

2023 State of the City Remarks Mayor Gary McCarthy

Council President, Majority Leader, Members of our City Council – thank you for the opportunity to address you tonight. As we start our 225th year as a city, I’m looking to talk to you about housing, continued development, public safety, and city services.

I want to thank our department heads and city staff for the work they do every day for the residents of our city and especially how they stepped up during the pandemic to make sure our city ran smooth. It is great to see everyone out tonight.

Schenectady is a leading community with new housing initiatives. Work continues on the next phase of the 300-unit Northside Village, home ownership opportunities are still the cornerstone of our award winning H.O.M.E.S. program, and construction of market rate apartments remains strong. Over the last several years we have produced 1,111 newly built or renovated affordable housing units in Schenectady.

Our relationship with federal and state government is producing real results. Congressman Tonko and Governor Hochul have been very supportive of our efforts to create innovative housing options in Schenectady.

In recent federal legislation, Congressman Tonko was able to secure \$1 million for a Community Virtual Power Plant project. We have partnered with a local company EcoLong, whose CEO Nancy Min is joining us tonight. This will be done in conjunction with the Brookhaven National Laboratory. This project will place highly efficient components into homes that will lower heating, cooling, and lighting costs by 30% and maybe as much as 50% with some of the machine learning being developed by the Brookhaven National Lab.

The clean energy efficiency modifications to low and moderate income (LMI) residential buildings will include on-site clean energy generation, such as solar and battery storage. Building loads will be optimally controlled using machine learning for energy use reductions and demand and generation flexibility to lower energy costs. Each building will be connected and coordinated for further optimization and demand flexibility. This will serve as a national model.

I am looking to incorporate the Community Virtual Power Plant in a soon to be formally announced affordable homeownership opportunity on Summit Avenue. Working with AIK Properties, whose Principal Pam Swanigan is with us tonight, and MLB Construction, will convert 15 vacant city-owned properties into 31 units of affordable housing.

DePaul Properties ‘Mosaic Apartments’ development on Crane Street will transform several parcels of vacant land and buildings in the Mont Pleasant commercial corridor into 60 units of new, quality affordable housing. This is the same developer that did the Joe Allen Apartments on Albany Street. This is also just up the street from the recently redeveloped Orchard Park and down the street from the new Mont Pleasant County Library.

The former Elmer Avenue School on Eastern Avenue received some local support and has been awarded state and federal housing tax credits to transform the building into Elmer Gardens, a senior housing complex. Developed by Home Leasing and Better Community Neighborhoods,

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Inc., the project will convert the historic Elmer Avenue School into 51 apartments for adults aged 55 and older. Twenty-six homes will be reserved for seniors in need of supportive services to live independently. These units will be funded through an Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative award.

I thank Governor Hochul and her team at HCR for this critical support that makes possible our efforts to renovate the historic Elmer Avenue School and create the new Elmer Gardens Senior Housing Development. Our unified economic development team lead by Metroplex has worked on this project for several years and while it was not an easy deal to put together, this award of the competitive tax credits is a recognition that our team, with the Governor's support, has once again been successful.

We are also proud to support the construction of the new Bethesda House \$8.5 million facility – Cara House which will include 26 units of permanent supportive housing, and 11 units with 16 beds of emergency housing for adults experiencing homelessness and those re-entering the community from incarceration.

This new facility is being built on a previously vacant city-owned lot at 910 State Street to expand critical care, and safe and secure housing for our most vulnerable residents. We are grateful to have the opportunity to support this project and share Bethesda House's call to create a healthier, safer, and thriving community.

I also want to thank Neil Golub, who is joining us tonight, for his support of this project. Neil's car is the one out front with the "New Schenectady" bumper sticker on it. I also want to thank New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, NYSERDA, and our partners at Schenectady County who have supported this years-long effort to make this project a reality.

As I said before, work continues at the new Northside Village on Van Vranken Avenue. Both Hillside Crossing on Albany Street, and Renaissance Square, just off Eastern Avenue, are open and fully occupied. These developments represent over \$180 million in investments in our community.

