

STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS
OLEAN, NY
JANUARY 3, 2023
WILLIAM J. AIELLO, MAYOR

It is my pleasure to welcome Father Claude Franklin of St. Joseph's Maronite Catholic Church, the Honorable Nicholas DiCerbo, Jr., Boy Scout Troop 617, my wife Patty, my family and friends, members of the media, members of the Common Council, City of Olean Department Heads and City Employees. Most of all, welcome to you in the audience both here in the Council Chambers and those of you watching at home.

Please keep Damar Hamlin, his family and the Buffalo Bills organization in your thoughts and prayers.

We have a few honored guests here tonight that I would like to introduce: Earl McElfresh and David Forney.

Thank you for joining us tonight.

This is the start of my 10th year as Mayor of our great city and it has been my privilege to work with a wide range of individuals--all of whom have the best intentions for the future of Olean.

It is an honor to work with the Common Council as we face the challenges inherent in a small city. And I pledge that we will continue to work together as a team to refurbish our infrastructure, make our community safer and keep the tax rate at a minimum.

I am a true believer that Olean is the best place in the world to live. Sure we have plenty to deal with like the changeable weather, but that makes our residents versatile and able to adapt very quickly to changing circumstances.

I am going to go out on a limb and say that there is not another city in the country where such an abundance of people work tirelessly to keep Olean relevant and provide residents with a safe and growing community. And it starts with our department heads.

Please let me introduce them:

- City Clerk Frank Caputo,
- City Attorney John Hart,
- Community Development Program Coordinator Keri Kerper,
- City Auditor Lens Martial,
- Assessor Gregg Piechota,
- Police Chief Ron Richardson,
- Fire Chief Tim Richardson,
- Youth and Recreation Program Coordinator Kris Shewairy
- DPW Director, Robert Thompson
- Superintendent of Water and Sewer, Brad Camp and
- Human Resources Specialist Ward Near.

They are all committed to our community and have done an excellent job working with their staff to make Olean a better place for all of us to live.

This year the First National opened as a residential tower and it provides an excellent example of Olean's grit and determination. The building's fate was tied to a rollercoaster for well over 25 years. So many times it was going to be redeveloped--and as many times it fell through. But a group of people never gave up on it—including the city's Community Development Office, members of the Olean Urban Renewal Agency and the Common Council.

Ultimately the Savarino Companies took possession and redeveloped the building. But this year as the scaffolding came down and as the lights in the apartments began to shine, Olean residents were reminded that anything is possible—as long as you never give up and abandon your cause.

Olean is resilient and our short term history shows what we can do when we put our minds to it.

Before applying for and receiving the TIGER Grant in 2014, leaders throughout the City--and county for that matter---took stock of Olean---and realized that our small city had what it takes to be a vibrant and healthy community.

They appreciated the many assets of our surroundings. Things that those of us who live here take for granted, but to outsiders are quite attractive—to name just a few--clean water, clean air, a hospital, a university, a college, a manufacturing sector, and ample seasonal outdoor activities.

The problem, at that point in time, was that Olean's wasn't appealing and its infrastructure was falling apart. Meeting the challenges of the new century required Olean to invest in itself and revamp.

To start that process a project was necessary and North Union Street was chosen as the place to begin. The street was hollowed out, store fronts were empty and upgrades were needed---both underground and above. Fortunately under the leadership of former Mayor Linda Witte, the City secured a TIGER Grant and a Green Innovation Grant and a two year refurbishment was underway.

That project was just the beginning and provided the catalyst for us to continue to make Olean a place where people want to live and raise a family. The Community Development Office explored every grant opportunity available and even while the North Union Street project was moving full steam ahead, we were able to start numerous projects to enhance our quality of life in Olean.

Grants helped fund the field house at Bradner Stadium and renovate the ice rink and other facilities at the Recreation Center.

Grants helped build Lincoln Square, Trailhead Parklet, and upgraded King Street Park. Marianne and Erick Laine provided the funding to restore the entrance to Oak Hill Park. A new playground was installed near Homer Hill. The City, through the Cattaraugus County Land Bank, secured property which will enhance the entrance of Franchot. With the help of Cattaraugus County, Forness Park was upgraded and we received a grant to plant new trees around the pond.

