

2017 Saratoga Springs State of the City Address

SHAPING OUR CITY TOGETHER

Mayor Joanne D. Yepsen

Monday January 30, 2017 at 6:00 p.m.
City Center, Downtown Saratoga Springs

Good evening, my fellow Saratogians. Welcome to the City Center for the 2017 Saratoga Springs State of the City Address. This location represents the best of Saratoga Springs' strong economic activity and viable downtown core, and why we are uniquely positioned and the model for much of upstate NY. We have integrated the new with our historic charm and are now planning for the future.

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

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

Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul	Commissioner Skip Scirocco
Assemblywoman Carrie Woerner	Commissioner John Franck
Dan Peluso, Congressman Paul Tonko's office	Commissioner Michele Madigan
Michael Kenneally, Senator Tedisco's office	Commissioner Chris Mathiesen
Supervisor Matthew Veitch	Former Mayor AC Riley
Supervisor Peter Martin	Former Mayor Raymond Watkins
Judge Jeffrey Wait	Former Mayor Ken Klotz
Judge Douglas Mills	Former Mayor J. Michael O'Connell

Thank you, Ryan McMahon and the City Center Board for hosting us.

INTRODUCTION

While it seems like just yesterday, it has been four years since I first stood before you as mayor and outlined my vision for how we could all move this city forward, while keeping intact our time-honored traditions, unique character, and commitment to making life better for all of our citizens.

I have a thorough speech planned for you all, but because of last weekend's national events, I want to say something first. Our constitutional rights are not Republican rights, nor are they Democrat rights. They are the rights held by all Americans, and we should honor them above all else.

My fellow Saratogians, I stand here today as a mother, a daughter, a friend, a neighbor, and as your mayor to say most emphatically, the only rights that should matter to all of us are human rights.

How we treat our fellow human beings defines our community. I think we all agree, no matter our political affiliation, that the larger environment in which we live is vastly different today than those four short years ago. And as the national scene swirls around us, and, at times may turn us virtually upside down, I want to tell you today that I am more confident than ever that the state of Saratoga Springs is strong. I want to thank the Governor and Lt Governor for keeping our state, inclusive, welcoming and safe.

Saratoga Springs is strong and its people and neighborhoods remain strong, because of our collective shared values. We are a community that comes together when the most important issues of the day require unity. And every time our values are critically tested, our neighbors, parents, teachers, business leaders and clergy come together to stand up for the ideals we should be most proud of today:

Our community is inclusive.

We are tolerant of our differences.

We are intolerant of bigotry.

We are Saratogians, New Yorkers and Americans who
believe “we the people” means us all!

In the past, this address was a report from the mayor. And although the mayor is the Chief Executive Officer of our city, I started a new tradition four years ago, asking each city commissioner to offer an update from his or her respective departments. I present their reports now.

Public Safety, Commissioner Mathiesen

The City of Saratoga Springs continues to be a safe place with many activities and a high quality of life for our citizens and our visitors. Our Police Department, Fire/EMS Department, Code Enforcement Officers and Parking Enforcement Officers are all improving their operations in order to serve us well. As our community continues to grow, as more events take place within our borders and as tourism and convention activities expand, the challenges to our department become more significant. The Code Enforcement department will be re-organized this year in order to keep up with greatly increased demand. Significant improvements are being made in the technology and staffing levels of our Dispatch Department.

Sadly, our community is not immune to some of the challenges that have surfaced in recent years. The heroin epidemic is very real here and elsewhere. This drug is often being laced with other drugs, which are highly addictive and very dangerous. We strongly advise anyone using or considering using these drugs to instead seek help and to notify our police of anyone selling these deadly drugs.

Another distinctly disturbing problem has surfaced that must be addressed. There are indications that racism and intolerance may be on the rise here in our City. Swastikas and white supremacy blogs are appearing. We have a responsibility to do whatever is necessary to educate our youth about the history of slavery, racist policies, anti-Semitism and the terrible impact of these on innocent people and on our world in general.

