

Troy City Council President Carmella Mantello

Legislative Address

March 3, 2022

Thank you all so much for joining me this evening at the Annual City Council President's Legislative Address. Joining us this evening are my fellow City Council Colleagues Gulli (Pro-Tem), Ashe-McPherson, Steele, Menn, Conley-Wilson, and Sorriento, Mayor Madden, Deputy Mayor Nolin, City Department Heads, City Clerk Maria DeBonis, Legislative Assistant Seamus Donnelly and staff.

This evening, the City Council, partnering with the Mayor, will be passing a resolution supporting the Ukrainian people and the imposition of stiff sanctions on the barbaric Putin regime. Let us pause for a moment of silence as we stand in unity with our Ukrainian brothers and sisters.

Residents of Troy, I continue to be honored and humbled to be your first directly elected Council President with a four-year term, and I want to thank you for placing your trust in me.

For the past two years this pandemic has tested our patience, endurance and strength like never before. For many of us, these have been the most challenging years in our lifetime. But we have come through it together and we are stronger for it.

One year ago, I delivered the Legislative Address virtually. This evening we are "in-person" and this is the first full "in-person" Council Meeting since the beginning of the pandemic proving that Covid has moved from being a pandemic disease - to an endemic disease.

We will persevere together as One Troy because we are Troy Strong!

FINANCES

Our City finances continue to move in the right direction. When the Mayor and I took office in 2016, our City was perpetually on the verge of bankruptcy facing another State Control Board and whopping tax increases. Determined to not go down the path of another Control Board being placed on our City, the City Council at that time implemented several new guidelines and reporting requirements. These necessary checks and balances to the executive branch, in addition to several other expenditure measures were critical averting State Control takeover.

Fast forward six years, Moody's and Standard & Poor's have again raised the credit rating and outlook for City finances and yes, finally, the 25-year debt of the Municipal Assistance Corporation (also known as the MAC) has been retired. Additionally, another example of fiscal prudence is phasing out the practice of bonding and borrowing for city vehicles. While these are great accomplishments, the City Council cannot and will not relax our fiscal and fiduciary oversight responsibilities. The City Council and I will continue to be the taxpayers and residents' fiscal watchdog ensuring fiscal transparency, accountability and checks and balances. I will continue to work hard every day to find ways to ease the burden of taxes and fees on the

residents of our city. I will continue to stand against shifting the tax burden to residents and taxpayers through regressive taxes and fees, such as the garbage and bulk trash fees. They hurt the people in the city who are least able to absorb new costs especially now with skyrocketing inflation, which is why I will continue to oppose them and seek alternative solutions. We need less fees and taxes, more common sense, and most importantly we need fairness.

That is why the new City Council Majority and I will be sponsoring legislation to establish a bipartisan City Council Special Committee, to explore establishing a User Fee for the Troy Redevelopment Foundation (the major tax-exempt properties in the City) – which include RPI, St. Peter’s Health Partners, Emma Willard and Russel Sage. According to a 2018 New York State Comptroller’s Office report, the Foundation has not increased its \$450,000 contribution to the city in over twenty years. This is unacceptable – that is not fair, it’s time for it to change.

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT (ARPA) FUNDING

Switching gears to a once in a lifetime opportunity...As many of you are aware, the City of Troy, thanks to Senator Schumer and our federal representatives, is receiving significant COVID-19 American Rescue Plans Act (ARPA) federal relief funds totaling approximately \$43 million.

I am pleased to be a member of the ARPA Steering Committee. However, at the end of the day, these transformational projects are driven by our residents. My number one priority is to see these funds build healthier and more sustainable neighborhoods, and a stronger city! Recently, the TroyNow website was launched with a community input form and neighborhood meetings in progress. Please, we want to hear from you! Together we will build a foundation for today and future generations.

Partnering with neighborhood groups and city organizations, the City Council has approved several projects to date. To name a few;

- A new Knickerbacker Pool and Park upgrades.. The Knickerbacker pool is long overdue for an enhancement and this multi million investment will turn the park into a major asset for the community. Working with the Knickerbacker Park Trustees, this will be a huge boost for our Burgh Community and kids. Construction is expected to begin this year.
- I am proud to announce, after decades of advocacy, the City partnering with the Troy Housing Authority (THA) and Pennrose Development, is redeveloping the Taylor Apartment area and the demolition of Taylor Building I and II is scheduled to begin in late March. This project will transform a gateway along our magical Hudson River developing new affordable housing, mixed-use development, trails and walkable accessibility linking South Troy to the southern end of our downtown.
- Home and Property Investment Program – Developing grants for facade improvements and other homeownership improvements. Additionally, a Lansingburgh Strong Initiative for homeowners/property owners, a new North Central Neighborhood Community Center, additional youth programs, partnership with Habitat for Humanity project, and

several other initiatives for neighborhood revitalization, workforce development, economic development, food access, public art, and child care assistance.

