

Troy City Council President Carmella Mantello's Legislative Response & Address
March 4, 2021 @ 7pm

Thank you all so much for joining me live and virtually this evening at the Annual City Council President's Legislative Address. Joining us this evening are my fellow City Council Colleagues Gulli, Ashe-McPherson, Steele, Cummings, Zalewski (Pro-Tem), and McDermott, Mayor Madden, Deputy Mayor Kurzejeski, Comptroller Piotrowski, Corporation Counsel Morrissey, and City Clerk Mara Drogan.

And to the great people of Troy -- I am honored and humbled to be your first directly elected Council President. I want to thank the people of Troy for placing their trust in me.

As we continue our work to get through this pandemic, our patience, endurance and strength has been tested. This past year has been one of the most challenging years in our lifetime for many of us ... Whether it be the loss of a loved one, financial setbacks or emotional distress - COVID-19 has changed our lives forever.

However, we have persevered together as a City because we are Troy Strong.

With vaccine distribution increasing weekly and spring just a few weeks away - we are finally turning the corner on this crisis. A huge thank you to all Troy residents who have been so patient and those who continue to practice safety guidelines during this pandemic. You rock and keep rocking!

A couple weeks ago during the World Read Aloud Day, I was honored to have virtually read to my alumni elementary school Rensselaer Park, 4th Grade Class. During the question and answer period one of the students asked me, "Why do I live in Troy and why haven't I left?"

My answer was simple ... It's the people!

I have traveled the state and visited hundreds of cities, towns, and villages, and while each municipality has great people, there are none that are more passionate and dedicated to their community than Troy residents. And this pandemic has truly shown the strength of our people with dozens of mass food distribution drives for hundreds of Troy residents, countless charity events, and neighborly love.

FINANCES

During the early days of this crisis in March and April, we recognized that the fiscal damage to our local economy would be severe -- devastating the small businesses and restaurants, which are a backbone of our community. We knew that our local anticipated budget revenues such as sales

tax, state aid, and other city revenues would be dramatically reduced and cut. But I'm proud to say unlike so many communities, we came together to face the challenges.

The City Council, Mayor and his administration pulled together as "One" putting politics aside and worked together immediately to reduce spending, institute a hiring freeze -other than public safety and public health - , put various projects on hold, and other necessary budget actions. We met constantly and together and we worked to ensure that the costs of the COVID-19 shut-down would not be passed onto the already burdened taxpayer and resident. (A shout out to Comptroller Piotrowski and his team for timely financial reports and "on call" whenever needed regarding fiscal issues.)

I am pleased to say that a year later, while the city may be facing a deficit, due to these actions, I am cautiously optimistic about our future. Early on during the pandemic the City Council unanimously passed a resolution imploring our federal representatives to work together to pass a stimulus package for direct aid to all municipalities of all populations. Today, thanks to Senator Schumer, we are on the verge of realizing a significant federal relief package.

While we are hopeful, no matter the outcome, the City Council and I will continue to be the taxpayers and residents' fiscal watchdog providing that fiscal transparency and checks and balances. I will continue to work hard to ease the burden of taxes and fees on the residents of our city. I pledge to continue being a watchdog for your pocketbook and serve as an appropriate check and balance.

The tax burden shifted to the residents and taxpayers through regressive taxes and fees, such as the garbage and bulk trash fee, must end. They hurt the people in the city who are least able to absorb new costs which is why I will continue to oppose them.

That is why I continue to oppose the Pay As You Throw (PAYT) garbage plan. While COVID put the plan on hold for 2021, the Mayor has indicated his intention to move forward with this proposal for a 2022 implementation. Yes. We need to encourage and incentivize more recycling, but a PAYT plan is not the answer. As I have stated many times, I will not support the PAYT proposal; it encourages illegal dumping, results in higher fees and steers more homeowners to private haulers.

