

2016 Saratoga Springs State Of The City Address

Given By Mayor Joanne D. Yepsen

Saturday, January 30, 2016 – 10:00AM

Canfield Casino – Congress Park

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Good morning my fellow Saratogians. Welcome to the beautiful Canfield Casino for the 2016 Saratoga Springs State of the City Address. This location represents the best of Saratoga Springs' rich history, cultural opportunity, and architectural integrity, how our residents make a difference in preservation efforts, why we are uniquely positioned for the future. We have preserved the past and are planning for the future.

As your mayor, it is my distinct honor and privilege to give this annual address to our citizens.

First, I want to recognize several current and former elected officials who are with us this morning.

United States Congressman Paul Tonko

New York State Assemblywoman Carrie Woerner

Saratoga County Supervisor Matthew Veitch

Saratoga County Supervisor Peter Martin

Saratoga Springs Commissioner of Accounts John Franck

Saratoga Springs Commissioner of Finance Michele Madigan

Deputy Commissioner of Public Safety Eileen Finneran

Deputy Commissioner of Finance Lynn Bachner

Deputy Commissioner of Accounts Maire Masterson

Deputy Mayor Joe Ogden

Former Mayor Kenneth Klotz

City Judge Jim Doern

City Judge Jeffrey Wait

Since I took office, I've made it a point to create strong working relationships with all levels of government. Bipartisan partnerships for our City at the federal and state levels are critical to serve our common constituencies effectively. We have many examples I will include today of how our administration's partnerships with all of you are working for the people of Saratoga Springs.

Thank you to my colleagues on the City Council for contributing to this occasion, both in content and to public works for helping with the set up, and to Jamie Parillo of the History Museum also located in this historic building.

While it seems like just yesterday, it has been two years since I first stood before you as mayor and outlined my vision for how we could all move this city forward while keeping our time-honored traditions, unique character, and commitment to making life better for all of citizens, intact. And two years later, I am both happy and humbled to report that our vision and our continued efforts have produced success and that the state of the City is strong.

This last year we celebrated our centennial year as a city, and we did so with tremendous class; remarkable enthusiasm; and an unwavering appreciation for our unique history, in other words – we did so in true Saratoga Springs fashion. From fireworks at First Night, to the commemoration of the incorporation of our City 100 years later at the original drink hall - now the Visitor's Center, Centennial Day at our beloved Saratoga Race Course, the re-dedication of our Spirit of Life, the unveiling of Centennial Park donated by Marylou Whitney and John Hendrickson, our citizens, businesses and public officials put on a year-long show that very few communities could emulate. We are Saratogians. To commemorate our centennial year we commissioned Look TV to make the following video, which I'd like to show at this time.

(Centennial Video Shown Here)

In the past, this address has usually been a report from the Mayor. Two years ago, I started a new tradition and asked each city commissioner to offer an update from their respective departments. I will present their reports now.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Our Department of Public Safety, led by Commissioner Chris Mathiesen, continues to provide excellent protection for our community twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The police department, under the direction of Chief Greg Veitch, the fire/EMS Department, under the direction of Chief Robert Williams and the code enforcement office presently staffed by Dan Cogan and Jack Donnelly, face greater challenges every year in

our increasingly busy city. Traffic regulations technician Mark Benecquista oversees a department charged with ever expanding traffic light maintenance, road and street striping and advisory responsibilities to the land use boards and as well as other city projects. Assistant Police Chief John Catone has been coordinating a citywide comprehensive revamping of our Community Emergency Management Plan. We expect to have this very important update completed in April. Thanks to Marilyn Rivers, the Department of Public Works, Lt. Mitchell, Asst. Chief Catone, and all others who have contributed to this effort.

Commissioner Mathiesen would like to thank all those working diligently in our department so that we can continue to meet the public safety needs of our community, especially Deputy Commissioner Eileen Finneran for her devotion to the department and to improving City government.

I continue to seek input from our community in order be sure that we are meeting the needs of our community. DPS will again be having a forum in the spring and in the fall so that citizens can speak directly to me and to other Public Safety Dept. officials.

