

State of the City Address

1/30/2025

Councilman-At-Large Hockenberry, Councilmembers Siegel, Oney, Mann, Fuller, Dennison, O'Connell, Rhoades and Vicchiariello, respective department heads, guests and residents of the City of Port Jervis:

This evening, I stand before everyone presenting my 2nd State of the City Address. Last year, at my first state of the city address, I had asked for everyone's patience and understanding as my administration was in its infancy. We had much work ahead of us, and we were eager to roll up our sleeves and begin. I can report that 2024 was a successful year for our City.

In 2024, we welcomed back with open arms, the Department of Motor Vehicles into our downtown. We saw the opening of a new elementary school on East Main Street aptly dedicated to Mr./Principal Tom Hoppey. In May, we were "officially" awarded our Downtown Revitalization Initiative awards. The City was awarded four specific

Projects: the Jersey Ave Streetscape project, the Riverside Park project, funding for a marketing and branding campaign, and the small projects fund. The city is patiently awaiting the state's forthcoming contracts.

The city will also finally see an additional 988 acres, including Boehmer Pond, added into the City's watershed. Once we are fully closed on those properties, additional biking and hiking trails will be added to our already renowned, "watershed hiking and biking trail system."

2024 also saw eight (8) grand openings in our city. I am happy to say those eight businesses; PJ Fish and Chips, Skynails, Property Sisters of the Hudson Valley, Azure Candles, Inspire to Create, Neverlost Adventures, Soul Purpose Aesthetics and Rosalinda are all open and operating today. Just this week, we have already had our first grand opening of the year, The Dogpound TnT sports training facility. Two more grand openings are already booked for 2025, which will be happening soon. This week I also received very good news. After a few ups and downs the past three months, long time Chester, NY business, SA Baxter which manufactures architectural hardware - will

be leasing 55 Jersey Ave or otherwise known as the Flanagan building.

We look forward to this business breathing new life into that storied old building.

The Department of Public Works, under the direction of Director Steve Duryea and Assistant Director Wayne Addy, have a busy year ahead of them. To go along with their “normal” day to day operations consisting of garbage and recycling pickup, snow and leaf removal, fleet maintenance, and general upkeep of the city, some major projects this year includes the annual milling and paving of city streets, construction of a splash pad, continuance of the lead service line inventory and the Glass Street retaining wall reconstruction. I would like to acknowledge the following retirements from our DPW. Mickey Lane, 38 years of service, Mike Sauschuck, 31 years of service and Kevin Degroat, 25 years of service. These men leave with a wealth of knowledge and service. We thank them for their many years of service to our city.

I would also like to recognize our water filtration plant operators, under the direction of Chief Operator Scott Decker. The water filtration plant provides critical service to our City and a key component for our future economic development. In the fall of this year, the massive water filters inside the plant will be replaced with 4 new ones. This is just phase 1 of our filtration plant overhaul and updating. This work will be paid for through a \$1.5 million-dollar CBDG grant the City applied for and received in 2024. Once the work is completed, we will apply for another round of CBDG funding for a replacement of the reservoir/filtration plant intake system. Separately, we are also targeting funding to increase our water storage tank capacity on site to 2 million gallons.

Chief William Worden, Lts. John Fitzpatrick, Chris Sargente and William VanInwegen continue to lead our professional police department. These highly trained men and women proactively protect our City 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. As I stand before you, I am proud to report that crime rates in our city are at a historic low. Overall

criminal offenses reported through the National Incident Based Reporting System are down over 14% as compared to 2023. This includes the Uniformed Crime Report (UCR) which is the most serious crimes involving Aggravated Assault, Robbery, Burglary, MV theft, and larceny. From a historical perspective, the city continues to experience its lowest historical crime rates range since 1980. Chief Worden and his administration are diligently working towards NYS Accreditation. This voluntary program is designed to improve our agency's effectiveness, efficiency and professionalism. Our police department must meet 111 different standards in three categories: administration, training, and operations. For 2025, the department will continue to develop positive relationships with our community through the popular National Night Out and Fall Harvest Festival outreach programs. Chief Worden remains diligent in seeking outside funding for our police department.

