

The Honorable Mayor William T . Keeler  
presents the

**2022** *State*  
OF THE  
*CITY*

A D D R E S S

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Tuesday, February 15, 2022

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Welcome fellow Cohoesiers to the 2022 “State of the City” address. A theme you will hear throughout is that we are doing more with less. Completing more major projects, purchasing more new equipment, paving more roads, etc. – all while spending less of Cohoes property taxpayers’ hard-earned dollars. We’re able to do this for three reasons: First, we have become more efficient and have eliminated unnecessary spending in the process. Second, sales tax revenue has returned to and even exceeded pre-pandemic levels. And the third reason is due to an all-out effort by our on-staff grant writers to secure state and federal aid as well as private philanthropic grants.

Sometimes you get lucky, as every state/county/town/village and city did last year by virtue of the American Rescue Plan Act, under which Cohoes unexpectedly received \$1.7 million. Other times you make your own luck, which our grant writers did in spades, by tirelessly seeking out and pursuing grants at every turn, resulting in almost \$4 million in additional funding. Our outside-funding efforts were successful in 2021, and we have every reason to believe those efforts will bear even more fruit in the year ahead.

So as we enter our third year of COVID uncertainty, we are better positioned today than 12 months ago, thanks to a brighter financial outlook and because of widespread vaccinations, natural immunity and an apparently less-lethal strain of the virus. Just a year ago, the city held 20-plus drive-

up food distribution events as the state and nation were in the midst of a crippling lockdown that closed schools, restaurants, businesses and government offices. Our efforts then involved working with non-profits, including the Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York, as we focused on keeping our vulnerable population safe and their pantries well-stocked. These days, with the economy generally reopened, our focus has been on distributing N95 facemasks and at-home COVID test kits, again with the goal of limiting COVID spread among Cohoes residents. In partnership with County Executive Dan McCoy and County Sheriff Craig Apple, we were able to hand out 1,100 of the rapid test kits and countless masks in the month of January.

Today, with our population largely vaccinated, businesses are not just surviving, their numbers continue to grow. Over the past 24 months Cohoes has seen, on average, one new business open per month. That's a strong showing in the best of economic conditions, let alone in the throes of a pandemic. And there are more in the pipeline, so we expect to see the trend of new business openings continue in 2022. That's not the story everywhere and it didn't happen by accident. Our office of Community and Economic Development, directed by Steve Napier and greatly assisted by Debbie Jacques, enthusiastically marketed Cohoes business opportunities to a range of potential entrepreneurs. The results have been an eclectic mix of new storefronts featuring arts and crafts, bakeries, cafes, restaurants and much, much more. But

attracting businesses is only half the equation. Assisting existing businesses during these difficult times means we have to constantly be putting on our “thinking caps” and inventing ways to get people to shop local. One such example, dubbed “Eat in the Street”, initially addressed a state ‘social-distancing’ mandate by effectively moving dining rooms onto a closed-off Remsen Street during the first summer of COVID. “Eat in the Street” proved so wildly popular we will likely continue it this summer for the third year in a row. “Small Business Saturday” was accompanied by our first-ever Soup Stroll where, for the price of a \$10 ticket, patrons could walk downtown and sample soups offered by various Cohoes vendors. The large turnout by our supportive community made the day a win-win-win – a tasty treat for patrons, an economic boost for downtown businesses as well as proceeds to support our Fire Department’s holiday toy drive. Despite a cold wind that day, it was an enjoyable community event for all.

Similarly, “Bottoms Up Bagels” brought their traveling roadshow to downtown Cohoes in November when the Baltimore-based bagel company opened a pop-up storefront. For five days, patrons lined Ontario Street as the shop opened its doors – quickly selling out each day. Whether or not the company opens a franchise in Cohoes, we’re betting others noticed the demand and will respond to the business opportunity. By coincidence, the building that housed the pop-up storefront for the bagel shop also became the first in Cohoes to display a large scale mural. The building, backed up to