Public Works, Commissioner Scirocco

The Department of Public Works had a number of accomplishments in 2016. DPW paved just less than 5 total miles of City roadways. Work updating the city's water and sewer infrastructure continued in 2016. The 100-year-old four-inch water main on Woodlawn Avenue was upgraded and a water main was also installed on Aletta Street that completed a "loop" in the water delivery system. The Adams Street pump was also upgraded to support increased wastewater flow from NYRA and the Saratoga Casino & Raceway.

The Geyser Well Field was assessed and cleaned so that the capacity of the well fields was increased to ensure long-term sustainability.

Our city's arborist and tree crew worked with Sustainable Saratoga to plant 105 trees in city right of ways and city-owned properties.

Accounts, Commissioner Franck

The Accounts Department Assessment Office continues to see a decrease in the number of Grievances being filed. In 2016, the office had 71. The City of Saratoga Springs is the only municipality in Saratoga County to pass legislation to include a **Gold Star Parent** real property tax exemption as part of the existing Veteran's exemption offered by the City.

The department is currently working with Assemblyman John McDonald and the CDTA to make taxi legislation uniform throughout the Capital Region, to provide better transportation opportunities to and from the major transportation hubs in the area.

The Office of Risk and Safety continues its work with ADA policies for our community. Accessibility is a priority for both our residents and visitors to our area. Planning, coordinated with our Complete Streets philosophy, will enable our government to better meet the needs of our aging workforce and community.

In June of 2016, the City's Records Manager in the Accounts Department concluded a successful project fully funded by the New York State Archives to provide a researcher workstation at our City Historian Archives, which included a new computer and an overhead scanner.

The success of this project led to the City of Saratoga Springs receiving the 2016 William H. Kelly Annual Archives Award from the State Archives and Archives Partnership Trust for excellence in Local Government Archival Program development.

Finance Commissioner Madigan

The following are some highlights of the Finance Department's contributions towards the progress of the City.

There has been no increase in the tax rate increases for the past five years. Well within the NYS 2% property tax cap, this has also allowed City taxpayers to receive a check from the State under the recent Tax Freeze Credit program. **2017: no property tax rate increase; 2016: no property tax rate increase; 2015: no property tax rate increase.**

The property tax collection rate remains very high (about 97.2%), and the system for Online Payment of Taxes and Utility Bills instituted by Finance is an enormous enhancement for our taxpayers.

Moody's Investor Services upgraded the City's bond rating from Aa3 to Aa2. This is a strong rating for a municipality and in-line with our rating from Standard and Poor's AA+. Both rating agencies noted the City's excellent budget practices based on the city's strong fiscal management

We presented the Smart City Roadmap, introducing a variety of ideas for transitioning Saratoga Springs into a "Smart City." Projects include increased broadband connection, public Wi-Fi up and down Broadway, and in key corridors of the city, improved transit and smart energy projects. This initiative brings together a connected community and multiple organizations are represented.

Thank you to my fellow commissioners for these reports.

County Supervisors

The relationship between the city and the county is growing more important every year. Thank you to our city's county supervisors Matt Veitch and Peter Martin for keeping us informed and advocating for our city's needs.

Staff Recognitions

I don't usually single out staff in this address, but this year marked 30 years of service for one of our City Attorneys. Tony Izzo, please stand so we can acknowledge your dedication, expertise and commitment to this community, well beyond your job description.

On another personal note, I would also like to recognize Ms. Cindy Phillips, the City's Community Development Coordinator, for recently completing 20 years of service to the City. Cindy will be retiring at the end of this year.

Also, a very special thanks to my Deputy Mayor, Meg Kelly, and Executive Assistant, Lisa Shields, for their tireless service to our city and their long hours dedicated to making this event, and many of our initiatives, purposeful and successful.

2016'S CITY HIGHLIGHTS: SHAPING OUR CITY TOGETHER

1. The Saratoga Springs Visitor Center was awarded a Certificate of Excellence from Trip Advisor. Trip Advisor® is described as the world's largest travel site, enabling travelers to unleash the potential of every trip. Trip Advisor's tagline is: *Know better. Book better. Go better.* USA Today's 10 Best Main Streets Ranked Saratoga Springs #7 in their Readers Choice 2016 "Best Main Street in the US"; and WalletHub voted our city the "Best small city to live in", ranked #1 in New York and ranked #11 nationally. Saratogians will happily and proudly add these to our repertoire of achievements! Our city's architecture, history, locally-owned businesses and public spaces are the combined ingredients that make our city so special. And, of course you, the people are our greatest asset. I want to thank Todd Garafano and the entire team at the Convention & Tourism Bureau.

