

STATE OF THE CITY

JAMESTOWN, NEW YORK

EDWARD A. SUNDQUIST
MAYOR



Strong Roots,
Modern City.

2022

**PRESENTED TO THE MEMBERS OF THE
JAMESTOWN CITY COUNCIL ON THE
31ST DAY OF JANUARY, 2022**

To Council President Dolce, Council Members, and to our residents-

In my last State of the City Address one year ago, Jamestown faced an uncertain future. In the height of the coronavirus pandemic, we were in dire financial straits, unsure of needed Federal and State government assistance to escape the oncoming crisis. This, combined with the City's considerable legacy costs and tax rate right near the tax cap, meant we were headed straight for a Financial Control Board. This dominated my thoughts and conversations with leaders, residents, and colleagues throughout Jamestown. Even with tightening our belts with an emergency financial restructuring plan, we were faced with the prospect of highly diminished City services for years to come.

Since that day, much has changed. While the seriousness of the pandemic has not faded, vaccines have given us new hope and have allowed a return to a new form of normalcy. The immediate fiscal outlook of the City has improved, due to many factors. Strong growth in sales tax and home values producing increased revenue, coupled with judicious and conservative budgeting, have combined to create a large increase in fund balance. I am proud to say that 2021 looks to be another strong year, giving us a bit more breathing room for the future.

Other factors this past year have changed the City's fiscal landscape, such as the creation of a new retiree health care plan assembled in conjunction with our bargaining units, retirees, and City administration that will save both retirees and the taxpayers money. And, of course, the American Rescue Plan Act has given Jamestown over \$28 million dollars, a once in a lifetime opportunity to invest in our residents, our neighborhoods, our health, our infrastructure, and our local businesses.

All these factors have combined to improve the outlook of our City and to create a new day. As we think about our future and the direction of Jamestown, I have thought more and more about the past of our great City, our strong entrepreneurial roots, our grit to solve problems. When we wanted to solve the problems of bringing electric to City businesses and residents, we created our own electric company. When we realized we could use our resources to make furniture, we became a titan of industry and the exposition furniture capital of the world. Jamestown has a history of strong roots and a track record of innovation to drive the City forward. While we have slipped away from this in the past, now is the time to bring back our grit and think big for the future of Jamestown. 2022 brings about large projects that shape a new vision for Jamestown as a modern city, with strong roots.

2021 Accomplishments

I would be remiss if I did not start by acknowledging the great work all of our departments have done in 2021. It has been trying in many of the same ways 2020 was, as we continue dealing with the effects of the pandemic. However, our City departments and workers rose to the challenge of the year. I would like to take a moment to acknowledge all of their efforts and dedication.

In the Jamestown Police Department, we have seen an increase in community service details and beat walking assignments. According to our latest estimates, property and violent crime dropped in the City year over year. The Police Department also seized more firearms and drugs in the City, showing the effectiveness of our Metro Drug Task Force. Additionally, we added a number of new officers this year including K-9 Hope, who has assisted in more than 70 details as a comfort dog for victims of domestic violence. I also commend the SWAT Team for receiving certification from New York State, making the SWAT team one of only twenty-seven (27) teams to meet this standard. The continued work of our officers as members of our community, keeping the public safe and being responsive, is certainly recognized by City residents, and we thank all of our officers for their hard work and diligence.

In the Jamestown Fire Department, we have seen the successful implementation of a new EMS billing system and the acquisition of new fire reporting software. I applaud the hard work of our firefighters in navigating the transition from a paper operation to an electronic format with incredible speed and accuracy. By billing for ambulance services, we will bring in an estimated \$200,000 a year in additional revenue.

Our finance department, in partnership with City retirees, members of City Council, and other City Staff, formed a Health Insurance Advisory Committee, which rolled out a Medicare Advantage Plan to City retirees. In an enormous success, 137 individuals signed up, which allows the City to save over \$200,000 a year, and each retiree to save over \$1,500 a year in premium costs. The finance department also successfully implemented internal monthly budget review meetings to improve communication and financial coordination with all City departments.

Our Department of Public Works also had a record year, and dealt with an influx of work from more State roads funding that included:

- Over 5,800 feet of new sidewalk
- 8,100 feet of new curbs
- 90 new handicap ramps
- 18,300 feet of new blacktop pavement
- 57,000 feet of pavement surface treatment and maintenance coating
- 2,300 gallons of liquid asphalt crack seal applied
- 7,900 square feet of repaired brick pavement

- 65 new driveway aprons
- 1,400 feet of new storm sewer pipe, and;
- 30 new and reconstructed Catch Basins and Drain Inlets.

Our Department of Development continued to deal with housing related issues, and has taken a more active role in holding absentee landlords to account through Vacant and Zombie Property lawsuits, filing over 40 lawsuits and many more in the pipeline. The development office has also done more to connect with a larger range of businesses in all industries by holding roundtables with various business sectors and not-for-profits in Jamestown, in addition to beginning a project to map resources available to businesses in the area to encourage entrepreneurship. The Development Office has helped to bring in more than \$2 million in grants in 2021 alone to facilitate local development projects, with \$10 million in the pipeline earmarked for Economic Development through American Rescue Plan funds.