Silliman Park, was painted in November by a local artist who has painted many murals of historic significance throughout the region. We hope the mural is the first of several and have already discussed additional projects with the artist who is clearly on-board. I want to thank Debbie and Steve for getting the long-delayed mural project across the goal line. Lastly, after a COVID-mandated year off, Rock the Block returned last summer to large and enthusiastic crowds. We expect an even better showing this summer, so stay tuned for that announcement later this spring. Speaking of which, Cohoes will be hosting the 'TimesUnion.com's Table-Hopping Mac-n-Cheese Bowl' this March. The outdoor event is being held on Historic Remsen Street. Organizers anticipate 30-plus vendors and ticket sales of 2,500 to 3,000. The annual event is the Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York's largest fundraiser. It's appropriate that we host the event in Cohoes in appreciation of their previously mentioned assistance during our pandemic-related food distributions. That will be another fun community gathering, and one of the larger events we host.

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Residents and businesses were not alone in being impacted by the pandemic. Government at all levels were negatively affected. Yet as the pandemic itself continues, the very significant budgetary fallout our city government experienced in 2020 was more than reversed last year. As I alluded to in the introduction, Cohoes not only saw a resumption in NYS aid to

pre-pandemic levels, we were on the receiving end of \$7 million in county sales tax revenue – an all-time high. Additionally, the federal government’s American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 provided funding to state, local and tribal governments. While the formula that allocated funding under that act distributed significantly less funds to towns, villages and small cities like Cohoes relative to what was given to larger cities...the \$1.7 million we received will certainly help.

Along those lines, it’s worth noting that, we have had a laser-like focus for the past two years in seeking outside funding for Cohoes. We now employ grant writers in a handful of departments. Our Director of Operations, Theresa Bourgeois, has leveraged her decades of experience working in Washington, DC to pinpoint federal and state grant opportunities and see them ushered through the halls of government. City Planner Joe Seman-Graves, City Engineer Garry Nathan, Sharon Butler and Annmarie Potts round out the rest of our prolific grant writers who have enjoyed success, particularly at the state level. These folks have worked tirelessly applying for a wide range of funds. As a result, 2021 was a banner year for Cohoes in terms of grants received. We recently added Assistant Planner Josh Giller to the team and, based on the number of grants applied for, we anticipate 2022 will be even better. I’ll discuss more about the various funding awards as I touch on specific projects throughout this address.

The pandemic not only affected finances. It has affected the progress of some key initiatives that we remain focused on. The first is our “Cleaner-Greener Cohoes Initiative”. It includes several noteworthy projects that provide immediate savings for current Cohoes property tax payers as well as longer-term benefits for future generations and the planet we will leave them. One such project was recently completed, a second one is just underway, and the third is quickly moving from the conceptual stage to being greenlighted. Let me start with the recently completed citywide distribution of 4500 recycling carts. The new 65-gallon containers allow for significantly more recycling, while the attached lid helps prevent the wind-blown litter that was a hallmark of the 14-gallon, open-top bins they replaced. While the program cost \$270,000, a NYSDEC grant paid half of that cost, or \$135,000. A separate grant from a non-profit called “The Recycling Partnership” kicked in another \$73,000, including funding toward the purchase of a new recycling truck. Cohoes is the first municipality in NYS to receive grant funding through The Recycling Partnership. We are grateful for the funding provided by these two entities.

Last year, we also renegotiated the tipping fees the city pays to the recycling center, reducing the cost to a fraction of the prior expense. To recap: The city applied for and received outside grant funding to pay the majority of the cost of a program that will allow us to help beautify our city by reducing litter on our streets and recycle more than ever – all at a significantly reduced cost to Cohoes property taxpayers.

The second of three “Cleaner Greener Cohoes” projects involves our recently completed purchase of nearly 1,600 streetlights across the city in December of 2021. Having taken ownership of the streetlights, we will soon begin converting the High-Intensity Discharge bulbs to more energy-efficient Light-Emitting Diode, or LED lamps. Once completed this spring, we anticipate saving \$300,000 in the first 12 months alone, with additional savings annually thereafter.

