

STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS



2025

Charles V.
Patricelli, Mayor

CHARLES V. PATRICELLI
MAYOR

BARBARA A. DIAMOND
COUNCILWOMAN

CHRISTOPHER DAUS
COUNCILMAN

CITY OF WATERVLIET



JOSEPH LACIVITA
GENERAL MANAGER

Opening

Good evening, before I begin, I would like to take a moment and thank our residents for their continued involvement and efforts to improve our city. It is an honor to serve this city and I thank all of you for your support on allowing me to stand here and continue to serve my home.

Each year I look forward to delivering the State of the City Address as it gives me a chance to review our success and obstacles over the past year and be transparent to our residents to our focus on future goals ahead.

I would like to recognize our city employees whose determination and hard work continues to improve the services for residents, which is to be admired and recognized. I'd like to recognize those here with us today that have helped us achieve our current state.

- ✓ Councilwoman Barbara Diamond
- ✓ Councilman Chris Daus
- ✓ **Any local leaders present**

For the city of Watervliet to be successful, open communication between our government and our residents is crucial. I've made it a priority to actively

utilize social media and email to keep residents informed and up to date. In doing so, it does take a substantial amount of time and work, but it is worth it to provide transparency and connection to the city for all our residents. Let's now look at what we accomplished in the last year and the focus of our city's future.

Let's me start with:

Parks/Recreation

Park Renovations:

Citywide improvements to our parks are ongoing. The city has a program that allows for tree removal and pruning to open the canopy, sight visibility and safety throughout our parks. Work will be completed in the fall of 2025 on the redesign and replacement of the pool house at our Veterans Memorial Pool. The modifications will help improve both functionality, access and the appearance of the building.

Hudson Shores Park:

Rehabilitation work continued strong at Hudson Shores Park throughout 2024.

- ✓ We completed the bike/pedestrian path throughout the park and the installation of a child's play trail.
- ✓ The city is currently working with a consultant to assist with the design and marketing of a new riverside restaurant in the park.

- ✓ The city has agreements with the crew teams from RPI, Doane Stuart and Emma Willard to utilize our facilities located in the park and we are in discussions with the University at Albany crew team as well.

The Dome:

The Dome is being utilized seven days a week by a variety of groups including pickleball, soccer, field hockey, lacrosse, basketball and electronic airplane flyers. We received a grant from the county to modernize the sound system at the DOME so it can play clearer music and provide a professional Public Address system. This facility is still an untapped jewel and has so much potential.

Community Events:

- ✓ Watervliet will again hold two car shows in 2025. One will be held at Hudson Shores Park in May and the other one will be in the summer at the Gazebo Park in Port Schuyler. These car shows bring in hundreds of visitors to Watervliet.
- ✓ Through volunteer efforts the Summer Concert Series is anticipated to continue and will look to improve on the success seen in 2024. The concerts draw in hundreds of visitors and city residents by offering them evenings of entertainment with their family and friends. Special thanks to Peg Germano and her team for making this happen.

Our History:

- ✓ In a continued effort to **showcase** Watervliet’s industrial revolution roots, we have restored and are showcasing five Meneely bells throughout the city – with the two most recent bells placed at the Watervliet/Menands city line in Port Schuyler and the other on Broadway in front of the J. Leo O’Brien Municipal Building. This project has all been funded by the Watervliet Charitable Foundation. The Watervliet Charitable Foundation was founded by John Razzano in 2006 to give back to the city he loved. Sadly, John passed away on August 24, 2024 – we will always be grateful for his vision and his generosity.
- ✓ We continue to stress our attention on our rich history, the Charitable foundation purchased an electronic bell chime system on the cultural center to resemble the sound of bells that rang throughout our city. You’ll soon hear the bells play at 6 to night, like they do on every hour on the hour.
- ✓ The 200th Anniversary of the Erie Canal will be celebrated in 2025, and a bicentennial event is scheduled for Sunday, June 22, 2025, at Hudson Shores Park so mark your calendars. Then again in 2026, will be the 200th anniversary of the establishment of the Meneely Bell foundry.

The city is in the process of hiring a part-time Events Coordinator to assist in planning a wide range of City events.

Let’s talk:

Public Safety

Police

In June I had the pleasure of swearing in our current Police Chief, William Rice. Chief Rice has embraced the department's proactive approach to community policing, which has fostered safer neighborhoods and stronger relationships between our officers and the residents they serve. Chief Rice, on behalf of City Hall and the citizens, we thank you for choosing to serve our city and for your efforts to keep our officers and citizens safe.