2. I'm pleased to announce we were very successful in securing several grants in 2016.

- In December, the City of Saratoga Springs was proud to be awarded \$1.134 million by New York State's Regional Development Council to complete the Saratoga Springs Downtown Connector Trail. The city will match the DEC's Climate Smart Community grant with \$150,000 from recreation fees and \$833,237 from bonding. Private developers will provide the remaining necessary funding.
- We received an award of \$2,500 to assist communities in New York State adopt zoning provisions that promote solar energy systems while protecting community character and the environment.
- 2016 Community Development Block Grant: The City was awarded \$313,699 from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. The city in turn awarded these funds to nine (9) individual not-for-profit agencies that daily assist Saratoga Springs residents with low and moderate incomes.
- In 2016 the City was awarded nearly \$304,000 to assist the low- and moderate-income residents and neighborhoods of the city.
- This past year, the city sought and was awarded \$932,000 in additional federal funding to complete the Geyser Road Trail system that will run from the Town of Milton border, along Geyser Road, and join an expanded Spa State Park trail system.

3. Saratoga Springs had the distinct privilege of hosting a very important gathering on housing, titled: *Seven Cities, One Mission, A Summit on Housing and Community Development*. I proudly agreed, on behalf of the City, when Housing and Urban Development (HUD) asked us to host their 2016 Summit for Upstate New York. We had the opportunity to showcase the Canfield Casino, Saratoga Springs City Center, the Saratoga Hilton and our wonderful downtown. Six regional mayors and more than 300 attendees and presenters participated, as well as top-level

officials in the federal and state housing agencies. Thanks to the Housing Task Force for taking this on, under the leadership of Cheryl Hage-Perez and Paul Feldman, and due to the sponsors and registrations, there was no cost to the City.

4. In July, the New York State (NYS) Department of Transportation (DOT) announced their plans to remove the Nelson Ave Ext Bridge. Local residents were heard loud and clear. They rallied and collected more than 1000 signatures to keep the bridge open. After meeting with Sam Zhou of NYS DOT it was determined the bridge will remain open and will be inspected annually. Thanks to Sam and Commissioner Driscoll for meeting and appreciating our economic and infrastructure concerns. This action reflects responsiveness to the people as well as the strong partnership between the mayor's office and the Department of Transportation.

5. People are investing in Saratoga Springs. We cut 92 ribbons for new and expanded businesses in the city last year, a symbol of our stable and growing local economy – something that should not be taken for granted.

6. Another highlight of 2016 was the appointment of The Honorable Francine Vero, first-ever woman city court judge in our city. I want to congratulate her and The Honorable Jeff Wait for their appointments, and publicly thank Judge Jim Doern for his excellent years of dedicated service.

7. When we talk about the quality of life here in Saratoga Springs, The Greenbelt Trail is among the success stories that I am most proud to have advanced. The 23-mile multi-use trail in and around the city will connect our neighborhoods to our downtown and trails to each other. I declared this a priority and focused on finding funding to construct the Downtown Connector portion, and I want to thank Governor Cuomo's office for his Regional Economic Development Consolidated Funding initiative, as we were awarded \$1.13 Million. This is a people's project, much anticipated by our residents, and recognized regionally, and by the state, as significant. It incorporates cycling, pedestrian and transit improvements within a primary corridor connecting downtown with other destinations within the city, and will complement Governor Cuomo's plan for a 750-mile New York Empire Trail, of which Saratoga will be part of Phase 1.

8. Together, we are impacting the future of our city in so many ways. Another highlight I am most proud to note is a conservation easement agreement between the Pitney family, the city of Saratoga Springs, using Open Space Bond Act funds to purchase the development rights, the Pitney Meadows Community Farm, and the Agricultural Stewardship Association. Without the Pitney Family determination and generous support from the community, these 166 acres would not have been preserved. I want to thank the Pitneys, the Arnolds and your entire team, the Open Space Advisory Committee, and all who have worked closely with me over the past year-and-a-half to complete this transaction. Exciting new agricultural opportunities lie ahead.

