



STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

March 30, 2021

For over a year now, we have worked together to check the spread of the Coronavirus, while we cared for our families, our loved ones - and our friends and neighbors. This has been, and continues to be, a mighty effort of health care and public safety workers, from scientific researchers, to the nurses, pharmacists and volunteers who now are administering thousands of vaccines each day right here in the Hudson Valley. Throughout this crisis, many within our community have made great sacrifices, some have lost loved ones, and all of us have experienced tremendous stress, anxiety and even fear. But the past year has also seen the greatest collaboration among the public, private and non-profit sectors since World War II. It has sharply reminded us just how intertwined our lives really are - how much we all depend on one another, how the individual choices we make impact the lives of those around us, not just our own; and now it has brought extraordinary opportunity for transformation to our great city.

Our city government took decisive action at various pivotal times throughout this public health emergency. It was last year's State of the City address, in fact, scheduled for March 11th at Changepoint Church, which became one of the first public events in the region to be cancelled as a result of the emerging crisis. We quickly cut nearly two million dollars in planned expenditures, instituted a hiring freeze, established new rotating shifts for city employees, passed a local law authorizing partial payments on property taxes, cancelled our annual sale of delinquent tax liens, and worked with our partners in County government to ramp-up testing for COVID-19. Our community engagement office, city staff, and members of our Common Council found numerous

ways to help, from promptly disseminating accurate information via social media, to distributing hundreds of lawn signs advertising the COVID relief hotline that had been set up by the County's Department of Community and Behavioral Health. We moved to approve up to ten days of Special Leave Time for city employees weeks ahead of the Governor's Executive Order making COVID leave-time mandatory statewide, and we distributed hundreds-of-thousands of dollars in special assistance via the Community Development Block Grant Program to non-profit partners working to ameliorate the effects of the Coronavirus.

Through the year, we experienced revenue declines that were very close to our early projections. As we wrestled with several rounds of budget cuts, and worked with our unions to avoid layoffs and furloughs, we knew that we had fewer options than our peer cities, first because we had already availed ourselves of things like "early retirement incentives" (we had done that the year before), and "departmental restructuring" (we had done that two years prior, when we consolidated our transit system with the Dutchess County Transit System); and - most significantly, we were limited by the fact that the City does not have a fund balance. Without the "rainy day fund" that other municipalities have, we faced this crisis with no reserves.

Throughout last summer and into early fall, we worked to craft the budget for this year, which had to be delivered to our Common Council by mid-October. Once again we delivered an on-time budget - and we stayed under the tax cap for the fourth straight year. I particularly want to thank our city employees who are members of CSEA and the Police Benevolent Association, for agreeing to forego raises in 2021. In the case of CSEA, their members even voted to open an existing contract and give up a scheduled raise, and I know of no other municipal union in the State that agreed with their city leaders to do that.

Against the backdrop of a global pandemic, the work of your local government continued – on our streets, in our parks, and at our water treatment plant. Our twice-weekly sanitation service continued uninterrupted, and the seasons passed: first grass, then leaves, and finally snow, as the essential workers in our Department of Public Works did everything we asked of them and more. Public safety has never been more important, but the challenge in delivering those services reached a new level last year. Our brave firefighters - who man the city's three firehouses day and night - responded to nearly 4,000 calls of which 2,147 were EMS calls – *all in the shadow of the*

coronavirus. On behalf of a grateful city, I thank them for their courage and for their service to our community.

More than 26,000 calls to the city's police department came in to our 9-1-1 center throughout the year, while over 400 reports made online were investigated. But it was the work we began in 2016 that would prove to be the foundation for the steady, consistent, and meaningful results in the areas of police reform, improved transparency and stronger community relations that we strive for and which our citizens demand. New training programs in procedural justice and implicit bias took center stage within our police department. Within just the last few years, the department has returned to Community Policing, reinstating the street-walking, get-to-know-you, neighborhood-based work that builds stronger relationships between police and citizens. By January of 2020 the department had implemented body-worn-cameras, updated policies and procedures and posted them online, and created our *Procedural Justice Committee* to help set the course for what are the most important improvements within the City's police department in decades.

The work of our Procedural Justice Committee was already well-underway when Governor Cuomo signed Executive Order 203 on June 12, 2020, and so the Committee was able to seamlessly absorb the additional tasks required by his Order into its mission. The recommendations of the Procedural Justice Committee, along with significant public comments we have received throughout this public and collaborative process, have been incorporated into a report that I and Police Chief Tom Pape submitted to the Common Council on February 22, 2021 entitled "*The City of Poughkeepsie's Police Reform and Modernization Collaboration Plan*." An external, third-party review of our plan was undertaken by the Finn Institute for Public Safety, which noted: "we see a great deal of merit in Poughkeepsie's plan, which surely fulfills the requirements of the (Governor's) Executive Order, and then some. Indeed, the plan promises to honor and extend the advances that CPPD has accomplished in the past several years." I want to thank our Common Council for unanimously approving and adopting the plan just this past evening. This plan is not the *culmination* of our work, it is a roadmap for our *continued work together*.