Another initiative put on hold due to COVID-19, was a study to relocate City Hall. I am pleased the Mayor is committed to once again moving forward with this proposal. I have been championing this issue for years - it's time to finally cut the cord and Troy deserves our own City Hall. I look forward to working with the Mayor and administration on this project.

We need less fees and taxes but we also need fairness. In 2018, the New York State Comptroller's office issued a report stating that the Troy Redevelopment Foundation (the major tax-exempt properties in the City - which includes RPI, St. Peter's Health Partners, Emma Willard, and Russell Sage.) has not increased its \$450,000 contribution to the city in over twenty years. This is not acceptable - that is not fair.

Tonight, I'm announcing that I will sponsor legislation appointing a bipartisan City Council Special Committee, per Section C-12 of the Troy City Charter, to explore establishing a Public Safety Fee for the Troy Redevelopment Foundation. This is the model we used successfully to advance the city hall relocation issue. My hope is that this Special Public Safety Fee Council Committee will have the same success. This was put on hold due to COVID last year.

PUBLIC SAFETY

This past year was an extremely tough public safety year for our city with increased gun violence and neighborhood violence. We lost precious youth this past year and my heart continues to go out to their parents and family. We must as a city do everything humanly possible to protect our children and our residents.

To quote a police official last week at a public forum for our City's Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative, "Last year was one of the most violent years I have seen in my 26 years on the force."

While Troy was not the only city to see a major increase in violence this past year as municipalities in the Capital Region and across our State saw similar increases, we **MUST** reverse this trend.

That's why Council Member Ashe-McPherson and I proposed a Regional Joint Federal, State, County and City Task Force targeting hotspots throughout the Capital Region to weed out these violent criminals and gangs. While a formal regional task force was not developed, there are federal, state and local efforts underway. Just last week, federal, state and local law enforcement executed multiple search warrants in Troy seizing stolen merchandise, blank credit cards, body armor, a ghost gun and approximately \$20,000 in US currency. These efforts will only continue building as we work with our second to none Troy police department to take back our streets and rid these evil criminals.

Last summer, we saw over 11,000 people from Troy and the Capital Region march the streets of Troy in a peaceful protest following the death of George Floyd calling for peace and unity.

As many of you know, the Governor mandated that municipalities across the State adopt a police reform and reinvention plan by [April 1st](#). I'm proud to be on the Police Reform and Reinvention

Collaborative with so many other dedicated members of the community. A plan will be passed by [April 1st](#). However, Troy's police reform initiative began last summer and will continue long beyond [April 1st](#). Our goals continue to be building trust, respect, inclusiveness, and transparency. These are common goals we ALL want! I promise to continue to listen, and moving forward we will and can be ONE Troy!

Police surveillance cameras have been a huge priority of mine and my City Council colleagues. The Council funded the upgrade to the network for the present surveillance cameras to fully function **all** the time, and the Council will continue working to ensure that additional and mobile surveillance cameras are placed in hotspots throughout our neighborhoods. While surveillance cameras are not a panacea, they are an essential tool in tackling crime and violence in our City.

Along with surveillance cameras, body cameras for our police officers is another one of my major priorities. Body cams are a win-win for the community and police. Body Cam training for our officers happened over the last few weeks and our officers will be in body cam gear any day.

In addition, working with the Deputy Mayor, the Council funded two new youth coordinators who are being hired within the next few weeks. Enhancing our youth programs is a huge piece of the puzzle to tackle our neighborhood violence and we continue to work with our neighborhood organizations to keep our kids active. The City Council is committed to continue partnering with our many dedicated volunteers throughout our City to provide after-school programs, movie nights, basketball and boxing programs, block parties, and several more activities.

I'm a proud daughter of a retired Troy Police Officer and Detective, a proud Aunt of a present Troy Police Officer, and a proud sister-in-law to a State Trooper. My Dad walked the beat downtown, North Central and the Burgh. Everyone knew my Dad and he knew everyone and still knows everyone. While I am not suggesting to go back in time to twenty or thirty years ago (Although it may have been a much more simple and loving time ☐), there was a mutual respect and trust between community and police. We can and we will rebuild that bond here in Troy!

