



**City of Port Jervis 2023  
State of the City Address  
By: Mayor Kelly B. Decker  
January 25, 2023**

Councilman-At-Large Siegel, Council members Fuller, Mann, Miller, Newhauser, Decker, Foster, Livingston, and Simmons; Department Heads, distinguished guests, and ladies and gentlemen of the City of Port Jervis.

I stand before you to deliver my 10<sup>th</sup> State of the City Address. I have presented to you, in the past, a planned procedure of growth and maturation for our city and if we stay the course we will continue to grow and prosper.

I restate this phrase in many of my state of the city addresses ‘to look at where we are, we must remind ourselves what the past looked like not so many years ago.’ Our city’s future is at stake and the simplest disregard for progress can lead to years of devastation.

So, let us begin with what happened in the city in 2022. Careful planning and seeking of funds will produce wayfinding signs throughout our city in 2023. A sample is currently on East Main Street and the implementation of over 30 wayfinding signs throughout the city will help visitors find what they need, instead of perhaps just driving through. In May of 2022 the Transportation History Museum began operations with Operation Toy Train and the Dining Car Society. This development is breathing new life into our downtown as well as our past by attracting people from near and far to visit our little city on the banks of the Delaware. Our parks are being spruced up and two major improvements will be made this year with secured funds through our new state Senator James Skoufis to add a stage, lighting and sound system as well as some aesthetic work on Orange Square Veterans Park and Pike Street. In addition, there will be a new boat launch, curbing, paved parking lot and total rehabilitation of the bath houses at West End

Beach. Both parks are used extensively by our citizens, visitors and Veterans. Another improvement that began in 2022 and that will continue this year is the transformation of Pike Street with new concrete sidewalks that have a bluestone appearance as well as new lighting, waste receptacles, and shade trees. Pike Street will also be paved this year completing a total paving of all major streets and arteries in our city over the last 10 years. The traffic light at Jersey Avenue and East Main Street will be completely replaced making traffic and pedestrian flow safer. There are plans to break ground this year on a new DPW facility on Tow Path Road, that has been annexed into the city, Additionally, we hope to start rehabilitation work on the Farnum House to breath new life back into this historic gem.

Continuing our 4<sup>th</sup> year of sewer relining, this year will be no different. This 10-year + project takes our existing old dilapidated sewer line system and rejuvenates it by relining the pipe with fiberglass that is hardened and has an approximate 250-year lifespan. Initially a \$99 million pipe replacement project, creative minds, investigation, and commitment to reduce that price yielded a reduction of \$77 million dollars to an approximate \$22 million project. This was done by purchasing the equipment, through grants, and training our very talented DPW employees the operations and procedures to perform pipe relining thus saving the city a tremendous amount of money. To continue and complete this project the city was able to show the state the cost effectiveness and was therefore awarded a \$20 million-dollar 0% interest loan through EFC additionally the city also received a \$5 million dollar grant as well.

While the pandemic was certainly challenging for all of us; our city's finances remained stable during those trying times. Unfortunately, we

now experiencing increased expenses that were not planned, nearly a 25% overall increase, as the cost of living has also increased with inflation. To maintain our financial stability that helps us get those zero percent and low interest loans that we do; the council had to pass a budget in 2022 that was over the tax cap. As I have said before, if we follow our effective strategic plan, we will be able to sustain through this rough water. I watch where many municipalities are using their rainy-day funds, also known as their fund balance, to balance their budgets and keep their tax increases low. Unfortunately, they are gambling on increased revenue that they may or may not see. Your city department heads and city council members have work hard to keep expenses down while effectively trying to run a city and not putting us at that risk.

