

STATE OF THE CITY 2019

President Viscelli, members of the Common Council, citizens of the City of Rome, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the 2019 State of the City presentation at our beautiful Mohawk Valley Community College campus. I would like to thank President Randy VanWagonen, and especially welcome Rome Campus Dean Franca Armstrong for continuing their strong commitment to hosting many different community events and meetings hosted by various groups in this wonderful facility.

I would like to recognize representatives of my colleagues in government, Brian Adey representing Senator Joe Griffo, Amela Hrustic representing Assemblywoman Marianne Buttenschon, while both are attending legislative session in Albany. Our County Executive Anthony Picente. The Town of Verona Supervisor Scott Musacchio. Allison Nowak from Empire State Development. Steve DiMeo, President Mohawk Valley EDGE. Col Paul Bishop, Commander 224th Air Defense Group, Eastern Air Defense Sector. Please join me in welcoming our interim Superintendent at Fort Stanwix, James Williams, who will be with us for the next few months until a permanent superintendent is appointed to Fort Stanwix. I hope that Superintendent Williams will still be with us for “Christmas in July” at the annual Honor America Days Celebration and the Pops Concert on the great lawn at Fort Stanwix.

It has truly been an honor and privilege to serve as your Mayor. Over the last 3 ½ years we have been planting the seeds for growth throughout the city. We are now beginning to see real results.

Economic development remains our top priority, and the \$10 million Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) is the cornerstone of that strategy. Work has begun to transform the downtown area into a more vibrant, cohesive centerpiece with an emphasis on the arts and culture. Fittingly, the demolition of the Liberty/George Street parking garage began two weeks ago, and today almost the entire structure has been leveled to the ground. This clears the way for site redevelopment including an interim public parking surface with lighting and landscaping. The ultimate end-use redevelopment is envisioned as a mixed-use multiple story apartment building which contributes to the resurgence of vibrancy and economy in the downtown.

The Capitol Theater just recently modified its name to the Capitol Arts Complex to more accurately reflect the restoration of the grand theater with a growing emphasis on the performing arts. The Capitol has embarked on a \$4 million project which will include additional multipurpose performance space supplemented with \$2.5 million in DRI funding to restore the grand theater and return the marquee to the downtown superblock.

The REACH Center in partnership with the Rust to Green Urban Studio (a program affiliated with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Oneida County) and 4 Elements Studio, both located in Utica, will transform the REACH Center into the first regional Utica-Rome Creative Arts Incubator HUB. This DRI priority project with input from CNY Arts will utilize \$250,000 in DRI funding along with a \$200,000 Main Streets grant for development of an additional 8-10,000 square feet of maker space on the Erie Blvd ground floor to accommodate more artists and to provide enhanced arts and incubation programming.

Thursday evening the Rome Art Association hosted their annual spring art show awards at the REACH Center to an overflow crowd. This is the second gallery type event that I have attended at the REACH Center, and again the event attracted many from the arts community not just in Rome, but also throughout the county.

An important component of the DRI is to grow our downtown housing options and just recently, we announced an innovative housing project for the downtown corridor. The Kearney Group, aided by a \$500,000 DRI incentive, will embark on the \$16 million Copper City Lofts, providing 68 units of loft style apartments with an emphasis on attracting those with a background in arts and culture to live in the burgeoning downtown arts corridor. Imagine a living space where musicians, painters, writers, dancers, actors and actresses, singers, sculptors, videogame designers, and many other disciplines can live, work and collaborate while bringing new energy to our community and the downtown arts corridor.

Design and engineering is almost complete on plans for renovations to City Hall and the green. A community space of approximately 3000 square feet with public restrooms will be erected on the backside of city hall facing the green. This facility will allow for heated and air conditioned indoor space to support outdoor events on the city green like the ice skating rink. The goal is for the city green to host many wonderful quality of life activities focused in the downtown corridor.