- The department continues to grow with the addition of three new officers in 2024 and two officers in January of 2025. The additional hires will bring us to meet a fully staffed police department once the two January recruits complete their academy training.
- Chief Rice and his staff secured multiple grants last year. Additionally, our administration, in partnership with the school district, secured funding to install cameras on all school buses to prevent drivers from illegally passing a stopped school bus. Under this program, if a driver is caught on camera violating the law, they will receive a violation notice, along with a photograph of the infraction and the associated fine. This program was implemented in September of last year with 211 violations issued to date. This number serves as a stark reminder that our children face daily risks, and drivers must be reminded that this law exists to protect them.
- Another critical program implemented is Project Lifesaver, designed to assist vulnerable individuals, such as those with Alzheimer's disease,

autism, or other cognitive disorders. The program uses GPS tracking technology to help locate individuals who wander from their homes, providing families with peace of mind. I have firsthand experience with the benefits of this program. A close friend of mine suffered from a memory disorder, and through Albany County, we were able to enroll his family in this initiative. I am humbled that we now offer this life-saving service here in Watervliet. For more information on Project Lifesaver, please contact the Watervliet Police Department or visit their website www.watervlietpolice.com.

→ In 2024, the department placed significant emphasis on addressing mental health in the community. With nearly 500 mental health-related calls for service, these numbers reflect the growing need for compassion and professionalism in assisting individuals and families facing these challenges. I want to express my heartfelt appreciation to each officer for their dedication and the sacrifices they and their families make every day. Your commitment has not gone unnoticed, and your positive impact on our city is immeasurable. Together, we will continue to build a safer and more vibrant Watervliet for all. Chief Rice has prepared a 2024 Summary Report detailing the department's progress, is available on the written copy of this presentation or on the police website.

Fire

Chief Tom Garrett has led our Fire Department since 2019 after having 20 years of experience as Fire Chief of Troy. We are fortunate to have an experienced leader continue to serve our city. Thank you, Chief Garrett, for

your continued dedication to the fire service and especially for the safety of our homes and citizens.

→ With Watervliet having a high resident population of nearly 10,000, the demand for EMS response remains as a critical need for our city. Our agency operates as both Fire and an Advanced Life Support agency, making us a unique city that currently ranks as the second busiest city in the capital region due to our population volume.

→ In 2024, the Watervliet Fire Department responded to a total of 2,603 calls with an average response time of 4 and ½ minutes.

- Watervliet Fire responded to 44 fire calls in the city this past year, with no fatalities, most of them were for mutual aid calls

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→ Over the past decade, the call volume has increased to its present level. Short of Schenectady, our 10,000-population run total is the most of any mutual aid department. The department brought in \$750,000 in ambulance revenue while other municipalities pay close to 1 million for ambulance services.

→ In 2024, two firefighters completed paramedic school over the past year. Currently the department has one firefighter who is nearing completion of his Paramedic training.

→ In August, the city welcomed Don Cicchinelli as a firefighter/EMT to the department. Don laterally transferred to Watervliet from Green Island Fire and is a welcomed addition to the department.

- In August, the Watervliet Fire Department sponsored a Fire Safety for Senior Citizens Presentation at the Watervliet Senior Center. The Red Cross provided sign-up sheets to schedule free installations of smoke detectors at their residences.
- In November, City Council passed a resolution approving a contract to study sites for a new Fire station. A 2022 risk assessment classified the current station as being in extreme flood zone risk. Our current station was built on the former Eric Canal and is experiencing settling in multiple locations causing structural damage to the building.

Water/Sewer

In April of 2024, Dave Dressel, our long-time supervisor of the Water Department, accepted employment with Regeneron. Thankfully, he has stayed as a consultant to continue work on several ongoing projects. Brian White was promoted to the new working supervisor of the Water Department and Mike Fagnoli has taken on a role with the department as well.

- ✓ Our combined sewer separation is close to completion – the final phase design is under review by NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation. This is a major accomplishment for the city to comply with our stormwater/sewer separation. Once this project is complete, we will have ALL stormwater going directly to the river and sewage going directly to the county sewer treatment plant instead of mixing during high rain events and then entering the river.

Phase I of the improvements to our Water Filtration Plant is complete, and in 2025 we are moving to Phase II. Some of the work that was completed or near completion is:

- additional security around the facility
 - a new maintenance garage to house our equipment
 - the relining of our clear water wells, which helps to treat the water at our plant.
- ✓ Another great accomplishment is our Federal Energy Regulatory Commission license (FERC) which is our 40-year hydroelectric license renewal. This license allows us to continue to use our water to supply hydroelectric power to reduce our utility costs and generate income for the city. We have been working with NYSDEC and other federal agencies over the past five years, and the license, while it has not been an easy process, is getting close.
- ✓ EPA's new federal lead and copper rule revisions have guided our new lateral inventory program. We are asking homeowners or tenants to follow the link from the QR code on the city website and fill out the survey including a photo from the wall/floor where the service enters the building. We will continue to seek funding to replace any lead laterals and more of our water line infrastructure.

