

STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS
OLEAN, NY
JANUARY 3, 2024
WILLIAM J. AIELLO, MAYOR

It is my pleasure to welcome Pastor Steven Beatty from the United Pentecostal Church, the Honorable Nicholas DiCerbo, Jr., Olean City Court Judge, Scout Troop _____, 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.

We have a few honored guests here tonight that I would like to introduce: including the former Ward 1 Alderman Earl McElfresh

Thank you for joining us.

If I had one word to describe the state of the city it would be busy---very—very busy.

During my career I have spent 50 years in public service: 32 years as an Olean Police Officer, 1 year as a Cattaraugus County P/T Sheriff Deputy, 6 years as a County Legislator and currently I am starting my 11th year as Mayor. With this background, I

can attest that we have made great strides in reinvigorating our community. We have been met with obstacles and have learned to work better as team to meet challenges and continue in our quest to make Olean a competitor in the modern economy—as well as a great place to live.

This team should include the Common Council. And I pledge to continue to work with them to refurbish our infrastructure, make our community safer and keep the tax rate at a minimum.

The City works 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 Eric Maurouard,
- Youth and Recreation Program Coordinator Kris Shewairy
- DPW Director, Robert Thompson
- Superintendent of Water and Sewer, Brad Camp
- Human Resources Specialist Ward Near.

- And Assessor Gregg Piechota, I forgot him last year and have to make up for that.

This group of people are truly committed to our community. They are trustworthy and have done an excellent job working with their staff to make Olean a better place for all of us to live. Sometimes their hard work gets overlooked, because they make it look so easy. Please join me in applauding them for their efforts and diligence for our community.

Here are some highlights from the departments and they will reinforce the fact that the City is staffed with a group of dedicated employees who are truly committed to our residents.

Four City departments work to maintain the safety of Olean residents:

The Olean Police Department, in 2023, handled over 25,000 calls for service and arrested approximately 875 individuals, for a total of 1,805 charges. These charges included 246 felonies, 1,107 misdemeanors, 297 violations, 124 city ordinances, and 31 DWI's.

Early in 2023 it was a struggle to keep the department fully staffed. Two officers were on lengthy deployments. We are all grateful that they have returned safely and are back on staff. The department is currently down one officer and with a better pay package is having more luck retaining and recruiting.

The Drone program was implemented in 2023 and it has been used on five cases.

The City of Olean Police Department continues to work very hard to bolster their relationship with the public. Members participate in the Easter Egg Hunt, Halloween Safety talks and Shop with a Cop.

School Resource Officer McGraw works Monday through Friday in the schools and spent an additional 285 hours ensuring the safety of school age children at extra-curricular activities, such as games, dances, concerts and field trips. His hard work establishes a positive police relationship with the students.

The Fire Department had a record number of ambulance calls at 3,220 and had its second highest year of engine calls at 1,861. It responded to 16 structure fires and saved an approximate \$2.9 million in taxable property value. Firefighters also delivered a newborn in the field on an ambulance call.

The department had two retirements including that of Chief Timothy Richardson and three firefighters graduated from its firefighter recruit program. The department hosted Louisiana State University *Active Threat Integrated Response* course which trains departments to work together during active shooter incidents.

Training is important to the department, currently 7 EMTs are enrolled in a 14-month Paramedic Program.

The fire department also engages the community. This year they hosted 4 car seat installations and 2 open houses; participated in 3 job fairs; held 2 adult/senior citizen fire

education lectures; provided child fire safety lectures at 4 sites with an approximate total of 1,200 students; and gave countless fire station tours to small groups.

The Code Enforcement Office had a very busy and productive year. The Staff performed 1,250 on-site inspections, received 824 complaints, demolished 3 blighted houses and issued 379 permits for a total valuation of \$17 million.

The Department of Public Works maintains 67 miles of street in Olean—requiring plenty of plowing in the winter and pot hole filling year round. This year the department was able to mill and pave 3.44 miles of street for a total cost of \$2.7 million. The City has approximately 60 acres of parkland that has to be maintained. This past fall the Oak Hill DRI project was completed, upgrades included an open air stage, a new restroom and a dog park for a total of \$745,000.

The Airport Taxiway was re-constructed for a total cost of \$1.1 million. The fire pits along North Union Street were completed and essential HVAC upgrades were made to the John J. Ash Senior Center and the Municipal Building.

One City Department Provides a Product and Service to Olean residents:

Each year the city supplies 903 million gallons of water through underground distribution pipes that are about 38 miles long. The sewer system is about another 38 miles long. Many of the

pipes are old – and as we found out in October a breach in the system can lead to three days of a boiling water regimen.

The **Water and Sewer Superintendent** reports that the sewer department was able to line 1,218 feet of sewer lines. They are currently working on the larger diameter pipes. Ten water main breaks were repaired and 3 water valves were replaced during the year.

Please check your water bills in the coming months. Residents can now start monitoring water consumption. Directions are on the screen, are also available on line and will be in the water bills soon.

Two Departments are on call to provide support to our employees:

Our IT department has been busy throughout the year maintaining the systems throughout our building. And, following the water pipe breach in October activated a text message subscription service for City notices. If you are interested, please follow the direction on the screen. The directions are also available on line.

The City's **Human Resources Specialist** continues to offer guidance and support to the mayor, the department heads and employees on the numerous issues that affect City personnel. Over the past year the department has had to contend with numerous issues.

Another two departments make Olean a more inviting place for both businesses and residents:

Our City's renaissance was imagined and created in the **Community Development** office. Since 2009, the City has been awarded and administered grants in the amount \$27.5 million.