PUBLIC WORKS

Our Department of Public Works, led by Commissioner Skip Scirocco, continues to maintain and improve our city streets and property. Our Water Treatment Plant has a newly installed emergency generator, which will allow the treatment of water in the event of an electrical capacity issue. We have new water wells at Bog Meadow that provide a backup water supply when needed. The Ballston Avenue Reconstruction Project,

completed last year, provides for additional pedestrian and vehicle traffic in that corridor. And DPW was an integral part of our ongoing partnership with the Saratoga Springs Preservation Foundation on refurbishing the Spirit of Life, in time for our Centennial Celebration.

ACCOUNTS

Our Department of Accounts, led by Commissioner John Franck, will continue its policy of no citywide reassessments in 2016. The Accounts Department will be holding their annual grievance class on Tuesday May 10th, at 6:00pm; this is the only such class offered by a local government in this area. Property owners will be educated on the proper procedures for grieving their assessments.

Our Risk and Safety Office is working with the Department of Public Safety the City's comprehensive "City Emergency Management Program" that will connect into the existing County Emergency Online Management System. The City Safety Committee will begin providing City personnel, and the community, with emergency preparedness training in 2016.

The Accounts Department is also working with the local Chamber of Commerce, Department of Public Safety, and Assemblymen John McDonald to develop a universal taxi ordinance that will assist in streamlining transportation throughout the Capital District Area.

FINANCE

Our Department of Finance, led by Commissioner Michele Madigan, continues to keep our city's fiscal health strong. There has been virtually no increase in the tax rate for the past four years – including a 0.14% tax reduction in 2016, which falls well within the state's 2% property tax cap; this has also allowed City taxpayers to receive a check from the State under the recent Tax Freeze Credit program. Standard and Poor's has granted the city an excellent AA+ bond rating in 2015, and noted the City's excellent budget by saying: "Given Saratoga Springs's demonstrated ability to produce strong budgetary performances, and the city's strong management conditions with good financial management policies, we expect the city to maintain at least a strong budgetary performance over the next two years." The debt refinancing undertaken by Finance took advantage of record low interest rates and will save taxpayers more than \$2.3 million over the next 20 years. City reserves and assignments have been established, funded, and/or increased. These have been judiciously used for one-time needs and certain costs associated with settling long expired employee contracts, which create abrupt budget changes.

SARATOGA COUNTY

I'm pleased that the relations between the County and City have grown over the past year. Together we are solving problems, working toward getting funding and moving our common goals forward with regional collaboration.

Thank you Supervisor Veitch for your leadership at the County level and for working on behalf of the City as the Chair of the County Board but also closely with my administration.

Also thank you to Supervisor Martin. Peter has been a valuable and reliable partner at the county level and we're very pleased that he will be back at the county seat for another two years. Please, both of you stand and be recognized.

In the Mayor's Office, I'd like to thank my full staff and in particular Joe Ogden, Deputy Mayor, who puts in endless hours and energy into moving our agenda forward. He's going on family leave for one month starting February 26th and we expect him back in late March. Also thanks to the rest of our team: Tony Izzo, Trish Bush, Gayle LaSalle, and Vince DeLeonardis, and all of our sub-departments. When I took office two years ago it was very important to create an administration with a strong constituent service mentality, a respect for inclusiveness, working as a team and being creative in solving problems. Thank you for making that a reality in the Mayor's Office. It's been a pleasure to work with all of you.

I think it's fair to say we all love our city and that success breeds success. We have more investors than ever looking to create projects and start businesses, and more residents moving here to start families, retire, and enjoy the quality of life.

We are not the only ones who recognize Saratoga Springs for being great; we are recognized on the national stage time and time again. Just in the past two years we have

won multiple awards: One of the 20 Best College Towns, One of the 10 Best Places to Retire, One of the Best Small Cities in NY, The Happiest City in NYS, as one of the most Walk Friendly Communities in US!