- Finally, in the Little Italy neighborhood, a project I am really excited to support is to restore the Historic Hill Street Market area and revitalize it into a community park and meeting place, and other opportunities.

Another initiative I have been championing for several years is the relocation of “city floor” aka City Hall. I am pleased the Mayor has joined me in supporting a new location for City Hall. Recently, the City Council appropriated ARPA funds for a Request for Proposal (RFP) which should be on the street late spring or early summer. Troy deserves our own City Hall.

Finally, like every organization competing for talent in today’s economy, Troy is struggling to find and retain the talent we need to provide the basic services our citizens deserve. We have a unique opportunity with ARPA funds to create the kind of support and incentives we need to recruit and retain our public servants. I have already called on the Mayor to address this need and I repeat that tonight.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Now let's talk about an issue on all of our minds.

Tragically, 2021 was another violent year in our city, and the past two years have seen increased gun and gang violence in our neighborhoods. We have lost too many of our precious youth, and my heart goes out to their parents and family.

And we saw one parent, the mother of Ayshawn Davis’ Mother, LaToya, tragically pass away losing her battle with a broken heart.

Our heart breaks - but not our spirit. This will not be Troy’s new normal.

I will say it again ...We **MUST** reverse this trend...We **WILL** reverse this trend.

That’s why as reported last year, the City Council working with the Mayor, approved funding and hired six new police officers. These new officers will be dedicated to a new enhanced more focused Community Police Initiative hand-in-hand with an Interactive Park, Walk and Talk effort in our four neighborhood zones beginning this Spring.

This is not just a community police officer popping by a ball game or community event. This is an officer getting to know people and building trust in the neighborhoods where they live. We heard throughout the Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative (PRRC) report process the issue of trust between police officers and the community, and the fear of folks reporting crimes due to retaliation.

My family has strong roots in the law enforcement community. As a proud daughter of a retired Troy Police Officer and Detective, Dad walked the beat downtown, North Central and the Burgh.

Everyone knew my Dad and he knew everyone and still knows everyone - they trusted him. By building this same kind of trust, we can reduce crime. Our new community police program can be a model for our State.

But we can do more. To enhance this effort, utilizing ARPA funds, I am proposing a police officer neighborhood residency incentive. Working with the Troy Rehabilitation Improvement Program (TRIP), I would like to explore the feasibility of a pilot program to incentivize police officers to live in our neighborhoods. This could be another step toward building that trust and relationship with folks in our community. Let's encourage our police to live in the neighborhoods they protect.

In that vein, I applaud Troy Police Chief DeWolf and the new command staff building these grassroots relationships by implementing "Coffee with a Cop" in partnership with Stewart's (stay tuned for upcoming events), partnering with Troy Uniformed Firefighters Association and neighborhood groups on youth programs and community events, and the new and enhanced community policing efforts. Additionally, I am pleased to announce the reinvigorated Police Objective Review Board (PORB) just released its annual report, and I look forward to continuing to work with Board Members building trust and partnerships.

As we all know, the recent gun and gang violence in our neighborhoods is not isolated in Troy but also the Capital Region.

That's why Council Members Ashe-McPherson (Chair of the City Council Public Safety Committee), Gulli, and Sorriento have joined me in calling upon the Governor to work with the city and implement a Capital Region State-Local Multi-Jurisdictional Task Force, funding for youth programs and additional School Resource Officers to tackle the gun and gang violence in Troy and neighboring cities. The proposed task force would be more proactive, enhancing and accelerating coordinated enforcement to rid our neighborhoods of evil and teach our kids that joining a gang is not the "cool new thing". Governor Hochul has recently extended the Executive Order declaring a gun violence state of Emergency and it is time for the state to partner with us to tackle this crisis. No more meetings, the time to act is now. We cannot afford to lose another young life.

As many folks know, I, along with certain Council Members have been fighting for enhanced and additional police cameras throughout the city. The residents and neighborhood groups have made it clear that they want cameras in certain locations and we need them working at all times. I am pleased, with the funding and support from the City Council, to report that the new software and foundation for future integration continues to be installed, and that mobile cameras for video surveillance will be implemented in neighborhood hot-spots. Our long-term goal is to integrate this technology for future "smart-city" infrastructure.

But our efforts to reimagine our police force is not limited to technology and more officers, it also requires better training. We have successfully, working hand in hand with our second to none police department, expanded mental health services training and hostage training negotiations for our officers with training for all police officers of a 40-hour training program on

how to support individuals in a mental health crisis. Eventually, my hope is to see a city-county mental health professionals crisis intervention triage program to assist those people in need.

