

**STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS
OLEAN, NY
JANUARY 4, 2021
WILLIAM J. AIELLO, MAYOR**

It is my pleasure to welcome Reverend Kim Rossi, Pastor of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Judge Nicholas DiCerbo, Jr., newly appointed City Attorney John Hart, my wife Patty, my family and friends, members of the media, members of the Common Council, our Department Heads and City Employees. Most of all, welcome to you in the virtual audience.

If you told me last year that I would be giving my state of the city address on a computer platform called Zoom and it would be aired on YouTube, well...I would have never believed you or thought I could do it.....Guess you can teach an old dog new tricks.

But 2020 has proven that as individuals and as a community we can rapidly process information and adjust to circumstances.

And, here in the City of Olean, we quickly adapted---and made the necessary changes to keep our staff and those whom we serve as safe as possible given the circumstances. City employees, throughout the pandemic, have continued to maintain the services necessary for our residents and I am thankful for their dedication to the wonderful community that we serve.

Over the past year the COVID-19 virus was a consideration in every decision we made as the City of Olean. And as you'll see, the path that we charted during 2020 will allow Olean to continue our restoration and renaissance despite being hindered by the side-effects of the global pandemic.

The commitment of our Common Council and our City employees is commendable. It is always an honor to work with them and find the solutions to drive our great City forward. As we hit obstacles, such as this virus, their collective problem-solving abilities and creativity give us the momentum to plow through the hurdles that we meet.

We have come a long way and it's because we work together, make necessary compromises and persist until projects are completed.

Seeing lights in the former Manufacturers Hanover Building is proof of our perseverance and grit and our ability to work together to solve monumental problems.

Last year my speech included a time line—it is worth repeating and adding the New Year to it. Because Olean residents have worked hard to keep our community vital and make it appealing and comfortable for the next generation.

In 2014 the City started work on the North Union Street Transformation Project—under Mayor Witte’s administration, two years later we were able to cut the ribbon on the newly refurbished street with new water, electric and gas lines.

Expansion of our walkable city resumed this year when construction started on Walkable Olean Phase II on Main Street from North Union Street to Front Street. Please take notice of the new traffic pattern and both the street and traffic lights, these additions aid pedestrians and drivers as they manage one of the busiest intersections in our community.

The brownfield sites off Buffalo Street and Homer Hill had been vacant for as long as I can remember. But after the site went through an extensive clean-up, the City received \$1 million dollars in Restore NY grant funds from Empire State Development to assist with redevelopment. In addition the city received \$416,000 in funding to aid the HK Olean Hotel Project on the site. Construction on the hotel was proceeding last year at this time, unfortunately the COVID shutdown held the project up for a bit. But if you take a ride past the hotel at night---you will see the lights on inside the hotel---and construction has resumed.

Homeridae Solar Farm occupies a huge portion of the brownfield. It continues to collect energy from the sun and helps the City reduce electric expense--allowing us to keep our City lights shining brightly.

The lights in Bradner Stadium were not turned on very often this year—the pandemic took its toll on the leagues that use the facility. But the stadium, which took a decade to refurbish, and was a dedicated project for three mayors, is ready for next summer and new exciting events.

The lights are also on in the buildings in the 100 Block of West State Street. Sold by the URA to Jeff Belt in 2014, the buildings now house the Tri-County Arts

Council with a gallery and art facilities and creative classes--right in the center of our downtown district.

In 2015 I started the Blight Task Force. Our City was being overtaken by blighted houses. Over the past five years our department heads have worked together to conquer the blight and have done an excellent job. They deserve commendation for the work they have done. Community Development applied for and received, not one, but two LISC Zombie Grants. As a result, we now have a Zombie Coordinator and the City has worked with the County Land Bank to demolish some of the eyesores in our community.

Also in 2015 the City complied with a DEC consent order and work started on the \$23 million dollar upgrade to our Waste Water Treatment Plant with the help of interest free loans. Today that project is complete.

