



**City of Port Jervis 2022
State of the City Address
By: Mayor Kelly B. Decker
January 27, 2022**

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

If 2021 showed this world anything was that people have strong opinions. In those opinions, unfortunately, the messages can be interpreted differently by others when received. I suppose what we can take from that, perhaps, is that we must all learn to respect each other's opinions and ideas. By doing so together, we can make this place we call home the best that it can be. As the pandemic of 2019 appears to continue its strong hold on the health and safety of so many, remote contact has appeared to become the norm for many. I desperately hope this year, that will change; and what use to be normal returns.

This is my ninth address to the residents of the City of Port Jervis and although we saw some tremendous change in 2021, I see a bright and promising future for our small little city on the banks of the Delaware.

The Strategic Plan that I put together eight years ago and have updated and renewed every year is working. It's certainly not perfect, but we are seeing the fruits of this plan working with major projects tackled and completed. We are seeing growth in residential as well as commercial properties. We have completed one of the largest land annexations in New York State and the focus is to continue to grow as well as thrive economically, and aesthetically, to produce a city that draws the attention of people from many different walks of life.

The key to our success is hands down our city employees and her volunteers.

I would like to show you this evening what each of our departments accomplished during the past year not only in continuing the regular operation of a small city but what they do above and beyond to accomplish the goals set in the strategic plan and what they envision for a prosperous 2022.

First and foremost are our volunteer organizations in our city. Whether it be the churches, individuals or 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 alone the focus has been on our hiking and biking trails, activities at Riverside Park, opening the campground at Point Peter, clearing the brush from the 1-mile length of the D&H Canal that is here in our city and most highlighted is the revitalization of the Erie Turntable. This year will be no different. This year we will see a development of one of the largest growing pastime sports in America, Disc Golf at Riverside Park. This course is 18 holes and is designed for beginning and experienced players. At the turntable we will begin to see new (old) trains positioned, rehabilitated and the creation of a historical reminder of transportation in here our city. This will serve as great education center resource. The turntable, control booth and railyard will have a new facelift and education and activity programs will begin soon after. These activities are the results of one community organization **The Outdoor Club of Port Jervis.**

This year again our city finances have continued to bounce back, and our Moody's Rating was finally upgraded to A3 'stable operations.' One thing we have worked very hard to improve over the last 8 years was our financial stability and we must focus on continuing that trend to build a stronger financially stable city. Our **City Clerk's Office** can be credited with effectively making this work. This level of upgrade shows a positive forward movement in the city's financial stability. Speaking of our finances, the city experienced a major change in our city clerk's office this past year. After many years of service Robin Waizenegger, our City Clerk Treasurer retired, and the city now has a new City Clerk Treasurer Laura Quick. We wish Robin well in her retirement. This department and its employees continue to provide countless functions that maintain the city operations. From records keeping, tax and other collections to licensing the Clerk Treasurer employees are an extreme asset to our city's survival. This year they will oversee a comprehensive software package installation that will provide real time availability of accounts, improve checks and balances within departments and replace a very aging software system used in that office.

Our city **Assessor's office** 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 during the Annexation process as we take multiple properties into the city from the Town of Deerpark for both Commercial and Light Industry use. Started in 2017, this office of 2, will have completely updated photos of all city properties by the end of 2022. As real estate is on the move here, the Assessor's office keeps on top of sales as well as handouts "Welcome Packet's" with information from all departments to our new owners. The Assessor monitors exemptions and unfunded

mandates as well. This year they will also focus on helping seniors save a little more on city taxes by requesting an income level increase in city exemptions.

This past year has been a stellar year for our **Building Department**. Between major commercial projects and increases due to municipal searches, increased property sales and over 240 building permits issued; this department stays busy. There are 6 large commercial projects that are currently underway here in the city with nearly all being completed in 2022. The challenge this year, the building department will surely receive development requests from the newly annexed properties as well as new commercial projects currently under review and development that will soon be released to the public.