And, in 2014 Saratoga Springs was listed as having one of the Best Main Streets (again)! They commended Broadway in downtown Saratoga Springs for it's famous architecture, shops, restaurants, and people watching. And now, our own Coffee Traders has won the \$5M advertising Super Bowl sweepstakes!! This will give Death Wish and Super Bowl a whole new meaning for us locally. I invited Mike Brown, owner of Coffee Traders to be in the audience and be recognized. We are proud of you and your success. Please stand to be recognized.

As we move forward in our second century as a city, we must sustain our growth without compromising our city in the country. We have a unique package of assets, a quality of life envied by many others in New York State and across the country. Together we will thoughtfully balance and grow our economic, cultural, and environmental assets to ensure success and the quality of life our current and future residents deserve. This morning I will outline the plan to do so. And we will do it with our amazing human capital, with all of you.

I'd like to recap our achievements from this past year.

In June, after nearly two years of meetings and thoughtful, public deliberation we delivered the city's first updated Comprehensive Plan in 14 years. This plan is nothing

short of the very foundation for how we go forward in all of efforts to enhance the quality of life for all of our citizens, preserve our natural resources and green space, begin to address housing needs, bolster economic development and job creation. I again want to thank all of our citizens, the Comprehensive Plan Committee, our city staff, and our City Council for rolling up their sleeves with me and giving us a plan that will keep the Spa City a thriving and beautiful place for many, many years to come.

The preservation of our green space and open lands has been, and always will be, a top priority as long as I'm mayor. This last year we completed the Waterfront Park, and gave the public a completely refurbished piece of lake front property after so many years in the making. After years of being vacant, we have finally filled the charter-required position of Administrator of Parks, Open Lands, and Historic Preservation- Sustainability Coordinator, as we pro-actively tackle a host of issues -- from producing a new Unified Development Ordinance, to writing grants and stewarding our City owned open space, this job will be crucial in coordinating so many of the policies that make us a truly sustainable city. And after so many years of wondering what will become of that massive, historic piece of rural land along West Avenue, we finally have put together the community and financial support to ensure that the Pitney Family Farm *stays a farm, stays agricultural, and stays beautiful*. Again, many thanks to the Pitney Family and Saratoga PLAN for working with us on this project. It's very reassuring to so many of us that the Pitney property will be with us as a farm for many, many, many years to come.

My administration continues to employ a thoughtful and balanced approach to economic development against a backdrop of continued success. Working partnerships with our business community have resulted in great projects. I have listed three major examples:

1) With the City Council and the Special Assessment District we were able to deliver a second round of capital funding for our city's way finding program that will overhaul and optimize our signage, while making the navigation of our downtown more efficient. I also want to thank the Special Assessment District for hearing my call for help on the homeless. They are working with Saratoga Arts on designs for drop boxes that are going to provide residents and visitors an opportunity to redirect their donations and not give directly to the homeless. 100% will go to shelters. This is just the way private and public sectors should work together to solve community problems.

2) We have delivered a new and very successful partnership with the Saratoga Convention and Tourism Bureau to help us unlock the potential of the Visitor's Center. This new collaboration is already saving taxpayers money, while allowing an organization that specializes in marketing our city an opportunity to give our city's tourism efforts the kind of resources, attention and expertise it deserves. With this new innovative partnership, we can build programs, begin facility improvements and create an exciting portal for residents and tourists. Expanded services are also being discussed. Imagine a master ticket kiosk located there to promote all the wonderful events we offer by the city and local organizations. Thank you to Todd Garafano and all of his staff for making this

partnership a reality. Next we will be forming a new advisory board and “friends of” group to be stewards of our Urban Heritage Area and the historic Visitor’s Center.

3) A Downtown Parking Task Force has been formed to tackle important goals including conducting a full inventory of all current parking and how we can better manage or reorganize to create more spaces, consider new locations for additional parking structures and look at other means of transporting people around downtown including shuttles, technology, bike share, etc. In many cities that have had success, the business community takes the lead and I see that as appropriate in this case as well. Therefore the following members have already met and are moving forward with three tasks as an ad hoc committee: Tom Roohan, Brian Stroughter, Heidi West, Mike Ingersoll, and Harvey Fox as Chair. Thanks to Commissioner Madigan and IT for partnering with us to incorporate important technology advances. Let’s not forget, parking demand is a sign of success.