The City didn't stop there.....optimism was growing as we continued to look for opportunities to achieve our potential.

The City applied for and received the Downtown Revitalization Initiative—a grant that brought a \$10 million dollar investment to our community—helping both the private and public sector. Results are

appearing throughout downtown Olean. Projects such as this year's upgrade to North Union Street and the work at Oak Hill Park were financed through the DRI. A number of other public works projects will start in 2023. Other recipients of the DRI include the Old Library, First National, the African American Cultural Center, 4 Mile Brewery, and the former JoJo's Building.

Our work did not stop with the downtown district and the parks, realizing Olean's potential took us into the neighborhoods.....

Community Development, the Fire Department, Code Enforcement, the Department of Public Works and the IT department worked together as a team to conquer blight. Together they have isolated the root causes and have coordinated an effective and balanced best practices plan to take preemptive action to prevent vacant and zombie housing.

Olean was fortunate enough to receive a series of grants from LISC (the Local Initiative Support Corporation) to aid this effort. In addition numerous blighted houses were removed with the help of the Cattaraugus County Land Bank and our Community Development Office.

The pedestrian and bike trail system in Olean continues to grow. This past year the Urban Renewal Agency developed the land and financed the connector leg of the Allegheny River Valley Trail from Twelfth Street to the current trail. And the City worked with Twin Tiers Disc Golf Club to introduce disc golf to Olean at Gargoyle Park in 2021. It was an immediate success and this past summer a course was added to Franchot Park.

The brownfields off of Buffalo Street sat desolate for a generation. They now house a large a solar farm that helps reduce our energy costs and a Hampton Inn which welcomes guests as they travel along Route 86.

We have made significant investments in the waste water treatment and water plants. In addition we have had significant infrastructure and road surface upgrades. In fact since 2013 the City has paved or done brick repairs on 136 streets for a total of 29 miles at a cost of \$8.8 million of which \$7.4 million was funded by the New York State CHIPS program. In addition Capital Projects since 2013 that were managed by the Engineering division total \$10 million dollars and include the reconstruction of East State Street, Prospect Avenue, York Street, North Third Street, and the waterline and reconstruction of Washington Street.

When investors and developers started to see that the City of Olean was on a mission to reinvigorate and reinvent itself, they took note and started to make investments in our community:

The old Market Basket warehouse is being developed by CDS Monarch into 46 apartments. CDS Monarch received a \$4 million grant from New York State to rehabilitate the facility.

There is also plenty of private investment coming to Olean. Tim Hortons on East State Street, Starbucks, Chilpolte, Well Now and Hobby Lobby on West State Street as well as market-rate housing on West State Street.

In the winter of 2020 when Siemens announced it was closing its Olean facility, Olean residents had a collective lump in their throats. But once the news was processed, we worked together with federal, state, and county officials as well as the Cattaraugus County Industrial Development Agency to chart a new course for the facility. I am so pleased that over the next couple of years Cimolai-HY will be

creating over 200 skilled manufacturing and office jobs in our community. And I thank everyone who made this happen.

During the past year the City received a little over \$1.3 million from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). The money was immediately put to use: purchasing needed equipment for the fire department, and fixing the water line on the east State Street Bridge. Money was also allotted to upgrading the HVAC in City Building and John J. Ash Community Center and purchasing splash pad equipment.

In the spring the City initiate the \$200,000 Boost Business Grant Program. It was specifically designed to get ARPA funds into the hands of Olean's small businesses who were greatly affected by the Covid shutdowns. The Community Development Office had run many successful programs in the past and were able to use their vast experience to rapidly develop an efficient and fair operating plan. Working with the Small Business Development Center who helped facilitate the application process, the department successfully closed on 45 grants.

And speaking about Community Development the department added three new buses to the Olean Area Transportation System. The new busses were fully funded through both federal and state agencies.

In addition Olean Community Development department helped the owner of the Olean Center Mall to successfully apply and receive a Restore New York grant which will help reinvigorate and add upgrades to the mall property.

The City Auditor reports that Olean maintained a healthy fund balance well above the balances suggested by the New York State controller and the City remained under the tax cap with a 2 percent increase for 2022-23 budget. Half way through the year, our sales tax revenue has remained steady, in fact, the City collected 57% of the budgeted figure in that time period.