We received a record amount of HOME funds this year through the American Rescue Plan to reduce homelessness and increase housing stability. This award is shared with the City of Troy and the Town of Colonie. The majority of these funds will be used for additional affordable housing development in our community.

The \$2.3 million RESTORE NY award for the Wedgeway building restoration, which was the 2nd largest in the region and 6th largest in the state, will enable the restoration of this vacant, blighted, and historically significant structure in the heart of downtown. We are lucky to have Marc Paquin and his team at Cass Hill Development now as owners of this site. They will transform this corner into a great addition to downtown.

The adaptive reuse of historic buildings adds character to our community. The Foster and Edison buildings are great projects. Home to the great Nest Restaurant, the Edison Banquet Hall, and

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housing to new people moving to our community. If you have not stopped at Armory Studios to see the Van Gogh Immersive Experience, please put it on your schedule.

I was doing a quick count and think there are only 39 projects on this list, but I see John Roth in the audience and the Public Hearing for the Masonic Temple Historic District Overlay later on the agenda. So the City Council should be able to assist with the financing to make this restoration possible and then I can add it to the list and make an even 40!

In just the last few years we have reduced the number of vacant properties in Schenectady by over 50%. But there is still more work to be done. Distressed property still drives a lot of our costs for Code Enforcement, Police, Fire and related expenses. This is on top of the lost property tax revenue.

The cities of Albany, Schenectady, and Troy obtained a settlement of over \$665,000 in a coordinated Zombie Property lawsuit against Ocwen Financial Corporation and PHH Mortgage. In July 2021, utilizing New York State's Zombie Law, the three cities filed 18 lawsuits covering 18 properties with 502 NYS building code violations. This coordinated action sent a strong message to mortgage servicers across the State that they must properly maintain properties upon which they foreclose and bring foreclosure proceedings to a timely completion.

Also, in Schenectady City Court, a judge found Al Haqq, LLC guilty of multiple property code violations at eight properties in the City of Schenectady and imposed fines totaling over \$600,000. The City's Law Department prosecuted the cases and proved numerous violations dating back to 2018.

The City of Schenectady was the winner in the IDC Government Insights' 5th annual Smart Cities North America Awards! The City was recognized in the Administration Category for our Community Officials Data Exchange (C.O.D.E.) project that shares data around problem property owners and best practices in code enforcement with the goal of using data to address urban blight in our communities.

We thank the New York Department of State, and CTG UAlbany for their partnership and continued engagement in working together to address distressed property. We are grateful to receive this recognition for our joint efforts to target blight that harms neighborhood quality of life.

My focus since I have been Mayor is to prioritize the sale of city-owned properties to create homeownership opportunities. At the same time, this program is producing real revenue for the city, \$13.5 million since 2016. Not just in the purchase price of these properties, but additionally the community also benefits in the reoccurring property tax revenue that is being generated by competent building owners.

Prior to COVID, we cut our Property Tax Rate for five consecutive years. Today, our tax rate is still 6.5% less than in 2015 and we actually lowered the tax rate by \$.01/\$1000 for 2023. Our Assessed Value of property in the city continues to steadily rise with a total value of \$2.43 billion for 2023.

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This summer, the City of Schenectady and local community organizations hosted the inaugural 518 Common Unity Cup. Local law enforcement and community organizations participated in a five-week summer sports series that was kicked off during National Night Out.

The 518 Common Unity Cup was a five-week summer sports series for one cause – community – during the eighth month of the year. There were events every Tuesday in August. Basketball, kickball, football, softball, dodgeball, and field games. The events were held at Burrell Park, Bellevue 4th Street Park, Schenectady High School, Central Park, and Mont Pleasant Middle School.

Thank you to William Rivas, who is here tonight, and the event sponsors on this successful community partnership. This is an exciting new event designed to promote activities for local youth and serve to strengthen bonds within our community. I thank all the dedicated community partners who made this possible.

In 2020, we saw historic lows in criminal activity due to the COVID pandemic. Unfortunately, since then we have seen an uptick. But the numbers need to be put into perspective. These graphs show the last 10 years. Our Part 1 Violent Crime is still 20% lower than 2012 and Property Crime is 18% lower than in 2012.