I continue to work hard to enhance our community policing program. That's why Council Member's Gulli, Ashe-McPherson and I proposed two additional community police officers this past budget cycle so we could have one community police officer in each of the four zones. Unfortunately, this proposal was voted down, but we will not give up working to get more community police officers in our neighborhoods. These officers are critical in building that trust and police-community relations.

Additionally, I will continue working to implement a Park, Walk and Talk program, an Adopt a Cop initiative, supporting the critically important School Resource Officers who are mentors and sometimes social workers to our students, create more police community outreach programs

designed to engage youth and young adults, more mental health and diversity training, and increase the pool of minority candidates for all of our city workforce.

Speaking about our school resource officers and the community partnership with both of our school districts and Superintendents, John Carmello and Antonio Abitabile, a highly successful 2020 Troy Graduates Car Parade began with a phone call from former Council Member Debra Garrett and grew from there. I am pleased to announce this extremely successful event will be happening again this year.

Due to COVID-19, last year many Troy educational institutions either decided to hold commencement ceremonies virtually or postpone to a later date. We are not sure about the upcoming year's commencements. However, we saw incredible community spirit, energy and a bond through this event that I will never forget. As one graduate stated last year, "Waving from a car through "town" wasn't how I envisioned my high school graduation, but it was one car ride I and my family will never forget!" Council Member Ashe-McPherson and I will also again be sponsoring a resolution declaring June as Graduate's Month in the city and we look forward to working with everyone to make this event an even bigger success this year.

This past year, the City Council fought hard to ensure our aging firehouses had clean showers, working toilets, and other every-day necessities. We also worked to implement a second set of turn-out gear for our firefighters, and as many folks may recall last year an RFP was to go out for design services for either the present location or relocation for the Lansingburgh Fire House on 5th Avenue. This was delayed due to COVID-19 but was awarded this past Fall. We are hopeful to see this project move forward this year.

Our city run ambulance continues to be the "gold standard"- responding to mutual aid throughout the County. While I strongly support sharing of services, I am concerned that mutual aid calls for advanced life support (ALS) to Petersburg, Hoosick Falls out past the Tomahanock Reservoir, and East Greenbush to name a few are stretching our resources too thin. The total call time for these responses can be up to two hours, putting pressure on other firehouses increasing response times to city emergencies. This is a major concern, and I wholeheartedly support the Mayor and Fire Chief McMahon's proposal to study the demands on our fire department today compared to twenty years ago.

Thank you to all of our Troy emergency responders for putting your lives on the line to keep our residents safe and provide critical care to Troy residents throughout this pandemic and always. Whether it be our crews out in the field or our office workers I would also like to give a shout out to all of the city workers who continue to work hard during this pandemic. The City Council is committed to continuing to provide you the tools to safely and effectively do your job.

Neighborhood Revitalization and Parks

While some of the initiatives I outlined last year for the City Council were put on hold due to COVID-19, many major revitalization efforts happened in our neighborhoods. It's truly inspiring to see our resident's passion and dedication in working to improve the quality of life in our neighborhoods.

I have lived my whole life in this city, I love this city, I breathe it - and I am every day reminded of what a tremendous community we are privileged to call home. Whether it be Burgh, North Central, Sycaway, Downtown, Eastside, and South Troy ... I will continue to work to make us ONE TROY -- BRINGING PRIDE BACK TO OUR NEIGHBORHOODS.

I continue to work with my Council colleagues to spread the momentum from downtown into our neighborhoods and focus on reducing the tax burden, improving public safety, garbage pick-up and street paving, and restoring or removing blighted buildings. Our people and our neighborhoods make our city great – it is our neighborhoods, all unique, all special that make this city the greatest city in our State.

The City Council Neighborhood Improve Program (NIP) continues to be a huge success toward building partnerships and pride in our neighborhoods and revitalizing one block at a time in every corner of our City. These small grants build the velocity of positive momentum in the economic development, recreation and revitalization for our neighborhoods.

