



STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

Mayor Marc Nelson

March 29, 2023

Greetings, Friends and Neighbors. It is my distinct honor and privilege to deliver the State of the City address to you this evening.

It is an evening of firsts. Our first State of the City address in this magnificent space, our first address with our Council Chairwoman and her colleagues in leadership, and of course, my first State of the City Address to you as Mayor.

Together, we are transforming our magnificent city into an efficient and effective unit of local government. We set about the job of regaining our proud status as the Queen City, and we remain focused on that and on repairing the wrongs of the past by making our local government more strategic, agile, and responsive to the needs of our community

Tonight, we celebrate a number of important milestones achieved, and we present our plan for the shared successes of this year and the years to come.

I'd like to thank our hosts here at The Academy, and recognize my colleagues in government gathered here with us tonight.

LIST OF ATTENDEES.

I particularly want to thank Council Chairwoman Natasha Brown for that wonderful introduction and to point out that there is a new era of cooperation between the administration and the Common Council, and Natasha is a major reason for this.

Regarding the Council, I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge my good friend, Councilmember Lorraine Johnson, who is term-limited, and thus will be leaving

the Council at the end of the year after eight years of serving her ward so well. Thank you, Lorraine.

I also want to acknowledge someone who couldn't be here tonight because he is busy with his new job in Albany — that is, former Mayor Rob Rolison. He paved the way for many of the accomplishments I'll be mentioning tonight, particularly his emphasis on the fiscal health of our city, the previously-unaddressed needs of our city's youth, and the importance of strong inter-governmental relations and bipartisanship. It means more than words can describe that Senator Rolison had trust in me to complete this term of office — and to finish the work that we started together.

Of course, if it wasn't for Rob, I would not be standing here before you this evening as Mayor. However, I cannot give our great Senator all of the credit. You see, I needed to first make sure that my family was behind me on this decision. As we all know, family is everything, and I have the best one around. They stand behind and with me, encouraging me to push forward and never ceasing to support me in all that I do. I am forever grateful for them. They are the best team one can ever wish for.

They aren't the only team in town, though. Together, we are all on Team Poughkeepsie. Each of you, and those watching at home.

The energy and support here in Poughkeepsie is contagious, and it seems like we have all caught the bug, or as we like to say in the Queen City, the buzz!

Last year at this time, I had no way of knowing I would be addressing you as mayor tonight. My tenure here has been an opportunity of a lifetime that has included overcoming significant obstacles that used to stand in our way. Together, we say not anymore. Not on our watch. The obstacles are gone.

Finances

As we go over the accomplishments of years past and plot our future successes, there is no better place to start than with our finances.

As has been the case ever since my time as Finance Commissioner, the foremost importance of our work, day in and day out, is restoring the fiscal credibility of this great city and ensuring that our future is fortified by the strongest financial foundation possible. Doing so will enable us to continue to position ourselves in a

way that improves the quality of life for our residents, businesses and patrons. Together, as we embark upon 2023, I am here to tell you that, in terms of our financial condition, the city is at its strongest in nearly twenty years.

The numbers speak for themselves: We have worked hard to reduce a \$13.2 million general fund deficit that we expect to be eradicated through the creation of the 2024 budget this year. That's not all that awaits; we also expect some very positive news from our rating agency. As the year unfolds, I am sure we will all be grateful that our hard work has finally been recognized as our bond rating continues to improve.

The goal is in sight. And with it comes a major reward. Reducing our deficit and rebuilding our fund balance hold the key to restoring our investment grade quality bond rating, which will lower our cost of borrowing. This is particularly urgent given the economic challenges caused by inflation and rising interest rates.

I want to thank Finance Commissioner Dr. Brian Martinez, the rest of our financial team, the department heads and the Common Council for their dutiful contributions to get us to this moment.

The city's finances also have been bolstered by the American Rescue Plan Act, but we know that money will be coming to an end — all the more reason to continue fortifying our financial house.

Along the way, the city administration made key, positive and strategic choices, including how we handled the negotiations of a 10-year sales tax agreement with Dutchess County and the City of Beacon. That agreement infused Poughkeepsie with an upfront \$3 million payment and guarantees a graduated increase in the percentage of sales tax received in Dutchess County over the next 10 years. We want to thank our county partners and the City of Beacon for these good-faith negotiations.

