



**City of Port Jervis 2018
State of the City Address
By: Mayor Kelly B. Decker
January 24, 2018**

Councilman-At-Large Bavoso, Councilmembers Fitzpatrick, Mann, Randazzo, Trovei, Belcher, Foster, Santini, and Siegel, Department Heads, distinguished guests, and ladies and gentlemen of the City of Port Jervis.

I am here in front of you tonight presenting my fifth State of the City Address. This address will continue to be one of promise and hope for the future of our city, a city that is on the move but that still needs nurturing to succeed.

While contemplating how to approach this year's address while recognizing the success that we have had over the last few years along with the leaps and bounds we will take this year as well as understanding that there are still challenges ahead, that we as a community, will need to work together head on; I found the vision we needed in a simple radio announcement just this past Thursday (January 18, 2018). It was around 4:30pm as I was listening to WALL radio while traveling down Jersey Avenue. DJ Jim Frey said and I'll paraphrase "Today's community of the day is Port Jervis...settled in the 1690's, it became a village in 1853, and a city in 1907. Here is to the city that's on the move and he played Fleetwood Mac's "Don't Stop Thinking About Tomorrow." I was a bit inspired by the thought of Middletown's WALL radio recognizing us and for the first time, after hearing that song countless times before, I actually listened to the lyrics.

It's funny that there are days where many of us wake up and don't want smile, but sometimes it takes just a little while. We open eyes and look at the day and we might start to see things in a different way.

So Don't Stop Thinking About Tomorrow: As many in our community have been rolling up their sleeves and are making our future here in the city a better place to be, better than before. We need to remember that, Yesterday's gone, Yesterday's gone.

We should think about the times to come...like the growth of business downtown along with new growth on the horizon, especially with the proposed annexation from the Town of Deerpark. These are different, from the things we've done before.

Our city has seen some bad times but as we turn the corner imagine what tomorrow will do as I ask our citizens of this great city to continue to commit to the change that is here.

Don't stop thinking about tomorrow as we embrace our past and don't stop, our growth and revenue as they begin to trickle in.

It will be here, more prosperous than before, our gloomy yesterday is gone. Yes, it will be gone.

All I've ever wanted for our city since taking over as your mayor is to see our residents and businesses smile, yes it has taken a little while, and I know some of you are still skeptical too but I'm hoping this year you will really see that it is true.

I know I said that 2017 would be a banner year for our city and it certainly was. Now 2018 is looking just as bright. The focus on new businesses and outdoor activities that will provide jobs to our city residents is clearly underway. Our downtown business district is taking shape with renovated buildings and new businesses that focus on what

American's are looking for today in a vibrant downtown. The hiking and biking trails have grown to approximately 38+ miles and have been designed, created, and maintained with a full volunteer force. Thank you to the Outdoor Club of Port Jervis for leading this endeavor and for taking on new recreational activities that provide exposure to our city and the outdoors. We continue to develop the railroad turntable with its future museum along with the tow path connection, and at least a partial revival of the D&H Canal that is set to come to life soon. This will present a flashback of what life was like here during the 19th Century with transportation here in America. It will act as the connector between the Watershed Trails, our downtown, and Riverside Park. The BOCES summer work program also returned for its 5th year and created a challenging trail that leads from Hudson Street at West Main up to Point Peter with several stops and majestic views of the city on the way. This free labor is paid for through a grant from BOCES and is a supervised program that teaches our local teenage resident's responsibility, coupled with hard work, equals success.

“Community Service Saturday's” continued its 4th year but it also morphed into a school activity bringing out Port Jervis Middle School students to clean the banks of the Delaware as well as spruce up and paint Riverside Park. Additionally, a new endeavor of clearing out, revitalizing, and maintaining one of the area's oldest cemeteries; Magagkamack Cemetery on East Main Street began. This sprucing up will continue this year as the Community Service Saturday program looks for schools, clubs, religious organizations, or even families in the area to help donate their time to freshen up our city. From 9:00am – 12:00pm, only 3 hours, on a Saturday, allows the volunteers to make a difference in their community. It is not much to ask and many hands make for light work. Look for it to start again this April.

As events and activities draw thousands of people to our small little city on the banks of the Delaware. The Snowball's Chance Fat Tire Bike Race, Citywide Yard Sale, Soap Box Derby, Art in the Park at Orange Square, Dinner Along the Delaware and Fireworks Show, Fireman's Day Parade, Summer biking events, Tri-State Triathlon, Fall Foliage Festival, the Erie 80 and Chrstkindlmarkt that draw thousands of visitors from all over the world. Our team of volunteers on the Port Jervis Tourism board, the Port Jervis Outdoor Club, and the Soap Box Derby committee are to be commended for the success of each of these events.

Our budget challenges are nearly over, as this is the 5th year of a 5 year strategic plan, our council will work this year on the most challenging of expenses and that is our personnel. We hope to come away with an agreement so that each side feels as if they have been respected and understood, while our taxpayers feel as if they have been represented properly. We want to continue a well-established foundation of growth for our future without stripping the essential services that make us a city. We have begun to build our fund balance while preparing to now see savings that also comes with our economic growth. It's important to understand that to continue stabilization means that there must be tax increases until a time comes that alternative revenue can sustain the growth.