There were several inspiring 2020 Council NIP projects in 2020 and I would like to dedicate a portion of this Address to recognize these projects and special Troy residents:

- 11th Ward Veteran Memorial Committee in Little Italy in South Troy installed flags, lights, and flowers for three memorials (Thanks Sam Chiappone and Crew)
- A really neat Prospect Park Disc 9 Hole Golf Course (Thanks to Greg Kurtz, Sam Wechsler and Phi Sigma Kappa)
- North Central Community Solidarity Group – [10th Street](#) Park Bleachers (Thank you to Frank Mayben and Team)
- Lansingburgh Historical Society – Signage, lighting for flag poles in Lansingburgh Cemeteries, and garden and landscaping at the Melville House (Thank you John Ward, Toni Dickinson and folks)
- Eastside Neighborhood Group – Seasonal plants and planters at the Ward 5 Monument (Shout out to Kathleen Cassidy, Mary Herrick, John Vanalstyne and folks)
- Frear Park Conservancy in Sycaway – New flagpole and slide at the North Lake playground (Brian Sano, Bram Van Heuvein and Team)
- Friends of Lots of Hope in South Troy – Plants for Lots of Hope – (Diane Bell and Folks)
- Team HERO – Picnic tables, grill, painting, and flowers for the 3rd and Canal Park in South Troy (Jerry Ford and Team HERO)

- Troy in Bloom – Fertilizer, mulch, and soil for planters (Marie Gavazzi and Team)
- 9-11 Memorial Park in Lansingburgh – Flowers for the Park (Bette Dinovo and Team)

Thank you to all the volunteers! You all rock! Additional thanks to the City Council Subcommittee, Council Members Gulli, Steele and Cummings.

In my Legislative Address last year, I had four words regarding the South Troy Pool, “OPEN IT THIS YEAR”. We opened it and the Council worked with the Mayor to waive the swimming pool fees for city residents last year. I will once again sponsor legislation to waive the pool fees for city residents for the upcoming season and look forward to working with my council colleagues to enact this legislation.

Now, let’s move forward with the Lansingburgh Pool. This pool is more complicated than the South Troy Pool as it will be a newly constructed pool in a different location in the Knickerbacker Park. One year ago this month, the City Council approved a 25 year agreement with the Knickerbacker Association and the collaboration continues to thrive. The Knickerbacker Park Board of Trustees recently announced plans to construct a new playground in the Park with a groundbreaking this Spring. This partnership with the Board is key to turning the park into a major destination. Additionally, future use of the Knickerbacker Ice Rink facility is being explored. Stay tuned.

As part of the 2021 initiatives, I look forward to working with my Council colleagues Ashe-McPherson and Gulli on an Adopt-an-Alley and Adopt-a-Gateway initiative partnering with residents, businesses and neighborhood associations for alley and gateway clean-ups. In addition, I look forward to working with Council Members Steele, Zalewski, Cummings and McDermott on a Neighborhood Clean Up Program. Stay tuned for details on these new initiatives.

The 2021 NIP applications are available and due back [April 12th](#). I am looking forward to continuing working with all of you and hope to see even more great projects this year.

Speaking of neighborhood projects, we have a true jewel that has not received enough attention over the years in our neighborhood pocket parks. That’s why late last year the City Council worked with the Mayor to authorize \$2 million to upgrade and improve our pocket parks over the next two years..

The long-awaited 7th Avenue Park in North Central is nearly completed. In addition to the park’s official opening this year, Neighbors and residents requested and are excited about the future naming of the park as the “Geneva Pompey Park” and the pavilion named in memory of “Reverend Clark”. I look forward to working with the Mayor and Deputy Mayor on this

proposal, and the Council will be sponsoring a resolution in the coming weeks to move this project forward.