There is no single action that can tackle our neighborhood gun and gang violence issues and each piece is a part of a bigger puzzle. I will go out on a limb that our full City Council is committed to do everything humanly possible within our power to tackle neighborhood gun and gang violence in our city.

Turning to another critical aspect of public safety. In 2020, I along with a few Council Members fought hard to ensure our aging firehouses had clean showers, working toilets, and other everyday necessities. Fast forward to 2022, the results are clear with major investments by the City Council of over \$3.3 million for upgrades and repairs which are complete in five of the six firehouses.

The North Lansingburgh Station 1 firehouse on 5th Avenue is presently being slated for demolition and the Mayor stated in his State of the City a reconstruction of this firehouse, but I am hopeful that relocating this firehouse is also an option.

As I mentioned last year and have stated many times, our city-run ambulance continues to be the “gold standard”- responding to our city’s needs and mutual aid throughout the County. However, the model for our city run ambulance was developed in the 1990’s and our city’s housing and population have dramatically changed over the past three decades. Last year I reported that the city’s ambulance service was provided all over the county. However, it was reduced this past October to providing mutual aid ambulances to the towns of North Greenbush and Colonie. Mutual aid fire responses between Troy and Watervliet have been non-existent since July when that agreement fell apart. It has been reported to me that our fire department now waits up to 20 minutes for Albany to respond through mutual aid on a second alarm fire call, when Watervliet is sitting in quarters only minutes away. This issue needs to be addressed immediately, and I am requesting the Mayor and Chief McMahon come to a solution with Watervliet sooner rather than later. As we all know, mere seconds can be precious in an emergency.

To address the present ambulance model and staffing issues, the City Council, joining the Chief and the Mayor, have proposed a comprehensive review be undertaken. The Mayor stated last week that an RFP for this study is due to be on the streets in late Spring.

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

I state it each year, but it truly is the heart of our city ... Our people and our neighborhoods! We see our downtown thriving and as I’ve stated many times let’s take that momentum and spread it

into the neighborhoods. This effort is beginning to happen folks! Several major revitalization efforts are happening 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 is working to reinvigorate the city landlord registry program to address non-responsive owners with blighted buildings and dilapidated-ridden homes throughout the city. From Zombie properties to occupied properties, it is imperative to work together to act quickly to address these troubled properties. Additionally, Council Member Gulli and I are working on new Foreclosure Registration legislation and enforcement. Stay tuned regarding this new initiative.

The City Council Neighborhood Improvement 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.

Despite COVID-19, neighborhood groups were out in full force in 2021 and there were several inspiring NIP projects. I would like to truly thank all the Troy residents, volunteers and neighborhood groups for stepping up to the plate and reclaiming our neighborhoods block by block. You know who you are and you all rock! Additional thanks to the City Council Subcommittee, Council Members Gulli, Ashe-McPherson, and Steele.

The 2022 NIP applications are available and due back April 8th and the maximum grant award has been increased to \$1,500. I want to thank the Capital Resource Commission for their partnership with this important neighborhood program. I am looking forward to continuing working with all of you and hope to see even more great projects this year.

Folks may recall in my Legislative Address in 2020, 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, my four words regarding the Knickerbacker Pool in Lansingburgh ... "DIVING IN, IN 2023".

The Adopt-an-Alley and Adopt-a-Gateway initiative partnering with residents, businesses and neighborhood associations for alley and gateway clean-ups was put on hold last year due to COVID-19. I look forward to working with my Council colleagues on this important quality of life project.

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 in 2020 the City Council authorized \$2 million to upgrade and improve our pocket parks and the City Council recently approved an additional \$1 million of ARPA funding for this important initiative. Designs and overhauls of various parks are complete, and I have stated over the past year my profound disappointment with the failure to get these dollars into the ground for construction and implementation. The pandemic has demonstrated the need for more and better outdoor space in the city. My message is very clear this evening. Start the implementation and construction phase this spring!

The long-awaited 7th Avenue Park in North Central finally opened this past year with the Council and Mayor naming the park officially, The Geneva Pompey Park. It was an incredible day of celebration on Juneteenth with Geneva and her family and neighborhood friends.

And on a somber day this past fall, the City Council, Mayor, family and friends dedicated a beautiful tree and memorial at the Old Sixth Avenue Park. Our city will forever remember Ayshawn. And his Dad, Tarence, has stated he hopes that this tree and memorial will remind our youth of the evils of gang and gun violence in our neighborhoods.

As many of you are aware, as part of our "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. It was a special day that means so much to me personally and Troy's special needs community.