\$310,580.00 was obtained in outside grant funding to assist with technology, facility upgrades, and training. Interested in joining our

finest? In the early fall of 2025, the Port Jervis Civil Service Commission will be hosting a Police Officer candidate exam.

The Port Jervis Recreation Department, led by John Faggione, hosted more than 5,300 students throughout the year at our recreation center. Fourteen different community organizations utilized our facility for meetings and events. Mr. Faggione was pleased to report that West End Beach had one of its busiest beach seasons in recent years - especially on weekends. The recreation department oversees many special events over the course of the year. Some of those include Little Chefs cooking classes, polar plunge, Delaware River 5K Run and Walk event, Food Truck and Firework Festival in July, and the long running Halloween parade. This past year the recreation department hosted the following field trips: Circle line cruise in July, NY Mets baseball game in August and NY Jets game in September. I would like to thank Jill Mason for her 26 years of dedicated service to the recreation department and City of Port Jervis.

Fire Chief Keith Brown, along with his assistant chiefs Anthony

Fuller and Jeff Lewis, continue to lead our 100% volunteer fire department. Day in and day out, these men and women continue to faithfully answer the call. The Port Jervis Fire Department responded to a total of 450 calls for 2024. Mutual aid continues to be a part of call volume with 89 calls for service. This represents 20% of the total call volume. In 2024, the City and Fire Department applied for and received \$825,000.00 in grant funding towards a new engine through Congressman Pat Ryan's office. Additional grant funding was secured for a turn out gear extractor dryer. The department has also upgraded its MDT and Wi-Fi service in the entire fleet of apparatus and support vehicles. The departments goals for 2025 include, seeking to become an accredited technical rescue team, complete the study phase of a central station design, establish a Lexipol training program and further implement the change over from Emergency Reporting to Emergency Networking software. The department will also prepare for a possible ISO inspection as well as improve exposure to carcinogens for

firefighters through programs and new equipment. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge that the PJFD for the years 2023 & 2024 has had the Orange County Firefighter of the year come from within our ranks. 2023 saw A/C Fuller and Captain Shane Fuller recognized for a Jersey Avenue structure fire, while 2024 saw firefighters Zach Morris and Mike Kowinsky recognized. Again, this is a testament of the selfless service being provided to our residents. The Port Jervis Fire Department is always looking for more volunteers. If you have an interest in serving your community, contact them to find out more.

Our City Clerk's office, led by our new City Clerk Treasurer Stacey Hosking, along with her Deputy Bobbi Jo Muller and dedicated staff, have the unappreciated job of collecting taxes, water/sewer bills, fines, fees, and documenting vital records. Under Clerk-Treasurer Hosking's direction, the office seeks ways to save money, upgrade and update services to assist the public and make all our lives easier. Since last year, we have already seen a net positive in our cash flow

and city finances. This is one of the few reasons we were able to stay under the NYS Tax Cap for 2025.

The Building Department, led by Building Inspector Rivera and Assistant Building Inspector Laurie Powrie, work towards helping prospective home and business owners by providing safe and reliable information to help assist and educate them towards achieving their goals. 2024, saw a total of 296 permits issued. Of those permits, there were 268 building permits, 10 demolition permits, 8 pool permits and 10 sign permits. The department also issued 189 Certificates of Compliance/Occupancy. The building department remains in the center of our future economic development assisting to move the city forward.

In April of 2024, the City hired a new Fire Inspector, Craig Becker. The results have already paid off with nuisance fire alarms dropping for our fire department. This is a result of a proactive fire inspection program and plan review. FI Becker, along with the code committee and City Council, recently enacted a local law eliminating fire inspection fees and occupancy permit fees. I firmly support this local law and believe its

necessary for our small businesses to continue to grow. The Bureau of Fire Prevention and the Building Department have been teaming up on new projects to increase safety and continuity. The Bureau of Fire Prevention's goal for 2025 is safety through education and an effective and organized inspection program.