The next DRI project to go out to bid will be for the new CENTRO transfer station on W. Liberty Street. Our goal is to have the transfer station ready for occupancy by November before our next winter season is upon us. This transfer station will feature floor to ceiling windows to allow for a well-lit building with comfortable seating, heat and air conditioning as well as route maps for this \$400,000 DRI priority project.

Downtown will also be enhanced with wayfinding directional aids. New signage will assist citizens and visitors alike to navigate their way throughout the downtown area.

Integral to wayfinding is improving connections between Erie Blvd and W. Dominick Street. Two weeks ago, the Governor announced that the City of Rome was a successful award recipient of a \$1.1 million Erie Blvd TAP grant. Administered through the DOT, the project will produce pedestrian and streetscape enhancements along Erie Boulevard from James Street to Madison Street including intersection safety upgrades and strengthened pedestrian connections. Pedestrian connections along and across Erie Boulevard were identified as a pipeline project of the DRI and we are pleased that the DOT recognized its importance to the overall Downtown Revitalization Initiative.

We are very fortunate to have two city parks within the DRI catchment area. Passive park settings are integral to those wishing to bike, walk or picnic in the city. We will be working with the DRI architects on design enhancements to Veterans and Gansevoort Parks. These parks are within the Bellamy Gansevoort Historic District, one of the most historically significant urban areas in the city. The design team will take into account the site sensitivities when laying out the design options, which will ultimately require the sign off from NYS SHPO before any work can commence. This project was also indicated as a pipeline project within the DRI Plan and we look forward to providing functional and interesting park enhancements as part of this project.

Renovations for Rome Abraham House, formerly the Rome Home, are progressing nicely. Rome Abraham House fills a service gap identified in the Community Needs Assessment for end of life care in our city. This 6 bed facility will provide a home-like environment for patients and families who are unable to be cared for at home as they approach end of life in a caring and nurturing atmosphere. We will be supporting programming activities at Rome Abraham House through the Community Development Block Grant.

The downtown superblock area has already begun to see the effects of the DRI with new facilities housing urgent care, dental offices and a coffee shop. Very soon an arts supply store will establish in the area as well as a company specializing in cybersecurity collaboration.

When we took office 3 ½ years ago we settled on a redevelopment strategy that would encompass different quadrants of our city, downtown central, east, south, west, north and northeast. We fulfilled our dream of winning the \$10M DRI which got us off to a great start. Let's look east next.

The next target was cleaning up the old Woodhaven housing blight. Made possible by a \$1.5M NYS ESD grant we also invested an additional \$500,000 of city funds to demolish almost all of the structures and begin to restore the neighborhood. We are now exploring ideas to possibly rubbleize the remaining concrete slabs for use as base material for our water and public works departments. We believe this Floyd Avenue/Route 825 corridor will become our next large development area incorporating an urban setting near Stewart's on the former Building 240 site and more of a neighborhood setting along the front 30 acres on Floyd Avenue and the remaining 60+ acres behind on Park Drive. Significantly, we will also bring together the city and the Griffiss Business and Technology Park as those living either at the B240 site or at Woodhaven will be within walking distance of the Griffiss Park, a much closer commute to where they work. A major anchor identified through our community engagement meetings was the need for a recreation facility. The YMCA was successful in its application through the Combined Funding Application (CFA) last year and has been awarded a \$2M NYS CFA grant to establish a new YMCA facility on Floyd Avenue. The YMCA has recently retained GRO Development, a national leader in design/engineering of new YMCA facilities, to begin the planning process. GRO recently visited Rome engaging many different focus groups to begin the process of making the new Y a reality. Armed with this exciting news, the city and Mohawk Valley EDGE solicited potential developers earlier this year through a Request for Expression of Interest (RFEI) proposal process. We were successful in receiving some very good proposals for both the B240 and Woodhaven sites. Announcements concerning the future development of these two areas will come soon.

Also in East Rome, a new business is taking shape in the former 1212 facility on E. Dominick Street. Atom29 Corporation specializes in copper wire processing. Please join me in welcoming the new owner, Jim Lawson, to our city. Jim has been busy clearing land and making internal upgrades to the facility to accommodate his business. He will initially have 15 employees and plans to grow employment yearly.

