



**City of Port Jervis 2019
State of the City Address
By: Mayor Kelly B. Decker
January 29, 2019**

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 present to you my 6th State of the City Address. This address will highlight the promise that was made to move our city forward, how far we've come, and where we still need to go.

In 2014, the Delaware Bridge was dark at night, the Port Plaza was abandoned, our downtown had only a couple of store fronts open, crime was on the rise, buildings were deteriorating at an alarming rate, major construction projects sat unfunded for years, and the financial shape of the city was dismal.

Today there is a shadow of that Port Jervis still around but 2019 should whisk away any remnants of a sad yesteryear.

Don't Stop Thinking About Tomorrow, what a great theme. The bridge is brightly lit. A newly refurbished Port Plaza has a grocery store and nail salon, with more to come. Crime is at an all-time low.

Deteriorating building have and are being torn down or refurbished. Construction projects are completed or in the construction phase. Most importantly the financial shape of our city is rebounding day by day.

Plans for future development has our city on the cusp for an explosion of new opportunity. There will be new reoccurring revenue for the city and jobs too.

6 years ago I asked our citizens to commit to change and many have. I remember my father once saying to me “When you see a crane in operation in a city, you know that city is moving forward.” Well, we have a crane in Tri-States.

So don't stop thinking about tomorrow and how we are progressing but also don't forget about the past either.

As your mayor I am proud to see the commitment made by our residents and business owners. I find it extremely encouraging and helpful when I hear people who return to our city for a visit who say that they love what they see. But does everyone? Of course not. Many people get stuck in the past of what was, but in reality, it can never be. However, what we can do is embrace a future that we can see.

I look at the list of accomplishments that have happened over the last six years and the people behind those accomplishments. Some are new here, some have been here for years, some are young, some are old, but all with a vision and a goal in mind.

Wow, 2018 really surpassed many of my expectations. We opened a facility for higher education here with the opening of the SUNY Orange Sarfatti annex. Our first Homestead Program house was purchased and is under full renovations. The promenade downtown was completed and dedicated in memory of Mr. Josef Kucher a prominent and longtime businessman here in Port Jervis. We began the long-awaited Tri-State Corridor and Bridge project as well as put in an integrated high tech city-wide camera system. Our focus on new businesses and outdoor activities continues to develop and move forward while our downtown

business district is continuing to taking shape with renovated buildings, new storefronts, and a pedestrian sound system for a vibrant downtown.

Development at the hiking and biking trails have not sat idle either as another approximately 5+ miles of trails were created in 2018 and excellently maintained by the Outdoor Club of Port Jervis a non-profit group of volunteers who are entrusted with this care. This commitment provides a tremendous exposure to our city and the outdoor adventure that can no longer be dismissed. The continued draw of attention that these unique trails have are causing our local businesses to thrive and our housing market to boom. This year we will continue to develop the railroad turntable with its future museum along with the tow path connection, and at least some recognition of the days gone by on the D&H Canal. People will take notice to what life was like here during the 19th Century with transportation and be able to do it by walking, riding their bike, or letting Fido hangout in the city's new dog park beginning this spring. What's great about the turntable area is that it connects our Watershed Trails to our downtown and Riverside Park.

“Community Service Saturday” events bring out our young people as we not only work with clubs in the area but the entire Middle School student body that gets involved in our revitalizing and maintaining one of the area's oldest cemeteries; Mahackamack Cemetery on East Main Street. Other schools, clubs, religious organizations, or even families are always welcome to help donate their time to freshen up our city.

As events and activities continue to 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 & History in the Park at Orange Square, Dinner Along the Delaware and Fireworks

Show, Fireman's Day Parade, Point Peter Pounder, Fall Foliage Festival, Erie 80 and the Chrstkindlmarkt draws thousands of visitors from all over the world as well as impromptu events such as "Grinchmas," and it's done by all volunteers. Members of the Port Jervis Tourism board, the Port Jervis Outdoor Club, Historic Downtown Merchants Association and the Soap Box Derby committees are again commended for the success of each of these events and activities.

As for our city budget? We can begin to take a sigh of relief. We have a fund balance, that can always be better, but is ok. We have budget that addresses our needs and wants. But we must still stay vigilant to protect our interest and growth of our city. Now in the 6th year, I have given our Strategic Plan an overhaul and we start with Day 1. Interesting enough many of these projects will not only come to fruition during the next year but will be completed too. I am pretty confident, that in our foreseeable future, we will have steady budgets as we have two contracts settled with one to go, with hopes that it will be resolved very soon. We will continue a well-established foundation of growth for our future and keep all the essential services that make us a city. We will continue to build our fund balance and prepare our city for the future with infrastructure improvements.

We are looking at protecting the city and our environment while creating longtime revenue streams with solar energy and forest carbon management in our Watershed. We must stay vigilant in regards to new unfunded mandates as well as mandated expenses imposed on the city by other entities.

This year we have many obtainable goals such as annexation that will increase our property tax base and include development that will lead to

new jobs, a new Tri-State corridor and bridge, Safe routes to school sidewalks, subtle development of Riverside Park, continued expansion of the Watershed Park including trails and camping at Elks-Brox Park, new signage at the entrances of the city, the continued development of Phase 2 of the citywide high tech camera system, demolition of buildings that are beyond repair, and the plans of strategic development of Riverside Park and the Farnum House Community Center.

Our city building department led by building official, Dave Rivera and his assistant Laurie Powrie are the face of the city when it comes to compliance from dilapidated, un-kept, and unsafe buildings throughout the city. This is one of the few departments in the city that actually generates revenue. In 2018 they issued 335 permits and raised nearly \$328,176 in revenue. Residents continue to take 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 too.