The third Cleaner Greener Cohoes project is our city-owned floating solar array. This project involves installing, owning and operating a 3.2 megawatt dc floating solar array on the city’s 10-acre enclosed reservoir. 8,000 solar panels would cover two thirds of our reservoir’s water surface. Last April, Congressman Paul Tonko selected the project as one of just 10 that he submitted to the U.S. House Committee on Appropriations for a federal investment under the committee’s new “Community Project Funding” process. For more than 30 years Congressman Tonko has been a powerful and persistent voice calling for innovative clean energy solutions that benefit all communities, including working class cities like Cohoes. On the Senate side, U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer has added funding for the 8,000 solar panels and Senator Kirsten Gillibrand is also supporting federal funding for the project. On the state level, I’ve spoken with DEC Commissioner Basil Seggos and NYSERDA President Doreen Harris, who have also expressed support for the project. We are honored and grateful to have their support and guidance, and to partner with them as we work to get this



exciting floating solar array installed on the Cohoes reservoir, generating both power and opportunity.

The anticipated cost of the installation is \$5.9M. The city has applied for federal, state and foundation grants to cover the costs.

Once operational, floating solar would generate 100% of the city's electric energy demand for its municipal facilities. That means the city can expect to save \$500,000 a year on our electric bill. That's half a million dollars per year the city will have to invest elsewhere. Investing those savings into our community would have a generational impact on our residents. But it gets better: The Floating Solar Array would create clean energy in excess of our municipal building needs. We are exploring opportunities to contract with our School District and Housing Authority so they too can benefit from this clean energy.

The city-funded preliminary design and study work is underway. Receipt of outside funding is an essential hurdle going forward. We are pretty optimistic that floating solar will be a reality in Cohoes in the not-too-distant future. I would like to publically recognize the efforts of our City Planner, Joe Seman-Graves, and our Director of Operations, Theresa Bourgeois, who are spearheading many of our "Cleaner Greener Cohoes" projects. Their combined efforts are very much appreciated.

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Efficiency breeds success. Each efficiency we create provides the opportunity for even greater savings in the future. LED streetlight replacement is projected to save the city \$9 million over 20 years. This year we plan to reinvest about \$750,000 of that savings into our Cohoes Parks and Playground Renewal project, to ensure our parks are modern, safe and accessible to all. Barring continued supply-chain shortages, Greenbrier Park, Sunset Park and Craner Park are all due for facelifts beginning this summer. Improvements will include resurfaced basketball and tennis courts with related equipment, new fencing, modern playground equipment, handicapped access, improved parking and more. At Lansing's Park we will replace the disjointed and decades-old lighting with a new and improved LED system that will better illuminate the fields for nighttime sporting events. We began repairs to the hut at Lansing's Pool last year and will finish that in the spring. The basketball court will be resurfaced and the backboards replaced. The Lansing's Park skate park is likely looking at an upgrade in the summer of 2023.

We are also working to establish and connect trails and bike paths. There are three main arteries running north-south through the city – the Mohawk-Hudson Bike Path, the Cohoes Erie Canal Parkway, and the Van Schaik Island Historic Corridor. The first is now part of the Empire State Trail. We are working to revitalize the second and establish the third – and in the process connect the three to each other as well as to regional and statewide bike paths and trail ways. This undertaking will

include a new city park that we are developing on Delaware Avenue, just south of the 112<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge, that will include a non-motorized boat, canoe and kayak launch. Cohoes was just awarded over \$900,000 in state funding to help fund the project. This will provide the only public access to the Hudson River in Cohoes.

We are also working to create a more walkable city in general. We've begun cataloguing sidewalk conditions throughout the city, establishing priorities for repair or replacement. Cohoes was just awarded a \$460,000 grant from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's "Climate Smart Communities" grant program. This grant will be put toward a \$900,000 project to improve walkability and incorporate a "Climate Smart" community pocket park along the White Street corridor between Main and Mohawk Streets. This project will also be supported by \$210,000 in funding from the New York State Department of Transportation and another \$225,000 grant from National Grid. Another plan in the works is our Remsen Street Phase III, a \$400,000 grant-funded project that will involve new sidewalks and street-scaping of Remsen Street between Columbia and Howard Streets.