In addition in 2015 we received a grant to revitalize North Third Street—and within a year the beautiful street in the Oak Hill Historical District was restored. The Common Council adopted a new water policy, also in 2015, which addressed many issues that existed in the collection of water and sewer payments.

In 2016 we upgraded the City's Parking Policy, allowing for two hours of free parking on the business streets. The Common Council also changed the local law which allowed us to boot cars and collect on unpaid tickets which at that point had grown to well over \$200,000.

In 2017 the Common Council amended the City's Code to add a new property Maintenance and Residential Occupancy Code, another arrow in our quiver in the fight against blight.

In April of that year, after the skating season was completed and the Home Show had wrapped-up, the construction vehicles moved in on the William O. Smith Recreation Center. A grant package was used to finance the \$3.3 million dollar project. By September the new Ice Rink had opened and started the first of three in a row banner years.

September was a good month in 2017, because we got notification that the City received the \$10 million dollar Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) from New York State – it was great news and we are beginning to see the results of this investment.

In 2018 a grant from Marianne and Erick Laine enabled us to restore the entrance to our historic Oak Hill Park. In addition our Community Development and Codes offices pooled resources and partnered with the Land Bank. Together they were able to demolish 15 blighted properties. An additional 22 properties were demolished in 2019.

2019 was a great year for our park system.

Lincoln Square opened in that summer and the open air facility was a Godsend during 2020. With public buildings closed and social distancing the norm, Lincoln Square was used consistently for support groups, service clubs and social meetings. It was so beneficial to have this alternative and it was great to see people filtering through our beautiful park. Construction of the facility was made possible by a number of grants from the Western New York Regional Economic Development Council, Cattaraugus County and former Senator Catharine Young.

Grants from KaBoom! Keurig Dr. Pepper were applied for and in 2019 we were able to build Trailhead Parklet on Whitney Avenue and upgrade King Street Park. Again, the open air facilities were invaluable during the summer of 2020.

A few of the other projects that were initiated since 2014 include:

- Upgrades to York Street and Prospect Avenue;
- Completion of the t hangar at the airport;
- Upgrades to more than 25 streets;
- Installation of New Play Ground Equipment in Homer Hill; and
- The Common Council adopted Form Based code.

In 2018 the Urban Renewal Agency (URA) named Savarino as the preferred developer of the former Siegel Shoe Store and the Manufacturers' Hanover Building. The building was allocated \$2 million of the DRI money to renovate and stabilize the building. In 2019 the building qualified for an additional \$500,000 from the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historical Preservation and an additional \$200,000 from Empire State Development for a roof stabilization project. The URA had to complete the stabilization project---and---it needed to be timely and completed within at a specific time in 2020 for the transfer to take place.

I want you to imagine that for just a moment...

In 2020, as we contend with the shortages, lockdowns and the virus—the URA’s portion of the stabilization project had to be completed by a specific time for the transfer of the property to take place.

It took the strength and determination of URA, the Agency’s director Keri Kerper and her office of Community Development. It also took the discipline of the numerous contractors including RE Kelley, as well as the enthusiasm of Savarino Companies to pull it off.

Which they did—the transfer took place in November---and....

Just a few weeks ago--in the darkest days of December---we saw the building illuminated for the first time after almost three decades of darkness. It wasn’t a miracle, it came from hard work and determination and true grit.

I mentioned the Downtown Revitalization Initiative earlier, of the \$10 million dollars, the City of Olean received \$5.5 million dollars for public works projects. During 2020 work started on a number of the projects.

We are currently working with a consultant to improve the North Union Streetscape through beautification, appropriate lighting, seasonal banners, sidewalk replacement and seating, this project will be completed in the summer of 2021.

Other projects that were funded through the DRI include:

- The South Union Street Gateway. The project is ongoing, mapping the project location and surveying data has been completed;
- Walkable Olean Phase III, will upgrade a portion of East State. A designer has been hired and we are expecting to go to bid in spring;
- Oak Hill Park Improvements. We are working with the Olean Theater Workshop and Plywood Studios has been hired for design and scope of services.

