

State of the City 2024

Ladies and gentlemen, good evening, and welcome to the historic Troy Savings Bank Music Hall. Before I begin, I want to thank the staff and ownership of the Music Hall for allowing me to give my first ever state of the city address from this National Historic Landmark.

Taking the State of the City Address out of City Hall and into the community is one example of how we can work as “One Troy” moving forward.

Just as the Troy Savings Bank Music Hall, with its rich history and acoustic brilliance, underwent a renaissance that rejuvenated its legacy as a beacon of cultural and musical excellence, so too is the city of Troy in the midst of a revival. This transformation mirrors the hall's resurgence, symbolizing a broader renewal of the city's vitality and spirit. As the Music Hall emerged from periods of uncertainty to host world-renowned performances once more, Troy has embraced our rich diversity while fostering innovation becoming a vibrant community where history and modernity harmonize, reflecting the enduring resilience and rebirth of both the hall and the city.

I want to thank all the elected officials who have joined us here tonight, including _____, hello to the Troy City Council members in attendance _____, and thank you to all of you in attendance or watching on-line who have joined us this evening.

When we took office less than two months ago, we committed to three goals: making Troy safer, cleaner, and greener. These efforts aim to dramatically improve the quality of life for everyone who calls Troy home, transforming our city into a place people are eager to move into, not out of. Troy, the upstate city that bucks the trend, that demolishes the stereotypes - that proves our future is more golden than our gilded past.

Together, as One Troy, we will realize this vision.

You are going to get tired of hearing me say this, but the most important responsibility of the government is to keep our people - ALL of our people safe. Every day the memory of the senseless death of Ayshawn Davis reminds me of the work we have to do.

Safety and quality of life are the bedrock of thriving communities, the key to attracting investment, and a necessary condition for unlocking educational attainment. I promised in my inaugural address to create a safer future for all. We will work tirelessly to dismantle the systems that enable violence and drug trafficking, empowering communities and fostering a brighter future. This includes investing in our police and promoting better communication.

I want to thank Chief DeWolf for his leadership and our officers that are on the frontlines to make our city safer every day. I am proud to call them a partner in this effort. And I know we will work together every day to make Troy the strongest community possible.

To that end, we must ensure our police department is properly staffed. Just two weeks ago I was proud to swear in eight new officers. This is one of the largest classes of new recruits that the Troy Police Department has had in years. I pledge that we will continue to invest in growing, training and equipping our police force for the difficult challenges they face every day.

However, in the end, no matter the number of officers or how well equipped, public safety also comes down to personal agency - people make choices. We will not tolerate an attitude of lawlessness. We will not look the other way. So I reiterate a promise I made in my inaugural address: we will make life hell for violent perpetrators and drug dealers who make the choice to victimize the people of Troy.

To follow through on this promise we are taking a series of actions.

First, I am working with Chief DeWolf and his team to implement Task Force Sentinel, a specialized unit within the force to be deployed specifically to target hotspots of illegal activity. This dedicated team will employ advanced surveillance technology and intelligence-led policing strategies to identify, disrupt, and arrest criminals operating within these areas, ensuring a safer environment for our community.

Another way to keep Troy safer is through improved coordination and deeper intelligence regarding drug trafficking. The involvement of street gangs in the retail-level distribution of cocaine and heroin is increasing across Upstate, including the Capital Region, leading to deadly consequences.

The federal High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) program, offers support to federal, state, and local agencies in areas identified as critical drug-trafficking regions. Although Albany and Schenectady Counties have already joined, we are not currently participating in the program. I am supporting District Attorney Donnelly and Rensselaer County Sheriff Bourgault in her effort to add Rensselaer County to the program so we all might benefit from more coordination and better intelligence.

Last week, to celebrate Black History month we honored Sam Moses. Sam was the first black officer to join the force. Sam was also friends with my dad, and they served together on the force. A lot has changed in Troy since my Dad and Sam walked the beat. While I am incredibly proud of the men and women who serve our community, we need to actively work to recruit more officers who reflect the population of our city.