Public Safety

The fact of the matter is that improvements are being made across the board.

While we will stay intensely focused on the city's financial condition, we recognize services are important — and none more so than public safety. I want to thank Police Chief Tom Pape and Captains Rich Wilson and Steven Minard for their steady leadership over the years. The accomplishments are abundantly clear:

- Bringing more diversity to the police ranks through recent hirings.
- Guiding city residents by providing free preparation to those taking the police officer civil service examination.
- Reinstating a community policing unit along the Main Street corridor.
- Placing mental health professionals within the city Police Department to augment patrols and enhance community policing. With our partners Mental Health America of Dutchess County and Hudson River Housing, we are assisting those on the street in need of mental health or housing services.
- Creating a Procedural Justice Committee to give citizens more input and insights on policing as part of the successful Police Reform & Modernization Collaborative Report accepted and approved by the state.
- Securing additional Body Camera funding from New York State and Dutchess County totaling \$320,000.
- Installing 10 license plate reader cameras in strategic locations throughout the city, in addition to adding a gunshot detection system that will be online sometime in the second quarter.
- Starting a New York State Accreditation process that will increase our prospects for grants once the process is completed by the end of this year.

I think we all know that you can't acknowledge our Finest without mentioning the Bravest. Needless to say, I want to take a moment to thank and recognize our reinvigorated Fire Department.

Last year, our firefighters responded within minutes to more than 5,300 calls for service, of which more than 2,600 were for emergency medical response.

Fire Chief Joe Franco took the reins last year and is doing excellent work. Following this, Lt. Vincent Parise became the Deputy Chief.

Please take a moment to help me thank them for their service!

We have added Fire Inspectors and other staffers, along with some critically important equipment. Together, we will find a way to outfit the Fire Department with more resources they need to get the job done.

We have done a lot, but there is still so much to do. So far, we have secured a county grant for a new rescue boat, Marine 2. Other monies from that grant will go

to purchase an off-road vehicle and equipment to respond to calls on the department's section of the Dutchess County Rail Trail and the Urban Rail Trail.

The department also is raising public awareness about safety issues and plans to work with schools to help show how math and science is applicable to a career in fire service.

And we are working to make the department even stronger, including looking to secure a federal grant to replace fire boat Marine 1 and making improvements to our satellite firehouses.

Youth Division, Grants

While we continue providing these essential public safety services — and implementing new and dynamic ways of providing them — the city has greatly increased its capacity to help youth through key initiatives and new resources. We have created a Division of Youth Opportunity and Development at City Hall and, last year, hired Karen Williams as its first director.

Karen has worked with other members of the city team to implement the city's Youth Activities & Opportunities Grant program that began with \$140,000 in seed money in 2018 and has grown significantly every year since the program began. It's a remarkable accomplishment for the city, and it is just one example of our success at the difficult task of balancing the need to expand important services with the need to resolve our deficit and rebuild the city's fund balance.

These youth grant awards assist local nonprofits by providing funding to support clubs and leagues, expand exposure to arts and culture, and engage our youth in their own community in exciting new ways. Our program partners hold the keys to success, and I see many of them here with us tonight. Thank you for all you do, you are the real heroes and champions and because of your work we are seeing real change.

The Youth Grant Program has become more sophisticated as it has grown, with performance metrics becoming a hallmark. To this end, the city holds in-depth training sessions for applicants to answer questions and provide instruction on reporting requirements. I want to thank not only Karen, but also Social Development Director Jaclyn Greenwald for their outstanding work on administering the youth grant program.

This evening I can report to you that we will shortly be announcing more than \$400,000 in immediate awards under this program, some of which are for first-

time applicants as we continue to fund proven programs, even as we try to seed new ideas and new opportunities for our children.

Children's Cabinet

Collaboration and building partnerships are precisely how the city has been able to lift itself out of financial despair — and to start focusing on more positive and innovative initiatives. That is particularly true through the work of the Poughkeepsie Children's Cabinet, created by the city with our good friend, Poughkeepsie City Schools Superintendent Dr. Eric Rosser.

The Poughkeepsie Children's Cabinet — which brings together government agencies, child-serving community organizations, health institutions and other local stakeholders — is the only one in New York outside New York City. The Cabinet was formed in recognition of the fact that children spend 80 percent of their time out of the classroom and in the broader community. As such, we have embarked on a shared vision and cradle-to-career agenda for child and youth development throughout the city.