In addition to serving as your CEO, the mayor oversees many critical departments. Here are some of our accomplishments and updates.

Planning, Economic and Community Development

- Over the last 3 years, the city has invested \$762,000 in a range of activities, including supporting the Saratoga Community Health Center, the Saratoga Affordable Housing Group; home improvement grants for 27 income-eligible households; a host of site and building improvements to the Saratoga Senior Citizen Center; and financial assistance for the acquisition and rehabilitation of the new Legal Aid center to prevent homelessness. Over the past 3 years, these locally invested, federal dollars have assisted more than 72 households and over 7,200 individuals in the City of Saratoga Springs.

Through an additional funding opportunity, the city was awarded \$303,987 to continue administering the ongoing Shelter-Plus-Care program that provides rental assistance to homeless and disabled individuals and families in 26 scattered-site apartments. Over the last 3 years, the city has assisted 125 individuals, many of whom are veterans, to find safe, permanent, affordable housing with vital support services.

- A major priority for my administration has been creating an even more walk-able/bike-able city. The Geyser Road Bicycle Pedestrian Trail will provide a quarter of our city's population a safe route to downtown and the State Park, and completes that portion of the Greenbelt Trail.

This shared bicycle-pedestrian trail and associated improvements, totaling \$3.5 Million, with much provided through grants, will provide connections between our neighborhoods. Additional partners in making this a reality include NYS Dept. of Transportation, NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, the Capital District Transportation Committee, the Capital District Transportation Authority, Saratoga County, the Southwest Neighborhood Association and the Saratoga Greenbelt Trail.

- We are a city with an increasingly aging population and more emphasis on senior needs and services in the home are appropriate. Therefore, the mayor's Senior Advisory Board is creating a strategic plan for 2017 that will focus on walkability, better communication about senior resources and a legislative forum with our state and federal legislators. The mayor's office also provided financial support for an initiative of the Senior Citizens Center called Senior Connects Program.
- We are lucky to have many hard-working and dedicated volunteers to serve on boards and committees. I would like to extend my gratitude to all our volunteer members of the

city's three land use boards: the Planning Board, the Zoning Board of Appeals, and the Design Review Commission. Each of these boards make the difficult decisions in order to preserve the city's historic character and look to create an environment that will continue to attract residents, businesses and visitors for decades to come. These members serve many unpaid hours to make this city one we're all proud to call home.

If you are interested in serving on any of these boards, or other committees or commissions, please submit your interest to the mayor's office through our new online form, which is found on the city's website.

At this time, I would also like to recognize the Saratoga Springs Preservation Foundation and their ardent advocacy to preserve, maintain, and enhance our historic properties. In recent years, Samantha Bosshart, as Executive Director, and the Preservation Foundation have provided a valuable partnership with the city to update our data resources for our historic properties throughout our city limits, including Congress Park. In this upcoming year, the Preservation Foundation will assist the city in developing an economic impact analysis of the city's historic districts and to quantify the benefits that the districts provide to heritage tourism, to job creation, and to the maintenance and enhancement of property values.

- Also, in the past year, the Planning Office has created online land use application. This has simplified the process for applicants to submit materials to the city, improved accuracy, reduced the time to distribute information to our volunteer land use board members, and vastly reduced paper waste.
- With so many visitors to the city, we're committed to helping them find their way around more easily, using the visual impact of signage. This has been a very productive year, working with the city's Downtown Special Assessment District, to design a coordinated and comprehensive approach to signage, to guide residents and visitors, and to enhance the visibility of our businesses and attractions, while decreasing visual clutter. The first of these signs, a welcome sign, has been located at the North Broadway/Van Dam/Route 50 intersection and gateway to our historic downtown. This year, we will see the placement of more than 50 new auto-directional, pedestrian-directional and parking directional signs, and informative kiosks along Broadway from the City Center south to the Visitor Center.
- Our city is now working under an updated Comprehensive Plan and the next step is to update our zoning ordinances accordingly. We have contracted with Behan Planning and Design, our own local experts to establish a Unified Development Ordinance.