In other departments, our Assessor's office updated all pictures for properties in the City. The City Clerk's office transitioned many functions online, including successfully rolling out the option for online property tax payments. Our Corporation Counsel's office negotiated contracts with *every* City bargaining unit, ensuring that the majority of our employees will continue to operate on a current contract. Our Parks department completed a new playground at Lillian Dickson Park, as well as a myriad of other projects, that continue to improve our world-class parks system.

The City has worked to transition onto a new Citywide software system that will allow departments to be more organized and responsive, and grant the public ease of access for information, submitting issues they see, and applying for permits. While many processes, including constituent issue tracking and requests for records, have already transitioned onto the new software, we anticipate much more in 2022. This, among other critical digital security projects, will continue the record investments my administration has made into technology, making the City more data-focused and adaptable to the modern world.

The City brought in more than \$28 million dollars in American Rescue Plan Act Local Recovery Funds. The Master Plan was developed to help organize and direct spending of these funds, and created through a collaborative process with the Chautauqua Region Community Foundation, in listening sessions held with not-for-profits, businesses, and residents. As we continue into 2022, it is the City's priority to spend in a transparent and transformational way. I am happy to say that the City Council has started approving projects to receive funds, and this year will be heavily focused on the implementation of such projects and programs. We must use the American Rescue Plan funding as a catalyst for the future, by investing in our small businesses and homeowners.

Protecting Our Kids & Families: Vision Zero

One of the things that makes Jamestown so great is that we are a small, dense City with beautiful neighborhoods. Almost every street has sidewalks we utilize daily for exercise, walking to work or school, and to see our neighbors. Unfortunately, we have seen too many senseless tragedies and accidents on our streets. As one of the rare walking school districts, we must place pedestrian, student, and child safety at the forefront of our efforts to make a safer Jamestown. That is why I am announcing a new Vision Zero campaign for Jamestown, which aims to eliminate fatal and serious injuries from traffic accidents through design. Our schools are mostly located in high traffic areas with high speeds. The reality is that we can prevent these tragedies by taking a proactive, preventative approach that prioritizes traffic safety as a public health issue.

Vision Zero recognizes that people will sometimes make mistakes, so the road system and related policies must be designed to ensure those inevitable mistakes do not result in severe injuries or fatalities. I have a clear goal: zero fatalities and severe injuries from traffic accidents.

We are currently applying for Safe Routes to Schools grants through the New York State Department of Transportation, to improve conditions and ensure we are the path for zero serious injuries. It is my intention to reach out to the community for their input and feedback, and I encourage everyone to join me in the quest for making a safer Jamestown.

Connecting & Enhancing Our Waterfront

The Chadakoin River is the lifeblood of the City. Our founders chose this spot because of its strategic location at the base of the lake with the river flowing through. From the commerce it generated, Jamestown became an industrial powerhouse, creating furniture in homes and businesses worldwide. When I speak with other mayors across the U.S., I often joke that our furniture is most likely in their grandmother's house.

All kidding aside, it is time to recognize the power and potential of the river in the 21st century as a beacon for recreation and investment. Just this past fall, the City and its partners have brought in over \$1.5 million in grant awards to be used for projects near the river. With over \$1.2 million awarded by the State, the Chadakoin Basin Strategic Plan was funded to clear the upper Chadakoin River of obstructions so boats could easily travel to the basin, make improvements to the public spaces and Riverwalk that encircle the Basin, and set aside funds for strategic land acquisition by the City to ensure that new development can occur by the Basin. This is some of the most valuable land in Jamestown, and it is vital that the land surrounding the Basin be used for a variety of new projects, from top-tier public parks to potential mixed-use developments.

I am also proud to say that the City has funded a nearly \$300,000 project to clear out and restore the Lower Chadakoin River. This is the section after the Warner Dam. Years of neglect and failed mitigation strategies has caused the river to seriously erode, threatening wildlife, private property, and the future health of the river itself. With this funding, the City will create a clean-up effort to clear blockages in the river to ensure it flows in its natural path, take out invasive species accelerating erosion, and plant trees to stabilize the banks. This is a natural resource that we cannot take for granted, and with work being completed over the next few years, this can also become a spot for families to enjoy the natural setting and observe the wonderful wildlife that few know inhabit the Chadakoin. Time is of the essence, but the City will work as hard as possible to ensure the river is clear so that no permanent damage will be done to private property.

All this work will integrate with the continued redevelopment of McCrea Point, which in the past few years has seen investments in the Riverwalk bike trail, new playground and viewing platforms, a kayak launch, and coming this year, a new world-class skatepark. In addition, private investments are being made to the surrounding area, which will bring new, mixed-use developments to another section of our waterfront. It is vital that we continue these investments and work to make sure that we work with businesses to relocate to areas that are more suitable for industry. The Chadakoin was essential to bringing industry to Jamestown, and now we must adapt our plans to utilize one of our most valuable assets for the new economy.