We have increased revenues through taxes, yes but we are also beginning to tap into those alternative income sources with the development of vacant properties, solar energy, and the sale of city owned properties. We continue to explore how to create sustainable

alternative revenues while enhancing our city. The problem we have is the State of New York as it continues to raise mandated fees, program fees, and insurance rates to support their operations without consideration of their municipalities.

As we won't stop thinking about tomorrow, our council will work on endeavors that will make sure that our city is operating efficiently. As I said last year that just cutting services and cutting personnel are an easy budget fix but will ultimately lead to greater hardship for our citizens in the future. If we cut services we will see more garbage on our streets, we will see crime rise, everyone will see insurance rates escalate, and much more. This is not a scare tactic, it is reality that can be seen in other cities here in New York and across America. We have worked hard cleaning up our city and we are making it more attractive to visitors and new homeowners especially our single-family homes where sales have soared this year. We will focus our rehabilitation goals on blighted areas and as values increase and as buildings are rehabilitated our tax base will grow making for happier residents and business owners.

This year's obtainable goals such as the annexation of several parcels of property from the Town of Deerpark will increase our property tax base and include development that will lead to new jobs, subtle development of Riverside Park, expansion of trails in the Watershed Park, 19th Century Transportation in America Museum and Learning Center at the turntable and canal, new sidewalks downtown, campground development at Elks-Brox Park, new signage at entrances and throughout the city, citywide camera system, demolition of buildings that are beyond repair, safe route to schools sidewalk replacement, and perhaps finally after 19 years the Tri-State road widening and bridge replacement will all take place.

We will also continue to work on long term goals including the White Water Kayak Park in the Delaware, the Water Trails at Riverside Park, the alleviation of parking issues downtown, development of West End Beach, expansion of activities in Riverside Park, the Farnum House Rehabilitation to a Community Center with a gymnasium addition that can also be utilized as an emergency evacuation center for city residents, as well as continued efforts to identify, repair, and replace issues with our fresh water, sewer, and storm water pipes.

Our city building department led by building official, Dave Rivera and his assistant Laurie Powrie are in the forefront of this effort as they have worked very hard again this year to focus on compliance when it comes to dilapidated, un-kept, and unsafe buildings throughout the city.

Thanks to this department the city, this year, hit an all-time high in building permits issuing 236 permits and raising nearly \$365,241.00 in revenue, \$30,915 over 2016. Residents are taking advantage of 421-f called the “Capital Improvements to Residential Property” exemption, that allows homeowners who are putting an addition onto or rehabilitating their main structure the ability to apply for a tax exemption on city taxes over the course of 4 years for the improvements done thus offsetting any new tax burden. Our businesses are also using their tax exemptions to do the same thing.

Our city Assessor, Teresa Spradling and her assistant Heather Marino have been working closely with the building department in shared programs to make sure they review, inspect, and measure our city’s inventory as they update property photographs that haven’t been done in nearly 10 years. In addition, they are preparing for the 2020 Census by updating premise identification and reviewing property exemptions. All

the while Mrs. Spradling was able to get her full certification as an Assessor done in record time, a great job to her.

Our Community Development Agency, that is contracted by the city, plays an important part of our city's future growth as they deal directly with business owners on low interest loans while seeking to get the best dollar for the city when it comes to grant or low interest loan projects. CDA director Valerie Maginsky balances the task of taking awards from beginning to end. This tedious process of making sure that paperwork on projects such as the Jersey Avenue Sewer Rehabilitation, Microenterprise grant for six small Port Jervis businesses, our downtown Greenway Grant, as well as our White-Water Planning Grant have their I's dotted and their T's crossed. We were awarded a DEC Urban Forestry Grant this past year, written by the CDA, and we continue to progress on our sewer I&I studies, our Comprehensive Plan and Code Updates, Fire Department grants, home rehabilitation grants, and blighted housing demolition grants. The CDA and the city have also teamed up to write a grant for archiving and maintenance of records for both the city and the CDA, as well as preparing and submitting the NYS Consolidated Funding Application for the next round of \$10,000,000 grants. In addition, this office manages the Section 8 program for the city.

Our city Recreation Programs are led by John Faggione, in 2017 alone our summer program and youth center served more than 5,500 kids. There are countless events throughout the year that John, his staff, and volunteers work on to make our city a better place to live. Free movies, free concerts, sports camps, special events, and field trips. John's department has also taken on the task to raise revenue with park rentals as well as beach parking. Recreation is also about community by raising

food and supplies for the Human Society as well as local food pantries in the area. Recreation will also add 2 new special events this year with a New Easter Youth Event called EGGceleent Spring Races as well as starting a fall trail run in the watershed trails. We will see playground equipment upgrades this year as well as new safety surfaces at Church Street Park. There are plans to begin re-creating West End Park and Beach as a destination here in the city with a paved parking lot along with creating a ball field again at that location. Additionally, the recreation department is working closely with volunteers that have also brought donations that we hope to add beach volleyball courts to either Riverside or West End.