Last week, we had 9 police officers graduate from the police training academy and I hired 6 new officers who will start the police academy. This will bring us closer to full staffing and enable the public to see a greater deterrence to criminal activity.

The city's partnership with Transfinder – CEO Tony Civitella is here tonight – on the development and pilot deployment of Patrolfinder. This GIS software will increase police officer efficiency, dramatically improve the flow of information to the patrol officer, expand community safety, and forward-facing transparency. I'm looking forward to the formal announcement of this partnership next Tuesday, January 17th at 9:30am in the GE Theater at Proctors.

We continue to develop a new telemedicine platform with Ellis Hospital, insurance carriers, United Concierge Medicine, and IDION, and are looking to expand our partnerships with other providers.

The country saw the value of immediate and appropriate medical care last week with the incident with Buffalo Bills Safety Damar Hamlin, and I want to wish him the best in his continued recovery. Having properly trained and equipped personnel that immediately respond produces lifesaving results.

About 70% of the calls to our Fire Department are for emergency medical services. We can put apparatus with fully trained paramedics in front of your house in 3 to 4 minutes from dialing 911. Current protocols have the paramedics put the patient in an ambulance and transport them to the Emergency Room. If there is trauma, a cardiac or stroke event, that is clearly the best way to treat the patient. But most patients don't need the full suite of services provided by an Emergency Room.

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We are using our well trained and equipped paramedics to do a more detailed diagnostic evaluation of the patient in the field. With direct observation and consultation with Emergency Room certified UCM physicians the patient can be directed to the most appropriate level of care. It could be an Urgent Care Center, their personal doctor, an imaging facility, a sprained ankle, or to the Emergency Room on a scheduled basis. You don't end up sitting in ER for several hours waiting or leaving the patient in place with a high level of monitoring with our partner Idion.

By getting individuals quick and the appropriate level of care we can improve outcomes and reduce the overall cost of healthcare.

We continue to see an increase in the use of our online platform SeeClickFix for residents to contact the city with issues or questions. After our first full year of deployment, we are very happy with the utilization and look to continue to promote its use by our residents as just one more way to better manage citizen requests and ensure appropriate follow up. Last year we successfully closed out over 1,500 requests.

We have now completed the conversion of all our 4000+ utility pole mounted streetlights in the city to Smart LED's. This mesh network of Smart Lights has reduced our electricity use by over 1.6 million kWh every year.

Our Public Wi-Fi deployment in the neighborhoods has also steadily increased which has been critical to many residents throughout the pandemic. I remind residents of the interactive Wi-Fi map we have on our website to keep everyone posted on where we currently have this service. Networking of all city facilities with fiber backbone is a foundational part of the project and we are more than halfway there.

We have installed over 115 Public Wi-Fi access points installed throughout the city. There are 304 additional access points that will be installed through the CARES Act grant and projected 1,500 total with the full city-wide deployment.

To show how important this network has been for residents, in just the past year there have been almost 1.5 million visits to our network. This was driven by over 53,000 unique visitors in 2022, up from 45,000 in 2021.

From replacing city streetlights to advanced LEDs, to building municipal solar arrays, to expanding our EV charging infrastructure, and growing our municipal EV fleet, I am proud to continue the Electric City's innovative legacy by leading the way on climate. The City of Schenectady has previously received Climate Smart Community certification through DEC and Clean Energy Community designation through NYSERDA.

Thank you to all the volunteers who helped organize the Capital District Drive Electric Week & Sustainability Fair to celebrate National Drive Electric Week here in the Electric City. Schenectady's was the largest National Drive Electric Week event in the country by number of registered participants.

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We continue to take advantage of incentives and partnerships as we build out our infrastructure. It will be formally announced next week that Schenectady has been selected as the Electric Vehicle Association's EV City of the Year for 2022. The Electric Vehicle Association is North America's leading volunteer organization that accelerates the adoption of electric vehicles.

The Climate Vulnerability and Adaptation Report, done by our staff, identified the critical role of urban trees in combatting air pollution, reducing heat island effect, and improving mental health. DEC provided funding to complete our city-wide tree inventory and management plan.