Our health care insurance rate has decreased from 2.79% to 2.77 %, due to the good experience and utilization use of our employees.

And in June of 2022 the City began to participate in NY Class or New York Cooperative Liquid Assets Securities System, a highly liquid investment fund designed for the public sector. So far the investment has been lucrative for the City, as we have to date collected \$5,000 more than anticipated for the fiscal year

The City Clerk's office, collected almost \$82,000 in revenue from our parking lots and hangars over the past 11 months. Revenue of almost \$47,000 came from vital records and 129 marriage certificates were issued. As Mayor I officiated a number of marriages in my office—one of the honors and great pleasures of being Olean's Mayor.

Over the past year the IT staff continued to upgrade our systems throughout the departments. And added equipment, including a Neat Board allowing us to facilitate video conferencing. I call the board Sheldon.

The City Assessor's Office reports that there were 126 residential sales in 2022. Average home sale price was \$93,818. To put that into historical perspective, in 2013 before Olean started it's revitalization the average home sale price was \$74,009.

DPW

After the resignation the former DPW Director, the City hired, Robert Thompson to fill the position. Robert came into a very active department. The Streets Division was in the midst of a 15 street or 4.3 miles paving project. The North Union Street Oak Hill Park DRI project was in progress as was the airport runway replacement project. The three DRI projects for next year were in the planning phase as were plans for the splash park. That's not to mention the day to day activities of the department.

I have to thank all of our DPW employees, during the transition to a new director they did an excellent job overseeing our capital projects and maintaining our streets, parks, vehicles and water lines as well as the water and waste water treatment plants.

Police Department

The Police Department contended with a number of personnel challenges during 2022. Five officers resigned and four officers were hired to replace them. In addition 2 officers are currently on military deployment, but there is hope that one will return soon. The department hired a part-time animal control officer during the year and she doing an excellent job.

As of the date of this report, the Police Department received almost 22,000 calls for service and has successfully made over 1,000 arrests. To accomplish this while being short staffed, officers worked numerous hours of overtime. I commend them for their dedication to our community.

During the year, the department started a drone project and secured funding to support the project. The program should be up and running by late spring. In addition, two new vehicles have been added to the fleet.

Every year, the City of Olean Police Department participates in a variety of programs in an effort to assist the community and bolster their relationship with the public. Officers helped at both the Easter and Halloween "drive-thru" events. The officers also participated in numerous Car Seat Safety Check events.

School Resource Officer McGraw, spent over 320 hours this year ensuring the safety of school-aged children at events and enhancing their relationship with the community.

Captain Marsfelder coordinated and presented training in Civilian Response to Active Shooter Events (CRASE) to a variety of different organizations. These trainings give vital information and options in the event of the unfortunate occurrence of an active shooter or other imminently dangerous situation.

For the fifth year in a row, the Department partnered with CARES for the Healthy Cattaraugus County Program. Funded by grants procured by CARES, this program sends officers into the community to interact with kids and their families. This year officers logged 154 hours in a four month span discussing the dangers of substance abuse, as well as the warning signs and preventative measures all while building a better relationship with the community.

Fire Department

The Olean Fire Department responded to over 1,800 fire calls and over 3,000 EMS responses. There were 3,596 calls dispatched to the department.

The Department had 6 retirements in 2022, losing a total of 167 years of experience, but on the upside 6 new firefighters were added to the staff.

All members of the department have completed their NYS 100 hour continuing education fire training, and EMS training of 24 hours. In addition many members attended NYS Fire Training and received national certifications in a number of courses.

The department trained on three acquired houses on Tenth, Buffalo and Fulton Streets and attended a joint drill on the Allegheny River for water rescue with Allegany and Westons Mills.

The Department also worked with the Water and Sewer Departments to preplan confined space and trench operations. In addition two swift-water/flood rescue technicians and three rope rescue technicians were added to the department.

Engine 41 arrived in November, it was the first custom built engine that the department has purchased in 25 years. Engine 40 was repaired and returned to the fleet. ARPA funds were used to equip two ambulances with power load stretcher systems. In addition the 15 year old self-contained breathing apparatus was replaced.

The Code Enforcement Office worked very hard throughout the year. The department issued 327 permits for a total of almost \$9 million dollars in valuation.

