

Good evening and welcome to the Council President's Address.

I'd like to welcome you all tonight. In addition to my colleagues on the City Council – Mayor Mantello, Deputy Mayor Donnelly.....

Section C-34 of the City Charter states that at the first March meeting of the Council following delivery of the State of the City report, the President of the Council shall deliver a legislative response to the mayor's speech which shall include the legislative initiatives for the year to come.

This legislative address marks an historic moment in Troy's history - the first time two women have led our city's co-equal branches of government. I consider this a true honor to share my thoughts with you this evening.

I've titled tonight's remarks "The People's Address" because, it's not about me - it's about you – Troy's residents, business owners, community leaders and families- who make our community so special... a unique, vibrant place to live and work.

To begin with, I recognize we've only been in office 67 days. For some, this is the first time holding the position and we're just learning our roles. Still, we can take pride in our accomplishments so far. We've:

- held 5 confirmation hearings for the mayor's appointees
- Held a public hearing
- Passed a local law giving senior much needed tax breaks
- Adopted nearly 50 ordinances and resolutions

In doing so, we've started to listen to each other's points of views and consider them in taking action. That mutual respect and understanding is the foundation for a collaborative environment of the Council – one I hope to foster going forward. We were elected to represent our constituents - not a political party or our own interests and, as we legislate going forward, I hope we collectively embrace that philosophy of common and united action.

Tonight I intend to spotlight a few key initiatives I intend to advance for consideration by the full Council:

- Cleaner, safer more accessible neighborhoods
- Infrastructure investment
- Community Engagement

Cleaner, safer, more accessible neighborhoods begins with improved Quality of Life.

I want to commend the Mayor and the work of her Quality of Life Action Task Force in physically clearing our streets of trash and litter to provide a visibly cleaner environment.

The Council's Neighborhood Hood Improvement Program goes a long way in offering incentives to neighbors to work together on a common venture that enhances their surroundings. I encourage residents to apply for a NIP award and consider making your neighborhood even better.

The previous Council and administration invested millions in city parks. Continuing that work throughout our city should be a goal of this Council so that residents have recreational opportunities and green spaces near their homes. I concur with the mayor that Prospect Park is worthy of a master plan and investment.

Beyond these actions we must acknowledge that our city, like others, has a housing crisis. There aren't enough houses, rents are too high. People who want to find housing here can't. We need to address our housing shortage and develop strategies to move forward.

Affordable and accessible housing is at the heart of one's quality of life. People need a safe, economical place to live and raise their family. When the cost of housing takes over 50% of one's take-home pay, then families are living paycheck to paycheck - only an instance away from homelessness.

I will be bringing the establishment of a **Housing Task Force** before the full Council in the coming months. The ultimate goal of this work group will be to create a blueprint, a Strategic Housing Action Plan that provides solutions for infill as well as new affordable development.

The **Strategic Housing Action Plan** can be accomplished without any cost to the City, utilizing nonprofits in our community. By bringing together Trojans, business, and nonprofit sectors toward a common goal, we will benefit from their collective wisdom and wholistic viewpoint. This will not be a task force with a vague agenda but one that's time-limited and specific.

We are accomplishing advances in making our city safer for walkers with the ADA transition plan and the work of CDBG funded sidewalks, however there are miles of residential sidewalks that need attention. I'll be asking the General Services Committee to explore ways to assist residents in replacing deteriorated sidewalks.

We also need to address the problem of sidewalks blocked by improperly parked cars.

As I mentioned accessibility is part of quality of life. All residents deserve to fully enjoy city resources. Therefore, I am recommending a **Disability Advisory Committee** to the City Council.

- Consisting of members of the disability community, residents and Council members to help develop recommendations on how to improve accessibility throughout our city – our buildings, parks and public spaces.
- The committee would consider operationally how we deliver services and communicate with the public.
- This Committee would build on the work of the previous administration including the ADA sidewalk survey and ADA Transition Plan

Infrastructure

A City as old as ours suffers from aging infrastructure - be it water lines, streets, sidewalks, etc. We can't fix everything at once but must develop a plan to fund and address routinely. One area that particularly needs attention is replacement of lead service lines as mandated by the EPA. I recently attended "Leading on Lead Service Lines in New York."

I will be calling a meeting of the Finance Committee with the City Engineer and Director of Infrastructure for an update on the Tomhannock water transmission project. This is one of our city's major infrastructure initiatives and Council members should be informed.

Troy does not have a good track record as a landlord. We have allowed our buildings to languish instead of investing in routine maintenance. That's why it was necessary to rebuild the DPW facility and why we no longer have a usable Knick Ice Rink or a stand-alone City Hall.

I understand the desire for a City Hall facility but, like the mayor, I've been around long enough to remember the devastating consequences of overspending that brought our city to the brink of bankruptcy. The math must make sense. I look forward to meeting with the mayor to discuss this proposal. We will need to carefully consider the costs weighed against competing priorities facing our city.

And that brings me to another key point....

Balanced budgets

The City Council serves a critical check and balance against the overspending practices of the past, to protect taxpayers going forward. While we are in an excellent fiscal position, thanks to the Madden administration that retired Troy's 30 year historic debt and succeeded in repeated bond rating upgrades, we can't be lax in our duty to keep a cautionary eye on major projects and costs.

We take our fiduciary responsibility seriously so the Council will be having monthly updates from our newly appointed Comptroller at our regular Finance Committee meetings. We had the pleasure of unanimously appointing him, and we look forward to working together to keep our city in good fiscal shape.

Civic engagement

As City Council members we have a very direct connection to residents. Often, we are who they call about a pothole or trash problem. It's important to foster that sense of connection between City Hall and the community, to pull back the curtain and inform the public.

We need to be cautious about overstepping boundaries, though. Recently the City Hall Facebook page published photos of a private residence in connection with a violation. That's a reminder of how we need to be careful with social media to protect personal privacy and limit

exposure to lawsuits. We also need to be mindful of how social media is being used – to inform, not influence.

Therefore, along with my colleagues Council members McLaren and Vera, I am proposing that we work on a City **Social Media Policy**. Guidelines are needed for official accounts maintained by the city, including Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube and other networks.

A draft policy was developed by the previous administration and would serve as a good starting point for the Corporation Counsel's office, Personnel Department, Bureau of Information Services (BIS) and the City Council's Science and Technology Committee to collaborate in a bipartisan fashion to review and finalize the draft policy.

A social media policy would:

- Prohibit posting content from personal or political campaign accounts associated with elected officials and/or political organizations to official City government social media accounts.
- Institute a legal review of content by the Corporation Counsel, as necessary, prior to publication on city-operated social media pages.
- Designate specific employees for managing city-operated social media pages.
- Obtain permission before publishing photographs and videos, and include appropriate attributions to content, where required.
- Require two-factor authentication for authorized employees to manage social media accounts on behalf of the city.
- Prohibit the use of personal devices to manage city social media accounts and require the use of city-issued mobile devices or computers.

In closing, I acknowledge this is an ambitious agenda but one I hope we will tackle *collaboratively* in the coming year. It will require *better* communication, *greater* understanding and patience.

I'm ready to hit a reset button and hope we will all consider doing so. Let's start with more respect for each other and the positions we hold. Let's keep our residents first and foremost.

Troy is stronger together, and as elected leaders, we need to communicate and cooperate.