As mentioned earlier, senseless gun violence brought great heartache to our community this past year. We all grieved, shocked by the senseless murder of 11 year-old Ayshawn Davis who was shot and killed on Old Sixth Ave near the park. Soon after Ayshawn's death, I met with his parents and family who expressed the desire that Ayshawn's brief life and his infectious optimism and indomitable spirit not be forgotten.

The City Council unanimously passed my resolution to pay respect to the family of Ayshawn in their grief, and to memorialize the life of Ayshawn. We must commit to take action to ensure Ayshawn did not die in vain. In the upcoming year, a neighborhood meeting with residents to discuss the placement of the memorial and needed proposed upgrades and improvements to the Old Sixth Ave pocket park.

As some folks may know, as part of City Council's "Think Differently" initiative, I was pleased to work hard with the Epilepsy Association to get our first handicapped swing in Troy and pleased to see more installed at other city parks, such as [112th Street](#) in the Burgh. However, more needs to be done to make our parks, streets and facilities more accessible, user friendly, and inclusive - much more. As the mother of a son with special needs, this is an initiative near and dear to my heart!

In July of 2018, the Mayor and the ADA Compliance Officer began a project to collaborate with local disability advocates and residents to explore ways by conducting a comprehensive review and develop a transition plan to improve access by removing physical barriers which limits access of individuals with disabilities to municipal services, programs, and activities. Unfortunately this initiative has stalled - I am imploring the Mayor to reinvigorate this effort and stand ready to join him to continue our progress.

There are so many residents working so hard to keep their properties neat, and as many folks know, it takes only one neglected residence or business to blight a neighborhood. A new initiative Council Members Gulli, Ashe-McPherson, and I are proposing is a Quality of Life Task Force which would hold negligent property owners more accountable, This task force would be a formalized detailed unit comprised of a Community Police Officer or Patrol Officer, Code Enforcement Officer, Litter Patrol Officer, Public Works, and any other city staff necessary. This task force would tackle our neighborhood quality of life issues one or two blocks at a time all throughout the City. Additionally, the task force would promote enforcement and education. The goal is to encourage landlords, residents and businesses to take pride in their neighborhood and partner with the city to revitalize our neighborhoods.

Economic Development and Infrastructure

Over the years, I was proud to work with struggling waterfront communities as they were revitalized by utilizing the waterfront as the front door to economic development and recreation. This is truly a passion of mine. Working with hundreds of communities statewide through my roles as the NYS Canal Director and the Hudson River Valley Greenway Executive Director, I had the honor to partner and promote waterfront and economic development projects, water and land trails, and protect our natural and cultural resources.

We have a national treasure and majestic river, the Hudson River, in our own backyard stretching seven miles connecting South Troy to Downtown to North Central to Lansingburgh, and it is incredibly rewarding to see our city's waterfront transformation begin.

Last year, we celebrated the completion of the \$26 million dollar Troy Seawall Stabilization Project funded in large part by FEMA to mitigate future flooding. This waterfront initiative and other projects using the Hudson River as the front door for economic development, water and land trails, and dovetailing into revitalization into our neighborhoods will continue to move forward. Outlining a few of these projects which are underway for 2021 from South Troy to the Burgh:

- The two decades long project of the South Troy Industrial Roadway. South Troy residents have endured disruptive truck traffic through their neighborhoods. Phase I is complete and Phase II will be underway this year.
- The demolition and redevelopment of the Taylor Apartments affording us an opportunity to reimagine and transform River Street with a contiguous trail and connection to South Troy. In an intermunicipal project with Watervliet for a Congress Street Bridge Study to increase access to the Hudson River and create more user-friendly walkability.
- One Monument Square continues to move forward and my focus will continue to ensure that his public-private partnership creates additional access to the Hudson River and protects our viewshed.
- Moving North, with the completion of the new marina and docks we look forward to opening this navigation season, coupled with Marina North Boardwalk and the Ingalls Ave Boat Launch in North Central the transformation continues.
- In Lansingburgh, Powers Park upgrades continue and I will continue to work with the administration to connect this area to the waterfront. With the closure of Price Chopper last year, it left us with an opportunity to reimagine our Burgh waterfront. The Farmer's Markets' temporary move into Price Chopper is one great outcome for this building and its proximity to the waterfront. Forums took place in Lansingburgh prior to COVID-19 to create more accessibility, amenities, economic development and connections into our neighborhoods with a vision of a Lansingburgh Gateway and Waterfront Development. It's time to capitalize on this idea and move it into the next phase beyond a vision.

