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Mayor Madden Delivers 2018 State of the City Address

TROY, NY – Outlining his administration’s continued commitment to responsible budgeting, community engagement and investment in the Collar City’s diverse neighborhoods, Mayor Patrick Madden delivered a message of optimism and progress for the City of Troy during his third State of the City address at Troy City Hall on Thursday, February 1.

During the address, Mayor Madden detailed the community’s tremendous progress and shared achievements of the last two years while outlining his vision for moving Troy forward, including continued financial oversight of City budgets, investment in vital municipal infrastructure and community assets, expansion of recreational opportunities, and proposals which encourage continued economic development and revitalization, support small business growth and encourage civic engagement in shaping the future of the Collar City.

Full text of the 2018 State of the City Address as prepared for delivery:

Good evening.

Council President Mantello, members of the Troy City Council, and our distinguished county, state and congressional representatives: thank you for joining us this evening.

I would like to thank you all for your service. Public service is not an easy or comfortable undertaking. But in a functioning democracy it is a necessary undertaking. An effective democracy requires that we all show up, that we all participate.

I’d also like to thank each of you in attendance. Thank you for showing up, for investing your time in the City. Many of you have attended meetings with me over the past two years; it might have been neighborhood meetings, church meetings, house meetings or budget workshops. You have invested your time. You have been thoughtful and engaged, you have prodded and challenged my thinking, you have done exactly what you should be doing – participating in the

democratic process to make a difference in your community. I hope you will all continue doing that in the years to come. You are making a difference.

The Annual State of the City Address is an opportunity to celebrate our City's successes and to speak about significant fiscal and administrative objectives for the coming year.

When we began this journey together two years ago the difficulties facing our city were daunting. We knew that confronting these tasks would not be easy – and it has not been – yet we have made considerable progress. And while fiscal matters have been and will continue to be a significant driver of my agenda we have a good deal to look back on and be proud of in a number of areas. During the last two years, we have seen and felt tremendous progress in improving our city.

When I assumed office our attention was rightly focused on our finances. Structural imbalances, declining reserves and deferred obligations invoked the ire of the NYS Comptroller year after year. I spoke frequently and forcefully that the practice of kicking the can down the road had to end. By way of a series of predictably painful decisions we have made considerable progress.

We have passed two structurally balanced budgets with bi-partisan support. The process was not easy. The budgets were not ideal but a bi-partisan majority of the council understood they were necessary. We cut positions, in some cases perhaps too deeply. Our 2018 general fund budget has 18 fewer full time positions than the 2015 budget did.

We reconciled and closed 40 open capital accounts, some dating back to the year 2000. We corrected the structural deficit in our sewer fund thereby enabling us to meet our obligations to reduce the occurrences of sewer overflows into the Hudson River; we cleared all past audit findings; and we addressed the misgivings of the State Comptroller that appeared year after year in their budget reviews.

As a result, our Moody's credit rating has improved from a negative outlook to stable. Our fiscal stress rating as calculated by the NYS Comptroller decreased by 20 percentage points in 2017, and we are now in the lowest tier of risk for fiscal stress.

Going forward, we are committed to fiscal discipline and fact based budgeting. Though we are not out of the woods yet we are on the right path and headed in the right direction. The practice of kicking the can down the road has stopped. We are acting in the best interests of not only the taxpayers of today but also in the best interest of those who will inherit this City from us. I want to thank our Deputy Comptroller Andy Piotrowski and his staff for their steadfast commitment to these efforts.

In many ways we are the beneficiaries of the foresight and investment of those who came before us. The infrastructure investments of the preceding generations benefit us on a daily basis. But for too long we have neglected these assets with short sighted approaches to

budgeting. Our pools are a good example. A recent engineering assessment determined our pools are in need of a \$3 million investment to repair them and make them safe. Or our last City Hall at Monument Square that was allowed to deteriorate leading to its controversial demolition. The uncomfortable truth is that most City-owned assets show signs of deferred maintenance to varying degrees. This neglect has passed the buck from generation to generation with no solution in sight. Although we cannot immediately correct all of these omissions we are taking significant steps to address some critical components of our infrastructure.