What is done today in and on our city streets as well as below ground level we hold “Thanks” to our employees of the **Department of Public Works**. Over the last 8 years this department has taken on tasks that in years past were put out to bid and given to private contractors. They have saved this city millions of dollars and will continue to do so in years to come by tackling projects in house as we hire individuals that have those trade skills. One of the largest projects is that of the sewer line replacement. A fine for a broken sewer main in early 2012 launched a comprehensive investigation by the New York State Department of Conservation that led to the city needing to replace its aging sewer infrastructure underground. A \$99 million dollar price tag, if put out to bid, has been substantially diminished by this department training its employees on a new form of realigning that will give existing sewer pipes a potential 200 plus year life expectancy for a fraction of the original estimate. Additionally, this department paved city streets, performed repairs and replacement of pipes throughout the city;

including manholes and catch basins. The DPW also replaced, at a fraction of the cost, a culvert on Warren Place that had washed away. The water department, also part of the DPW installs services and repairs main breaks, the water plant produces 330 million gallons of pristine potable water a year and maintains dams and roads in our watershed. Currently DPW is slated for 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 2022, on top of everything they do each year, this department will work on several projects including rehab and painting of the underpass, painting of the exterior of city hall and completion of the police department expansion to name a few. I would be remised if I didn't mention that tomorrow is the final day, before retirement, of 37-year employee and director of the Department of Public Works for the past 8 years Jack Farr. Jack started here as a teenager and worked his way up to director. He has certainly proven his worth to our city and we wish him well in his retirement and look forward to his legacy being continued.

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 390 calls in 2021 which is an increase of 8% from 2020. Additionally, mutual aid requests are up 18%. There were 10 structure fires in the city in 2021 and our department has a well trained staff to help save life and property of our residents. This department has taken great strides in becoming compliant with New York laws including bail out systems. Successful grants have been written to seek new equipment that will also help replace aging vehicles in the fleet. On the water, our fire

department received a new Jet rescue boat, through grant money, that will play a critical role in water responses. Its operation only needs 4” of water to travel which makes it very useful in our major waterway, the Delaware River. In 2022, all New York Fire Departments will begin falling under OSHA standards for Commercial Dive regulations. These regulations are strict and will require new equipment and training. Our department will also be seeking accreditation in Technical Rescue that will put them up to National Standards. Lastly this year the Fire Department is establishing two work groups. One group that will focus on life-cycle replacement of apparatus and vehicles in the department while the other will research the feasibility of a Central Fire Station.

Working hand in hand with the city’s Fire Department is our **Fire Inspector**. The goal of this department is simple, safety first. While conducting residential and commercial inspections the Fire Inspector has been able to drastically reduce false alarm calls that had become burdensome on the Fire Department. The Fire Inspector keeps up with the ever-changing laws and is certified in Code Enforcement as well as International Code Compliance for Fire. The Fire Inspectors goals for 2022 are simple, educate and work towards no violations through inspection.

Our other emergency department, our city’s **Police Department**, is an agency of respect throughout the county and even right here with its own residents and businesses. They have definitely seen challenges over the last year with reported incidents up 14.45% over 2020 with a rise in domestic violence of 8.21%. Nationally violent crimes are rising and here our Part 1 crimes are up 8.9% while Part 2 offenses are up 16.78%. Our department has taken a proactive approach to this rising concern. The city has invested in technology to further help our officers

investigate as well as process individuals who have made a choice to violate the law. Officers will soon be wearing body cameras to protect themselves, as well as the public. The Live Scan electronic booking system is being totally replaced and there will be construction of a range training facility to help facilitate comprehensive training of officers on a regular basis. Additionally, the police department expansion is nearly finished, and our officers will have the space and tools they need to do their job effectively. In 2021, the Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative made recommendations to the Common Council that were considered and passed. All of the recommendations have been implemented. We sought and have been awarded many grants to help this department. A tentative approval was given from the Department of Justice Safe Neighborhood for a grant to combat violent crime, gang related activity, narcotics trafficking and gun violence in our city. The police department was awarded a grant for a Special Service Truck for community policing as well as using it for special operations. The goal of the police department in 2022 is to continue Community Policing based strategies, bring back National Night Out Against Crime, deploy more foot patrols in our neighborhoods, work together with the Community Advisory Board but most important; to make our city a safe environment for all. Getting those that commit crimes off the street is a goal however as many of us know the New York State bail reform has placed many of these defendants back out on the street allowing for the criminal activity to repeat itself. To combat this our police department has partnered with many services in the mental health and domestic violence fields to help to at least help those that are charged with crimes that need these services.