The UDO will synchronize our policy documents, such as the Open Space Master Plan, Complete Streets Plan, and the Urban and Community Forest Master Plan, in accordance with the newly updated 2015 Comprehensive Plan, into a coordinated, user-friendly document.

We expect to have the final draft of the UDO published by the end of June. As the project progresses, there will be public workshops to introduce the new streamlined ordinance and answer questions and comments.

- Balancing open space with smart sustainable development is critical to our success and a priority for my administration. That's why I re-established the Open Space Advisory Committee in 2015. In 2016, the Open Space committee established by-laws better defining the role of the committee within the city government.

The major accomplishment in 2016 was the city's commitment of \$1.13 million to permanently preserve the Pitney Farm property as farmland -- the biggest commitment we have ever made to preserving open space. The Open Space Committee is now working on additional open space parcel acquisitions, including the Crown Oil Parcel at the intersection of Ballston Avenue and Broadway, which should happen very soon; the incorporation of the Corcoran Parcel into joint partnership with Town of Milton and Village of Ballston Spa; and other proposed acquisitions currently in progress. I've asked the committee to update the 2002 Open Space Plan, create a Natural Resource Conservation Plan/Ecological Resources Plan, and identify methods for the continuation of open space lands acquisition now that the city is reaching the depletion of the \$5M Open Space Bond (Environmental, Parks and Open Areas Protection Program). I believe another bond act referendum to purchase and steward open space is imperative in the next couple of years.

As discussions and challenges nationally may take different directions, here in Saratoga Springs we are proudly committed to protecting and preserving our environment – to being climate smart for today and the next generation. We asked the Climate Smart Task Force to continue to focus on reducing emissions and increasing climate resilience in our community.

We are shaping our city together as a solar city. In June 2016 the Climate Smart Task Force, in partnership with Sustainable Saratoga invited two highly qualified solar experts to answer basic questions that residents and businesses face when buying or leasing solar systems for their property. Their good work will continue.

Protecting our drinking water is certainly on the task force's agenda. We hear about dangerous scenarios from communities across our region and country. We continue to believe that water quality testing should be done for Loughberry Lake, especially now that Governor Cuomo is offering funds to support these studies, and we will continue to offer to partner with our Department of Public Works to get that research done.

Recreation

2016 was a very busy and financially sound year for our Recreation Department. They had over 2,500 registered participants and over 1,300 participate in their daily drop-in activities. This is probably the department that interacts with your families the most closely, and we take your suggestions very seriously.

That's why the city's recreation department launched the Playground Initiative to update our outdated playgrounds. The mission of the Playground Initiative, funded in the capital budget, is to ensure that all residents in Saratoga Springs have access to a safe and engaging play space in their own neighborhood. In December 2016, the first playground renovation occurred on the old North Side Park playground. In 2017, we plan to begin the second playground renovation at the West Side Recreation Park.

Through the generous support of our community partners, the recreation department made significant improvements to the ice rinks, including the LED scoreboard and new flooring, added two (2) new electric Zamboni machines, renovated bathrooms, and installed a new roof over the locker rooms and lobby in the Vernon rink. It's you, the people, who are together shaping Saratoga Springs.

Human Resources

Our city government departments serve close to 28,000 in population. The Planning/Zoning department is still operating with the same number of staff as we were in the 1970s! In order to serve the public properly, we need to fix that discrepancy. With our busy workforce – 343 full time and 166 part time employees currently – Human Resources needs are becoming more critical. We will need to develop a comprehensive Personnel Department in the coming years.

In our city government, we have seven labor unions, and when I took office, I inherited seven unresolved contracts. Proudly in 2016, the last of the seven has been resolved. Many of these contracts were resolved largely in-house, saving significant legal fees. Now the city can budget accordingly, and staff morale is up. My goal is to stay current and not get into a retro

challenge again. The next two contracts up for renewal are CSEA City Hall and CSEA DPW, and I will lead the negotiations to firm and fair resolution.

Partnerships

We depend on our external partners to maintain and strengthen our local economy. The partnership between the city and the Saratoga Convention & Tourism Bureau is thriving at the Heritage Area Visitor Center on Broadway. The Visitor Center welcomed more than 38,000 visitors in 2016, thanks to increased staffing that allowed hours to be extended during peak times. And more tours are now being conducted.