In 2017 we replaced a mile of century old water supply piping in Lansingburgh. When doing so we also installed additional loops and valves so that if a catastrophe like that should occur again we have built in redundancy to ensure no interruption of service. We paved 5 miles of streets throughout the City. In concert with CDTA we replaced 2 miles of sidewalks and curbs in Lansingburgh over the past two years not only enhancing the look of the neighborhood but also ensuring greater accessibility We secured the last parcel of land necessary for the replacement of the aging water lines between the Tomhannock Reservoir and our water treatment plant; and completed surveys and began parcel acquisition for the long talked about South Troy industrial Roadway. It is now actually underway. Completion of this project will greatly enhance quality of life in the South Troy neighborhoods by diverting heavy truck traffic from residential streets and promote redevelopment of a much underutilized area.

2018 will usher in similar infrastructure investments including: the relining of the compromised sewer line on Campbell Avenue; the restoration of three of our water tanks; the replacement of 2 sewer pump systems; installation of a replacement water service line running under the Poestenkill Creek; and the beginning of the Seawall Flood Mitigation project. We are nearing the final approval for this long anticipated project and expect to start this spring. We will continue the street paving and sidewalk replacement initiatives; the stabilization of the embankment on Brunswick Road damaged by Hurricane Irene; and the replacement of the Mount Ida Dam on Brunswick Road and repairs to the Bradley Lake Dam.

While not generally visible or ‘ribbon-cutting worthy,’ these types of investments are necessary to preserve our assets and ensure continued reliability of services and quality of life for our residents.

Healthy neighborhoods are essential building blocks of strong and vibrant communities. The City continues to refine our programs to better address the needs of our residents. Our staff is working smarter with new technologies to improve operations and deliver quicker and more effective results for our neighborhoods. A recently secured grant will allow the Bureau of Code Enforcement to deploy new handheld technology to improve their efficiency and better track neighborhood level problems. The grant also provides funding for an additional Code Enforcement Officer whose focus will be on vacant so called ‘zombie’ buildings as well as part time legal counsel to assist us in applying pressure to the owners of vacant structures that are having such a blighting influence on our neighborhoods.

Increasing the rate of homeownership remains an important priority for our neighborhoods. Working through partners such as TRIP and Habitat for Humanity we allocate a significant portion of our federal HOME funds to assist in creating opportunities for our resident to own their own home and develop the deep connections to their community that come through homeownership. The City of Troy is also fortunate to be one of just four cities across the State to pilot a program with TRIP and SONYMA to provide financial assistance to first-time homebuyers who are interested in purchasing fixer-uppers.

In response to the closure of our pools at the end of 2016 we pulled together non-profit youth service providers in the City to see if an alternative could be developed for 2017 and beyond. The Troy Boys and Girls Club, the Lansingburgh Boys and Girls Club and the YMCA stepped up with new summer recreation opportunities with generous private sector donors underwriting the program. More than 150 young people were served in these summer camps last year. They received two meals a day and participated in structured learning environments that included: swimming, art classes, baseball camp, bowling, soccer, fishing lessons and had access to sprinkler pads at each camp site.

It was a great success and we appreciate the work of our non-profit partners and the generosity of the donors. Our plan for 2018 includes increasing the number of participants by way of earlier and broader outreach.

We are also developing plans to add splash pads and upgrades to more of our pocket parks around the City. Decentralized opportunities will make it easier for more youth to access these amenities. Funding for this is included in our 2018 capital plan and we are hopeful the Council will agree with this priority.

In 2017 we continued our commitment to fostering small business growth and entrepreneurship in the Collar City. This past October, Cheryl Kennedy, Troy's Economic Development Coordinator, spearheaded the second annual Small Business Summit which brought together hundreds of local business owners and industry professionals at the Tech Valley Center of Gravity. The result was a widely successful event that further demonstrated Troy's unique small business community and how they continue to propel us forward.

It is often noted that the marketplace is the best barometer of optimism or its absence. In 2017, more than 40 new businesses opened in Troy. Not included in that number are the small businesses that opened in workshare environments or people's homes.

In addition construction was completed on three significant projects: Tapestry on the Hudson, the conversion of a long vacant warehouse in the North Central Neighborhood into 67 apartments; the School 1 Apartments, the conversion of a vacant school building also in the North Central Neighborhood into 28 units of housing and restoring the parcel to the tax rolls; and Hudson Valley Suites, a newly constructed student housing facility adjacent to Hudson Valley Community College.