I am also pleased to report that the PILOT program we began last year, which imbedded a full time employee of Mental Health America of Dutchess County within our police department, is contributing to better outcomes for individuals in need. With the Behavioral Evaluation and Action Team, a street-level collaboration with the Dutchess County's Department of Community and

Behavioral Health, the City of Poughkeepsie Police Department is at the forefront of important reforms which are at various stages of implementation all around our nation.

The death of George Floyd shook the very consciousness of America. Our outrage and horror is the floodlight on systemic racism and the need for police reform in our country, but it should also drive transitional change in other areas of society where disparate impacts are found. Few of these are as obvious as the issue of housing. Here in Poughkeepsie we see growing pressure on local housing supply, increasing numbers of homeless persons on our streets, and rising rents. I believe that affordability and access to housing will require intervention at every level of government. With that in mind, I have asked the City's Development Team, led by Paul Calagorakis, to study local housing trends, anticipate future needs and identify barriers to housing in the City of Poughkeepsie. We will be assisted in this work by our partners at *Pattern for Progress*, a leader in data-driven research for the furtherance of social policy in our region. And we will not stop there. We will also move forward to craft a new Comprehensive Plan, a framework for future planning and development that will engage all our citizenry and community stakeholders in a long-overdue visioning process - work which we hope will lay important new foundations for equity, social justice, diversity and prosperity in our community.

We know the emotional and financial toll this pandemic has taken our residents and our businesses. A few months into the pandemic, the City launched its "*PKGO Forward Economic Recovery Plan*," allowing restaurants and retail businesses to expand outdoor seating and displays in response to social distancing requirements. The initiative, which involves no fees for applicants, is assisting business owners of restaurants and retail stores in our city. We created an easy-to-use, one-page certification request form and a quick, illustrated guidebook to help businesses be innovative during the COVID-19 crisis. Our expansion program was highly successful last year, and we expect it will remain popular with both businesses and the public this year as well.

The recent passage of the American Rescue Plan offers the City of Poughkeepsie a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to address a range of challenges, from aging infrastructure and deferred capital projects, to the elimination of our remaining deficit and the restoral of critical positions in city government. On April 19th I will unveil our "*PKGO-Parks Plan*" that will commit more than Three Million Dollars over the next three years to our city parks, rebuilding and replacing aging and dilapidated infrastructure from Kaal Rock Park to Pulaski, from Malcolm X Park to Spratt and

Bartlett Parks, this will be the most significant investment in our parks in a long, long time. It will build upon and accelerate work we've been doing gradually over the last several years. For example, at College Hill Park a wide range of stakeholders and community groups have stayed the course, working with our engineers and grantors – the Environmental Facilities Corporation and the Greenway – to improve access, construct ADA-compliant walking trails, remove dead trees and construct a pollinator garden. The tree work and improved access from the Rail Trail up to the open reservoir at the top will have a tremendous impact, and I am very excited that this year's work at College Hill Park will complete the multi-year project that began back in 2016 – a multimillion dollar project that saw the City bring on line our new five million gallon water supply system - and will end with the formal decommissioning of the underground cistern that has been in operation for nearly one hundred years.

I am also happy to report that work is proceeding at Pershing Park where a generous grant and other support from Scenic Hudson, along with City funding, will uplift an entire neighborhood, creating a revitalized park, community garden and an urban farm that will provide food to neighborhood residents and employment training for local youth. We are extremely grateful to Scenic Hudson and excited about working with them to complete the work at Pershing and to the prospect of restoring and enhancing other Northside parks as well.

Thanks to the City's Anti-Blight Task Force which I established in 2018, the number of vacant properties in the City has declined from a high of about 600 in 2016, to fewer than 200 today. I want to take a moment to thank City Administrator Marc Nelson, who chairs the task force, as well as our local housing partners, Habitat for Humanity, Rebuilding Together of Dutchess County, and Hudson River Housing, for their participation in this effort, and for all their work in the City – work which also continued unabated throughout the pandemic. I should mention that much of our Anti-Blight work has been funded by two grants from the New York State Attorney General's Office, about a quarter of a million dollars in fact. We are very grateful to the New York State Housing Stabilization Team at the Local Initiatives Support Corporation for their guidance and collaboration with us on this important work.

One of the best examples of our working the problem of vacant properties in the City involves our effort surrounding the former YMCA building located adjacent to Eastman Park near Stitzel Field. This long-vacant and deteriorating building had become one of the most visible symbols of blight

in our community. Now, the building is slated for demolition and the site is the planned location for the construction of a state-of-the-art youth empowerment center in the City of Poughkeepsie.

This is not a project the City could undertake on its own. I want to thank the County Executive, Marcus Molinaro, for his strong commitment to making the Youth Empowerment Center a reality. Subject to the approval of our Common Council and the Dutchess County Legislature, the framework we established over the last eight months envisions a phased-approach beginning with a change in ownership of the property from the City to the County, followed by demolition and greening before moving into the design and construction phase.