- West State Streetscape: The mapping of the project location and surveying data has been completed.

Switching gears to the current year, the City continues to operate within the tax cap according to Auditor Fred Saradin. In fact during 2020 we chose not to raise taxes or the water and sewer rates in order to support our taxpayers as they struggled with the financial burdens brought on by the pandemic. In addition we were able to add to the fund balance of the General fund, keeping us well above the balances suggested by the New York State Comptroller. Our Department Heads are to be commended for understanding the situation and adjusting their budgets appropriately.

The City again received a clean report from the independent auditors.

Our sales tax revenue has been hit by the pandemic, it decreased for the period June through December 2020. But the decrease is not as bad as we had anticipated.

Unfortunately our AIM funding from New York State was reduced by 20 percent in October and we anticipate that the March payment will be cut by 20 percent as well. This means that our revenue from AIM is down by \$448,000.

Our health care insurance will increase by 3.34%, a very favorable rate compared to other municipalities in our region. This is due to our good experience and utilization of our employees.

The City Clerk's office, managed by Lens Martial, collected \$32,750 in revenue from our parking lots over the past year. Parking ticket revenue was \$72,190. Revenue from vital records included \$44,297 from births, deaths and copies of marriage certificates. 148 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. I didn't celebrate as many this year because of Covid—but one couple used Zoom to broadcast their marriage vows to friends and family.

Over the past year the IT staff has met the challenges of COVID-19 quickly and with innovative skills. In March they helped a number of our employees to transition to working at home. They also set us up to be able to video conference

to hold our Council meetings--as well as those of our boards and committees--on Zoom.

The City Assessor's Office, under the direction of Gregg Piechota, reports that we had 142 "arm's length" home sales in 2020 with the average home sale price of \$87,500, an increase of \$12,500 over last year.

Olean's Department of Public Works has been very busy in 2020. Director Bob Ring reports that the department is currently in the midst of 11 capital projects. Projects that were started during 2020 included:

- The Walkable Olean Phase II project which is scheduled for completion in June of 2021.
- The Stardust – Arland Pump Station also scheduled for completion in 2021.
- The Fluoridation Well House Improvement Project has been awarded to Kinley Corporation and is slated to start in the spring of 2021.
- The Washington Street Waterline Phase I is completed with the exception of milling and paving. It included improvements of the intersections on North 4th and Laurens and Washington Streets. Phase II of the project is on-going.
- The Times Square Entrance Project is ongoing, however the entrance is currently functional and is very well designed for handicap accessibility.

Capital Projects that are slated for 2021 include:

- Walkable Olean Phase III,
- North Union Street Streetscape, and
- South Union Street Complete Design.

Capital Projects that are slated for 2022

- Oak Hill Park Project,
- South Union Street Project, and
- West State Street DRI

There are a number of upgrades taking place at the airport that are grant funded including:

- A fuel pump/card reader replacement project. This \$35,000 project is funded by Cattaraugus County.
- The HVAC is being replaced in the Main Hangar and Offices. This is funded by a NYSDOT Multi-Modal grant.
- A Runway Rehabilitation Project in the works and will likely start in 2023. The project is 95 percent funded by the FAA; Cattaraugus County and the CARES act will also help fund the project.

Thirty-three homeowners took part in the Sidewalk Rebate Program since its inception. In 2020, the City contributed \$22,357 and anticipates about \$14,000 from property owners.

The Department of Public Works worked on a number of projects during the summer including:

- Painting the Rec. Center and the War Vets Pavilion;
- Milling and paving a number of streets;
- Patching blacktop and sealing cracks on the streets as needed;
- Improving the Bike and Pedestrian Trail;
- Replacing the electric service in the Recreation Center, and
- Stabilizing Fire House #1.

The Olean Police Department continues to keep the City safe. This year the police department, managed by Chief Jeff Rowley, implemented and activated the Body Camera Program, utilizing a \$56,000 federal grant to do so.