Instead of advancing the plan for a massive stand alone parking garage that will be with us for decades to come with very few questions or comprehensive planning, we have listened to the citizens of our city and we have taken a more comprehensive approach and issued an RFP for the development of the *entire* High Rock Avenue Parking Lot. The City Center is a major player in our city’s economic engine, and their needs were a primary focus of the RFP request. As public officials we are duty bound to think about how we can maximize the public benefit from the last significant piece of city-owned land in the urban core, add more parking than a stand alone garage, and meet other urban needs that we have as a city. As many of you know, the City Council has appointed a Technical Review Committee

to review the two RFP proposals, with the City Center's input, and they will finish their work in the coming weeks and present their analysis to the City Council and the public. We must let that process conclude before any final decisions are made for this prime property. Anything else would be irresponsible to both the people who elected us, and the RFP responders who have engaged with us.

One of the major responsibilities the mayor has is to negotiate the contracts with all seven labor unions. Not only have we accomplished the settlement of almost all contracts to date, but also did it with far less reliance on costly outside attorneys, which saved taxpayers tens of thousands of dollars, if not more. Employees are getting fair deals that value the goods and services they produce for our city each and every day, without breaking the bank of city taxpayers. The result is that employee morale is up markedly from 2013 and the costs associated with settling these contracts have been able to be absorbed without any significant increases in city taxes, and for 2016 – no increase in city taxes.

The people of our City are smart, committed, and involved. The wide breadth of experience and talent amazes me each time I go through a process of seeking and interviewing individuals to serve on important boards and committees.

For instance, we have resurrected the Open Space Advisory Committee, started the first ever Arts Commission, created the Housing Task Force, a Business Advisory Council, and the newest Downtown Parking Task Force to name a few. The Land Use Boards are extremely important legislative bodies with great responsibility, making critical decisions

every month about what will be built, and where, following codes, ordinances, and our newly updated comp plan.

The appointments I make are determined based on skills and talents, not political affiliation. Most important, they make the Mayor's office and the city more representative and responsive to the needs of City residents.

Not only do volunteer positions utilize our diverse talents and resources, but they also allow many priority issues to advance. I will be highlighting many of you and your accomplishments during 2016. It's because of you that the State of our City is strong.

The City Attorney's Office is turning around a heavy volume of FOIL requests in a far more efficient and timely manner than ever before so our citizens can have the greatest access possible to public information and records.

At the recommendation of our City Ethics Board, we unanimously adopted new set of rigorous regulations that will ensure our city government is functional in the most ethical and transparent way possible. Everyone appointed during my administration is asked to sign an oath of office. In addition, all land use board members not only sign an oath of office, but will also be part extensive ethics and land use training. I encourage all elected, appointed and/or citizens to utilize the City Ethics Board to avoid, at all costs, conflicts of interests and even perceptions of impropriety.

Just like we've updated other city records and major documents, we will be asking for a thorough review of our City Charter this year. According to our current City Charter, and

I quote, “the Mayor shall cause a review of the City Comprehensive Plan and City Charter periodically. The City Comprehensive Plan”, (which we completed last year), “shall be reviewed at least every five years, and The City Charter shall be reviewed at least every 10 years”. A Mayor has not caused a review of the Charter since 2006 and therefore it will be 10 years this year. This process will be an opportunity to 1) ensure our Charter language conforms to the language of codes and ordinances that have been revised or introduced at the Council table over the past 10 years, 2) adhere to new state laws passed in the past 10 years, and 3) update ways we can be more effective for the residents of Saratoga Springs. One example of this may be to look at what’s known as the POSH position in the charter and update it to better reflect the needs of the city and sustainability opportunities that now exist that did not 10 years ago. I would like to recognize our newly appointed staff person for this position now – and as a temporary measure, Civil Service Commission has approved the title Parks, Open Lands, and Historic Preservation – Sustainability Coordinator. Tina Carton, will you stand?

Last year, we also filled the Human Resources Director as a full time in-house position after being vacant for several years. Employee relations, an updated employee handbook, employee recognition and health and wellness programs are among her priorities.