Sidewalk improvements are also incorporated into the "Comprehensive Gateways and Thoroughfares Streetscape Improvement Planning" for Columbia Street, and eventually the rest of the SR-470 Corridor – including Bedford Street and Ontario Street to the foot of the 112<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge. SR-32,

Saratoga Street, is also in our sights. New sidewalks are incorporated into the Columbia Street Phase II Sewer Separation project, slated to begin this summer. This project will incorporate rain gardens and other green-infrastructure to reduce the amount of storm water presently running into our sanitary sewer for unnecessary and costly treatment.

Additionally, we're going to reinvest \$3 million of the LED streetlight conversion savings into city-owned buildings, replacing leaky roofs, drafty windows and converting the worn-out HVAC systems to modern electric units. Those changes will generate their own significant savings from our \$68,000 monthly National Grid bill. In fact, once floating solar is a reality, the combined annual savings will approach \$800,000.

Discussing the savings and subsequent reinvestment from our "Cleaner Greener Cohoes Initiative" leads me into another major undertaking, specifically our "Restore Historic Cohoes Initiative". Our city is home to a number of buildings that date back centuries and some are, rightly, a source of great community pride. While the overwhelming majority of them are in private hands, a few are municipally-owned. The Cohoes Music Hall, Cohoes Public Library and our City Hall are all magnificent examples of 19<sup>th</sup> century architecture.

Nonetheless, each suffers from the effects of time and a lack of upkeep over too long a stretch. I will not 'kick the can down the road' for some future mayor to deal with this challenge. My administration is firmly committed to reversing the results

of years of neglect, and restoring these buildings to their former glory. To that end we have hired outside experts to conduct comprehensive building assessments of all three structures. Once completed, we'll have a thorough understanding of each building's specific needs – and we already know they are numerous. We are painfully aware that each building needs major roof work, window replacement and critical masonry restoration. Last year, for example, we paid \$300,000 for emergency roof work on City Hall, largely funded by a NYS grant secured in cooperation with state Assemblymember John McDonald. Last month, a window fell out of my office – only the most recent such incident, and an unneeded reminder of the urgency in addressing the 330 windows at City Hall. Our Public Library closed back in July after a sizable portion of the exterior bluestone facade collapsed near the main entrance. With the assistance of NYS Senator Neil Breslin and Assemblymember John McDonald, we were successful in getting a \$116,000 NYS Library Construction grant to fund the emergency restoration work and other improvements to the building. That work is well underway.

The price of restoring these buildings will no-doubt be considerable, but further delay is like throwing money out of these energy-inefficient windows every month, and only adding to the price that eventually must be paid. That's why we are directing \$3 million from the \$9 million total savings from the LED streetlight conversion into our building restoration fund. We are aggressively seeking outside funding in an effort to turn

that \$3 million into \$6 million or more through matching grants. I'm pleased to report that in December the City of Cohoes was awarded four grants totaling nearly \$3 million in NYS Regional Economic Development Council Grants. Two of those grants will go toward restoration and clean energy-related upgrades for City Hall.

As magnificent as these city-owned buildings are, our greatest assets are the personnel who make up our municipal workforce. I'd like to thank the many hardworking employees that help our city function. Let me start with those who ensure our public safety:

Under the leadership of Chief Joseph Fahd, the ranks of our city Fire Department swelled last summer to 34 – the highest in decades – with the addition of four new firefighters. Two other fire officers were recently promoted to Lieutenant and Captain, respectively. I again congratulate all of the newly assigned members.

We were fortunate that last October's structure fire on Bridge Avenue was the only major structure fire of 2021. That said, firefighters assisted with hundreds of medical calls and aided in three cardiac arrest reversals last year. Department personnel also participated in fire-prevention outreach to our senior-citizen facilities and city schools. Additionally, they are currently working with the School District to establish an EMT course for high school seniors. On a related note, five firefighters were recently recertified as EMTs. In the year

ahead, Chief Fahd plans to have department personnel assist the Code Enforcement office by conducting fire-prevention inspections of various business properties throughout the city. Also worth mentioning: Cohoes just last month entered into a shared-services agreement with our friends and neighbors in the adjoining Village of Green Island. Under the pact, Chief Fahd, in the short term, will serve as the head of both departments. Doing so not only fills a critical village post but also helps prepare a more seamless coordination when the two departments collaborate on occasional mutual aid calls. I thank Chief Fahd and the rest of Cohoes' Bravest for keeping our citizens safe.