In total there 931 inspections were logged for a total of \$21,810 in collected fees.

Regarding complaints 388 are currently open, 351 are closed and 232 inspections were logged.

The department worked on 8 site plans and 7 zoning board projects.

The City's Youth and Recreation Department had a very successful 2022. Highlights include:

- 19 summer concerts held in Lincoln Park with over 4,700 residents attending.
- 375 children, ages 6-12, participated in the summer youth recreation programs.
- The City Cup Softball tournament was held in August with 22 teams participating.
- Well over 1,200 participated in the public ice skating season—a record for the Rec. Center.
- War Veterans Pool opened for the first time in three years.
- Special events were held at the William O. Smith Recreation Center including an Arts and Craft Show, Job fair, and a BOCES police show event,
- The Enchanted Mountain Roller Derby returned to the Rec. Center
- The Bartlett House hosted numerous bus tours and was opened for extended hours during the Christmas holiday season.
- The John J. Ash Community Center was busy with a variety of programs for seniors and there were numerous rentals of the facility throughout the year.
- Youth Basketball leagues for boys and girls(grades 4-6) at the former St. John's School, saw 10 teams participating In January and February

Human Resources

Last year the City hired a Human Resources Specialist and over the past year the department has successfully negotiated a 5 year contract with the CSEA. The department offers guidance and support to the mayor, the department heads and employees on the numerous issues that affect City personnel.

Volunteers

The volunteers that step up to help Olean are a very dedicated group of citizens.

Our volunteer Olean Beautification Committee did an excellent job redesigning the North Union Street gardens to control weeds and provide pretty flowers from late March to October. You can see members maintaining the gardens throughout the growing season and their hard work pays off, this year I received numerous compliments regarding our gardens from local residents and visitors.

The Litter Control group continued to work hard to keep the streets clean. Olean would be a mess without their dedication.

The Junior/Senior League Coasters at the Senior Center are up to 170 members and they continue to work for the betterment of the City, this year raising over \$2,000 for various agencies in the City. Members also help with the many different programs offered at the center.

The volunteers at the Bartlett House tend the gardens through the seasons and beautifully decorate and open the house for extended hours during Christmas. Olean's history is fascinating and the Bartlett House allows us to see it first-hand.

In October we had the second annual Pizza Party to honor all volunteers. Larry Ordway received the key to the City. Larry is truly an ambassador for the City. He volunteers at the John J. Ash Community Center and the SWAN program. He is a volunteer and guide on the OATS bus and he is a promoter and greeter for the Concert in the Park Series. His dedication and commitment to Olean has been outstanding.

The Next year has started and Olean's future continues to look bright: Walkable Olean Phases 3, 4 and 5 are in design phase. The three projects will take our walkable downtown district to the river on South Union Street and extend it from the East State Street Bridge to Fourth Street. Soon the Mall will start development, the Splash Park will be a War Vets addition and there will be a shared used path on Wayne Street.

Olean residents should be proud of our last decade of refurbishment. Together, we have left no stone unturned, and taken every opportunity available to reinvigorate our community. When we have been stymied by outside influences, such as large corporations closing up factories, we pressed forward and found a different path.

As witnessed by the reopening of the First National, Olean residents have an attitude of can-do and will-do no matter how long it takes. We are a resilient group and will continue to move forward regardless of what obstacles are placed in our way. That's our nature.

And our city consists of good, kind, charitable people. Every day we can witness people stepping up to help those in need.

I am going to repeat something I said in my very first State of the City address in 2014, “I’m open to suggestions and I’d like to hear from the people. If we’re doing something you think is right, I’d like to know. If we’re doing something you think is wrong, I’d like to know. If you have suggestions for me, I beg you pass them along.” Resident’s suggestions have facilitated many positive changes in our community.

When I took my oath of office I pledged to represent all the people of Olean, not just the ones who come to meetings to give comment. I again make that pledge that I will listen to all comments and suggestions brought to me.

We are all in this city together—and I have to say—there can’t be a better group of people ---than the residents of Olean.

I am honored and proud to be Mayor of this community –because we continually work together----as a team----to meet the challenges and move our City forward.

Thank you very much for joining us to night and Happy New Year.

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