Kenneth Brooks from Ground Up Landscaping, who is also with us tonight, planted 100 trees this year in the community.

Our garbage collection is one of the great services we provide to our residents. Unfortunately, we are facing two issues. Our recycled material, we used to have it taken at little or no cost. Today our cost is just under \$62.00 per ton as compared to \$44.34 per ton for solid waste.

We also still deal with individuals who put out extraordinary quantities of garbage. I look forward to working with the council to address these issues.

I appreciate the City Council's early support for a new pool in Central Park. This will allow us to deal with State Department of Health compliance issues with the current pool, reduce overall maintenance issues and complement our previous investments in Music Haven, the 'A' Diamond, and the tennis courts.

We rededicated the Central Park 'A' Diamond last year to the famed William "Buck" Ewing. Ewing, a star catcher for the Mohawk Giants who used the Central Park Field as their home field from 1924 to 1943. Buck Ewing spent five years in the Negro Leagues, including three (1928 to 1930) with the famed Homestead Grays. This was made possible by \$1.5 million grant from Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie and Assemblymembers Santabarbara and Steck.

We look forward to starting construction in the spring for Jerry Burrell Park upgrades this year. This will include a new splash pad, basketball court, seating area, lighting, and public art. This is possible because of support from New York State Parks and Schenectady County and supports the investment from the City of Schenectady.

We continue to plan for upgrades to other parks in the city. We have projects for both Hillhurst Park and Fairview Park in Bellevue designed and ready to be bid for construction this year. These projects were designed with the input from the Bellevue Preservation Association and the Mohawk Pickleball League.

The Schenectady Municipal Golf Course generated an all-time record for revenue in 2022 of over \$1.4 million. The course continues to increase in popularity and is great resource for the city.

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The \$3.1 million Francis Avenue bridge deck replacement was completed through New York State's competitive BridgeNY program. The project included the complete removal and replacement of the concrete bridge deck and sidewalks and increased lighting.

These essential upgrades to a vital link connecting the Mont Pleasant and Hamilton Hill neighborhoods also complements the recent pedestrian improvements at the Forest Road and Francis Avenue intersection. I would like to congratulate and thank the City Engineering Department and our project consultants on the successful completion of this critical infrastructure project in our community.

The City of Schenectady paved 14 miles of road in 2022. More miles paved in 2022 than any year in the past decade. The City of Schenectady is also slated to receive a record \$4 million in the 2022-2023 state budget.

The current process used by the City Council for special assessment for sidewalk replacement is too complex. It has many variables that residents find hard to understand. I will submit legislation to the Council with a fixed cost of \$55 per foot of sidewalk for the property owner which could be financed up to a 20-year period. The city would assume the additional variable cost. Additionally, I'll recommend the Council appropriate \$1.5 million of ARPA dollars to help finance this initiative.

In 2022, the CDTC approved over \$14 million for major transportation infrastructure projects in the City of Schenectady, including \$9 million for the Craig-Main Connection Initiative. We're going to the CDTC this month with a TIP Amendment to merge the 3 individual projects into one large project. We anticipate that all of 2023 will be dedicated to design and to begin construction of the project in 2024.

The Forest-Main and Forest-Holland intersection improvements are designed and will be coordinated with what is ultimately approved in the new Albany-Crane Complete Streets Study. We also have \$500,000 grant from Assemblyman Santabarbara to complete the Crane-Main-Chrysler intersection upgrades.

We have over \$35 million of pending infrastructure projects going into 2023. The Rice Road Water Infrastructure Improvements include 3 new water wells that will produce 9,000 gallons per minute, made possible with a \$3 million Water Infrastructure Improvement Act grant from the NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation. These critical infrastructure upgrades will help improve the resiliency and sustainability of our water supply system which also serves multiple adjacent municipalities.

We're still hiring! Please go to the city website to see what jobs are currently open.

The record and our accomplishments are impressive. Our city's future is bright. I thank you for the opportunity to serve as your mayor. Enjoy the rest of the evening!

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