There are three priorities included in our vision and agenda for this year:

- Building Economic Opportunities
- Land use and environmental protection, and
- Housing Initiatives

We are rich in assets and amenities. We need not to sit back on our laurels but must be pro-active on all economic development fronts. I spend a lot of my time greeting visiting conventions and meeting with businesses and interested investors. In fact, just this week I joined SEDC to greet a hospitality business from Japan. They only have one business so far in this country, in Hawaii, and they are interested in Saratoga Springs and helping us to bring back a return of the mineral waters. We are positioned well to build an international economy, and that's exactly what I think we should do.

There is no doubt that the racing industry is key to our economic success locally. So it will be important in 2016 that we work with the Governor's Office and state officials to return NYRA to a private, not for profit status and have more than one representative on the new NYRA Board. We have been in close touch with the Gaming Commission and NYRA regarding their potential capital improvements that are planned for the east side of our city. Job creation, an exclusive racing season, and a full 6-month Oklahoma Track training season are synonymous to attracting the best of the best in the industry. The higher quality of racing we can offer, the better our local economy will do.

Over 75% of our economy is small businesses. Our Business Advisory Council will be working hard to link available city resources, such as our city low interest business revolving loan program, to current and future businesses through our new web site. They support citywide technology advances and are thrilled Wi-Fi has been added to our Recreation Center and the ice rinks. The Council will also continue to look for appropriate businesses to add to our wonderful repertoire.

Once the report came out from the Center for Economic Growth on Leveraging Regional Assets for a Vibrant Future, we established our first ever Saratoga Springs Arts Commission in order to maximize our creative economy and opportunity to move art forward. The 20 appointed members of the commission are incredibly talented and represent a rich variety of organizations and companies in the arts. They are hard at work creating a strategic plan and setting their goals for this year that include:

- To Develop an arts master plan
- To Support the formation of a downtown incubator business and idea lab
- To Facilitate “Artist in Residence” programs in and around Saratoga Springs

Marcia White is one of the 20 members of the Commission and I’d like to take this opportunity to congratulate SPAC, a very important part of our creative economy and tourism market, on their 50th anniversary this year!

Our Recreation Commission agrees there is great potential for Sports Tourism for Saratoga Springs but we need to play a more competitive game. We’ve hosted multiple sporting events this past year, but we can do even more. We want to be a destination for

major tournaments and add water sports in our goals. In order to be successful, we need more land. We now have public access to the Kayderoseros and the Lake but we need playing fields and want to create a sports complex. To that end, we are fervently searching for land for fields; we are putting funds away and meeting with landowners. We hope to make a purchase this year.

As I mentioned, 2015 saw the completion of our first Comprehensive Plan update in over 14 years. Three areas in our 2015 Comp Plan identified for potential growth are Weibel Avenue, West Avenue, and South Broadway. We are working as a team with SEDC (Prosperity Partnerships) and property owners in these targeted areas to improve the gateways to our City.

Now, it is time to drill deeper and implement the vision of the Comprehensive Plan through a zoning and regulatory review that will eventually become the city's Unified Development Ordinance. This is, so to speak, where the rubber meets the road. Our City's zoning is the blueprint for how residential and commercial activity occurs in the city, and by extension will dictate how we go about preserving our neighborhoods, protecting precious open space, and incentivizing economic growth in our core.

After securing a grant from the New York State Energy Research Development Authority (NYSERDA) the City has selected Saratoga-native Behan Planning and Design to be our consultant on this important project and they, along with our Office of Planning and Economic Development are hosting an all day and evening public workshop on Thursday, February 4th from 9 a.m. – 9 p.m. at the Empire State College where the public is

encouraged to come offer ideas and input to be incorporated in the zoning diagnostic report. I hope as many of you as possible can join us.

In 2016 the Open Space Committee will work to update the outdated 2002 Open Space Plan for our City. Thank you to the Open space Committee, chaired by Matt Veitch, for taking this on. From the \$5 M 2002 Open Space Bond Act passed, only \$260,000 approximately remains. We have made some very worthwhile purchases with this authority – the Waterfront Park, land around Loughberry Lake as a protection to our water source, and trail systems. The Committee is also discussing the possibility of the need for securing another bond act.

