

Legislative Response to the State of the City Address 2019

Good evening fellow City Council Colleagues, Mayor Madden, City Clerk Drogan, Department Heads, City Employees, Family, Friends, and Troy Residents! Thank you all so much for joining me tonight to hear the Annual City Council President's Legislative Address.

Also, I'd like to thank all the people joining us at home on our Youtube channel. In the upcoming days, the text of this address will also be posted online.

I'm honored and grateful to be your Council President, and I promise to continue my commitment to being Troy's legislative watchdog striving to make our great city the very best we all know it can be!

I have lived my life in this city, love this city and am every day reminded of what a tremendous community we are privileged to call home. And while we have challenges, I can't imagine calling anywhere else home, and I know our best days are yet to come. Because what makes our city great are the people. Our family, our friends, our neighbors - it is our neighborhoods, all unique - all special, that make this city so strong.

And if we can look at each other and respect each other as neighbors, rather than political opponents and adversaries, we will see Troy become "One Troy" with increased revitalization in our neighborhoods and spread the downtown momentum into South Troy, the Burgh, North Central, the Eastside, and Sycaway.

In the coming year, I will continue working hard to ease the burden of taxes and fees on the taxpayers and residents of our city. As I've stated many times, while the administration states finances are better, much of that burden has been shifted to the taxpayers through taxes and fees. One example is the garbage fee. I personally oppose this fee as it's just another tax. The fee was set to expire at the end of December in 2018, and was not only continued but increased. I thank the Solid Waste Advisory Committee for their hard work on a new plan, but unfortunately the administration has not implemented a new solid waste and recycling plan to date.

I and Council Member Gulli will be introducing a ballot referendum that would amend the charter so voters can say yes or no to continuing the garbage fee in 2020.

To keep a lid on new taxes and fees we need to be creative. We should always be working to advance smarter and more efficient government, which is why it's unfortunate that the City - County Shared Services Working Group hasn't met in several months. I urge the Mayor and County Executive to reinvigorate this important working group. I continue to believe there are several areas the City can share and consolidate services to save taxpayer dollars.

We all know public safety for our residents is critical, it is the most important thing that we do..

As the original sponsor of our city run ambulance service, I will continue to support the necessary funding for training and equipment for our police officers and firefighters.

In fact, it's come to my attention that many of our city run street light cameras in our neighborhoods and downtown have malfunctioned on numerous occasions. Just this past week, a stabbing occurred on Congress and Third and the surveillance cameras were not functioning properly. I am requesting Council Member Bissember, Chair of the Council Public Safety Committee, and committee members work with myself, the Mayor, and the police department to get these cameras properly working. We must immediately correct this problem and have 100% fully functioning cameras with an ongoing maintenance plan!

Over the past 3 years I've proposed and supported body cams for our police officers. I'm proud of the Council's partnership with the administration and pleased that today we have the necessary funding in place to provide body cams for our officers. Our police should be outfitted with body cams by the end of 2019.

The new proposed Gun Buyback Program is a great step forward and I look forward to working with the Mayor and Chief to get dangerous guns off our streets.

The best way to make all of our neighborhoods safer is through more community policing which is why I support expanding the police - *Park, Walk and Talk* program, which has been a success downtown, throughout our entire city.

With our soon to be (in fact, officially tomorrow) new Fire Chief Eric McMahon, it presents an opportunity for the city to explore utilizing our firefighters to tackle code enforcement issues plaguing certain neighborhoods.

To advance initiatives like these and to keep our community safe, I continue to strongly support the full staffing of police and fire departments. But it's also important that our first responders reflect the diversity that is Troy. As our only woman firefighter has recently retired, I have asked Chief McMahon to enhance the Department's outreach to encourage the recruitment of more minority and women candidate firefighters. And I'm pleased to report that outreach has began, just this past week, the fire department partnered with the Troy African American Pastoral Alliance to recruit candidates at HVCC.

Finally, there's been an aggressive and energetic push to designate Troy as a Sanctuary City. This is an emotional issue for many residents and as I proposed back in December, I believe organized not selected neighborhood meetings to listen to what the residents have to say still needs to happen. While I'm opposed to this initiative, I'm one vote and ultimately the full Council and Mayor have the final say.

As we move forward into 2019, it's essential the City focuses more on improving the quality of life, work to make our neighborhoods safer and cleaner, and make the smart investments in infrastructure for the future of our city.

The City Council's Neighborhood Improvement Program (NIP) (with the assistance of the Capital Resource Commission) is one example the City Council partners with volunteer groups to bring pride to our City gateways, pocket parks, and monuments. Project examples range from fire hydrant painting on the Eastside to a new kiosk for our Frear Park Conservancy Trail to the

9-11 Memorial in the Burgh to the Green Infrastructure Sidewalk project to the South Troy 11th Ward Memorial, community gardens and handicapped accessible swings. While the maximum dollar amount of these projects are only up to \$1,000, this program provides huge leverage toward advancing community enhancement projects in our neighborhoods. I look forward to continuing to work with Council Members Gulli and Kennedy moving this valuable program forward over the next several months.

A special thank you to all the neighborhood organizations and volunteers who are so passionate and dedicated to restoring pride in our neighborhoods!! You rock!

Another awesome group of volunteers, who I sincerely thank for their commitment and hard work are the City Council's Dog Park Committee Members. Committee members have dedicated countless hours to recommend a specific location for our city's first official dog park, and two or more subsequent locations. Outside of the obvious social and health benefits for dogs and their owners, dog parks create opportunities for owners to connect and build community beyond the park. Stay tuned folks as the final report is nearly complete.