Our City Assessor Teresa Spradling and her Assessor clerk Heather Marino continue to work closely with our building department in monitoring and inspecting inventory changes. This includes property transfers, building permits, suspected changes and individual requests. This is to ensure our taxes are distributed fairly. The Assessor's office oversees approx. 1,700 exemptions in our city. These exemptions must also be monitored. The office also pays close attention to senior citizens, making sure they are afforded the best programs available to them. As the City begins to grow commercially, the Assessor's office offers as a courtesy the business exemption RPTL 485-b as an incentive to business property owners to revamp and beautify their

establishments. All exemption must be submitted before March 1st.

The Community Development Agency, which is contracted by the City and led by CDA Director Valerie Maginsky, works tirelessly seeking and writing grants for the city. Ms. Maginsky also works closely with potential investors, developers and small business owners helping them to find low interest loans and grants to kick start projects within our city limits. The CDA was instrumental in assisting the City secure \$825,000 for a previously mentioned fire apparatus, \$1.7 million under NYS-Empire State Development Corporation Restore NY Grant, \$1.5 million CDGB grant for our water filtration plant, and a \$1 million USDA Forest Service Urban and Community grant. In December, the CDA assisted the fire department submit to FEMA an Assistance to Firefighters grant application for \$541,599 to supply the City fire department with 55 new SCBA. The CDA also contributed to the City's timely Hazard Mitigation plan submittal to Orange County. The CDA and Mayors office are happy to announce that this week the City has contracted with Drapkin Strategies for 2025. Jonathan Drapkin brings a wealth of experience and

knowledge to our government, which in return will assist us in economic development, long term planning and strategy development, and community affairs amongst other items.

So, what's to come for 2025? This year I am going to ask the code committee to consider rewriting the overnight parking law and bring it into current times. I believe it's time to change the law and transition into a "weather/snow alert" style. This will allow on street parking year-round, except when deemed necessary because of incoming weather or other circumstances.

In the month of April, Church Street Park will undergo the beginning of a big renovation. The first phase of this renovation will be the creation of the City's first splash pad. This much needed addition will be located in the middle section of the park facility. The newly reconfigured section will also see the construction of a new pavilion. With ground breaking in the spring time, I fully expect the splash pad to be open by July 1st. I will have the drawings posted on Facebook shortly.

At the conclusion of the summer recreation season, we will begin the renovation and resurfacing of the basketball courts, as well as the addition of pickleball courts on the lower level. I also want to mention that we will not stop in our chase for grant funding for a new recreation/community center. The new construction must have a dual purpose of finally upgrading our recreation facilities as well as serving our seniors who desperately need a place to call their own. Keeping with outdoor recreation opportunity, working with The Orange County Runners Club and Recreation Director Faggione, I would like to proudly announce that in October of this year, the City of Port Jervis will host "The Big Orange Ten". This ten-mile race, which is inspired by the former "Orange Classic", will attract runners from various backgrounds and be a welcoming challenge for beginner and veteran runners alike.

Working with the Community Development Agency Director and Colliers Engineering, the City was awarded a \$167,000 federal railroad crossing elimination grant. We will continue to plan and seek ways to allow a pedestrian crossing from the end of Fowler Street to Riverside

Park. This project remains a priority to further unlock our downtown business and recreation potential.

Last year, with only 30 days into my new administration I stood in front of everyone proclaiming we would hit the ground running. There were a lot of tough decisions and conversations ahead of us. However, I was confident that within the two (2) years the City would see positive changes. With the backing of the council and department heads, we have. Over the next 12-18 months the City will see a positive long-term transformation that will be clearly seen by everyone. I've always said, our City should never be a finished product. We must continue to move forward.

Thank You. God Bless America and God Bless the City of Port Jervis.