From a financial point of view, our latest audit shows the City in a better position financially. Sales tax revenue was up over \$700,000, we are beginning to see some solar revenue of a little over \$100,000, telemedicine continues to lower our overall healthcare costs, and our actual expenses and revenues are staying on target with our budget forecasts.

Continuing our efforts to function more efficiently from an operational standpoint, we have created a new position of Supervisor of Buildings and Grounds to assist the Commissioner of Public Works with his many responsibilities. The Supervisor of Buildings and Grounds will have responsibility for all our parks, municipally owned buildings and facilities. I am pleased to announce we have appointed our long time foreman of our Parks, Jim Guy, to this new position. We will be making more announcements about this position and its responsibilities during our 2019 budget presentation.

We are busy in the areas of water and sewer. The Wastewater Treatment facility is in the midst of a \$6,000,000 solids handling upgrade and is in the design phase for a new state mandated \$6,250,000 UV disinfection facility. Both of these projects are being supplemented by \$4,910,300 in NYS grant funding. Work continues on the UV disinfection facility at the Water Treatment Plant. HVAC is almost complete, electrical work is progressing, and we applied for and received a \$3 million grant toward construction of this facility last year.

Just recently, we executed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Town of Verona to explore the possibility of the City of Rome becoming the sole water supplier to the Town of Verona. This is a great example of implementing a shared services approach to a public health/public safety issue with the need for expansion of Verona's ability to service all of its residents with clean, treated drinking water, and eliminate the need for well water throughout the Town. We will continue working toward an Intermunicipal Agreement with the Town to supply drinking water.

This was a truly long winter producing a number of winter storms, and our employees did an exemplary job. The February storm which produced thick, heavy, wet snow and damaging winds was especially challenging. Fortunately, we were ready from an operational standpoint and deployed our Emergency Storm Management Response Team. Our departments functioned extremely well and worked seamlessly as a team deploying resources and people where necessary without hesitation.

The Rome Fire Department does not get enough credit for their first responder responsibilities during a storm. They are dispatched first to all 911 calls involving downed trees and downed wires, which may be blocking roadways and intersections. Many times they cut the trees away themselves clearing the roads and intersections for traffic. They are responsible for assessing the situation, requesting dispatch of National Grid, the cable and/or telephone companies and then securing the scene until the utilities arrive. During our February storm, they handled a record 159 calls for service that covered virtually all 72 square miles, and a week ago on Friday night they were back at it handling calls for downed trees and downed wires in our latest storm.

The Police Department has the harrowing responsibility of covering all of our intersections when we lose stoplights to power outages. Our regular duty officers, along with our VIPS, provide traffic control at crucial times when a storm is sometimes developing in all kinds of foul weather. It is their responsibility to set flares, alert National Grid and keep our intersections safe and traffic flowing. The day of our February storm we had multiple, major intersections without traffic lights for extended periods of time but our residents never felt unsafe on our roadways due to the efforts of our patrol officers and the VIPS.

Our Department of Public Works was tasked this past season with a very long winter requiring them to plow or salt almost daily for a very long period of time. Although, they had to be tired of getting called back every overnight they never complained and our roadways and intersections were kept clear of snow and ice. The February snowstorm was especially taxing on them as our crews literally ran for almost 48 hours straight. Our crews remain hard at work cleaning up from our winter storm damage.

The Parks Department also provides a variety of services during a storm as they are tasked with keeping all our 25 parks facilities cleared of snow and ice, including Kennedy Arena and operating our sidewalk plows over 15 miles throughout the city. In addition to doing their regular duties, they also re-deployed their resources during our February storm to assist the DPW.

Of course, our Water and Wastewater Departments were also very busy during the long winter and during our snowstorms. Over a two year period the Water Department, which has responsibility for over 187 miles of water mains, has repaired numerous water main breaks in all kinds of weather including the extreme cold, and our Wastewater Department continuously maintains our 27 pumping stations and 175

miles of sanitary sewer which keeps our sewage flowing. Both of these departments deserve our praise as their work often goes unnoticed because they are able to minimize disruption to the drinking water or wastewater facilities to our residents.

The employees of these departments may not get much recognition, but they are truly the backbone that keeps our many services operating smoothly. Please give them a much deserved round of applause.

Our Community and Economic Development Department has made great strides over the last two years to augment our communications efforts with the public rolling out a newly designed website, utilizing traditional and social media marketing, instituting monthly newsletters and managing public engagement sessions. We will continue to grow this communications network.

A great variety of economic development activity will occur throughout the city in the next two years, and we are well on our way to unfolding some truly transformational projects in our downtown area, South Rome, East Rome and North Rome. It is important to remember we cannot change our past, but we can absolutely forge our future. My thanks again to the citizens of Rome for entrusting me with the opportunity to lead this great city. May God Bless the City of Rome and all of you.