Our city Assessor, Teresa Spradling and her assistant Heather Marino continues to work 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. In addition, they are preparing for the 2020 Census by updating premise identification and reviewing property exemptions. They are a great asset to our city and I appreciate their due diligence. Exemptions take up a great deal of time in this office as there are over 2,000 exemptions that need to be

monitored, reviewed, and processed each year with many an annual review.

The Community Development Agency, that is contracted by the city, works with business owners in attempt to find them low interest loans and grants when involved in a project or even to start out. CDA director Valerie Maginsky balances the task of taking any grant awards received from the state or federal government and manages the process from beginning to end. Some of the projects and grants her agency will be working on this year are the continuation of the White-Water Kayak Park, DEC Urban Forestry, our Comprehensive Plan and Code Updates, Fire Department Confined Space, home rehabilitation program, and blighted housing demolition. The CDA wrote two Consolidated Funding grants and the city was awarded a total of \$2,632,500.00 to include land purchase and conservation easements to improve our water quality surrounding the city's watershed property and repairs to the city's wastewater system. In addition, this office works closely with Orange County and other agencies promoting community, home, business, and health initiatives. It also manages the Section 8 program for the city.

Our city Recreation Programs led by Director John Faggione, serves the youth of our city and has countless events and programs led by his staff and volunteers. Many of the programs are free of charge and allow idle time to be filled by being involved in activities as well as community service initiatives. We will continue to see playground equipment upgrades this year as well as the West End Park and Beach initiative working closely with the local Little League. John also oversees all of our Tourism Board activities and other event.

I say this every year and I certainly mean it; our Department of Public Works hardly receives the recognition it deserves as its employees are involved in basically 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 going out and performing skilled tasks rather than the city going out and contracting projects that would cost double with mandated prevailing wages. This past year our DPW completed the in-house replacement of the Hudson Street Bridge, paved 2,500 feet of roadway, landscaped the pedestrian mall, erected a building there to house the fountain control, irrigation, communication systems, repaired and replaced dozens of sewer laterals city wide, installed over 20 new ADA compatible handicapped ramps, repaired and replaced fire hydrants, and countless water service lines saving the city hundreds of thousands of dollars had it gone out to contract and on top of their regular duties that need to be completed such as water filtration, garbage pickup, snow and leaf removal, grass cutting, and maintenance on city wide fleet vehicles.

Chief William Worden and Lt. John Fitzpatrick along with our highly decorated and professional police department define the mission of safety and security to all of our law-abiding citizens. As always, our men and woman work tirelessly to provide safety to our residents and visitors alike. Our police department staff displays incredible courage, professionalism and commitment every day. They proactively prevent crimes and rapidly solve them that contribute to the safe and resurgent atmosphere our city is experiencing. Once again, we have seen part 1 crimes, the most serious crimes, in our city reduced by 24% from 2017 and nearly 83% since 1995 and Part II offenses (crime from controlled substance related to simple assault to criminal mischief) down 19% from

2017. Their partnership with our citizens allows for our officer's success. They are dedicated parents, family members, community volunteers, coaches, parishioners, mentors, and neighbors. They are involved with the Domestic Violence Intervention Program, the 24-hours Risk Assessment Program, Enhanced Mental Health Assistance and Crisis Intervention, Operation PJ Pride, DARE, National Night Out Against Crime, Too Good for Drugs and Violence, and the Youth Leadership Program. Our department saw many seasoned veteran officers retire this year to only return as our new school officers in the Port Jervis City School District an initiative of mutual agreement worked out between the school district, the Town of Deerpark, and the City of Port Jervis.

In our City Clerk's office, led by our City Clerk-Treasurer Robin Waizenegger and her Deputy Clerk Bobbi-Jo Muller and staff, but traditionally have the 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 watched closely and balanced with unrealistic financial mandates coupled with added services our residents require.

Fire Chief Dominic Cicalese continues to lead our 100% volunteer Fire Department. This dedicated team of 6 companies as well as the special OPS team and fire police responded to 459 total alarms in 2018 a 10.67% increase from last year. Day or Night these volunteers risk their lives to save ours without fearing the risk that they take jeopardizing their own. In addition, they respond to calls in neighboring departments.

Several key purchases this year help enhance the safety of not only the firefighters but our public too. A new Thermal Imaging Camera helps seek hotspots and aids the firefighter in an active fire. Additionally, the purchase of the Paratech Air Bag System that aids in heavy lifting and rescue is something the department has been without for nearly 20 years. In addition, as these men and woman give countless hours of training, time away from their family, and to make sure your family is safe from harm's way they will now possess an AED Automated External Defibrillator on each fire apparatus to remedy aid to someone in need. As our fireman work hard for us, they deserve our protection too and the city is in compliance with the New York State Volunteer Firefighter Enhanced Cancer Disability Benefits Act that became effective at the beginning of this year. We not only should be proud of these men and woman but Thankful for the time they give to protect each of us.

So here I am 6 years later. We have a new city on the rise. We must continue to be fiscally responsible and continue to build our fund balance for those years when things aren't so good. We might not have control of what happens outside this valley but we certainly and collectively have the responsibility to our city and her residents. We must know that seeking help from others is fruitless and we must work and communicate with one another.

This year is an election year. It is a minimum 2-year commitment that could allow you to represent the city you live in. I say this as the laws in New York State have recently changed and now a decision to run for an office here would need to be done by the end of February. If you or anyone you know that might be interested let one of your elected officials know or you can contact the Orange County Department of Elections in Goshen for details. Be involved, make good things happen,

give suggestions, help in planning. We have promise, we have hope, and we can certainly show our pride.

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