The Convention and Tourism Bureau is doing a great job under the three-year contract we developed, and my recommendation to the Council at the end of this year will be to sign another three-year contract with them, and keep the positive momentum going.

In June, a group traveled to Burlington, Vermont to launch a new City Share initiative, and in August, Burlington leaders travelled here. Burlington and Saratoga Springs have much in common, and these visits were informative and energizing. We look forward to sharing challenges and new ideas again in the future with them and other cities, and we thank the Chamber of Commerce for organizing the City Share program.

Homelessness

With our partners, we're making strides toward problems related to homelessness, and we're coming up with real solutions that are working. Thank you to Kathleen Fyfe at the Chamber, Shelters of Saratoga, my deputy and the Downtown Special Assessment District Board.

You, the community, inspired a 6-Point Plan toward ending homelessness.

The plan includes communications to educate and engage our entire community, continued services to reduce homelessness in our city, a permanent home for Code Blue, and a sustainable community policing effort for our vibrant downtown. Assigning police on foot and the installation of several drop boxes downtown have helped tremendously.

The Arts

The Saratoga Springs Arts Commission, appointed two years ago, has worked diligently to provide the city with our first Public Art Policy. I would like to thank Ian Berry, Ardie Russell and the entire Arts Commission for all their efforts to bring this policy to a unanimous vote by city council.

City Charter

Last year I announced that I would fulfill my charter responsibilities as mayor and appoint a Charter Commission to review the current city charter, and I did. I asked the other council members to propose appointments, because I feel the broader its representation, the better the product. My sincere thanks go out to all commission members for their many months of service. They have been meeting since June, and I'm sure they will be reporting to the public with their ideas soon.

VISION 2017: SHAPING OUR CITY TOGETHER

We are transitioning from the first century to our second century as a city. And as we move forward, your priorities become my priorities, and my work plan. We are shaping our city together with three major themes for 2017:

1. Diversify our economic portfolio by building an *innovative economy*
2. Promote *smart development* including affordable workforce housing
3. Be an *inclusive community*

Innovative Economy

Horse racing will always be the industry with the greatest impact on Saratoga Springs. That's why in 2008 we fought for a new franchise agreement. A few years later, we advocated for video lottery terminals, or VLT's at Aqueduct to feed our breeding industry. And we continue to fight annually for our fair share of the VLT proceeds. Thank you, Senator Marchione and Assemblywoman Woerner for your advocacy.

Now, it seems the requests we sent to Albany, after a unanimously passed resolution by our city council, are getting some traction. We asked for the reprivatization of the New York Racing Association, NYRA. We asked for proper representation on the NYRA board. And, we asked for reactivation of the Local Advisory Boards. Our Saratoga Race Course produces the most revenue in the industry for New York State, and we deserve a voice and a strong local economy. When it comes to horse racing, what's good for Saratoga Springs is good for New York State.

Saratoga Springs will be the host city for the first-ever international horse racing convention and industry trade show. The inaugural Equestricon will bring together fans, horseplayers and stakeholders from every corner of the sport in an atmosphere of non-stop entertainment and lively discussion. Equestricon 2017 is scheduled for August 13 – 15, right here in the heart of Downtown Saratoga Springs. And we are proud to serve as its host city.

Continuing to attract small businesses and future entrepreneurs to our city is critical to the success of our local economy. Saratoga Springs will become the host city for an innovative incubator program. In 2017, a business incubator will be launched that will inspire, mentor and accelerate emerging company development. We are excited to have an incubator program right here in our city, thanks to the good work of the Saratoga Economic Development Corporation.

Becoming an international city with new tourism and cultural experiences will only boost our local economy and our continued quality of life. We have companies from around the world looking to invest here. We are building strong ties with Japanese hospitality firms. We've had international groups sponsored by the Capital District International Center – from a dozen

countries – come through my office with translators to sit down and learn about our city, and discuss how best to share information about their communities and government. I will be proposing, in the near future, new cultural development and sister cities, so that we can strengthen our relationships with other cultures and economies, and boost our international reputation and economic opportunities.