An effective way proven to help develop and grow an individual and show them how to interact with others is to keep them active in

organized sports and activities. The city does its part in providing many options for our city youth throughout the year with the **Recreation Department**. Although the last 2 years have proven to be truly challenging, the programs have begun to recover with increased attendance in 2021. The summer recreation program returned to its normal schedule and hosted 673 kids over a 5-week period. West End Beach returned to normal with no attendance restrictions last year. The Recreation Department was proud to hold events like the Polar Plunge in conjunction with the Special Operations Team of the Fire Department as well as the Easter Candy Dash, Delaware River 5k, Independence Weekend Fireworks Display from Point Peter, the Fall Harvest and Halloween Parade, the Stone Challenge with the Port Jervis Outdoor Club and provide field trips in 2021. Additionally, they had the opportunity to repair and replace playground equipment throughout the city. This year Recreation would like to help improve youth attendance and bring back Friday Teen Night. They would also like to reinvigorate events such as the Dinner Along the Delaware and the Tri-State Classic 10k. Lastly, this department will focus on installing more playground equipment in our city parks and restoring the Rotary Skate Board Park at Riverside Park.

The **Port Jervis Community Development Agency** isn't really a department of the City of Port Jervis but certainly an asset that the city could not operate without. The CDA takes on the role of seeking grants and managing Section 8 housing for the city. In 2021, the CDA had sought and awarded, on behalf of the city, numerous grants such as \$1 million grant for equipment to the DPW to use for sewer realigning, \$1.8 million to acquire and expand our watershed source by purchasing Boehmler Pond, \$35,000 acquired for a tree removal process in the city under the NYS DEC Urban Forest grant, over \$600,000 for lead service

water replacement in the lower 4th ward and body cams for our police officers. Additionally, they have worked with the Nature Conservancy on acquiring Woodland Carbon Credits estimated to benefit the city at \$540,000 just by having trees in our watershed. Additionally, the CDA was key in helping the city acquire a 0% interest hardship loan of \$20 million to reline our city's wastewater system, convert 10 DPW vehicles to the Bio-fuel pilot project, at a cost of \$1.00, joined the NYS Climate Smart Communities that will allow for greater grant opportunities in storm water displacement. They also have been and will continue to work on the possibility of e-vehicle charging stations, the feasibility study that was awarded in regards to the O&W trail to Port Jervis as well as HUD Section 8 housing that assisted 195 families here in the city. As grants change, the CDA is changing as well. When it comes to requesting grants there has been a shift in awards to already engineered "shovel-ready" projects. While we deobligated the Pike Street sidewalk project in hopes for the \$1 million award this year, the project is engineered and shovel ready. The CDA will be working on projects that the city and its department would like to develop or rehabilitate.

We were also grateful to be able to have our tremendous volunteers on the **Tourism Board**, pull off some of our yearly events very successfully such as the Fall Foliage Festival, Christkindlmarkt, City Wide Yard Sale, St Patrick's Day parade and a new acclaimed Italian Festival.

Again, this past year was difficult for everyone when it came to dancing around the COVID infection. Let us hope we are near the end. Our city council was able to help keep taxes fair with a low increase while not adversely affecting the positive changes that we've made in the city as we continue moving forward in the right direction.

This past year we launched our new city website at www.portjervisny.gov. It has been tweaked and so we are now begin phasing out, www.portjervisny.org. Our old website will begin directing you to the new site for our residents and visitors to enjoy.

We have completed the annexation of property from the Town of Deerpark that will increase our property tax base substantially as it begins to be developed. This development will lead to new jobs in our area as well. In 2022, we will continue to focus on the redevelopment of the Riverside Park with the new 18-hole Disc Golf Course. We are seeking funding for the enhancement of West End Beach with a new parking lot, a boat launch, renovated bath facilities and a sidewalk to West Main Street on Ferry. Additionally, grant funding has been requested to install handicapped access and beautification of the Tri-State Rock as well as lighting, sound system, and stage for Veteran's Orange Square Park. The city's Farnum House is need of attention as well, this 19th century home owned by the city in perpetuity, that once housed the caretaker of the D&H Canal and his family will be on the drawing board for a facelift.

So, as I wrap up my 2022 State of the City Address, let us take a moment to remember those that we've lost in this pandemic and let us pray for those that are still suffering through it now including residual effects...

Let us reunite our city and her residents and visitors in 2022 and bring a sense of normalcy. Our city has had a lot of positive change in the last few years, and it should continue. I continue to challenge our council to be leaders of that change. To move our city in a forward direction, to

allow recreation to flourish so that it can provide years of positive economic stability to our small businesses. Let us seek to find through careful planning, coordination, and cooperation the growth and development of our city to make sure we move forward and prosper.

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 these United States of America as well as our small city on the banks of the Delaware; Port Jervis, New York...Thank you!