Jamestown as a Destination

One thing we haven't traditionally done as a City is market ourselves as a destination to live, work, and recreate. But with world-class attractions, a central location, low cost of living, and some of the cheapest utility costs in the state, Jamestown is primed for tourism and investment by businesses and potential homeowners. We need to give these efforts a kick start, and marketing Jamestown as a place to be is necessary for growth. Other cities around the country do this very thing, fostering a brand and attracting both internal and external investment.

Jamestown was known as the furniture capital of the world, with the Furniture Mart Building being an exhibition space for people from all over to come and see how their furniture was made. By investing in marketing and making our public spaces world class, we can draw more people into Jamestown. Jamestown has the potential, through a robust hotel infrastructure, private investments, and nationally recognized attractions to become a hub for conventions. Any increase in the number of visitors will first require additional investments into our waterfront areas, a robust marketing campaign, and attract private investment into our downtown and neighborhoods.

Jamestown has always been a city of neighborhoods, and good neighbors. But our neighborhoods are in dire need of investment. While the strongest rise in housing prices in decades has been a positive development, we still see empty and decaying houses in almost every neighborhood in the City. That is why I am excited that the American Rescue Plan Master Plan includes \$5 million dollars for healthy neighborhoods and housing. These funds will be used to help supplement homeowner investments into housing improvements, as well as ensuring that our community is walkable, safe, and enjoyable places to be. While downtown has received much investment over the past decade, and will continue to need to be invested in, our neighborhoods have often been left out. This direct infusion of cash will help property values in all of our neighborhoods which will encourage further investment into our housing stock.

Grow with Jamestown

The City of Jamestown has taken an aggressive approach to cultivating a business ecosystem that will support the establishment of new cannabis related industry in the City. The City has received over 250 inquiries and has conducted dozens of interviews with companies interested in seeking one of New York State's coveted cannabis industry licenses. The City's efforts have been featured in three national publications and multiple podcasts, and Jamestown is quickly becoming recognized as a future hub for the budding cannabis economy.

From small co-operatives that feature many respected local businesses, to large, multi-million-dollar developments on an industrial scale, the cannabis industry in Jamestown will add hundreds of good-paying jobs. New businesses have already bought millions of dollars' worth of unused property to redevelop thousands of square feet of currently vacant and underutilized warehouse, manufacturing, and commercial spaces. This will put properties back on the tax roll, which will be a piece in my goal of reducing the tax burden currently borne by residents.

It is also estimated that within the first four years in operation, retail dispensaries in the City will generate upwards of \$500,000 in direct tax revenue from cannabis sales. The development of a supportive business ecosystem that establishes Jamestown as a cannabis hub, will attract the various ancillary businesses that will be necessary to support cannabis industry related supply chain demands, and will further catalyze Jamestown's cannabis cluster economy. I also emphasize that local control of cannabis-based industry is a critical component to the successful development of the local cannabis economy, and we have developed criteria that businesses must meet in order to earn a municipal letter of support.

Transportation

To truly thrive, Jamestown needs to be connected to the rest of the region and country, as well as strengthen our internal transit systems. I am proud to say that the City helped broker a deal to give a permanent home for CARTS in the City of Jamestown, helping to ensure ridership stays stable and having a key downtown property for both the City and the County to invest in. Modes of transit outside of cars and infrequent regional bus service are necessary to help those residents who work or travel to major metropolitan areas, and to connect the many tourists that flock to Western New York with Jamestown. Losing the Essential Air Service designation at Jamestown's airport was a blow to the entire County's economy. I promise to work hand in hand with the County and our local, state, and federal representatives to return to this vital designation and have commercial passenger airlines serve Jamestown once again. We are also in active discussions to bring passenger rail service, and have been in contact with the private, regional, state, and federal partners needed to fix the railways to allow train service from Jamestown to Buffalo, Niagara Falls, and beyond. This is a priority and would be a major boon to our economy, allowing residents and visitors alike to travel and connect with the rest of the region right from a convenient downtown location.

Municipal Broadband

I am also excited to announce that as our joint Municipal Broadband Feasibility Study is being completed, and I am prepared to create an ad-hoc Broadband Committee consisting of Council Members, BPU Board Members, and Community Members, to go over the plan, speak with experts, and help determine the City's path forward on a potential Municipal Broadband system. With the passage of the bipartisan infrastructure bill, there is money available for the rollout of an affordable, high-speed, high-quality, fiber network throughout Jamestown. The network will address the digital divide, help in our goal of attracting those doing remote work, and will ensure access to telehealth and educational resources for every resident of Jamestown. This would make Jamestown a leader in the State of New York, where currently no municipal broadband networks exist. I am excited for the path ahead, and we will continue to pursue funding to make a network a reality.

Conclusions

As we look toward to a once in a lifetime moment to invest in Jamestown, we must reflect on the past, to remember what made our City great, and the innovation of past leaders. There are many obstacles to achieve our potential, but I am confident our resourcefulness, grit, and ability to adapt will drive Jamestown forward. Jamestown's future is brighter than it has been in quite some time, and I am excited for the opportunities that lie ahead, and to tackle the challenges along our way. Jamestown ... strong roots, modern city.