Our water is a jewel, a precious resource! We must continue to maintain the infrastructure to our water system to provide safe drinking water to our residents and surrounding communities and look to the future to expand to other communities such as Hoosick Falls, Petersburg and Schodack. Last year, I supported a \$40 million upgrade to our water transmission system which is presently underway.

Speaking of water, we still face issues when it comes to our city pools. Recently, the City Council passed the necessary funding to get both pools open. However, in 2019 the South Troy pool is scheduled to open which an RFP for bids was released this week, but not Knickerbacker. It's simply not fair to the residents of the Burgh. I'm calling on the Mayor and the City Council to take the necessary steps to ensure, that our youth in the Burgh have access to a pool this summer.

Over the last couple years, I have supported funding for major infrastructure projects such as the water transmission line, the Seawall, South Troy Industrial Roadway, Ingalls Ave Boat Launch, Powers Park, Knick Ice Rink, our pools, upgrading our firehouses and water towers, Frear Park golf course and so many other projects. But sadly, our streets are in desperate need of a major capital infrastructure plan ranging from street paving to fixing potholes. I propose a 5 year capital street paving plan. It's time we get back to basics!

This leads me to the maintenance of our city assets. I'm calling for an asset management plan for our city owned buildings, facilities, equipment, and structures so we can have better capital infrastructure maintenance for short term and long term planning.

To help fund some of our capital needs, it's time to explore public-private partnerships. I have proposed and call again for selling naming rights to our pools and the Knick Ice Rink, and dedicate these funds to maintaining these facilities.

In addition, I'm renewing my call for establishing a permanent home for Troy City Hall. We are currently paying \$362,000 annually for a leased space floor. It is time once again for the people of Troy to celebrate our heritage and community pride and to have our own City Hall.

As we are the proud home of Uncle Sam, I bet some folks may not be aware that Uncle Sam's home was on Ferry Street. Let's celebrate our history by establishing Uncle Sam Park at this site.

And we must finally move forward on One Monument Square. As you all know, after several RFP's and recent charrettes, there continues to be a hole in the ground on our treasured waterfront. Whether it becomes a park or multi-use development, it is an embarrassment and eyesore that needs to be resolved Once and for all!

It's also time we address another embarrassment , according to a recent independent audit the city lost \$1,375,000 each year due to PILOT agreements. While the IDA controls the PILOT agreements, I am proposing as the City Council watchdog that the IDA Chair meet with the Council Finance Committee quarterly to update the Council on all PILOT agreements and property agreements.

One project near and dear to my heart is our city's "Think Differently" initiative. A couple years ago, I sponsored the Think Differently initiative, which is an effort for more inclusion and accessibility for our developmentally disabled and special needs community. It's been a challenge to move our working group's major initiatives forward since Hans from Rensselaer County ARC retired. However, I'm so proud of our first handicapped swing and more installed since, and the city's appointment of an ADA coordinator. The ADA coordinator is undertaking a self-evaluation of city programs, activities and services, and reviewing the policies and practices which govern them to identify issues which affect the participation of individuals with disabilities. Following the completion of the self-assessment, the City of Troy will develop a transition plan to remove any identified physical barriers which limits access by members of the disability community to programs or activities in the City of Troy. I look forward to working with the Mayor and the ADA coordinator on this project.

As many, if not all, folks are aware there's an intense debate happening at the state level to potentially legalize cannabis. While I can't predict if and when this may happen, I did want residents to be aware that there's been outreach for a potential cannabis dispensary here in Troy. If this progresses, I will work with the Mayor, law enforcement, and others to hold public informational meetings for citizen input and discussion so we make the right decision for Troy.

Additionally, let me touch briefly on a couple other important issues:

We need more open space and a green walkable community.

As a prior Director of the Hudson River Valley Greenway and NYS Canal Corporation and someone that has worked with hundreds of communities across our State on the NYS Empire Trail, I'm thrilled to see our citywide land and water trail system move forward! The recent addition of a 3.1 mile extension added from Congress Street to Middleburgh is one of many trail connections being developed throughout our City. Ultimately, we will have an end to end trail

from South Troy to the Lansingburgh connecting our neighborhoods. We all know how trails are a great recreational and quality of life asset, but they are also an economic development boost to our neighborhoods.

The Council worked with the administration on our city's recent designation as a Green Energy Community. This will implement LED lighting which will benefit our city both financially and environmentally, more green space in our neighborhoods, and ridding tree invasive species through a recent state grant. I look forward to working with Council Member Kennedy on a "Climate Smart Community" designation for our city, which is an extension of the green energy community status and will open our city up to additional grants.

We need to enact reforms to ensure accountability, transparency and bring our government closer to the people.

For additional accountability, Council Member Gulli and I will also be proposing legislation whereby before any reverters are released for city surplus property the City Council must approve after the Mayor. Additionally, no city employee involved with the assessing or code compliance (whether a director or through a supervisor) shall be allowed to bid on city surplus property. Lastly, I'm proposing Council Member Coleen Paratore, Chair of the City Council Law Committee, and Law Committee Members review the current practice of selling city surplus properties based on best usage versus the highest bidder.

The City Council and City Clerk Mara Drogan continue to be the most transparent City Council and City Clerk in the CapitalRegion stepping up our presence on social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and live youtube of all Council Meetings, committee meetings and public hearings.

Continuing to bring government to the people of Troy, working with Council Member Cummings, funding has been secured and supported by the Council for an Electronic 311 System which will allow residents who have concerns about crime, potholes, garbage or trash collection, code or quality of life to interface through an interactive map. Stay tuned!

In closing, the richest asset our City has is you...It's us. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and working together we can be the greatest city in our state if not the nation.

Carmella R. Mantello
City Council President
City of Troy