The 35 Montgomery Community Coalition — which includes Dutchess County as well as education and health care leaders — seeks to create a multi-use facility that would provide services connected to their respective missions in the community. The Coalition includes the YMCA of Kingston and Ulster County, which is working to re-establish the Dutchess YMCA as a hub for educational and recreational resources for all Dutchess County residents. The YMCA facilities would include an indoor pool, gymnasium and fitness center and wellness services. DAY ONE — a City of Poughkeepsie-based nonprofit co-founded by Geraldine Laybourne, former president of Nickelodeon — intends to operate the first-of-its kind Child Development Center. The Center also would house DAY ONE's apprentice teacher training program that will train 200 early childhood teachers over five years, providing hands-on and intensive coursework to individuals new to the early childhood education field and those working in local daycares. I want to thank the 35 Montgomery Community Coalition for sticking with this critically important project through the pandemic; the tremendous community benefits are now within sight.

While we have pursued these innovations and key partnerships, the city has not forgotten about the basic services residents require and expect from their government. We know that the majority of the garbage we see around the city often originates with improperly secured or too-small capacity garbage cans. One of the things that we achieved several years ago was we implemented a seven-day-a-week work schedule in our Department of Public Works. By doing so, we made sure we could pick up city garbage on weekends – in parks and along our Main Street corridor, particularly. That helped, but it hasn't completely solved the problem. We still see garbage flying around throughout the city, and we have a plan to address it. We are going to roll out a PILOT program *that will provide standardized garbage containers to all residential customers along the*

arterials. Right-sized and uniform containers – in and of itself – will be a huge step in the right direction in my view, but this will also allow us to test the use of automation, something that was one of the primary recommendations of the study we conducted last year our sanitation system. Thank you to the many residents who received and responded to the random survey that was conducted as part of that study, and thank you to our partners at Dutchess County for funding the study. Now it's up to us to implement those recommendations. To be clear, this plan is about keeping our city clean and improving our quality of life – we are not downsizing or outsourcing our sanitation service, but we do need to upgrade equipment and so this is the right time to explore options that automation and new technologies can bring us.

Now in its second full year, our new partnership with the Poughkeepsie City School District has really taken flight. This partnership is anchored in the belief that it is not just the responsibility of the school district — but of our entire city — to ensure that all of our children are able to reach their full potential. That is why I am so proud to have joined with Poughkeepsie City School District Superintendent Dr. Eric Jay Rosser as co-chair of the Poughkeepsie Children's Cabinet, which officially launched in February of last year.

Our school district works tirelessly to help children in our community succeed, but with 73% of Poughkeepsie students economically disadvantaged, the struggles our children and families face extend far beyond the school doors and school day. To ensure every child has the in-school — and out-of-school — support they need requires bringing together at one table all of the agencies and organizations that serve youth. The Children's Cabinet is a coordinating body designed to do just that.

By establishing a Children's Cabinet, Poughkeepsie joins a select group of communities nationwide. Last year, we became the first city in New York State, outside of New York City, to join the Local Children's Cabinet National Network — and we became only the tenth community in the country invited to join the By All Means Initiative at Harvard University. As a By All Means community, we benefit from the intensive support of Harvard staff, who are advising the Cabinet on the development of a comprehensive cradle-to-career agenda for the City of Poughkeepsie. This work has already gotten underway with the recent launch of two citywide Working Groups in “early childhood” and “out-of-school enrichment and learning.” Additional groups will soon be launched focused on “health and wellness” and “civic, career and college readiness.” For anyone

interested in learning more or getting involved, please visit the Cabinet website at www.PKChildrensCabinet.com.

Our collaboration with the School District is also allowing us to address communication gaps in both our organizations. In July we will be hiring a bi-lingual full time employee who will be a shared resource between the City and the School District, to broaden our outreach and engagement with our Latino community.

This has been an extraordinary year. It makes it all the more remarkable that we have made the progress we have. With everything else, it seems almost dull to mention that we finally installed new parking meters in the City, but that wasn't a minor thing to anyone who had ever tried to operate one of the old ones! This year we will move ahead with the rehabilitation of our Liberty Street Parking Lot, a \$1.2 Million project funded by a N.Y.S. Green Infrastructure Grant which was postponed because of COVID, and we will also be moving ahead with reconstruction projects on both the Washington Street Bridge and the Garden Street Bridge. Our \$2.4 Million Dollar Pedestrian Safety Project is also in the final planning stages and will bring long-overdue upgrades to crosswalks and traffic control devices in the Main Street corridor and surrounding area.

This month, as the American Rescue Plan was signed into law by President Biden, we have learned the City will receive more than \$20 Million Dollars over the next two years in direct aid from the Federal Government. This money will allow us to replace revenue lost as a result of the pandemic and restore funding that was cut last year. We also eagerly await details about a forthcoming infrastructure bill from our Federal partners which will help us fund important public infrastructure projects including water and sewer upgrades and replacements, sidewalk repair and street paving.

We are proud of what we have accomplished under these unprecedented circumstances and we are steadfastly focused on the future, and it's a bright one for the City of Poughkeepsie.

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

Poughkeepsie, New York
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