Don't take my word for it, though! New York State Board of Regents Chancellor Lester Young calls Poughkeepsie “a model for creating an ecosystem of success for small cities with big city challenges.”

We don't intend to let the Chancellor or the children down. In fact, the city's unique relationship with the school district has enabled us to move forward on some impressive fronts, including sharing a full-time bilingual public information officer who engages with the Latino community and is a liaison for the school district and city. Julee Molina has embedded herself in the Latino community, has created a bilingual newsletter and routinely works with the public library and so many more as we embark on all different types of important community outreach.

I especially want to thank the efforts of Robert Watson and James Watson for their work on the Children's Cabinet and for helping forge relationships with the Harlem Children's Zone, the Ed-Redesign Lab at Harvard Graduate School of Education and many others who have taken an interest in what the city is doing regarding youth and have shown a willingness to help.

The YOU

Last year served as a pivotal moment for another pillar endeavor that will greatly serve our youth. The former YMCA building, which had sat dormant for more than a decade, was demolished. The city took ownership of the property in 2019, and

following a series of public meetings, agreed to transfer the property to the county for the creation of a state-of-the-art Youth Opportunity Union. The county is moving through the design stage and will be seeking more funds to go with the \$25 million it has pledged to this project.

The city is also doing everything it can to support the project. In fact, we recently received a \$2.1 million federal grant to make infrastructure improvements in the area, including increasing the water capacity and enhancing the lighting at an adjoining ballfield.

Parks

Perhaps the city's most noticeable work of late involves our parks, which had long been neglected. We are plowing more than \$6 million into them.

We have worked with external stakeholders, such as Dutchess County, Scenic Hudson and New City Parks, to make significant and long-lasting improvements in the areas that need it most. This includes new benches, trees, basketball hoops, resurfaced courts, installation of new site lighting at Pershing Avenue Park and Malcolm X Park, and the installation of two soccer pitches at Pulaski Park — all Northside parks.

Our Public Works and Engineering Departments have been instrumental in this work, and I thank them for their service to the city.

The Pulaski Pool bathhouse is being replaced, and the one at Spratt Park Pool will be renovated, using funds the city has received via the American Rescue Plan Act.

At College Hill Park, picnic tables, benches and trash receptacles have been ordered and will be installed later in the spring. The backstop and infield fencing at the ballfield also were replaced.

On deck at King Street Park, playground equipment, chess tables and an ADA-compliant picnic table have been ordered and will be installed later in the spring, providing residents with the opportunity to exercise our minds and bodies.

On the waterfront, new playground equipment is coming to Waryas Park, and new picnic tables are coming to Kaal Rock Park, along with light improvements and a sand volleyball court.

These are just the highlights. It's now easier and more enjoyable to park at our parks as well, since the lots at Pulaski Park's Talmadge Street entrance, Stitzel Field, Kaal Rock Park and Spratt Park all have been paved.

While their help certainly is not limited to our park improvements, I do want to take this time to acknowledge the Dyson Foundation for continually stepping up and assisting the city when we present sound plans that benefit the community.

Arts

Five years ago, we began our Youth Grant Program with an initial investment of \$140,000. The model, starting small and growing year-by-year, is the way that small cities with challenging budgets have to meet the changing needs of their community.

This evening, I am announcing that the city will employ a similar strategy as we seek to build on Poughkeepsie's strength as a regional hub for the Arts. We can no longer sit back and expect great things to happen when we as a local government make no financial commitment to ensure that it does.

It seems like a long time ago to me, but it was former Mayor Rolison who created the City's Public Arts Commission, a group of volunteers led by Chairman Jeff Aman, just about six years ago now, and their work uplifts the whole city, month after month. Thank you, Jeff.

The next phase starts now, as we will deploy up to \$140,000 in ARPA funds to seed our new multi-year commitment to Arts in the City of Poughkeepsie.

Comprehensive Plan

The city has recently chalked up some major victories on the land-use front as well. First, the city finalized the update to our Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan, something that hadn't been done in two decades. The changes will enable us to increase public access along the water and enhance our chances of receiving state funding for capital projects, among other improvements.