1333 E. Dominick Street was remediated and demolished two years ago by the city ridding the neighborhood of a blighted factory along our entry corridor. We are now marketing this property to potential new business interests.

The first brewery in Rome in over 70 years, Copper City Brewery has begun an expansion to increase production capacity. A homegrown success story, Copper City Brewing Co. was rated as one of the best beer bars in America in 2018 by CraftBeer.com readers.

Street reconstructions have been completed on 1st Street and 5th Streets with 1st Street also receiving new sidewalks along with railroad crossing repairs at Mill Street and 5th Street. Three years ago, we completed a \$600,000 streetscape along the 200 block of E. Dominick Street including pedestrian crossings, bike pavement marking, landscaping and sidewalk improvements.

Nearby, a \$14.5M complete interior and exterior renovation of the 74 unit Colonial I Apartment complex is currently underway. In addition to restoring the exterior façade, residents will also have brand new apartments.

Some of our largest development projects are taking place in South Rome. Late last year, DePaul Properties demolished the former DeWitt Clinton School to begin a \$25M project providing new housing opportunities with 66 midmarket range apartments and 14 townhouse style units. Work is progressing quickly with DePaul representatives targeting a spring 2020 occupancy.

With the new DeWitt Clinton Apartments in mind, the first public project of the recently completed \$780,000 DOS neighborhood wide improvement design grant coined as “Waterfront Village” is the S. James Street Overlook. This \$600,000 scenic overlook trail enhancement project will begin the process of extending our improvements westerly along the canal. In close proximity to the DeWitt Clinton Apartments, this area will offer a great spot for walkers or bikers to take advantage of the historic canal.

Byrne Dairy, after many years of exploring new retail store opportunities in Rome, is quickly becoming a reality on our entry corridor near Coalyard’s. This store is not only a great addition to the neighborhood but will provide opportunities for those traveling from Rome to have a convenient stop for gas and snacks. Byrne Dairy is heading toward a June opening and currently accepting applications for employment.

Bowers Development will take on the remediation and demolition of the former Rome Turney Radiator factory on Canal Street. The city will utilize a \$200,000 EPA grant to assist some of the environmental cleanup in the courtyard area with Bowers beginning demolition activities soon thereafter. Bowers is actively marketing the site identifying several potential new business clients to occupy the corner upon completion of the remediation and demolition work.

After years of inactivity on our west side, our efforts to jumpstart new business opportunities is taking shape. Along with the neighborhood, the entire city has waited decades for removal of the blighted Rome Cable Building Complex 4. This summer our wait is over with the DEC announcing this past week that the entire remediation and demolition project will be paid for through the Superfund at a price tag of \$13M. DEC will eradicate the approximately 40 acre site of contaminants and demolish the entirety of the remaining blighted structures making way for an approximately 20 acre parcel capable of handling

200,000 square feet of new business/manufacturing space. We will apply a \$1M RESTORE grant toward site preparation of this new industrial park.

The first new industrial project out of the gate in this area will be the \$5M Coldpoint manufacturing facility. Bursting at the seams in their West Rome Industrial Park location, Coldpoint will relocate to the former Rome Cable Complex 3 parcel with a \$900,000 DRI incentive bringing its total employment closer to 50 employees when operations commence at this new location. EDGE and the city are working diligently to assist the company in completing the financing package to allow construction to get underway.

Also after decades of inaction, the city has worked out a plan with the DEC to demolish the former Polka Dot Laundry on Erie Blvd. Predemolition site work has begun with demolition scheduled for Monday, May 13. We will return this parcel to a nicely landscaped greenspace that contributes to the beautification efforts of the downtown.

Our city has a wonderful trail system. Formalizing the in-city portion of the Canalway Trail through signage will be taking place from Charles Street to South James Street joining the west side to the downtown center of the city. Additionally, DOT has committed to assist in accessibility improvements to the Erie Boulevard crossing at West Dominick Street, which should be completed this summer.