Building and Code Enforcement

Our General Manager and Code Enforcement officials continue to strengthen our procedures and policies of the department and work closely with our police department to be able to see violations that may not be seen from outside the building. This has allowed the department to take control of several homes and were determined to have severe code violations or offenses and presented major health and safety risks to residents.

Over the last several years, we have worked hard to identify and assess buildings that pose a serious threat to the health and well-being of residents and visitors. These structures, often abandoned or poorly maintained, have become eyesores and dangerous hazards in our neighborhoods. Through a concerted effort, we have removed a substantial number of these dilapidated properties, restoring safety and revitalizing parts of our city.

The process is not quick or easy. It requires careful planning, collaboration with local agencies, communication with residents, and securing the necessary funding to ensure that these demolitions are carried out in a responsible and effective manner. We've worked with demolition contractors, public safety teams, and environmental experts to ensure that each structure is removed with the least disruption possible to surrounding areas.

We are committed not only to removing dangerous buildings and structures but also to ensure that the land they occupy can be used for new development, green spaces, or community projects that benefit everyone. The

removal of these structures is part of a larger vision for a safer, more vibrant city, and we will continue to build on the progress we've made to date.

As we move forward, we remain focused on the ongoing safety of our residents. Our teams are actively updating code enforcement procedures, monitoring neighborhoods, looking for other high-risk structures, and continuing to make the necessary improvements to protect our city's future and finally disentangle a long-standing problem for our community.

Department of Public Works/Sanitation

We all share the responsibility to maintain a cleaner city, and with everyone's cooperation and diligence it is my belief we can make a visible difference, and I believe we have. To help this goal become a reality the city has hired a garbage compliance officer who will be enforcing the garbage policies daily. We are currently working to have all residents have a tipper can for both their trash and recycling materials so it will reduce the opportunity of having trash blow around or accessible to birds and rodents. We are not looking to generate fines for residents but for a cleaner city for all of us and the pride everyone deserves in their home.

We will continue to work with both landlords and tenants to keep our city presentable, continue to ask our homeowners, landlords and tenants to follow the rules we have put into place to help achieve our shared goals.

- ✓ Bulk pickup dates will once again be offered in 2025. This program will run from April to December. We have 30 spots open per month at a cost

of \$35 per unit. I will remind residents to sign up early as last year we sold out each month.

- ✓ This year we are again offering a free bulk item drop off event at Hudson Shores Park. The event will be held **March 28th and** we will also offer another electronics recycling day during the year. We will announce that date once it is finalized. Residents can also go to our website and find other sources to get rid of their bulk items if they can't wait for a city pick up. Some items will be free and some might have a minimal charge.
- ✓ Again, to help educate our new residents or remind our current residents on the trash policy, we sent out a mailer explaining the policies to further help then not to receive a violation notice
- ✓ With the relocation of Price Chopper to 19th Street, the traffic pattern has changed significantly, causing further areas of congestion and safety on 19th Street. We listened to the resident concerns and had an engineering study completed and we will be relocating the stop light signal on 6th Avenue and 19th Street down to 5th Avenue and 19th Street. We believe that this change will significantly improve the flow and safety of traffic on this busy corridor.
- ✓ In 2024 the city acquired all our streetlights from National Grid which generated an estimated savings of \$120,000 per year. As part of this project the city has installed all the new LED streetlights which allow for better visibility on our streets.
- ✓ The city received Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) funding to help ease large vehicle congestion on 25th Street and to repave and rebuild

the entire street to the city line. We will be working with Barton & Loguidice Engineering to design the project and F.C.M. Engineering will be the project management firm overseeing the project on behalf of the city. This is a \$5 million project and hopefully will begin in 2026, while engineering will go on this year.

City council received the recommendations for streets to be paved in 2025 and we will be reviewing the list and finalize the list of streets based on the highest street in need. The list will be announced once the streets are clear of snow to properly evaluate them.

Financials

Its not a secret that the city's finances are a top priority of mine, that is one of the top reasons why I was asked to run for City Council and Mayor. Together, as a team, across all departments, we have been working hard to strengthen our current state and set us up for success in the future. Fund balance is one tool the NYS Comptroller uses to review the financial health of our city. We are expecting a positive fund balance in all three operating accounts and in 2023 we received a "no designation" for the NYS Fiscal Stress Score for 5 years in a row.

- ✓ The City successfully negotiated contracts with CSEA and the Watervliet Police Department and will continue to seek an agreement with the Fire Department.

- ✓ New York State approved an additional \$140,529 in Temporary Municipal Assistance funds, this is in addition to the State AIM funding of \$1,210,193 which had been stagnant for years. We hope this funding will continue into the future.
- ✓ With DOT grants such as CHIPs (Consolidated Highway Improvement Program), Pave Our Potholes, Pave NY and State Touring, the city was reimbursed over \$2,600,000 to pave the streets of the city in 2023 and 2024.
- ✓ We also received the following grants from Albany County - \$100,000 for the Community Center, \$19,000 for the public address system at the Dome, \$12,000 for 4th Street Tunnel camera.