Many things make the city better and business growth in Port Jervis is certainly one of them. Business growth in our city continued in 2022 and 2023 even looks more promising. Our first Urgent Care opened at 9 Orchard Street located on the corner of Orchard and Fowler Street. Dr. Brandon O'Connor along with his wife, well established Port Jervis pediatrician Dr. Sara Little, took the leap of faith in our city and we wish them well. Speaking of healthcare, Cornerstone Family Healthcare located at 140 Hammond Street also completed their \$5+ million-dollar upgrade of the former Sunnyside Hospital. This past fall they had a grand re-opening to offer many primary health and dental services to the citizens of our city and surrounding area. These state-of-the-art facilities show the valued commitment to our community and its healthcare needs. After many years in Milford, PA, Breathless Raw Juice Bar made the bold decision to move to our city at 85 Pike Street and bring with them some of the finest healthy alternatives for our everyday life and we welcome them. If you are looking for a new place to eat, look no further than Sazon Latino a new sit-down restaurant at 50-52 Front Street that

offers Latino American food that is really incredible and if it is breakfast or lunch you are craving, the Bagel Barn has opened its doors at 31 Pike Street. Thank you again to the many businesses new and old that create the variety of offerings that brings people to the City of Port Jervis.

Although it seems to have started many years ago, the annexation of property from the Town of Deerpark into the City of Port Jervis is now complete. This past fall Orange County accepted the map changes and as of March 1<sup>st</sup>, this year, nearly 104 acres of light industrial land at the old Dick's Concrete and nearly 18 acres of commercial retail space near the I-84 interchange officially moves into the city limits. This is the first known annexation into the city since its inception in 1907. There are developers already interested in both locations that could bring not only jobs but potential revenue to the city. This is certainly a win for us all.

So, what really could draw even more people to come to Port Jervis? We see it, we know it, we just need to expand upon it. It's rafting, tubing, canoeing or kayaking down the river, it's hiking or biking on the Watershed Trails, it's camping in Elks-Brox Park, it's attending festivals and events, it's having a city that has activities and museums for people to pass their time. If this continues to grow as it has over the last 10 years so will our businesses. Development of Riverside Park is crucial to our future. The pump track shows the draw and so will the disc-golf when it opens this spring. How does all this happen? Volunteers: that work with our departments and our employees to make our city prosper and flourish.

I've said this every year and will repeat it again. Our volunteer organizations in our city are one of the most vital parts of this city's growing success. Whether it be the churches, individuals or even

community organizations that provide food pantries for those in need, give comfort and shelter to those who are without, or offer resolution to those that are struggling; we can't overlook their very important part in helping those in need who are right here in our community. We also have organizations that draw attention to our city and willfully work hard to develop activities and events that bring people here to our city from far and wide. This past year our volunteers in the Watershed Park and Elks-Brox Park have added several trails while others are creating a 9-hole disc golf course in Riverside Park. Whether it is the Transportation History Museum, the 1-mile length of the D&H Canal, or the soon to reopen campground at Elks-Brox Park our volunteers cut trees, clear brush, pickup garbage and tidy our city to make these places attractive for our visitors. This year, of course, will be no different. This year we will see the implementation of the largest growing pastime sports in America, Disc Golf at Riverside Park. This course is 9-hole course and is designed for beginning and experienced players. We will also see more changes at the turntable this year as the Transportation History Museum in cooperation with Operation Toy Train and the Dining Car Society brings the nearly two century old turntable property back to life. These all serve as great educational resources for our residents and visitors alike. These changes and activities are mostly coordinated and completed with volunteers from **The Outdoor Club of Port Jervis** under the direction of the man who makes things happen Michael Ward.

So, as I stated before, our city finances continue to be stable and our Moody's Rating remains at A3 'stable operations.' Financial stability for our city is imperative and those in charge of our city in the future must focus on continuing the trend that has been created for them. Our **City Clerk's Office** can be most certainly credited with effectively

making this work. This past year was the first complete year that our City Clerk Treasurer Laura Quick has been with the city. Besides all of her other tasks, Ms. Quick took on the task of bringing in a new comprehensive finance software package system that was desperately needed and about to go online very soon. This system will connect every department to give them real time availability of their expenses and trends. It will improve checks and balances with each department and replace our existing software system that is antiquated. This department and its dedicated employees continue to provide countless functions that maintain our city operations. From records keeping, tax and other collections, to licensing and paying the bills. The Clerk Treasurer employees are an extreme asset to our city's survival.