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding was utilized to complete a \$100,000 SMARTWALK sidewalk reconstruction in the 400-600 blocks of W. Dominick Street.

Currently, the 300 block of W. Dominick Street is undergoing a \$700,000 complete streetscape reconstruction with a public art component to kick off the public support of the emerging arts district. This is an important connecting block to downtown from the west. Improvements will include green infrastructure drainage, dedicated bike lanes, enhanced pedestrian crossings and landscaping.

Perhaps the most highly anticipated project since its announcement is taking place in north Rome. A construction fence has been installed and abatement has begun with demolition to follow of the former Rose Hospital facility to welcome a new Hannaford's grocery store to Rome. This store will be Hannaford's largest at 49,000 square feet expanding its network to the furthest point west of their company retail footprint. This new commercial offering gives the city the opportunity to begin exploring opportunities for overall better pedestrian connections, streetscape and intersection improvements as funding becomes available.

The Delta Luxury Apartments will begin their final phase build out with an additional 16 market rate units to bring a total of 64 luxury apartments to north Rome on Merrick Road.

To our northeast, the Griffiss Park continues to flourish. It was announced yesterday that Assured Information Security (AIS) was awarded a \$93.6M IDIQ contract to support the Virtualized Intelligence Platform Engineering and Research (VIPER) software. AIS employs 180 people locally with a total workforce of 300. Work continues on the \$10M 32,000 square foot NYSTEC office building. This state of the art facility will be the new headquarters of NYSTEC occupying 16,000 square feet of second floor

space with another 16,000 square feet of Class A office space available for commercial tenants on the first floor.

Yesterday, I had the pleasure of visiting Sovena, USA a hidden gem at the Griffiss Park. Sovena was recently recognized as the best olive oil in the world by the International Olive Council and was the winner of the prestigious Mario Solinas Quality Award, which is the equivalent of the Academy Awards for olive oil. The company employs almost 200 people in a 300,000 square foot facility, and owns 12% of the total U.S. olive oil market. The future looks very bright for this company, and we congratulate them on their achievements and wish them further continued success.

Oneida County is in the midst of a \$21M renovation of the runway at the County Airport located at the Griffiss Park. Additionally, the County is also embarking on a multimillion-dollar renovation of Building 100 which used to be the site of the former Air Force Base runway operations. When completed, Building 100 will house a state of the art Operations Center for Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) at the Griffiss Test Site as well as an Innovation Campus to support the Air Force Research Laboratory.

As mentioned before, a multiuse project at B240 continues to make progress after a successful RFEI process. Focus groups have been held with human resources personnel of various business park employers to gauge their interest regarding facility amenities, housing requirements and connectivity to the Griffiss Park and the city.

Property owners are being contacted with regards to easements and comments regarding the Phase II expansion of the Mohawk River Trail. This expansion will begin at the Chestnut Street trailhead and continue to Wright Settlement Road funded by a \$1.4M grant.

An important component of economic development is being attentive to municipally owned infrastructure as it is the backbone to future business and residential growth, and our administration has paid particular attention to municipal infrastructure improvements especially when grant opportunities present themselves. We would like to thank the members of the Common Council for their partnership in bringing not only these important municipal projects to fruition, but their active participation through their committee engagements with department heads.

The entire city hall façade was repaired last year including repointing of the entire building, rebuilding the exterior back stairwell leading to the second floor and protective aluminum sills were installed on windowpanes and stairway handrails. This work was funded with state grants totaling \$250,000.

Curtain wall improvements, handicap accessible public restrooms and security upgrades will be undertaken as part of the DRI at city hall. The Liberty/James Street parking garage will also undergo extensive renovation through the DRI as it becomes the main parking facility for the downtown area including Fort Stanwix. Approximately \$2,630,000 will be allocated from DRI funding for these projects.