And now we are seeking qualified developers to offer their visions for a 14-acre jewel on the city's southern waterfront. We have released a Request for Expressions of Interest (RFEI) for the DeLaval site, the last parcel with undeveloped acres on the city's waterfront. We are looking for qualified developers or organizations that have both the experience and financial capabilities to successfully complete this redevelopment project. And we are looking for creative, compatible waterfront uses, such as restaurants, a boutique hotel, docks, water recreation, and other such activities.

Late last year, the city also approved and published a revamped Comprehensive Plan after significant public engagement and feedback. Not to mention the great work of its Steering Committee, comprised of residents, business owners and community leaders. This Comprehensive Plan replaces a 20-year-old version and lays the foundation for important citywide zoning code updates. All this will positively impact development in the city while addressing important quality-of-life issues.

I want to thank our consultant team at czb LLC, and their partners Ingalls Planning & Design for what promises to be a strong and valuable end product.

The city's re-visioning work didn't end there. We participated in Dutchess County's "9.44.55 Study" of the arterials that is exploring how to redesign and rethink the major roads to improve safety and simplify travel for motorists, cyclists, those who walk and those who use public transportation.

These are not just lofty goals. We work on them every day, in ways both big and small. Improvements have already been made to pedestrian safety, including adding traffic signals, better signage and traffic markings at about a dozen locations. Don't be surprised when you see more crews out there working as the weather gets warmer and the days get longer.

Economic Development

Getting more of these components in place is essential because the city is buzzing with all types of development. In total, there were 1,782 building permits filed in 2022, about in line with the 1,797 filed in 2021.

The development of the former Dutton Lumber Yard — now known as Dutchess One — is completed in the city, adding 304 housing units and a couple of commercial spaces, including a restaurant.

The Wallace project on Main Street was issued demolition permits at the end of 2022, and the building permit for the construction is currently being reviewed.

We have secured a \$950,000 grant through Restore NY grant program to fund renovations to Up-to-Date.

And there have been some great new businesses opening downtown, including The Academy, Canvas and Clothier, Goodnight Kenny, The Dutch Crown, Midnight Munchies Company, Little Loaf Bakeshop, Ginza Sushi, Mercat by 1915, Mira

Mira Florals, Flowers by Angel, UpStream Café, Empire Jamaica Fusion ... just to name a few.

It should come as no surprise that we have launched a business attraction campaign with the help of Ashworth Creative, undertaking video and social media advertising. We are a business-friendly locality, attracting the best in class for our residents and neighbors alike.

As if that is not enough, we also have hired a consultant to complete the Main Street Façade Design Manual that will support that grant program this year. We will make this key investment in Main Street, continuing our efforts to enhance our core area and recognizing we are blessed with a historic Main Street and a vibrant, diverse community that we must do all we can to nurture.

To that end, I am pleased to announce this evening that the city will support and help implement a Downtown Business Improvement District, organized by the property owners within the district footprint. The concept of a BID was raised some years ago, but the headwinds and challenges the city faced made it one of those suggestions that was, frankly, a little ahead of its time. Today, now that we have regained our financial footing, updated our Comprehensive Plan, and are working strategically with our partners in the business and nonprofit communities, I believe it is the right time to renew our commitment and double-down on our Main Street corridor and the surrounding area. The formation of the business improvement district will give voice – and funding – to our community so that decisions aren't made solely by City Hall, but by all the stakeholders of the district.

Housing

Anyone paying attention and seeing the patterns throughout the Hudson Valley knows we need more housing of every type, and I am proud to say the city does more for affordable housing than any other municipality in Dutchess County, by far. I think that bears repeating – we do more in support of affordable housing than any other municipality in the county. It is also not accurate to say that Dutchess County doesn't play its part – just this week the County Executive announced nearly \$9 million in funding for affordable housing development in the county, and three of those projects are right here in the City of Poughkeepsie.

In fact, with only two examples that I know of, the city has not denied any development that proposed adding residential housing units of any kind, and, of the nearly 1,000 housing units that have been added in the last few years, around one-

third of those are affordable housing, based on Dutchess County Average Median Income (AMI) thresholds.

I want to thank our partners Hudson River Housing, Rebuilding Dutchess and Habitat for Humanity for employing various strategies to get people into affordable homes, and I want to acknowledge the work of the City-County Land Bank, led by board chair the Rev. Susan Fortunato, and her fully engaged board of directors.