- The grants have been used to reconstruct East State Street, North Union Street and North Third Street;
- They have been used to build or refurbish the Farmers Market, the Rec Center, and some of our parks.
- Grants have stabilized the Manufacturers Hanover building; prepared the brownfields for development and aided the developer; they have been used to create trails, manage our trees; and gear the Allegheny River towards recreation.
- Grants have been used to help people buy homes, start small businesses and reimagine the mall.
- Grant money is currently being used to create a comprehensive development plan and next summer grant money will be used for South Union Street and East State Street.
- Grant money from Cattaraugus County in amount \$400,000 will be used to upgrade lighting in Forness Park including new lights on Field 8 and Field 9.
- Additional grants were secured to purchase buses for the OATS Bus System.

- The Community Development office administers the Urban Renewal Agency and the Olean Local Development Corporation. This year the URA used their resources to extend the Allegheny River Valley Trail and establish a trailhead. The OLDC is turning its attention to a Citywide Revitalization Program.

Enhancing the quality of life for Olean residents is the task of the **City's Youth and Recreation Department** and they do a great job at it. The department oversees many activities in Olean and more and more residents are taking advantage of the opportunities.

- This past year 20 concerts were scheduled in Lincoln Park and a record 5,000 people attended.
- The Ice Rink had 11,000 public ice skating customers.
- The Summer Recreation Program had 380 children registered.
- A total of 19 teams participated in the 48th Annual City Cup Tournament.
- Over the past year the John J. Ash Senior Center logged 22,000 senior participants in the numerous activities sponsored in the facility.
- The Bartlett House continues to host numerous events throughout the year.
- This year under the direction of Gail Feuchter, a vintage kitchen was added to the house, as well as a modern

working kitchen to make it easier to host private parties in the facility.

By making Olean a better place to live, the hard work of Community Development and Youth and Recreation helped to contribute to a positive report from the **Assessor**. He stated that for the second year in a row, we have had an increase in the Taxable Value of the City, and it is the first time in 10 years that there have been back to back increases. And only the third increase in that time frame. Home values continue to rise this year, the average home sale price was \$111,000, or \$20,000 over last year's average.

The Clerk's office reported that Vital Records issued 1,318 birth certificates, 1,626 death certificates and 117 marriage licenses. In total Vital Records collected over \$50,000 in fees during the past year.

Unfortunately, there is also bad news and we have some major obstacles in our way as we press forward into the 2024 budget season.

Our DPW Director, Robert Thompson, will be leaving in January and Linda Huff, DPW supervisor will be retiring in January. Although we are sad to see them go, we wish them luck in their future ventures.

The **Auditor** reports that our health insurance costs will increase by 12.67 percent in 2024. And retirement costs are increasing by \$455,000 or about 22 percent.

But not everything out of the Auditor's office is bad news. So far this fiscal year, (or the past 6 months), the City has earned \$74,000 in interest income from New York Class and has collected 56 percent of budgeted sales tax revenue and 70 percent of budgeted ambulance revenue.

The **Water and Sewer Superintendent** reports that there are numerous projects to consider and many obstacles to overcome in the next few years. The list is long, but a sampling of the projects includes:

- Levee Accreditation,
- Water Meter Replacement,
- Water Reservoir Valve Replacement,
- Lead and Copper Service Line Inventory and Replacement, and
- Water Filtration Plant South Wall Restoration

Volunteers

The volunteers that step up to help Olean are a very dedicated group of citizens and this year we have added numerous volunteers to our list. The City established the Comprehensive Development Planning Committee with 22 volunteer members and the Civilian Review Board with 7 members. Tonight, I am announcing that, in accordance with state law, I will be establishing a Charter Commission and will be filing a certificate of appointment with the City Clerk which will include the names of nine members.

The City also had many volunteers who worked countless hours to make our City shine.

The Olean Beautification Committee and Litter Control group were out in full force throughout the warm months. Last January, the St. Bonaventure Swim Teams did a clean-up of North Union Street and this summer BonaResponds painted buildings in Franchot Park and rebuilt the accessible ramp at the Bartlett House.

In October we had the third annual Pizza Party to honor all volunteers. Pat and Kathy Driscoll were named the Volunteers of the year and received the key to the City for their dedication and service to our community especially along North Union Street. Each year the Driscoll's have volunteered to create the planters on North Union Street and the Stadium. They have maintained the rose gardens in the median. And have been strong advocates for Olean's Downtown Gardens. I don't know where our gardens would be if Pat hadn't accepted my invitation to be on the Olean Beautification Committee and served as chairman since its inception. Marcia Nandillon, was also recognized at the event for her volunteer work in the Bartlett House gardens, in which she has tended to for the last 10 years.

Conclusion

As we step into 2024, the final Walkable Olean projects are in design and will take our walkable downtown district to the river on South Union Street and to the East State Street bridge. Soon

the Mall will start development and the Splash Park will be a War Vets addition.

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 stymied by outside influences we pressed forward and found different paths.

Olean residents have learned to be proactive and resilient. We tend to move forward regardless of what obstacles are placed in our way. That's our nature.

I am proud to live in this community and am honored to be the Mayor. And our city consists of good, kind, charitable people. Every day we can witness people stepping up to help those in need

As my grandpa Pete always said, "You only live a once and Olean is a great a place to do that." And I agree, there can't be a better group of people---than the residents of Olean.

Thank you very much for joining us to night and in closing, I would like to dedicate this evening to Thomas Moran, the city's Electrician's Assistant who recently passed away. A fine young man who is gone to soon. May he rest in peace.

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