Chief Fahd also heads our Code Enforcement Department. And, like we did with the Fire Department, we beefed up the ranks of the Code Office by hiring two new Code Officers last year. That will allow the city to conduct more safety inspections of buildings and better combat the trash and litter complaints in our alleys and streets, thus making the city cleaner and safer. It's worth noting that building permits generated \$70,000 for city coffers, while Residential Occupancy Permits raised another \$60,000. Code Enforcement conducted over 1,500 inspections in 2021. We appreciate their efforts on behalf of our residents.

Our focus on Public Safety extends beyond the Code Office and Fire Department. We also increased the number of personnel assigned to our Police Department to 35 last month when we

hired six new police officers. This not only grew the ranks, but also created the most diverse force in the 150-plus year history of the Cohoes PD. That will help make a good PD even better. Credit Chief TODD WALDIN and Assistant Chief TIM KEEFE who constantly look for opportunities to improve, professionalize and modernize the department. Their efforts include:

- 1) working toward state accreditation of the department;
- 2) increasing training opportunities for its members; and
- 3) actively recruiting the best candidates and mentoring existing staff.

As a result, Cohoes PD has earned the respect of its law enforcement colleagues as well as from the community it serves. I hear it often: from senior law enforcement officials, from our school superintendent and principals, and from folks on the street...and I make the same observations myself. In the long history of our city, there has never been a better Cohoes PD than the 2022 version. Which is good, because there has never been a more difficult and dangerous era to be a police officer. District Attorneys from NYC to Los Angeles are allowing criminals to go unprosecuted. In New York State, progressive laws and policies have de-criminalized bad behavior. Well intentioned Bail Reform has taken discretion away from local judges and too often resulted in a revolving door of “catch and release” that has had statewide repercussions. It should come as no surprise that, both nationally and across the state, many cities saw an uptick in crime and homicides in 2021. The Capital Region was no exception. Cohoes, however, recorded no such



increase in crime and we had zero homicides last year. Cohoes is still a safe place to live and work. Chief Waldin and his rank and file officers deserve much credit for working closely with the schools, the various Neighborhood Watch groups, the Police Reform Committee and the community at large to improve police/community relations – all of which contributed to the safety of our residents.

Last year, patrol officers were issued Naloxone, also known as NarCan, a nasal spray that blocks or reverses the effects of opioids. Within weeks, officers used the NarCan resulting in two cardiac reversals, thus saving two lives. This year we will be training police officers to be Emergency Medical Technicians, adding yet another layer of protection for our citizens on top of the city-based ambulance and fire department EMTs. We also anticipate 2022 will be the year the police department implements a body camera program. Upcoming grant funding will allow us to purchase enough units to outfit our uniformed patrols and supervisors with cameras. I want to thank Chief Waldin for his vision and leadership of the department, as well as the rest of Cohoes Finest for keeping our citizens safe 24/7.

Now, in addition to the 4,000 calls to our Fire Department, and the nearly 27,000 calls investigated by the police department, firefighters and police officers enjoyed participating in a number of community events, including:

\*the Easter and Christmas Caravans that traversed the city;

\*our Trunk or Treat event during the Halloween Parade - when an estimated 1,000 participants lined Remsen Street from Columbia to the Senior Center;

\*National Night Out at Lansing's Park;

\*participating in various food drives;

\*partnering with the School District and CapCom Credit Union to provide 10 families with a full Thanksgiving Dinner

\*adopting families and playing Santa via Holiday Toy Drives;

And much more. Again, "thank you" to members of both departments.

Many of those events were coordinated by our new Director of Recreation, Ed Krajewski, assisted by Kathleen LaBombard. Ed and Kathleen also organized the Summer Sports Academy, the Cohoes Car Show, the Turkey Trot, Christmas Tree Lighting and the Winter Carnival.