This is essential for building trust and ensuring all residents feel safe and represented by our police force. Therefore, I have directed Chief DeWolf, Troy Fire Chief Celluci and our new director of Diversity, Inclusion and Outreach Kevin Pryor to develop new recruitment strategies and community outreach programs to attract more diverse qualified candidates.

I believe in the programs we currently utilize to get our officers out in the communities, like Park Walk and Talk and the Coffee with a Cop initiative and we will continue to broaden these efforts, but there is much more to do:

- I believe police body and fleet cameras improve transparency, accountability, and trust between law enforcement and the community. These tools are essential for justice, promoting safer interactions, and fostering positive community relations.
- Over the coming months, ALL marked police vehicles will be equipped with cameras.

- They provide objective evidence in contentious incidents, protect officers from false accusations, and promote professionalism.
 - In addition, we will expand and improve the City Street Camera Program - this will assist us in addressing areas of persistent criminal activity.
 - We will also be enlisting the help of our citizens and businesses by reinvigorating the Safe Cam program.
 - Finally, to improve our response times, we are collaborating with the County to implement a computer-aided dispatch program.
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Our EMS and Fire service are also top priorities for my administration. Last year, the department answered 13,416 calls for service - amazing right. But this volume has showcased the strain on our staffing levels. To help immediately address our staffing issues in the coming days we will be hiring nine new firefighters.

In addition, we worked with the city council on the purchasing of a new ambulance and a new fire pumper that will replace and upgrade our aging fire apparatus.

But there is much more to do.

The time has come for us to re-evaluate the over 30-year city-run ambulance model. As many folks may know, an outside review of our ambulance model and staffing issues is underway. I will continue working with Chief Cellucci and our firefighters to explore ways to improve our emergency services.

For years as Council President, I fought for improvements at our aging firehouses. Especially the need to replace Station 1 in Lansingburgh. Now as Mayor, I am proud to announce we are back on track for the building of a new firehouse on 2nd Avenue, pending an environmental phase 2 site assessment.

Finally, we must protect those who keep us safe. The deadly explosion of fentanyl onto our streets endangers our EMS, firefighters, and police. Fentanyl is so potent that, while rare, the DEA warns even accidental inhalation can cause overdose. Naloxone is the preferred antidote with the State Health Department but there are new FDA approved opioid reversal agents specifically designed to combat fentanyl. Sadly, it is not uncommon for it to take four or five doses of naloxone to

revive overdose victims and restore breathing - all that time the individual's brain is deprived of oxygen.

So today, I am joining Albany County Sheriff Apple, and with 26 other states, in calling on New York State to include these new opioid overdose reversal agents in the standing order to better protect our personnel. We need all the tools in the toolbox to combat the scourge of fentanyl.

Now let's talk about Quality of Life issues. We hit the ground running since day one. Our Quality-of-Life Action Task Force has been tackling issues in our neighborhoods which people have been yearning for far too long. No more looking the other way!

As I stated earlier, my top priority is keeping everyone safe, especially those who need it most. The encampment near Prospect Park was both literally and figuratively a ticking time bomb, with propane gas tanks, weapons, drug paraphernalia, security cameras, and a makeshift latrine that posed a health hazard in and of themselves. Removing the encampment was necessary—not only to protect the community's quality of life for everyone but also to address the immediate public safety and health concerns posed by the hazardous conditions at the site.

Listen, I get it, some folks might think we could've just ignored it, others probably would have preferred we just looked the other way but that's not what people elected us to do. Real leadership means doing things that aren't always popular. *Real compassion* means taking action for the long run, not pretending problems don't exist.

Our Task Force is walking the walk, not just talking the talk! It has been a whirlwind of activity.

This is just a small sample of what we have accomplished in less than 2 months and trust me, we're just getting started!

On Day One - We began the process of overhauling our Code Enforcement Bureau.

On Day Two - We discovered, what ultimately resulted in, an Emergency Declaration to make immediate repairs to the long neglected 30-inch water main at the Eddy's Lane Pump Station.