Among our achievements:

- Responsibly distributing approximately \$1 million in Community Development Block Grant funding for COVID recovery efforts. That included monies through a Rental Assistance Program administered by Hudson River Housing. And it included an Eviction Assistance Program administered by Legal Services of the Hudson Valley, Inc.
- Working with Dutchess County Government to create the land bank to return vacant, abandoned and tax-delinquent properties in the community to productive use.

Just as important, we continue to press the issue. We have released a comprehensive study that highlights the challenges and opportunities the city is facing regarding recent housing trends. The report was prepared by Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress. And now the Common Council is taking a fresh look at the issue through a vacancy study and formation of a committee led by First Ward Council Member Debra Long.

Homelessness is another matter that must be addressed. After facing some opposition, our county partners decided not to create a new shelter on Oakley Street, but the county is committed to moving forward with a new, evidence-based model that involves the type of support services and programming that our homeless need to get back on their feet. This summer, the county intends to begin using space at the decommissioned former jail facility to begin this venture. They will continue searching for a permanent Emergency Housing Facility location, and I will continue having conversations with Dutchess County Executive William F.X. O'Neil and key county staffers as they pursue this important endeavor.

Infrastructure

It's no secret the city's aging infrastructure needs unrelenting care as well. We continue to improve water and sewer lines. In fact, the City Engineer has prepared

a Master Plan to facilitate capital planning of future water system improvements to address flow and water quality deficiencies at 26 locations throughout the city.

Three significant bridge projects are in the pipeline, including the Garden Street, Washington Street and Mansion Street-Pershing Avenue bridges. All these bridges cross the Fallkill Creek.

More roads are getting milled and paved. In fact, we will be tripling the number of roads being repaved and using two contractors, not just one, to get this work done in a more timely fashion.

Trees are being trimmed and removed, while others are being planted. Emergency water leaks and potholes fixed, catch basins repaired or cleaned and fire hydrants tested and serviced.

There are not enough hours in the day for the work we are doing. Day in and day out, rain or shine. Our city is being repaired above and below ground.

Public Outreach

As we go about our daily work, and as we find time for the innovative and important undertakings that will yield these long term dividends, we will continue to do our level best to keep people informed. Our community engagement efforts, led by John Penney, have resulted in an expansion of “The Buzz” – the City newsletter that includes information about community events, and a dramatic growth in the city’s social media reach, through Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter. Thanks to the work of many, especially our IT Department, we have improved the functionality of our website and made it easier for people to sign up for notifications.

The City Chamberlain’s Office also continues to take tactical and incremental steps toward technology modernization with an eye toward solutions that promote efficiency, consistency and scalability.

The launch of the online FOIL system has allowed for more efficient workflows throughout City Hall with more than 500 unique FOIL requests successfully processed in 2022.

Utilization of the online appointment system by the public has allowed our office to manage traffic flow and keep our busy lobby congestion-free.

Records digitization is a significant process that would continue to preserve the integrity of our City’s historical documents as well as provide a searchable

database for more efficient records requests, streamlining work for frontline counter staff, providing critical information for agency executives and elected officials and creating a more user-friendly experience for residents and public sector workers alike.

In addition to the work of the Common Council and our standing boards and commissions, the city has carried out various public meetings and undertaken all forms of public engagement before deciding to sell the former YMCA site to Dutchess County, before updating our Comprehensive Plan and now our Zoning Code documents, before compiling our Police Modernization and Reform Report, and as we have continued to deliver vital, life-saving information about COVID and other health issues.

Also, city staffers can often be seen at community events around Poughkeepsie, and we do our best to promote other public activities in the city.

We are all fluent in Poughkeepsie, and as we go over the many accomplishments achieved here this evening, it is my hope that we all continue to read from the same sheet of success in 2023 and beyond.

Summary

Through dealing with cash shortfalls and COVID, through bolstering public safety and making park improvements, through guiding business growth and housing development, we, as a city, have faced extraordinary challenges these past few years and endured.

Undoubtedly, the city has momentum to thrive and prosper. Not even a global pandemic could slow us down for long!

As I bring this State of the City address to a close, I want to thank my wife, Lisa, for all her support. I also cannot emphasize enough how grateful I am to our all City employees who serve across the entire organization — it's an amazing team! And on behalf of the city's more than 365 workers, I want to thank our residents for their partnership and support as we continue to advance our shared goals and priorities.

Thank you, and God Bless the Great City of Poughkeepsie.