Health insurance continues to be a challenge, we continue to work on a consortium with Albany County which we hope will provide options and savings to employees and the City. This has been talked about for nearly 6 years, and we continue to hope to get to the finish line.

The city currently has over \$11 million dollars of active grant projects. This money is funding projects for many facets of the city:

- water and sewer
- rehabilitation of our filter plant
- Park improvements
- purchase of new generators for the City Hall and our Senior Center
- Our reservoir and dam facility in Altamont
- Many sites and facilities are upgraded throughout the city

- ✓ We are continuing our search for funding to help offset the cost of installing an elevator at City Hall, which would make the building compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- ✓ We are working to have a Geographic Information Software system, GIS, which is in the process of being built. This system will house annual paving and ADA sidewalk repairs, water system upgrades (hydrants, valves) and maintenance and repairs to catch basins. We anticipate this being online in 2025.

Economic Development

We will once again be applying for Governor Hochul's Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) in 2025. The \$10-million-dollar funding associated with this grant will be a game changer for Watervliet, and we continue to gather ideas and suggestions from residents, businesses and consultants to assist in looking to the future of our city. Unfortunately, we failed to submit our DRI applications this year but we are confident we can submit an application that will be favorable to the state and help develop our business district in the upcoming year.

The City of Watervliet's 5th Annual Restaurant Week will be March 2-8. The city's social media platforms will listings of all participants and their menus. This event is supported by not only Watervliet residents but also brings people from nearby communities and helps in the success of our Watervliet businesses.

Closing

As many of us know, our General Manager Joe LaCivita has accepted another position in Martha's Vineyard. We wish Joe all the best and thank him for his service to Watervliet. We are accepting applications from interested candidates and anticipate interviews to begin within the next few weeks. I was also just notified that our Finance Director has accepted a position at Albany County Comptroller's office effective in April. Although not the best timing we will get through the transition and wish Amanda well.

City Council and I are proud of the city staff and of all the things we have accomplished as a team in the past year but our hard work is not complete. We will always be looking to improve our operations, financial position and services to the city. Watervliet continues to move forward because of all their hard work. Thank you all for your commitment to strive for better. I would also like to thank numerous volunteers for all of their hard work and dedication to our city. It is greatly appreciated by the council, our residents and I. As always, I strive to keep residents informed through my email distribution list and social media and remind you all that if you have questions or issues, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your time tonight to hear the state of our city and our plans for the year ahead. I wish us all a healthy and safe 2025.

Attached Police Report

Subject: Police Department Updates & Grant Initiatives

I wanted to provide an update on the Watervliet Police Department's ongoing initiatives and recent grant funding efforts.

Our key initiative remains Project Lifesaver, which will enhance our ability to locate individuals with cognitive conditions who may wander. This program will significantly improve public safety and community engagement.

Additionally, we are working on the following programs:

1. Lead Program (Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion)
2. Safe Child ID System
3. Cadet Program
4. Accreditation Program
5. Possible Starting K9 Unit (Labrador)

We have secured the following grants:

1. \$50,000 DCJS Grant to purchase a van for our Rapid Deployment Team.
2. \$50,000 DCJS Domestic Violence Grant to purchase a Ford Explorer for our Domestic Violence Detective, as well as a printer, forensic camera, and vest for an Equinox member.
3. \$24,860 DCJS Grant for a new and upgraded Livescan and Child ID System.
4. \$92,000 DCJS Grant for an Evidence Tech vehicle and a forensic drying chamber.

Total: \$ 216,850 secured in grant money

We have also submitted applications for additional funding opportunities:

1. \$490,000 Grant to replace seven marked patrol vehicles.

2. \$50,000 Cybersecurity Grant (THS Grant).
3. \$50,000 DHS Critical Infrastructure Grant.
4. \$32,000 Stranton K9 Foundation Grant to potentially establish an explosive detection canine program. If awarded, I will personally donate the canine (Labrador).
5. \$500,000 Mobil Command Center Vehicle Assembly John McDonald and Senator Jake Ashby

Total: **\$1,122,000** grants waiting on approvals or going to apply for

Total number of grant money: **\$1,338,860**

The LEAD Program is an alternative approach to addressing low-level offenses, particularly those driven by substance use, mental health issues, or poverty. Instead of arresting individuals for minor crimes, officers can divert them to community-based services that provide:

1. Substance use treatment and recovery support
2. Mental health counseling and crisis intervention
3. Housing assistance and social services
4. Job training and employment resources

These efforts are aimed at modernizing our department, strengthening community safety, and enhancing our operational readiness. I appreciate your continued support and look forward to discussing these initiatives further.