Let me paint a picture for you folks, the failure of this main at the pump station would have been a real and possibly deadly disaster. The force behind the water pumped through those pipes would have not only wiped out the station, it would have caused extensive flooding to homes and businesses in portions of Lansingburgh and North Central. It would have seriously damaged other parts of our water delivery system and left an estimated 100,000 people without water for weeks.

That was just Day Two!

On Day Three we began updating the city's landlord and fire sprinkler registry, which hasn't been updated in years.

On Day Five we undertook the development of a residential occupancy permit program, everyone deserves an adequate living environment. We expect to roll it out in the near future.

On Day Seven We began dismantling the much hated traffic circle - probably the most popular thing we did.

On Day Nine After inspecting more than 40 "Red X" buildings across the city that require major repair or demolition, we have identified 16 of these structures as posing imminent threats of collapse. We are prioritizing these buildings for immediate action to ensure public safety and mitigate potential hazards.

On Day Ten The first of the "Red X" buildings is demolished in our Little Italy neighborhood.

On Day Ten We took decisive action to eliminate the growing unsafe homeless encampment in Prospect Park.

One Day Ten - The much-hated traffic circle is gone.

Let me tell you day ten was a hell of a day...

It's been like this most every day since.

Ladies and gentlemen, if you can't tell I'm passionate about this and I can guarantee you that we will provide top-level services. My team and I are literally on the streets in your neighborhood, day in and day out assessing needs. Our crews are out of their trucks, picking up litter, raking, blowing leaves, sweeping sidewalks with brooms, and street sweeping.

That's why we reopened the Alamo for winter service. To date many residents have taken advantage of this new program, resulting in cleaner streets and alleyways.

But now, I need everyone else to pitch in! Please ensure your storefronts are clean and let's crack down on littering by expecting more from each other. Let's pitch in, Troy!

Let me state the obvious, you can't have quality of life **WITH** toxic drinking water - it's a fact. In 2024, in Troy, New York - the Empire State - no parent should have to be afraid of what is coming out of their tap. No parent should lie awake at night worried that their baby's bath water is a toxic stew.

We must repair and modernize our great cities' infrastructure and it starts with getting the lead out of our water. Troy has always been proud of our quality water and our water treatment facility, we can get back to that! While it's ambitious, I have pledged to replace all lead water lines in our city in four years. Let's get this done as fast as possible!!

To be successful we will need assistance from our State and Federal partners. We know there will be a lot of money to compete for and we will need assistance in developing grant requests to win as much of those funds as possible. With that in mind, I have asked RPI President Marty Schmidt to work with the City to develop an AI based system to better access funding opportunities. This is the kind of project Artificial Intelligence is built to address and I look forward to our partnership.

No one can argue that every citizen of Troy deserves access to clean, healthy water, right? Similarly, it baffles me that anyone would think we should be denied

quality healthcare. The planned closure of the Burdett Birthing Center by St. Peter's Partners is unacceptable, and I have called on Governor Hochul to reject their plans as part of the state budget.

This closure would disproportionately impact expecting mothers, not just in Troy but also in all of Rensselaer and Washington Counties, especially hurting vulnerable populations who may not have easy access to alternative maternity services. I have a personal connection to Burdett—I gave birth to my son there.

A robust healthcare system leads to better public health outcomes and enhances the overall quality of life for all our residents. Burdett positively impacts our economy by attracting skilled professionals and supporting community resilience during crises. To continue Troy's renaissance, we must maintain access to high-quality healthcare services.

I want to thank Assembly Member McDonald, Senator Ashby and County Executive McLaughlin for their advocacy on this issue and I reiterate my call for the Hochul administration to intercede in this wrongheaded plan.

Safer, cleaner, greener - these are the keys to improving our quality of life. To make Troy greener we are supporting a series of important investments in our parks, pocket parks and trails.

The development of a new Knickerbacker Pool recreation complex is long overdue. This multi-million dollar investment will transform the park into a major asset for our community. In collaboration with the Knickerbacker Park Trustees, this initiative will significantly benefit our Burgh Community, especially our children, with construction expected to begin this year.

In addition, we have exciting projects underway at Canal Avenue Park, Beman Park, and 112th Street Park - all scheduled for completion in the spring.