These projects take what I call the "three P's" outside of funding. "Patience, Persistence, and Partnerships". I have seen firsthand how balancing economic development with recreation and

historic preservation can provide rebirth and reinvigoration to a municipality and its neighborhoods. Let's stay the course and make this happen in Troy!

As I have said many times Troy's water is a jewel! We have what I believe is the best drinking water in the State. Phase I of the \$40 million, 43,000 linear feet water transmission line upgrade from the Tomhannock Reservoir to the city's water filtration plant will break ground this year. This massive public works infrastructure project will continue to provide safe drinking water for Troy residents and other municipal customers opening the door to expanding service to Hoosick Falls and other communities.

These infrastructure upgrades happen when the Mayor and Council work together!

Last year, the Council and Mayor began working on a 311 system which is a citizen reporting system allowing residents to report issues such as potholes, garbage and trash pick-up, traffic signal not working and other reporting. Due to COVID-19, this project was put on hold which I am hopeful it gets back on track this year. I am also requesting the administration seek an emergency notification system of texts and calls as many school districts presently have.

The City Council approved two new litter patrol officers, and with mobile trail cams will hold code violators and illegal dumpers accountable. The Council is continuing to work with the recycling coordinator and our sustainability task force for a new and more aggressive education and outreach program on the need to recycle. While our present recycling participation percentage improved, it is still dismal and we need to encourage more residents to participate. It's not just an obvious benefit to our environment but will save money spent at the transfer station.

I, and I know many of my Council colleagues, receive calls regularly inquiring about the Alamo. I am excited that, working with the Mayor, we are in the final steps of re-opening the Alamo. Disposal of leaf bags, stumps, and branches will be available. Also, another exciting project is a new Mulch Program spearheaded by the Recycling Coordinator. We are inching closer to getting this program approved by the Department of Environmental Conservation where residents and neighborhood associations will be able to come and pick-up mulched wood at the Alamo site.

Just last week, the Council unanimously also authorized the Mayor to enter into an inter-municipal shared services agreement with North Greenbush and Bethlehem to hold four Hazardous Waste Collection and Disposal Days with the assistance of a NYS DEC grant. This inter-municipal partnership gives residents four days as opposed to one or two days. The days are scheduled for April, June, August and October. Information will be forthcoming on the exact dates and details.

The Council worked with the administration to get designated a Green Energy Community and is presently working with the administration and Siemens to implement a long-awaited LED lighting program which will benefit our city both financially and environmentally. This evening the Council will be acting on the contracts with National Grid to begin the implementation of converting all of our streetlights to LED. This is another step to continue to improve a healthy and better environment for our neighborhoods.

While COVID-19 has hindered our ability over the last year to meet in person. The City Council and Clerk's office continues to increase our outreach effort through social media, live YouTube Zoom Council Meetings, Committee Meetings and workshops, public hearings and other avenues to be one of the most transparent and open City Councils in the Capital Region.

And so today we look forward - made stronger and more united by the bonds we forged in the crisis of the past year. We all cried together as an extended family with the tragedy of the senseless loss of Ayshawn, and sadly Ayshawn was not alone. Neighbors lifted each other up to meet new and unexpected challenges. With the loss of life and livelihood, Covid has changed our lives but it has not dimmed our hope-it has reaffirmed our strength. Throughout we have come together like never before. And I have never been prouder or more optimistic about our future. This year proved, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and working together we can and will bring pride back to our neighborhoods!

Thank you, be safe, and God Bless.

Carmella R. Mantello
City Council President
City of Troy