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In a very real sense, Public Safety extends beyond the Police and Fire Departments. We can't have a city without safe drinking water, a sanitary sewer system, trash removal and safe streets to drive on. We have all these thanks to some hardworking employees at our Department of Public Works. Entering his third year at the helm of Public Works, Commissioner Steve Hennessey has made significant strides in a number of areas. One highlight has been paving. Last year we

were able to pave more roads than in any other single year in decades:

**Summit Street...Seneca Street...Mohawk Street...Jefferson Avenue...Grandview Terrace...Bevan Street...Lexington Avenue...Berkley Avenue...Pleasant Court...Cross Street...Rose Court...North Third Street...Adams Avenue...Forest Avenue...Heartt Avenue...and York Road**

That's a lot of paving, especially when you consider the amount of prep work that goes into raising and repairing all the catch basins, valve caps and sidewalk curb cuts involved. That said, we anticipate an even more productive 2022 paving season for two reasons:

First: In years past, the city would pave roads only to have them torn up shortly after by crews performing gas-line work for National Grid. I have no doubt it was a source of annoyance for previous mayors, but after Commissioner Hennessey and I saw it happen to a newly paved street, we decided to do something about it. We asked for a meeting with representatives from National Grid. Informed of our concerns, the utility representatives agreed that, going forward, they would meet with us monthly to coordinate the planning of gas-line upgrades. Those meetings not only eliminated the problem of newly paved streets being torn up, they resulted in a cost-sharing arrangement wherein National Grid will help offset costs for curb-to-curb paving of other roadways that they partially cut into so scheduled gas-

line improvements can be made. For example, folks living on the Island can expect to see the streets dug up by National Grid last year neatly paved, curb to curb, with financial support from National Grid. Those streets include Bridge, Park, Hudson, Van Schaik, and Myrtle Avenues as well as Second Street. Likewise, residents on the Hill whose roadways were torn up for gas line repairs can plan on seeing Leverage Avenue, Platt Street, Eagle Street and Watervliet Avenue paved curb to curb in 2022, again with National Grid support. This plan is actually cost-neutral for National Grid, which was previously paying sub-contractors almost the same amount to merely patch the road. For Cohoes residents and taxpayers, it's a very good deal.

Second: Thanks to the efforts of state Senator Neil Breslin and Assemblyman John McDonald, Cohoes received \$1.1 million in NYS Touring Routes funding specifically to compensate us for maintaining the state routes that traverse the city. We anticipate using that money as matching funds to secure an additional \$4 million in federal infrastructure grant monies. We should know more about our related application later this year.

Besides our seasonal street paving program, we have a dedicated three-person "patch crew" whose sole function is to find and fill potholes. Last year we purchased a "hot patch" truck and our crew has since faithfully employed it throughout the city. They obviously take great pride in their work. To

James Doherty and Robbie Benoit, on behalf of the motoring public, I thank you for your enthusiastic efforts. While I'm naming names, I would be remiss if I failed to mention our longest-serving DPW employee, Deputy Commissioner KEN RADLIFF. Even after 42 years, no one works harder than KENNY. He oversees the crews that maintain city parks and green spaces, including all mowing, litter removal and myriad other tasks that come his way.

Our DPW employees perform various tasks that are necessary to keep our city running. And they often do those jobs under difficult circumstances in inclement weather – such as repairing water main breaks, which all-too-often occur in the dead of night in the middle of winter. Last year alone DPW completed a host of capital improvement projects including”

- \*repairing a 50 foot sewer line on Bedford Street;

- \*repairing drainage in Glen Meadows, specifically Morningside Terrace & Stonehenge Square;

- \*repairing, replacing and cleaning out 100 catch basins and manholes citywide;

- \*installing a new pump at the Bridge Avenue pump station;

- \*installing a new pump at the Saratoga Street pump station;

- \*rebuilding the raw water pump at the Mohawk Street Pump House;

- \*rebuilding the pump at our Water Filtration Plant;

- \*replacing 60 feet of sewer line on Summit Street;
- \*replacing numerous valves and hydrants citywide;
- \*installing drainage and paving Berkley Park parking lot;
- \*purchasing and putting in service three new pick-up trucks, all with plow frames;
- \*purchasing a new garbage truck;
- \*purchasing a new Over-the-rail mower;
- \*cutting down trees at Lansing's Pool;
- \*installing a new roof on the lifeguard shed and bathrooms at Lansing's Pool;
- \*and installing a new chlorination system at the pool;
- \*last but not least, kudos to Tim Bariteau and John Bonkoski for repairing and painting our iconic flag pole atop City Hall.