Recently, we invested to repair and renovate the golf course at Frear Park. The Park Pub Restaurant, a city-owned building located at the entrance of the spectacular Frear Park Golf Course, has not received adequate attention to its water, sewer, and electrical needs. We are addressing these issues and will then

issue an RFP to attract a new restaurateur to manage the facility, making it a destination for people throughout the city and region.

While we have invested significantly in Frear Park and are focused on our pocket parks, Prospect Park remains one of our city's historic natural treasures. For over 120 years, the 80 acres of land conveyed by the Warren Family have served as an anchor, offering commanding views of the city and the region. It is now time to look to the future of the Park, and we will initiate a new Master Plan to envision the next twenty years.

In the Little Italy neighborhood, we are supporting a project to restore the historic Hill Street Market Place, revitalizing it into a community park and meeting place with bocce courts and pickleball.

And we can't leave the subject of open space without acknowledging the opportunity and the work being done to connect our amazing waterfront with the rest of the city. Our access to the Hudson River is unique in the Capital Region and we will need smart planning and investment to realize its potential. But we will realize its potential.

Finally, as we focus on enhancing our open and green spaces, it's crucial that we invest and also attract private sector investment in our commercial, office, and residential sectors. Housing scarcity and rising costs have made affordability a major issue for many, a challenge that extends statewide. To foster growth, developing more housing is essential. To this end, we have submitted our letter of intent to participate in New York State's Pro-Housing Communities Program. Participation in this program will benefit Troy by providing preferential scoring, aiding us in competing for certain discretionary funding grants.

In addition to fostering new housing projects, supporting investment in existing housing is imperative. Utilizing ARPA funds and collaborating with TRIP, we aim to launch the Home and Property Investment Program. This initiative will provide grants for facade improvements and other homeownership enhancements, targeting improvements on a block-by-block basis.

Talking about homeownership, it's evident that our city has been without a true home for too long. Our great city deserves a City Hall that inspires pride in all of us. I am thrilled to announce that an RFP for a permanent City Hall will be issued in the coming weeks.

One site that we will not consider for the new City Hall is One Monument Square. It has become clear that the development once planned for this site faces insurmountable obstacles. We are in the process of developing a new vision for the site that draws on years of public engagement to design a sustainable and achievable plan—we look forward to unveiling in the near future.

Our future is bright, and we are committed to building a city equipped with the necessary infrastructure, green spaces, and housing to support new industries and foster continued growth. There are exciting opportunities ahead, and private sector investors understand that our welcoming approach will unlock new possibilities.

We must continue to nurture new and emerging industries, such as the video game development cluster here in Troy. We have the opportunity to further cement Troy's status as a gaming hub by hosting the ECAC Esports Championship, which attracts hundreds of gamers from across the country. With over 150 ECAC Esports member schools fielding more than 2,000 teams across fifteen different games and divisions, the potential for growth is immense.

By the way, I had a revelation - it's time to stop yelling at our kids for playing video games! Who knows they might go pro. Just like Troy's own Jadah Robinson - junior olympics boxing champ - who is taking her game pro. Dreams do come true.

As Troy's first woman Mayor, I can tell you DREAMS do come true.

I look forward to collaborating with the ECAC Conference, RPI, and HVCC, along with Presidents Marty Schmidt and Dr. Roger Rammsammy, our high schools, and

most importantly, the video game developers, to make this event a reality. Stay tuned.

The future is here - there is a lot of building and investment on the horizon that will reshape the Troy we know, launching us to new heights. The optimism. The hope. The expectation that the best is yet to come - I can feel it.

I see it in City Hall where we start every day like it's on purpose - because it is. I see it traveling with our crews on the street, I see it with the cops on the beat, our firefighters in the house and I see it when I walk the halls of City Hall. A new attitude, better morale.

As much as I can see it in City Hall, I feel it on the streets and in our neighborhoods. I can feel it at the post office and in church, at Stewarts - on the grocery lines and in neighborhood meetings.., this feeling is palpable, it's the feeling of progress!

The State of Our City...it's Strong and getting stronger every day.

Thank you. God Bless you. God Bless Troy and God Bless the United States of America