In addition the Department applied new procedures to be in compliance with the recently adopted New York State discovery laws. An additional officer was added to the force to handle the new tasks required by the law.

Over the course of the year the City of Olean had three large protests. And the Olean Police department handled them professionally and without any arrests or injuries

The virus has hindered the Police Department's community engagement to some extent, but officers were able to participate in the program with CARES in which they interact with children to discuss substance abuse. This is an annual program

that is well received by the public. Members of the Police Department also participated in the Halloween Drop.

As Mayor I have recently appointed the Police Reform Committee in compliance with Governor Cuomo's Executive Order which requires communities to convene stakeholders for a fact-based and honest dialogue about the public safety needs of the communities.

The committee consists of an excellent group of community members who have volunteered their valuable time and expertise to make Olean a safe community for all members of our diverse population.

The police department will see a major change in personnel later this month when Chief Rowley retires and Sergeant Ron Richardson will become Olean's Chief of Police. I thank Chief Rowley for his 30 years of service and wish him well in his retirement.

The Fire Department responded to a total of 3,146 calls in 2020. There were 18 structural fires. And on Labor Day Weekend they responded to 42 calls during the wind storm.

Chief Robert Bell retired in February and Lieutenant Tim Richardson became the new chief and his first challenge came very shortly thereafter as the department plays an important part in our local fight against COVID-19.

COVID-19 Operations started in the department on March 5th. The Department works with the City, the County and the Western New York Region, to deliver PPE, decontaminate vehicles, assist with shelter placement, evaluate quarantined patients, and transport COVID patients with serious signs and symptoms. The Department continues to meet and coordinate efforts with the Olean General Hospital, Cattaraugus County Health Department and the New York State Department of Health's Bureau of EMS on a weekly basis.

The Department had a number of personnel changes during the year. Captains Connelly and Zink retired and Lieutenant Bullers and Lieutenant Maurouard were promoted to Captain. Firefighters Gaylor, Veno, Bauer and Isaman were promoted to Lieutenant. In addition two Firefighter/ EMTs have graduated from Paramedic school.

The department graduated two recruits from an in-house training program and another recruit from a training program run with the City of Salamanca.

The department participated in several community events including city and YMCA Halloween activities, Gift Tree and holiday meal deliveries for Interfaith Care Givers and they participated in the modified Santa Clause Lane Parade. The department also presented a hybrid fire prevention program to students and conducted a number of drive-up apparatus demonstrations for kids who would have normally visited the station, but were unable to because of COVID restrictions.

The Code Enforcement office had a very busy year. The new landlord inspection law that was implemented in 2019 continues to be very beneficial to our community. The law gives our Code Enforcement Officers more power to have buildings and units brought back to minimum standards and blighted properties back into compliance.

This year the Codes office completed 2,166 inspections.

The Codes Office issued 362 permits totaling about \$42,490 during the year with a valuation of about \$3.2 million.

And on the blight front the office reports that 35 structures were demolished. Of those The City was directly involved in 4, the land bank in 8 and private entities completed the other 18. In addition 2 billboards and 3 garages were demolished.

Olean's Youth and Recreation Department was hit hard by the COVID-19 restrictions, but under the direction of Kris Shewairy it was able to quickly adapt to the regulations especially when they were being relaxed in the summer.

The department was able to deliver a modified recreation program for 5 weeks during the summer. Over 120 students registered for the program and various activities were offered that allowed for social distancing and increased sanitation.

The department quickly opened up Franchot Pool when NY State allowed for it. The schedule and capacity limits were modified in accordance with state guidelines. Because it was a warm .dry summer, the pool saw an average of over 100 swimmers in the three different swim session daily for the 6 weeks that it was opened.

The Fall/Winter Recreation program has been operating since early September at the former St. John's school. The program allows for social distancing and safe activities for the kids. In addition the department has started to offer some virtual recreation activities for both the senior and youth programs.

The Olean-area Youth Court has recruited four new student members and the court is continuing in its mission to combat juvenile delinquency.