Next our city **Assessor's office**, with Teresa Spradling at the helm, as always, keeps on top of properties in the city. They are constantly reviewing and inspecting property inventory changes. They make revisions to the city tax map and have worked very diligently to make the Annexation process come to fruition. Real estate, as many are aware, is on the move, the Assessor's office keeps on top of sales and handouts "Welcome Packet's" with information from all departments to our new property owners. The Assessor monitors exemptions and unfunded mandates as well. This past year they also helped seniors save a little more on city taxes by requesting an income level increase in city exemptions. The Assessor also works with Orange County in updating 911 changes with the revision and addition of street numbers and the goals this year for the Assessor is to produce an accurate and fair assessment to all the tax payers.

Our **Building Department** seeks compliance to the laws set forth by New York State and zoning requirements set forth by the city. In 2021,

there were 240 building permits issued in the city. In 2022, there were 291. This shows positive growth but it is also a task that a very small department must accomplish to make sure that the construction, improvements or changes are done correctly and up to standards. This past year the building department led by Building Official David Rivera, has reviewed several major projects that either have begun, will begin, and open in 2023 such as the hotel on Front Street, a health facility at the Port Plaza and the move of Project Discovery to Jersey Avenue. In addition, the department must go out and inspect violations that are reported or that they witness. This department will surely be receiving development requests, shortly, for the newly annexed properties and must review those plans and inspect during the construction period. The building department is a very valuable asset to the maintenance, construction and inspection of businesses and residents in our city and they should be applauded for their exceptional work.

Major changes have been made in our **Department of Public Works**. Longtime Director Jack Farr retired at the beginning of 2022 and seamlessly the Assistant Director Steve Duryea took over. While the council considered the candidates for the Assistant Director position by rotating each of these able candidates, they ultimately chose Wayne Addy as the Assistant Director of Public Works. Wayne has stepped into this position very nicely and is truly an asset to the City of Port Jervis. This continues the trend of hiring and promoting individuals that can help save the city millions of dollars by tackling projects in house with employees that have trade skills. Of course, our largest in-house project is the sewer line replacement project. Explained earlier, we will continue this replacement program for the next several years. Our very talented DPW employees took on projects like the Pike Street sidewalk replacement that will continue through this year as well as the prepping



and paving of Minisink Avenue, East Main Street, West Main Street, Ferry Street and River Road by replacing and repairing manholes and catch basins. The water department, also part of the DPW, installs services and repairs water, sewer and storm main breaks, operates our city water plant that produces nearly 330 million gallons of pristine potable water a year and also maintains dams and roads in our watershed. As stated earlier we hope to have a shovel in the ground this year for a new DPW facility. It is slated as a slow transition to a new home at the city's old landfill location just annexed into the city. This multi-phased project will remove them from the dilapidated city barn on Franklin Street, that is in a flood zone, to a new facility that will be conducive to their needs for many years to come. In addition to the work above and their daily tasks of garbage, recycling and cardboard pickup as well as their seasonal leaf, debris and holiday tree pickups, this department worked on several projects including the rehab and painting of the underpass, painting of the exterior of city hall and completion of the police department expansion in 2022.