Now let me ask, could Saratoga Springs be the New York State designated “City of the Arts?” I think we can. The Arts Commission is working on increasing performance venues and developing a cultural exchange program with other cities. I have visited the mayor and the Arts Commission of Nashville, Tennessee, and we are in discussion about a plan to establish an exchange program soon. With new leadership now at SPAC, I am in discussions with the new President of this unparalleled arts organization about making Saratoga Springs – a national, even international destination for the ultimate appreciation of art and nature. Elizabeth Sobol, my partner at SPAC, please stand and be recognized. The Arts Commission will also be working with me to develop a Master Arts Plan for our city. Together, we are shaping the future.

In order to stay competitive as a tourism industry, I support ride sharing in upstate NY. I will be bringing a resolution to the City Council that we can send to our state legislators. Ride sharing is the future, and I believe we need it to stay competitive in the tourism markets. It saves lives, creates jobs and brings convenience and options to our citizens and our many visitors.

Smart Development

We can’t be a vibrant community, unless we construct options for housing that our workforce can afford. We are a tourist destination with an industry worth millions.

The city has been working with SEDC on developing a more international and entrepreneurial city, and they have called affordability one of the most pressing needs to sustain and develop our local economy. The recent study, commissioned by the Housing Authority, revealed that 33.5% of our renters are paying more than 30% of their annual income on housing in Saratoga Springs. You probably didn’t need a study to know this. You may be living it. Every day, I hear that we are in danger out-pricing ourselves out of our own city. We need to integrate more price points and housing options into our comprehensive development.

It’s not just good economics or just the right thing to do anymore. HUD is encouraging this through federal law, and state agencies are lined up to help. The Commissioner of Homes and Community Renewal, Jamie Rubin, is working with us, and with affordable housing national developers, who have approached the state and the city of Saratoga Springs. Hopefully, this will be a big part of the solution, filling the need for low to medium income workforce housing.

Our hard-working Housing Task Force recently added the Saratoga Builders Association to our group. We look forward to their input, and the Chambers' input, regarding building workforce housing in our city, along with the non-profits on the committee.

The definition of affordable housing is changing. It's not just Section 8 housing anymore. It's people like you and me who are getting priced right out of our community. It's about helping our daughters and sons to start their businesses and raise their families here; so we can continue to be a retirement hub; and have a reliable workforce. Another tool we have in our tool box is an Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance, and I do hope our City Council has the political will to make that ordinance law, for the sake of thousands of residents and potential residents.

Maintaining our beloved city in the country is the purpose of the Saratoga Springs Comprehensive Plan. The newly updated comprehensive plan identified three areas for growth – South Broadway, West Avenue and Weibel Avenue. The city has long identified Station Lane/ West Avenue/ Washington Street as a future walk-able neighborhood. With the train station, proposed Greenbelt Trail, and overall opportunities, we are looking at this additional area as a new neighborhood that will serve our existing residents and surrounding Washington, West and Church St. corridors.

Excelsior Avenue will see the addition of more housing and commercial units, connecting to the Spring Run Trail. And we will soon be integrating some exciting improvements for biking and walking. These private and public investments create a sustainable area that helps attract millennials and new businesses.

The Grande Industrial Park adds to the city's industrial tax base and provides jobs to our residents. Our business partners there include PureSource (the first direct spin-off of Global Foundries in Saratoga Springs), Greenfield Manufacturing, and a natural gas fueling station, offering a more diverse, sustainable fuel source within the city. More good news, KPS Bottling facility has been in the news signaling interest in relocating their business to the city of Saratoga Springs.

The Greenbelt Trail plan was developed with support from a wide array of local interests and organizations, and with input from a series of public meetings, and then unanimously adopted by the Saratoga Springs City Council on May 6, 2014. The plan is now being implemented in stages, and will continue to be a high priority of mine, given its potential for sports and international tourism use, advancing our healthy city and walkability/bikeability status, and providing safety and overall quality of life.

Our citizens can be proud of the role they played in preserving and protecting the 166-acre Pitney Farm, the last working farm in our city. The potential for this property is great – agri-tourism, economic development, recreation and health, education and youth, and supporting local businesses and restaurants through locally grown foods, and an agricultural training center. Just look at the partnerships that are building before our eyes.