I want to thank Commissioners Hennessey and Radliff as well as the rest of our hard-working DPW employees for their efforts on a daily basis.

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In addition to our three largest departments, just mentioned, we also owe a debt of gratitude to our City Hall employees, crossing guards and library staff. We are also grateful to those individuals – mostly volunteers – who staff our various boards and commissions. I thank each one of you for performing your

respective roles that help our city government function day in and day out.

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Our City Engineer, Garry Nathan, was kept busy again last year, overseeing a number of projects:

- \*finishing construction of the new water tower that went online in 2020;
- \*started and completed a sewer separation project at River Street and Jackson Avenue;
- \*completed prep work for the upcoming \$4 million Columbia Street Phase II and \$3 million Vliet Street Phase III Green Infrastructure projects, receiving a \$1 million grant in the process. Cohoes property taxpayers will only pick up 5% of the total project costs under an agreement Garry arranged;
- \*completed prep work for the upcoming \$1 million James Street Culvert Replacement project, funded entirely by the state Department of Transportation, so there is no cost to Cohoes property taxpayers;
- \*completed prep work for the upcoming \$1 million Saratoga Street Culvert Replacement, again seeking NYSDOT funding for the full amount;
- \*conducted prep work for the anticipated \$18 million in upgrades needed at our Water Filtration Plant;

\*presided over the emergency restoration work at our library, including the collapse of an exterior bluestone wall which shuttered the building.

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Which brings me to our Cohoes Senior Center, which is hosting the library while the main building is undergoing emergency restoration. I would again like to take an opportunity in this year's address to thank Beth Slezak and her amazing staff at the Senior Center. Beth gives 100% to the seniors, treating each of them like family. It's a joy to watch the interaction. She also enthusiastically embraced our plan to temporarily set up library services in her building. Disabled individuals living nearby, as well as the seniors themselves, liked the temporary library so much that we are discussing the logistics of keeping a Satellite Office of the Cohoes Public Library open in the Senior Center year-round.

Prior to the temporary move to the Senior Center, our library had proven resilient during the pandemic, when conditions and mandates limited or, at times, prevented patrons from visiting in-person. Library staff adapted by offering take-out service, online programming, and outdoor events. Outgoing Library Board President Carol Clingan deserves much praise for her years of dedication.

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Over the past two years, I've spent considerable time addressing issues and concerns related to the burning of hazardous waste and the associated shale mining at Norlite. My position is a matter of public record so I don't wish to belabor the topic. That said, the community should know I continually discuss the facility and its operation with affected neighbors, other elected officials, representatives of the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, and Norlite officials themselves. While I recognize that progress regarding the permitting renewal has been slower than we would like, I am grateful that state regulators – the scientists at DEC and, more recently, the lawyers in the Attorney General's office – have marshalled their considerable resources on behalf of the people of Cohoes. I'm confident these agencies will resolve the matter in a fair and appropriate manner in the not-too-distant future.

On a related matter: One of my earliest initiatives involved urging the Cohoes Housing Authority to relocate the residents of Saratoga Sites, moving them out of the shadows of Norlite where some have lived and played for decades. My Aunt Monnie and Uncle Glen lived there in the 1970's and I visited often in my youth, so I've long been aware of conditions there. That is why, back in January of 2020, I met with Congressman Paul Tonko to seek his assistance in closing the federally funded housing facility. He was immediately interested. I've subsequently met repeatedly with representatives of the Cohoes Housing Authority, which administers Saratoga Sites on

behalf of the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development. CHA Directors Kathy Oliver, Matt Ethier and CHA Board President Mark Pascale have been early and enthusiast partners as well.

While there is much work to be done, the task now seems doable. There are discussions underway with HUD regarding the relocation of residents as early as this year, followed by a demolition of the existing buildings and sale of the property. I envision a more appropriate industrial use for that five-acre parcel. To that end I have just authored a letter of intent, expressing the city's interest in purchasing the property from the Housing Authority after the HUD disposition is complete. We recognize this not only as a chance to dramatically improve the quality of life for the 70 families affected, but also as an opportunity for the city to redevelop the parcel for future sale or use, though in keeping with the industrial nature of the area. Never again should housing be constructed in such a heavily industrialized location. This is a heavy lift, and I thank Kathy, Matt and Mark for their support. I'm equally grateful to Congressman Tonko, Assemblymember McDonald, Third Ward Councilmember Chris Briggs, Joe the Planner and Theresa Bourgeois, for their considerable efforts.

