

**2016 State of the City Address**  
Mayor Richard C. David  
*Tuesday, Feb. 23, 7:00 p.m.*  
*Binghamton City Council Chambers*

**Introduction**

Thank you Councilman Matzo. President Papastrat, members of City Council, distinguished guests, and those watching at home — good evening.

Before I begin, I'd like to recognize the fresh faces in this chamber — our three newly-elected Council members: Giovanni Scaringi, Dani Cronce and Conrad Taylor.

They, along with their incumbent colleagues, have expressed a sincere willingness to work together with this Administration on behalf of the residents — a marked difference from the politics of the past. It's an encouraging sign that these next years will bring a new wave of collaboration and cooperation between the two branches of City government.

Also joining us tonight are the City's department heads and other key personnel. In that group, we have to recognize the career of Binghamton Fire Chief Daniel Thomas, who is retiring in April.

Chief Thomas guided the Department through an era of changing demands and new technology. An era in which first responders were asked to do so much in times of emergency. He led operations during the historic 2011 flood and efforts to battle many major structure fires that have shaken our community.

After a 40-year career, Chief Thomas, you deserve our sincere thanks and a round of applause.

Tonight, you'll hear about benchmarks of progress, fresh perspectives and new ideas. A report on not only the State of the City as it relates to our government, but on how we have transformed attitudes and expectations for what City Hall can do for its residents.

The successes outlined tonight are testaments to my philosophy as a chief executive in local government — focus on the fundamentals.

The lessons of Flint, Michigan demonstrate why basic city services are so essential. Local governments that take their eye off the ball from what really matters, even momentarily, are headed down a path of disaster.

In Binghamton, that's not the case. By making our streets safer, investing in infrastructure and neighborhoods, creating an environment for jobs to flourish, stabilizing taxes and building a bipartisan coalition on City Council, this Administration has crafted and executed the back to basics gameplan for Binghamton's comeback.

We're building from strength and seizing opportunities where they already exists, not fighting over where to look.

## **Public Safety**

We begin tonight with my most important duty as Mayor — public safety.

And in the last few weeks two law enforcement operations showcased the high-caliber work of those tasked with providing that safety — the Binghamton Police Department.

After a Valentine's Day shooting left one man dead, City police worked with the U.S. Marshals and Miami-Dade Police to catch their suspect more than 1,300 miles away. Detectives stayed around the clock to work leads and communicate intelligence to our partner agencies.

Two weeks ago, relying on proactive patrols and old-fashioned detective work, we took down a mugging ring targeting Binghamton University students. Four arrests were made and peace of mind was restored to West Side residents.

Make no mistake — Binghamton is a law and order community. We won't tolerate criminal activity on our streets. We're also a city that supports our police officers, understands the work they do and the dangers they face.

Over the last two years, I've worked to make that clear.

This past November, I welcomed 20 new rookies to the Department. These new officers completed a rigorous training program and are now in our community protecting residents. Last week, I filled eight vacant police officer positions. Next month, these new cadets start their training at the Broome County Law Enforcement Academy.

The addition of new police officers has been just one of the major breakthroughs in making our community safer.

One of my first actions as Mayor was to expand the Community Response Team, or CRT, by two officers. It's a specialized unit which focuses on proactive and engaged community policing. Talking to neighbors, developing relationships and showing a presence where criminals congregate.

That expansion is yielding serious results. With the personnel boost, arrests are up 24 percent year-to-year. 622 drug-related arrests and 130 warrant arrests — more than three times what was done the year before. The expanded unit is taking more drugs off our streets and putting wanted criminals behind bars.

Members of the CRT are here tonight. These are the cops behind those numbers. These are the officers that answer your calls and respond on the front lines, arresting drug dealers and violent criminals to make our neighborhood safer. I'd ask them to please stand — let's show them our support.

The Binghamton Police Department's participation in New York State's Gun Involved Violence Elimination, or GIVE, Initiative has also yielded promising results in fighting gun crimes.

Enhanced patrols in identified “hot spots,” focused operations against violent gangs and the deployment of outreach programs — like the City’s gun buyback partnership with the Attorney General — has led to a 30 percent reduction in firearm-related violent crime in just one year.

We’re also sending a message to those wishing to traffick drugs in Binghamton — they better not try to enter through our downtown bus station. Since December, Binghamton Police K-9 units have conducted daily, randomized drug sweeps at the Greater Binghamton Transportation Center. We’re sending a crystal clear message that criminal activity is not welcome in this community. By taking an aggressive approach, it’s another barrier for big city criminals wishing to peddle their poisons on our streets and in our schools.

The broad strategies I’ve just outlined to fight drugs and violent crime culminated in the early morning hours of Nov. 17 last year, when the Binghamton Police Department participated in a multi-jurisdictional law enforcement raid of 12 locations across Broome County, resulting in the arrest of nine individuals accused of federal drug crimes. I attended one of the early morning raids at 5 Edwards Street, seeing first hand our officers’ precision, professionalism and bravery.