However, much 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! Let's immediately put to work the \$3 million the Council has already approved toward making our parks more inclusive and accessible.

Finally, we must at last revive efforts among stakeholders to improve access throughout our city by removing physical barriers which limit access of individuals with disabilities to municipal services, programs, and activities. I have called for this for the past four years, and I am repeating my call again tonight and imploring the Mayor to reinvigorate this effort and continue to 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. An initiative Council Members Gulli, Ashe-McPherson, and I proposed during this past budget process and continue calling upon the administration to implement 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. I hope our new and prior colleagues join us on this initiative.

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. With the completion of the \$26 million dollar Troy Seawall Stabilization Project and several other waterfront initiatives in the works, we will use 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.

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 more than \$40 million dollar project broke ground this past year and this evening the Council is approving additional resources for this critical infrastructure. 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 other communities.

As many folks know One Monument Square is on its fifth proposal after more than a decade of being a vacant hole in the middle of our thriving downtown. This waterfront site, while challenging to build on, presents an incredible opportunity to be not just a city destination but a regional destination and model for waterfront development in our State. Hoboken Brownstone, who proposes a mixed-use development, have incorporated many of the things I and the community want to see with this development, such as waterfront access, city architecture (the developer has taken a really cool innovative approach portraying the city's history through brick fronts that reflect the 1840's into the 21st century), docking, trails, open space. The city began the work on the infrastructure improvements for this site and the developer is expected to present its plan to the Planning Commission this spring.

Dovetailing on the One Monument Square development, the City of Troy after several attempts was finally awarded the State's \$10 million Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) for the area of Division Street in South Troy through Downtown to Middleburgh Avenue in North Central. Stay tuned for the Local Planning Committee's neighborhood forums and this exciting initiative.

The two decades long project of the South Troy Industrial Roadway continues moving forward. South Troy residents have endured disruptive truck traffic through their neighborhoods and finally will have some relief. Phase I is complete and Phase II is scheduled to go out to bid this year and be complete by 2023. This also opens the door for a huge opportunity to utilize the Hudson River in South Troy for commercial shipping. We only have to look to see how the Port of Albany continues to increase its commercial shipping efforts. The Hudson River is designed to receive and ship goods, and I have seen first-hand during my New York State Canal days the environmental and sustainability benefits, especially with the new technology and sailing ship vessels ventures. Let's think greener and cleaner!

Speaking of cleaner and greener, last year I spoke about our work to open the Alamo in South Troy. I am excited that the Council working with the Mayor has reopened the Alamo. Disposal of leaf bags, stumps, and branches are available. Also, another exciting project is a new Mulch Program which residents and neighborhood associations can come and pick-up mulched wood at the Alamo site. Lastly, partnering with the County, stay tuned for the dates for this year's Troy's Household Hazardous Waste Collection Days.

Several other projects are in the works, such as the Council approved the necessary funding and worked with the administration to get designated a Green Energy Community and has approved Siemens to implement a long-awaited LED lighting program which will benefit our city both financially and environmentally. Just a few weeks ago the city completed the purchase of over 4,200 street lights from National Grid and will be converting all of our streetlights to LED in the very near future. It is estimated that this conversion and project will save over \$1 million each year, and more importantly provide our neighborhoods with better public safety through the LED lighting and create a healthier and better environment for our neighborhoods.

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

On a final note, hopefully folks are already seeing the new improvements with the City Council's newly enhanced community engagement efforts, social media presence, accessibility and transparency. In just over the past month, the City Council's facebook page has over 500 new followers and is growing. This is awesome and will continue. The City Council Clerk and staff intend to continue efforts to increase dog licensing and other services their office provides. Stay tuned as future pop-up offices at the farmer's market and other initiatives are moving forward.

These are important initiatives, but anyone that knows me, knows they can call me, email me, message me for quality-of-life issues such as a pothole fill, and I look forward to continuing to work to address your concerns. It is also great to see new energy and ideas from our recently

elected District Council Members, and I look forward to working with you over the next two years.

The last two years have been like none other in our lifetime. While too many of our friends and family were claimed by the pandemic, I am so proud of how we have come together as a city to help one another.

But Covid has exposed some faults in our community that we must address. Our children's intellectual and emotional development has been stunted, opioid abuse is on the rise, violence, depression and mental health challenges have grown. Our small businesses have struggled first without customers and then without workers.

Today as we gather together – the end is in sight. Finally, together we can fill the space between our fears and loneliness with hope and togetherness. From this crisis, we must seize the opportunity to build a better Troy. To make the structural investments throughout our city that will leave lasting impacts for generations to come. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and working together we will bring pride back to our neighborhoods!

Thank you, be safe, and God Bless.