I'd like to wind down by thanking members of the Common Council for their efforts in their respective Wards as well as for their ongoing support of our citywide initiatives. I'm very

grateful for the efforts of state Senator Neil Breslin and state Assemblymember John McDonald who, as our former mayor, understands our needs and works zealously at the state level for the betterment of Cohoes. I appreciate the CHA board and its director, not just for the previously-mentioned work regarding Saratoga Sites, but for their daily efforts assisting some of our most vulnerable residents. Last month, when the boiler at McDonald Towers broke down, CHA administrators and staff immediately sprang into action at 2:00am, delivering space heaters to every unit. As I went door to door with CHA Director Matt Ethier later that day, his concern for the tenants was obvious – as was their appreciation of his efforts. Lastly, I want to acknowledge the behind-the-scenes efforts of those I confer with on a daily basis, including Corporation Council Brian Kremer, my Executive Assistant Amanda Primeau, and City Comptroller Mike Durocher. Mike has kept the books here for 22 years and deserves credit for helping me guide the city through what he himself described as the most difficult financial period of his career.

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As we enter this third winter of COVID, there is good reason to believe that the worst of the pandemic is behind us. We have moved from a period of isolation and emergency food drives to one of vaccination and rapid testing. Cohoesiers have shown strength in the face of great unknowns. Together we have weathered the worst of the pandemic, and there is light on the

horizon. Cohoes businesses have also displayed admirable resilience throughout the pandemic and are poised to really take-off in the near future, thanks in part to a helping hand from city government but, more importantly, the ongoing support of our community. In fiscal terms, Cohoes has successfully navigated the economic hardships of the past two years thanks to early and necessary austerity measures as well as an increase in revenue streams to the city. In 2019, the city's Rainy Day Fund stood at almost \$4 million. In 2020, at the height of the pandemic, that balance dipped to about \$3 million. I'm pleased to report that we ended 2021 with the Rainy Day fund at nearly \$5 million. That is \$1 million higher than the 2019 pre-pandemic level.

Today we are \$2 million in the black and revenue is flowing into Cohoes at a rate unmatched since the Model Cities Era of 50 years ago. That allows you, the Cohoes property taxpayer, to keep more of your hard-earned money in your own pockets. I did not raise taxes in 2021. I did not raise taxes in 2022. I have no plans to raise taxes in 2023. We have reduced city spending and seen an increase in county sales tax revenue and a restoration of state aid. That's great news for residents and taxpayers. Folks, think about the road we've traveled over the past few years, and where we are now. By some measures, Cohoes has rarely, if ever, been better.

In the end, it all adds up to millions of dollars coming into Cohoes to address our three key initiatives: Restoring Historic

Cohoes, a Cleaner Greener Cohoes, and updating our infrastructure. And our ongoing efforts to secure grant funding suggest the year ahead may be even more fruitful. We have already applied for more than \$20 million in grants to fund everything from sidewalk, park and road improvements, to clean energy projects, to water treatment plant upgrades and other infrastructure needs. And we are planning to apply for millions more to restore and revitalize of our City Hall, Library, Music Hall and Senior Center.

While history may see the past several years as some of the city's darkest, considerable light is now shining on Cohoes, and its immediate future has rarely looked brighter. In a word, the State of the City is 'strong', because our residents are strong. Cohoesians have proven themselves indomitable in the face of a pandemic. The sense of community in Cohoes is palpable. It always has been. You feel it whenever we get together, whether in good times or when we grieve.

Cohoes is a small city and we are all connected somehow. I'm certain that Cohoes' best days lie ahead. As generations of Cohoesians have done before us, my team and I will continue to work tirelessly as we strive to create an even-better Cohoes for the generations that will follow. I truly thank you for bestowing upon me the honor of leading our beloved city. May God continue to bless Cohoes and its residents.