Our Department of Public Works hardly receives the recognition it deserves as its employees are involved in every single aspect of what makes this city work. Under the direction of our Department of Public Works Director Jack Farr and his assistant Steve Duryea, hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars are saved every year by our workers in the DPW rather than the city going out and contracting every project or event. This past year our DPW replaced a bridge on Hudson Street, performed the demolition for the promenade project, assisted in the 600 feet (19 feet deep) sewer line replacement on Jersey Avenue, blacktopped East Main Street, Park Avenue and Front Street, installed kiosks in the Watershed Parking areas, installed 300' of new sidewalks at Church Street park, installed and repaired dozens of sewer lines in the city, repaired 6 water main breaks, replaced storm water lines that alleviated flooding on Barcelow Street, installed and repaired over 20 water service lines, while still picking up city refuse, operating our water filtration plant, picking up leaves, plowing snow, and much more. This year's projects will include sidewalk replacements on Front Street, pave downtown Front Street and Jersey Avenue, replace culverts on Maiden

Lane and Warren Place, install a new handicapped ramp at city hall, and continue to work on the DEC compliance of sewer work.

Chief William Worden and Lt. John Fitzpatrick and our highly decorated and professional police department define the mission of safety and security to all of our law abiding citizens. Our men and woman work tirelessly to provide safety to our residents and visitors alike. Our police department is recognized for its utilization of Community Policing and Problem Solving that does not happen in other places throughout our state and country. This model builds trust, promotes partnerships, and enhances our quality of life. Our police department encourages community involvement which reduces crime. As our community experiences this renaissance of positive residential and commercial development, neighborhoods are watching out for each other too. They are observant, caring, and considerate which helps our officers resolve and solve. Our police department is successful in lowering crime rate, traffic accidents, and overdose deaths by having partnerships and problem solving, education prevention, community outreach, prioritizing safety, maintaining consistent staffing levels for deployment, and continuing progressive training and staff development. We again have seen part 1 crimes in our city reduced by 25% from 2015 and over 57% since 1995. Their partnership with our citizens allows for this success. The education programs allow our officers to interact with the youth of our community as well as their parents with the DARE program as well as Too Good for Drugs program in the middle school. Our department works closely with P.J. Pride and Neighborhood Watch programs and is partnering with the Reality Tour Drug Prevention Program. This past year our department successfully implemented a police department Youth Leadership Academy that was so well received it is expanding this year. Additionally, this year our officers will continue to focus on

Proactive Community Policing as well as training in Crisis Intervention, Police Firearms and Tactical training, creating an city impound yard and storage facility to increase revenue and accessibility to impounded vehicles, designing and installing a city wide street safety camera system, as well as deploying park and walk foot posts and bicycle patrols to targeted areas of concern.

In our City Clerk's office, led by our City Clerk-Treasurer Robin Waizenegger and her Deputy Clerk Bobbi-Jo Muller and staff, who has the traditionally unappreciated job of collecting taxes, fines and fees also seeks ways to operate efficiently. This department is continually looking for ways to improve our city's cash flow and making recommendations on how to effectively run our city more efficiently. As the city continues to grow the finances of our city begin to see a net in positive results however that has to be balanced with unrealistic financial mandates coupled with services our residents require.

The city's Nutrition Program ended this year after nearly 20 years of operation as Orange County took over the program and its federally mandated Meals on Wheels Program. I want to sincerely thank Kathy Potter who faithfully managed this program for many years as well as her team and volunteers for their dedicated service to our community and our elderly residents.

Fire Chief Dominic Cicalese leads our 100% volunteer Fire Department. This dedicated team of 6 companies as well as the special ops team and fire police responded to 416 total alarms in 2017. Day or Night these volunteers risk their lives to save ours without fearing the risk that they take jeopardizing their own. They answer calls to structure fires, brush fires, floods, accidents, drownings, and much more. In addition, they do

countless hours of training, time away from their family, to make sure your family is safe from harms way. This training includes swift water rescue training as well as confined space training and weekly operating training. Our fireman work with other departments to make sure that coordination and cooperation work hand in hand as they protect each of us.

We have stepped up and we have taken control of our destiny. New sustainable revenue will begin to help offset further tax burden. We must continue to build our fund balance for those rainy days. We must continue to understand that we are the ones that must control our city's destiny. To think for one moment that someone will bail us out has to be out of the question. We cannot seek help from others, we must seek help from ourselves.

Last year I said it was election year, now yesterday's gone. Think about tomorrow, let your council that has been elected for the next 2 years to represent you, know what you want Port Jervis to be. Tell them that you want it better than it was before. Make each of them understand where you want your city to go and grow. Give suggestions, help in planning, get involved or before you know it, today will be gone.

God Bless the United States of America and God Bless our small city Port Jervis, New York...Thank you!