Projects now under construction with completion dates expected in 2018 include: The News with 101 apartments, off street parking and ground floor commercial space; and 444 River Street which includes 74 apartments; and the Marriott Hotel with 120 rooms.

Projects expected to begin construction in 2018 include: City Station North which will include 66 apartments, a 250 car garage and 40,000 square feet of office space; the Tru Hotel on 6th Avenue across from the County Office Building with 98 rooms; the redevelopment of 669 River Street a long vacant building in North Central into a mixed use residential/commercial use; the redevelopment of 701 River Street, another long-vacant structure in the North Central neighborhood into a mixed use residential and commercial project; and the redevelopment of the Old Brick Warehouse, a conversion in the South Central Neighborhood which will contain 80 apartments when completed.

With regard to homeownership: the median price of a home sold in Troy increased 5.4% in 2017 over 2016. That rate of growth beats the County and the Capital Region as a whole. In addition, time on market – a good indicator of desirability – dropped 25% in 2017 from the previous year. That is the largest drop in the Capital Region and is indicative of strong interest in home buying opportunities in the Collar City.

These investments by numerous individuals and businesses from the single family home buyer to the large-scale developer bespeak a strong optimism about the City of Troy and its future. The diverse tapestry of our neighborhoods, our businesses, restaurants and civic institutions is unique and appealing to a broad audience. Families, businesses and investors continue to come to Troy confident in our future, investing their time and money and creating jobs and opportunities in the process.

Inarguably the most important service that government provides its citizens is public safety. The Troy Police and Fire Departments stand as equals among the best in New York State. Their training, their dedication and their professionalism is recognized and well regarded. Evidence of this is the degree to which other municipalities rely on our departments. Whether it be a block burning fire in Cohoes or an active shooter incident at Colonie Center our Departments are called on for their expertise. Our cooperation with other departments throughout the Capital Region is a long standing tradition.

While no amount of crime is an acceptable level, it is noteworthy that in the past two years, as compiled by the Capital Region Crime Analysis Center, violent and property crime has dropped 21% in Troy. Over the same period we have seen the number of illegal guns taken off our streets increase by 32%. These improvements are not accidental. They are the result of considered decisions, new training and close relationships with the FBI, the State Police, the DEA and the Rensselaer County Sheriff's Department. The willingness and ability to adapt to changing conditions is vital to remaining effective in today's public safety environment.

On this topic: the Troy Police Department stands on the threshold of significant change. Just last month Chief Tedesco retired from the Police Department, Deputy Chief McAvoy retired last

September and acting Chief George VanBramer will be retiring in the next couple of months. Combined these men have served the City for more than 120 years! Very infrequently does the entire leadership of a department transition in such a short period of time. Over the course of 6 months we will experience a generational shift in the leadership of the Troy Police Department. This is an important opportunity for the City and the Department. The individuals who will replace these long term leaders will come to those roles influenced in a different era, bringing with them different experiences, different training protocols and a more innate dexterity with technology.

This change in leadership will usher in an increased emphasis on community policing and a robust commitment to modern community engagement. To that end police command staff and I have been in conversation with the U.S. Department of Justice since last fall. Their Community Relations Service office, including its regional director, have committed to working with us in an effort to develop specific policies and practices to maximize the community's engagement. Only by working hand in hand can the police department and the community achieve the shared goal of safer communities. We are deeply committed to advancing that philosophy.

If we truly aspire to be a City that is welcoming to all we have to take the necessary steps to ensure that all people, regardless of their abilities, have an equal opportunity to enjoy Troy. This past year, I appointed John Salka as our City's ADA Coordinator. This is the first step in my promise to ensure that our programs, services and facilities remain accessible to all people regardless of age or ability.

One of our first initiatives will be to undertake a survey of the physical condition of all sidewalks, intersections and crossings in the Central Business District, identify the barriers to free and safe passage and prioritize improvements. We are partnering with the Independent Living Center for the Hudson Valley to begin that work in the spring. This is an important step toward making real change in the way we serve our residents and visitors.