We have secured \$11,910,300 in grants to be utilized at the Wastewater Treatment Plant for solids handling, ultraviolet disinfection, interceptor sewer upgrades and digester improvements.

At the Water Filtration Plant \$3M was secured to offset the cost of ultraviolet disinfection, which will be operational this month. We also continue to work with the Town of Verona toward an Intermunicipal Agreement for the supply of water to the town. The IMA is contingent on the Town finalizing their grant funding requests.

Following a major winter storm two years ago, we lost power to our DPW operations on a day when we needed it most. This prompted us to secure \$110,000 in grant funding for installation of a new electrical service and a generator which will keep our DPW garage operational during a power outage.

Last year we applied for federal bridge repair grants as well as BRIDGE NY funding. We were able to secure \$4.7M which will allow us to repair the bridge on Seifert Road, perform ditch work on Dewey Road, resurface the Floyd Avenue bridge deck on the entry to MVCC and Woodhaven and restore the Railroad Street bridge with the largest allocation of just over \$1M.

Transportation options are vital to the economic vitality of a community and at the train station grant funding of \$500,000 will help us to make structural repairs including elevator enhancements and brick pointing. As a result of a ceiling failure on the pedestrian walkway, a new temporary walkway was finished last year and more permanent walkway improvements are being studied.

Our engineering department spends a great deal of time formulating our street maintenance program each year. Annually we dedicate between \$1M and 3M towards repairs to our streets, culverts and ditches. Beginning last year, we made a commitment to add the Griffiss Business and Technology Park, which is part of Rome's 1st ward, to our annual streets maintenance program. Visitors from around the country remark on the beauty of Griffiss compared to other closed Department of Defense facilities and we should be very proud of the fact that our city is home to a business park with almost 6,000 employees, and the world class Air Force Research Laboratory with an annual economic impact of \$412M as its anchor.

Improvements are always ongoing at our city parks and Kennedy Arena. A new pavilion housing restrooms and storage was built to support our softball leagues at Haselton. This \$124,000 project was made possible with funding from NYS Parks as well as the Community Foundation of Oneida and Herkimer Counties. LED lighting was installed to the floor areas of Kennedy Arena last year and this year we will add the warming areas. The change to LED lighting has lowered our electricity cost significantly at the Arena. Pinti Field also underwent significant restoration of the walking/fitness trail with CDBG funding.

Public Safety remains first and foremost at the top of our daily agenda. We have secured \$381,000 in grants for our police department that includes a new mobile command unit, which will be deployed when necessary for the fire department as well as public works department, a K9 service dog and vehicle, license plate readers, video recording equipment, interrogation room renovations, traffic services, child passenger safety and protective equipment.

Funding secured for the fire department totaled \$376,955 including a FEMA grant for turnout gear, and an ATV equipped for EMS calls on our trail system where standard vehicles cannot reach someone in a medical emergency and during special events like the annual Honor America Days parade. We made a

commitment to improve our HAZMAT/Animal Control facility on Black River Blvd. Last year a new roof was installed along with much needed interior repairs. Later this spring or summer, a \$50,000 grant will be utilized to outfit the building with new siding and windows to improve energy efficiency and add value to the surrounding neighborhood.

It is also imperative to continuously police our foreclosed residential inventory for dilapidated structures, and when necessary remove the blight from our neighborhoods. In three years, we have returned \$630,000 worth of foreclosed property back to the tax rolls through the Real Property Committee and have demolished 19 units helping neighborhoods to control blight, restore parking options and open up green space.