Our city **Fire Department** is our key to the past when it comes to small cities. Rarely can you find a dedicated ALL-VOLUNTEER fire department in a city. These brave men and woman responded to 404 calls in 2022 which is an increase of 4% from 390 in 2021. Additionally, mutual aid requests were up 18% in 2021 and in this past year it increased to 28% for 113 mutual aid responses. There were 11 structure fires in the city in 2022 and our department has a well-trained staff to help save life and property of our residents and businesses. This department is now compliant with New York laws including bail out systems. Again, successful grants were awarded to the Fire Department to purchase gear and certify 8 Train the Trainor's. In 2023, the department will receive its Rescue Support Vehicle as well as a new

pumper/rescue unit. These two vehicles replace an aged-out pumper and heavy rescue vehicle. Our city dive team were certified in 2022 in side scan sonar that will help in water rescues. Additionally, for our dive squad, the department was able to procure a large amount of equipment to become compliant with New York State dive standards. Preparing for our city's future our fire chiefs are researching and attended a conference on Fire Station design to look at how our department can run more efficiently in the future. The goals of the department this year are to get two members certified as Public Safety Dive Instructors, for the Department to become accredited in Technical Rescue that includes dive, swift water, rope, confined space and boat operations. They will be working on a life cycle replacement program for all apparatus and support vehicles as well as to continue educating and training a process of moving towards a central station fire house in the future. Chief Brown with his assistants and members of the fire department are always seeking ways to improve the safety of our residents and businesses here in the City of Port Jervis.

Our other emergency department is our city's **Police Department** led by our very long-time dedicated Police Chief William Worden this department is truly a 21<sup>st</sup> Century model police department. They are now in their new expanded work place that enhances the safety for the police department staff and community partners. This department is focused in providing effective and professional community oriented policing services to the residents and visitors of our community. In 2023, the goal is complete the policy conversion to meet New York State Accreditation Standard and to seek that Accreditation. This is made possible as the council returned a fulltime administrator back into the department. Now administration can work on the 110 different standards in 3 categories of Administration, Training and Operations.

Accreditation provides formal recognition that an agency meets or exceeds expectations of quality and professionalism. Our police department will continue to make collaboration and reform part of its ongoing interaction with the public. The police department keeps the citizens advisory board well informed of changes and seeks their advice in the hiring process. The department is continuing efforts to seek training and implementation of less lethal technologies such as the new BolaWrap a remote restraint device that discharges a cord that wraps and immobilizes a fleeing suspect; significantly reducing the chance of injury. The department also continues to work on wellness of its officers as the position is more challenging than it was years ago. The mental and physical health of officers is imperative to be at peak performance. In addition, the department offers a plethora of community outreach programs that include National Night Out, Fall Harvest Festival, Youth Leadership Academy, Senior Safety Initiatives, and much more. Police Departments need to be proactive in the community and this department could certainly be a model to follow.

The **Recreation Department** led by John Faggione certainly works hand in hand with the community outreach part of the city's police department. The Youth Center continues to rebound from COVID and hopes that 2023 will result in the number of children back before the pandemic. 4,093 youths were in attendance at the center in 2022. This past year has seen the return of teen night as well as Little Chefs and Busy Bodies. Over 11 different community organizations use the Youth Center for meeting purposes. The recreation department also maintains our city parks as well as providing summer programs and events throughout the year. West End Beach that is projected to be overhauled this spring had one of the busiest summers recorded in 2022. The summer youth program that offers arts, crafts, sports and slip and slide

Fridays at 2 playgrounds as well as the youth center, also offer free lunch and served over 800 kids this past summer. 7 free music concerts were held in 2022 as well as 2 free outdoor movie events. Much of this is paid for by grants through the Orange County Youth Bureau. All of these and more are planned again for this year. Additionally, the Recreation Department plans and offers at a cost Casino trips, a major league baseball game and an NFL football game. Special events this year for the public will be the Easter Candy Dash, 28<sup>th</sup> Delaware River 5k Run, 74<sup>th</sup> Annual Halloween Parade, the Spring and Fall Clean-ups, a Food Truck Festival and Fireworks show on July 3<sup>rd</sup> as well as being co-sponsors for the Polar Plunge with the Fire Department, Fall Harvest Festival with the Police Department, and the Stone Challenge with the Outdoor Club.