In 2017, we completed installation of the first phase of solar energy system, a 2.1 megawatt array of solar panels. With that accomplishment 20% of our municipal electric usage is now generated by the sun. Tonight I am delighted to announce that we are expanding that project so that by year's end we will be producing 40% of our municipal electric usage from solar.

In addition, we have begun a full energy analysis of all City-owned facilities. We will be identifying cost effective improvements that can reduce our energy consumption. It might be as simple as adding insulation or installing LED fixtures in a firehouse or as complex as replacing pumps and compressors at the Department of Public Utilities. Recent advances in energy efficient products and designs compels us explore options to improve our efficiencies. These moves not only generate considerable annual savings for us but they demonstrate a commitment to acting responsibly in the face of global climate change.

Having learned some difficult lessons in 2017, this year will usher in improvements in our golf course and its operations. An experienced Golf Course Superintendent has been recruited and

an investment has been made in new equipment. We are confident these changes will improve the player experience and maximize the revenue potential of the course.

Partnering with the Rensselaer County Land Trust and the Post Contemporary, we have just completed the design of Phase 1 of “The Narrows,” an extensive 5-mile hiking trail proposal that winds through the waterfalls, and historic landscapes of the Wynantskill: a wilderness hike in the City. Thanks to support from New York State, we are now in position to apply for additional funding to undertake this project that will create a greenway connection from the Hudson River to the John B. Staalsen Preserve.

The long awaited Comprehensive Plan – funded in large part by the Troy Redevelopment Foundation – is completed and will be going to the Planning Commission next week, followed by presentation to the City Council for review and approval. The completion and acceptance of the Comprehensive Plan will trigger a re-write of our zoning ordinance beginning this summer as well as the development of design plans for the north end of Riverfront Park, the downtown Marina, the Green Island Bridge gateway, the Ingalls Avenue Riverfront Park and the North Troy Boat Launch Greenway running between 123rd and 125th Streets.

Construction of The Uncle Sam Bike Trail will commence this spring. Running from the Menands Bridge to Middleburgh Street this will complete the connection of a trail from the north end of Lansingburgh to the Port of Albany.

And finally, when my administration assumed office in January of 2016, many hard working City employees – including our police officers, firefighters, and staff across all departments – were operating under long expired labor agreements. We set out to resolve these important contract agreements, working closely with union leadership to find a fair and responsible resolution which respected their contributions while protecting taxpayer’s wallets. I am pleased to report that five of Troy’s six labor units have approved new agreements, bringing over 95 percent of our workforce under contract. This is an important accomplishment and I offer my thanks to the unions for their patience and cooperation and to the Deputy Mayor for her leadership in bringing these agreements to closure.

Let me conclude with these observations: Troy is a remarkable City. Two centuries ago we were a force in the opening up of this country. We were at the epicenter of much of this country’s early growth. We invented things. We manufactured things. Things that found their way to all corners of the globe – and in time, things that found their way to the moon. Our buildings and institutions tell a story of entrepreneurship, of vision. And it is precisely these characteristics that are reinventing Troy in the 21st century.

The numbers and accomplishments that I’ve recounted this evening are the sum total of the dreams of individuals and the steps taken in pursuit of those dreams. It is the actualization of the vision and the entrepreneurship of countless people. The story of Troy 200 years ago and the story of Troy today are the same. It is a story about people creating community. It is not

about elected officials. It is about you and the efforts you repeatedly make day after day to shape your community.

The credit belongs to all of you. It belongs to those who participate in our many neighborhood organizations and civic groups. It belongs to the investors and small business owners who have invested their dollars and sweat here in Troy. It belongs to the rich fabric of non-profits that serve our spiritual, intellectual and physical needs. It belongs to the homeowners who show pride in their homes and their neighborhoods. In short it belongs to all those who recognize that problems and opportunities are two sides of the same coin and who take it upon themselves to create solutions instead of waiting for someone else to do it.

In a word I would describe the state of the City as optimistic. Optimistic that our present challenges are smaller than our possibilities. Optimistic that we can create a future that measures favorably with the greatness of our past. I see and hear that optimism on daily basis from residents and non-residents alike. It gives me great confidence in our future.

I am proud and humbled to be your Mayor. It is my goal to make you proudly proclaim that Troy is your home.

We are Troy New York, and we are in this together.

Thank you.

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