Neighborhoods are our most important asset for quality of life. In order to better connect and learn firsthand from residents about neighborhood issues, I instituted Walk with the Mayor in 2016. These neighborhood walks have been extremely successful allowing us to hear directly from residents about the particular needs of their neighborhoods. The walks have resulted in many improvements including repairs to collapsed sewers, identifying streetscape improvements including tree issues, sidewalk problems, identifying codes violations, identifying absentee landlords, and much more. Sidewalks were a major issue during our first two years of walks, so last year along with the Common Council, we improved our sidewalk rebate program to encourage property owners to replace crumbling sidewalks. The response to the 75% reimbursement was very gratifying with \$100,000 reimbursed to homeowners. As the summer progressed and word spread about the reimbursement incentive, neighbors gathered together to replace many sections of sidewalk throughout the city spanning many blocks. It also increased work for our contractors and was a boon for those with small businesses. Because of the success of last year's program and the fact that we already have a waiting list, I will send legislation to the Common Council asking them to again approve a second round of sidewalk incentive with the city underwriting 75% of the replacement cost. We hope that many more property owners will take advantage of this program as good sidewalks are integral to our neighborhoods.

Walk with the Mayor will begin Monday and Tuesday, June 4 and 5. Walks will take place throughout the city between 4:00 and 6:00 PM from June through August. If you would like to schedule a walk for your neighborhood please contact my office at city hall.

Looking ahead to summer, our Recreation Department has many wonderful programs planned for kids of all ages. The Drop In program takes place Monday through Friday. Signups get underway at 6:30 AM tomorrow morning, Wednesday, May 8, for 70 available slots. All our parks will have daily programming available along with public swimming and swimming lessons at our pools. Lunch programs are available at many of the parks daily. Over three years we have increased programming and attendance at all the parks, along with bringing back the John DellaContrada and Stan Evans elementary basketball leagues in the winter, and of course public skating and youth hockey at Kennedy Arena. In conjunction with our Marketing and Special Events Coordinator, last year we held 2 very successful outdoor gaming nights on Griffio Green, our second annual Halloween event, our first adult Easter egg hunt along with our annual children's Easter egg hunt and we are gearing up for our second season of the Downtown Market to be held on Wednesdays beginning June 5 through September 25 on the Green. Monday Nights will again be filled with music on the Green beginning July 8 through August 19, 6-8 PM.

Since creating the position of Marketing and Special Events Coordinator in our Community and Economic Development Department we have seen a 100.5% increase in our social media contacts, redesigned the city website, established a monthly electronic newsletter, a weekly digital events calendar, have had over 100 participants film short videos on why they love Rome, held numerous community engagement sessions developing the Woodhaven Redevelopment Plan, Local Planning Committee of the Downtown Revitalization Initiative and Strategic Investment Plan, Erie Blvd and Downtown Brownfield Opportunity (BOA) Community Engagement sessions.

When we began this journey a few years ago, we inherited a city government whose anticipated budgeted revenue clearly did not meet its expenses as well as a feeling of general angst throughout our government and community. The circumstances were so complicated that I did not feel comfortable offering a state of our city until we got a better handle on the situation through the budget process. We moved quickly to shore up our finances and sought assistance from other agencies in an effort to get us moving in the right direction. Tonight, I have outlined a number of projects with associated grant monies attached to them. The bottom line is in just the last 3 ½ years through collaborative efforts with federal, state and county officials we have secured over \$40M all designed to lay the foundation for future growth, and most importantly more private sector investment. Additionally, we have reorganized some of our departments and continue to provide a high quality of city services, all while restoring fiscal discipline which has resulted in two years of stable taxes. I am pleased to report that our just recently completed 2018 budget audit resulted in a \$1.1M surplus and since taking office we have raised our total fund balance to \$12,621,220, an increase of \$2,316,848 over the last three years, continuing the City of Rome's A+ rating from Standard and Poor's as a result of our strengthened financial position.

None of this would be possible without the dedication and commitment of all our employees to consistently provide services with a high quality of professionalism, each and every day. Whether plowing our streets, repairing potholes or water main breaks, removing debris from our neighborhoods, or maintaining our municipal facilities and parks, or protecting our city with our highly trained police officers and firefighters, I am proud to work alongside all of them, and the department heads who lead them. I would especially like to thank my executive team for their unwavering support and counsel as we continue to lead our city into the future.

We have made tremendous strides in the last few years, and 2019 will hold more successes. Thank you for joining me tonight. God Bless you and all the citizens of our great city.