The people asked for transportation improvements and they will get them. A city Complete Street Plan was unanimously adopted by the City Council on December 20, 2016. The plan was drafted, after over a year of community input, and establishes recommendations for improvements within the city. We will now begin implementation of that plan. And by 2018, I expect to see many more of us walking and riding bikes, along with our children, as we shape the future of our city together.

The city will have its own bike share program, anticipated in time for the 2017 track season, thanks to CDTA's spearheading of a trail program in Saratoga Springs, Albany, Schenectady, and Troy. Current efforts are underway for the siting of the bike hub stations in coordination with CDTA.

But, of course, we can't always bike and walk. So we worked closely with CDTA and established new bus routes, a free trolley that will continue this year, and hopefully, if all goes well at the state level, ride sharing options that CDTA will manage and license.

The parking task force, that I announced last year, went forward and worked diligently to set up a full inventory and solid recommendations to the City Council. We now need to form a management team, to oversee a plan and begin to more effectively respond to the current needs and projects in the future. Thanks to Harvey Fox, and to all who served on the Parking Task Force.

Inclusive Community

We are Saratoga Springs, a unique community of strength, safety and sound economy. We are the caretakers of wonderful assets – history, culture, sports, arts, a downtown like no other, waterways, springs, and two racetracks. But cities aren't just buildings and landscapes; they are communities, and our biggest asset is our fellow citizens. We need to stay strong together, to treat each other with kindness and respect, to appreciate our differences, and to build a community where all people are important and treated equally. No one should be left behind, denied opportunities, or discriminated against because of their race, religion, economic status, sexual preference, or national origin. That's why I'm so proud of our city, proud to be your mayor, and I was pleased to get a unanimous vote for the humanitarian resolution I brought to the City Council.

I want to commend the school district and Superintendent Mike Piccarillo for responding to an exceptionally disturbing web site aimed at high school students. He responded quickly, with conviction, confidence and zero-tolerance against hate acts. I'm proud of the democratic leadership who determined they weren't going to just write letters, but get out in the community and literally clean up the graffiti. There have been several groups popping up, organizing and expressing themselves against actions based on hate and bigotry. I feel it's important we stay

united and stand up strong to uphold our values and not be divided, as many communities in our country clearly are today. That's why I'm proud to announce the creation of a Saratoga Springs Human Rights Commission that will be charged with unifying our efforts, providing education, offering programming and advocacy resources . The weekend of Martin Luther King Jr. Day is a successful community-builder of understanding and embracing diversity, but we must do more each and every day to build a strong, inclusive city.

Four years ago, we shaped our city together by establishing Code Blue Saratoga. You partnered with me and jumped into action even before I took my first oath of office. Together with non-profit partners and help from our clergy, we opened Code Blue Saratoga two weeks later on Christmas Eve 2013.

A special thanks to Shelters of Saratoga for taking this program under their wing. But they can't do it alone. They will need a private/public partnership to fulfill the Governor's Executive Order, to increase aid from social services and from the county and city to secure a permanent location for a drop-in center and Code Blue. The newly elected County Board of Supervisor Chair and I agreed to have preliminary discussions soon regarding solutions and shared services.

We must never forget our veterans and those who are currently serving. They are putting their lives on the line and risking everything – for and our freedoms – and for our children and grandchildren. It is the very least we can do to serve them every way we can when they come home. At the very least we need to thank them, often, and recognize them, and integrate them into our community. But we need to do more. The gallery that the VFW has presented on Veterans Day is heartfelt, and I think it's time to find a permanent home for a 'Veterans Hall of Fame'.

CLOSING

In closing, I'm very proud to be your mayor. And I'm proud that together we are shaping the future of our beloved Saratoga Springs. We are a strong city because of our history. We are a strong city because of our commitment to the balance of smart growth and open space. We are a smart city because we embrace the vitality of a livable, walkable downtown; and because we value the arts as much as education and social services. As a result, our quality of life is the envy of other cities. The key to securing that for our next generation is to continue to act responsibly and inclusively, to keep building our community, and to keep shaping our city together.

Thank you, very much, for coming tonight. God bless you, God bless Saratoga Springs, and God bless America.

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