**The Port Jervis Community Development Agency** led by its Executive Director Valerie Maginsky, works diligently through the year to secure funding for many of the projects that help our city move forward and improve. Grants, especially for our sewer line replacement program are imperative. The Port Jervis CDA was able to write, submit and have awarded over \$8 million allowing the city to purchase equipment, get material, and train operators to reline our city sewer lines. The CDA has also contributed to the pending EFC Hardship 0% loan for \$20 million. Additionally, the Port Jervis CDA has worked on and will continue to seek funding for projects that are in need here in our city. Some potential projects would be the replacement of a 24” main coming out of our water plant, climate sustainability, and locations to place EV chargers throughout the city. The CDA also works with the mayor’s office in its attempt to secure downtown revitalization money. The Port Jervis CDA attends various networking conferences for the city as well as managing our Section 8 housing program. Through 2022, the

Port Jervis CDA has seen an increase in rentals and maintains a waitlist, 72 applicants came from the waitlist and 35 families are currently under the Housing Choice and Mainstream vouchers program making affordable housing safe. One of the families in this program became our first homebuyer. This agency is now in a good financial stable condition under the direction Ms. Maginsky who took over and improved operations. This department will continue its efforts in 2023 to make Port Jervis a great place to live, work and play.

I would certainly be remised if I didn't tell the public how tremendously valuable our volunteers on the **Port Jervis Tourism Board** really are. Led by Laura Meyers, for over 10 years, these volunteers put on incredible events that draw thousands of visitors to our city. These visitors have returned, whether it be to other events, shop here, eat here, hike here, bike here, camp here, raft here or yes even move here to our city. The tourism board overcame obstacles due to COVID and bounced right back with a major success this year in the Lunar Chinese New Year celebration, ahead are events like the St Patrick Day Parade and Blarney Blast, City Wide Yard Sale, Fabulous Fifties, Bella Notte Italiana Festival, Fall Foliage Festival and the Chirstkindlmarkt that these volunteers bring together and make our city shine.

So now, as I complete my 10<sup>th</sup> State of the City Address, I would like to take a moment to let you know that every two years our citizens have an opportunity to pick individuals who reside here to be their local leaders; whether it be the city's Mayor, Councilperson-At-Large, or 2 representatives from each of the 4 wards and this year is no different. However, after 10 years as your city's Mayor and 2 years before that as your Councilman-At-Large, I have decided that I will not seek re-election. I have been extremely humbled and honored to serve the

citizens of the City of Port Jervis in this capacity. I believe I have worked very hard with our dedicated city employees to make major improvement to our city and brought about dramatic positive change. Is there still work to be done? Absolutely! I still have a plethora of ideas I can offer but I believe that this is the time to step aside and give someone else the opportunity to help move our city forward. Different ideas inspire change and it is my hope that someone is elected that can offer a breath of fresh air to our city with positive hope for our future. This is not goodbye as this is the city that I was born and raised in. I will certainly have more time to volunteer myself in improving our city. However, it is also a break that I need. I just ask that the citizens to please make sure you vote on Tuesday, November 7<sup>th</sup> and before you do, gather everything you can on each of the candidates that choose to run for office. Don't just accept "this is what we are going to do." Ask them how they plan on implementing what they are going to do and get details.

Now for the next 340 days, I will continue to work hard to move our city in a forward direction, to allow recreation to flourish so that it can provide years of positive economic stability and growth to our businesses. Let us seek to find, through careful planning, coordination, and cooperation the growth and development our city needs through industry and business to make sure this city moves forward and prospers.

Your thoughts are simply an email, phone call or social media post away. Check out our city website at [www.portjervisny.gov](http://www.portjervisny.gov) for all city information and updates.

To our residents, let your voice be heard. This is your city! Offer your ideas and thoughts, and if the spirit moves you, get involved.

It is my earnest hope that God will bless our small city on the banks of the Delaware; Port Jervis, New York as well as the great State of New York and these United States of America.

Thank you!