Most of the Bartlett House events were cancelled in 2020 because of the virus, however the volunteers once again decorated the house for a Victorian Christmas and opened it during the season for small and safe tours.

As I mentioned earlier, the **Community Development Office**, managed by Keri Kerper, was instrumental in preparing for the transfer of the Bank and Siegel's Shoes to Savarino Companies. The office administered the grants from the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation and Empire State Development for the stabilization project.

The office also successfully expended its \$200,000 funding award from NYS Homes and Community Renewal to implement a Microenterprise Assistance Program to assist in the establishment and expansion of Microenterprise businesses in the City. The projects funded included three unique business start-up and two existing businesses.

Community Development is administering the DRI public domain projects that total \$5.5 million dollars that were highlighted earlier.

The department also successfully applied for a 2020 NYS Urban Forestry Council Tree Grant. The Grant will fund a grove of trees at Forness Park to be planted on Arbor Day, April 30, 2020.

In addition the department was awarded a \$32,750 grant from the Department of Environmental Conservation to complete a tree inventory and management plan.

It has been an interesting year and I am very proud of how our community has worked through the challenges that we faced. Our community volunteers continued to help us keep the litter off of our streets. And they continued to work in our gardens.

Unfortunately the Olean Beautification Committee could not meet very often this year—but you couldn't tell by the gardens and the potted plants along North Union Street—the committee's work was outstanding in that regard. I received a number of calls the week in June when the planters were distributed—people were disheartened and isolated, it had been a long spring and the weather had been dreary. Our residents needed something to lift their spirits and the planters were the remedy.

I thank the Committee for their hard work. And look forward to what they have in store for us for next year. The Committee is currently working with our consultants on the North Union Streetscape portion of the DRI--which will be implemented next summer. I have a feeling that the gardens will look great.

During the summer we had a series of Town Hall Meetings that were well attended. Prior to the meetings, we had had a number of protests in Olean and there was an anger—an anger that if left unchecked—would destroy our community. I wanted to be proactive and determine how the City could prevent further damage so I hosted these meetings and members of the Common Council attended them.

The meetings proved to be very interesting and enlightening. In fact, a number of the attendees now serve on two committees that were appointed during the year.

The Equity and Inclusion committee will make recommendations on City policy, practices and procedure in order to ensure fair and equitable treatment for all Olean residents and City employees. The committee will also identify and address inequalities facing underrepresented populations in the Olean community.

The other committee, The Police Reform Committee, I discussed earlier in the police section.

Both committees are meeting via Zoom and are working hard on their missions. I appreciate the time and effort these volunteers are giving to make our City an inviting community.

Our world took a strange turn this year. There were some very scary and gloomy days and unfortunately there may be more. Despite the difficult circumstances of 2020 we closed the year on a bright note—lights are turned-on in the old bank, in

the old brownfields, and Santa Clause lane was brightly lit throughout the holiday season.

We have to face these times with optimism and hope.

My grandfather was an optimist and taught us the importance of a positive attitude. He always used to tell me that there are only two ways to look at things...a good way and a bad way, a positive way and a negative way.”

His meaning was clear and obvious—he was very practical and sensible.

After my 7 years as Mayor of this wonderful city, I would have to amend his advice a bit. I would say be positive and optimistic always.

It’s so easy to be negative—but negativity does not make anything better, it makes things worse. And when a small city like ours is faced with the consequences of a deadly virus, we need to be confident that our future will be bright. In fact --- it has to be the will of our residents to ensure a bright future for the next generation – there is no other option.

Try this little exercise--

Say the word yes out loud. The word carries a cheery note in it—pleasant, happy, encouraging, positive and friendly...That “s” at the end of word, when it is pronounced implies that the word never ends.

Now say the word “no” out loud. It just ends, it’s vacant, blank and fades into nothingness.

So I ask residents to be positive about Olean. Say yes to Olean. Yes to our future. Let’s continue to make it a great place to live, work and raise a family.

Thank you. Happy New Year. God Bless America and God Bless our lovely city of Olean, NY.