The multi-use Greenbelt Trail has been making great strides and will be included in a stronger Complete Streets Design and Implementation Plan.

Our long awaited Geysers Road Trail is going to be a reality. We are nearing completion on the Safe Routes to School project on Geysers Road. With Greenman Pedersen's help, we will hold a community meeting later this year that will outline the schedule and construction plans for a trail that will run from Milton town line to the Spa State Park.

As our city continues to grow and our downtown becomes ever more vibrant, we must recognize the myriad challenges that accompany our many successes. Sadly, life does not improve for all of our citizens with the arrival of new businesses or cultural accolades; and the same is true for any city in America.

“We are pricing ourselves right out of our city,” is something that I hear regularly. While it is so easy to point out our collective prosperity, let us not forget all citizens cannot afford the above market rents and sale prices of homes and condos in our City. We need a variety of price points offered for our working families, seniors, and young professionals.

If you go by the HUD standard, you don't pay more than 30% of income on your annual housing. And we know rents in Saratoga on average are 30 – 40% higher than fair market rents. If a family of four, with both parents working is making \$60,000 annual combined income, they should not be spending more than \$1,200 per month for a 3-bedroom home. That is hard to find in Saratoga Springs. As a community that depends on tourism and hospitality employees, we also need more work force housing. And, we are doing something about it.

We are in conversations currently with the owners of the Raymond Watkin apartments. Instead of turning them into luxury apartments, we are working collaboratively to come up with a plan to retain the affordability, all while making facility improvements, and allow all the residents who currently live there to continue to do so at an affordable rate.

My Housing Task Force is working with me and discussions are in place to develop new affordable housing. We are looking to increase 14 current units into 50 units with Saratoga Affordable Housing taking the lead supported by state funds; with RPC, Shelters of Saratoga and Wellspring as non-profit partners. There are several sites being considered and I want to thank our Housing Task Force for their continued good work.

When the Housing Task Force first met in April of 2015 we had an immediate need – to end veterans homelessness in Saratoga Springs. We had just signed the White House pledge along with 800 other cities across the country. We completed our pledge of identifying and housing all homeless veterans in our City ahead of schedule as one of the first cities to do so in upstate NY and now a plan is in place to ensure no veteran will have to sleep on the streets again. Now, the Housing Task Force members are going to tackle the affordability of our housing options. This task force should be commended. Please stand and be recognized.

Code Blue is in its third season and is in the middle of another successful winter of giving people a hot meal and a warm place to sleep at night. But we have to do more. Code Blue needs volunteers and resources to keep operating. Unfortunately, homelessness is not an issue that is going away any time soon in our city. Our community is generous and has devoted resources to begin to combat this problem; and unless we recognize that we do have a problem and address it directly it will get worse. It's going to get worse for the people living on the streets, and it's going to get less and less comfortable for our businesses, citizens, and visitors. I know for a fact those who are using Code Blue are Saratogians. Our statistics tell us that 98% of Code Blue guests are from Saratoga. We should take great pride in the fact we are a compassionate community and have put many resources in place.

The Clergy Commission has really stepped up. The Steering Committee of multiple agencies who work with this population and helped to start Code Blue, continue to meet

and collaborate even though Shelters of Saratoga adopted Code Blue operation under their organization. Thank you to all.

Saratoga Springs is a City who knows much success, but we have much work to do. This year, let's address the safety, quality of life, and economic issues I've outlined today. Join me in the process. Be a part of the democracy. Let me know your areas of interest and your suggestions. Continue to come in for my open office hours, no appointment necessary.

I want to thank my fellow Council members again for participating in this State of the City and I'd like to thank all of you for coming out today. The past election gave us, the incumbents, a mandate from you the voters, to work together, to take the City forward to even greater success. We are one City. We all have different perspectives and responsibilities and we will not always agree, but that diversity and open dialogue will make this City stronger in the end.

I look forward to working well with all of you.

God bless you and your families. God bless Saratoga Springs.

Thank you very much.

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