Relying heavily on confidential informants and street-level operations by undercover Binghamton Police officers, the FBI, U.S. Marshals, New York State Police, Broome County Sheriff’s Office, as well as local law enforcement officials, took down the “Eddie Block Gang,” major distributors of cocaine, heroin and illegal prescription drugs in Binghamton.

It was a win for the good guys.

Our commitment to improving public safety means not only rooting out criminals where they set up shop, but also building trust and support — strengthening the coalition between law enforcement, neighbors and community leaders.

When the national discussion came to Binghamton regarding police and community relations and perceived racial bias by police officers, important questions were brought to the table. But some sought division where none existed.

Endless nights of committee meetings. Political rhetoric in the newspaper for months. Police officers feeling vilified. Community members believing their suggestions were falling on deaf ears. Council members who attempted to legislate their way out of the controversy. It was clear decisive leadership was needed.

As Mayor and Commissioner of Public Safety, I stepped in and signed an Executive Order formalizing policies on comprehensive data collection and enhanced training.

At that time, I also announced the creation of a task force to make recommendations on diversifying the ranks of our police force so our government truly reflects the community we live in.

We initiated the Police Mentorship Program at the Boys and Girls Club and the Student Citizen Police Academy, building bridges between our youth and police department. As recreation and education leaders, our officers can be strong role models for students, engaging in rewarding activities to build mutual trust and understanding.

Most importantly, we ushered in a new era of transparency and accountability for the Binghamton Police Department with the roll out of body-worn cameras for each officer on the street.

As of tonight, in one of the most intensive technology upgrades in this City's history, all 90 body-worn cameras are in service and worn by officers during their shift — day and night. They're capturing audio and video of all law enforcement activities, which is then stored on a secure cloud-based server.

This new technology will protect our residents, our officers and the City, all while improving community relations and facilitating 21st Century policing.

Assistant Chief Dave Eggleston, Investigator Carl Smith and IT staff members Lori Clift and Nate Warner were instrumental in the research, planning, and execution of this half-million dollar initiative. I thank them for their hard work.

In the next few months, the City will be purchasing approximately 30 cameras for all police vehicles to further transparency and accountability.

## **Heroin**

There is a battle facing law enforcement that technology can't help.

The tragic scourge of heroin can't be eradicated through a sweeping raid or even overwhelming police occupation.

It's a living and breathing epidemic — like a virus — infecting residents of all walks of life. It's dashed young people's dreams of going to college or landing a job. It's torn families apart. Parents have had to bury their children.

Elected leaders, law enforcement and health care officials from across the country are left feeling helpless — asking themselves how the heroin epidemic got this bad so fast.

In the era of tightening budgets and tax caps, some local governments feel their hands are tied, and much of the focus is on police activity and arrests, which while important, fails to help the addicts who need support the most.

We need a new path in Binghamton.

Over the last several months, we've been digging deeper into the challenges of patient care in the City. Locally, 40 percent of addicted individuals fail to enter a long-term treatment program after

being discharged from a detox or crisis center. Beds are in such high demand patients have to return home and wait — in many cases returning to the lifestyle they're trying to escape.

For many individuals, it's a dangerous gap in the road to recovery. Tonight, I'm announcing plans to help fill that void.

The City of Binghamton will fund a two-year intensive case management program at Fairview Recovery Services on the East Side. A specialized case manager will support clients who are leaving Fairview's Addiction Crisis Center and awaiting placement at a long-term care facility.

The case manager will assist discharged clients with finding safe housing, provide transportation to medical and counseling appointments, and stay in contact through the entire treatment process. Patients will have the personal support to reduce instances of relapse and be accountable to a single individual they can trust.

Due to this program, Fairview will discharge patients in less time and with more confidence they will enter a long-term treatment program, opening beds faster for addicted individuals in crisis in our community.

The two-year program will cost \$80,000, and will be funded with Community Development Block Grant money. City Council will have the necessary legislation at its next meeting.

It's a small, but important step in our lopsided fight against heroin.

Michele Napolitano, Executive Director of Fairview Recovery Services, is with us tonight. I'd ask her to stand and be recognized for leading this initiative and for her years on the front lines of treating those addicted to heroin.

For decades, the City only dealt with drugs one way — enforcement. While we may not have the resources of the state or federal government, we need to do more, and that's what tonight's announcement is all about.

The only way our region can effectively fight the heroin epidemic, and save lives, is by working together. Elected leaders and nonprofit organizations all have resources to address different aspects of the epidemic — from law enforcement to treatment and recovery. We cannot afford to work in a vacuum. Our community needs us to work together to create a comprehensive plan to fight heroin and I am committed to being part of that team.

## **Infrastructure**

As we build new foundations in the area of public safety and other basic city services, we must remember our City's physical foundations and the work to update an aging infrastructure.

When I took office, Binghamton's crumbling neighborhood streets had residents in despair. Some told me it was 20 or 30 years since their street last was paved. Looking at the engineering data, the story begins to unfold.

For many years, Binghamton didn't do enough to invest in critical assets. This Administration has made transportation infrastructure upgrades its bread and butter.

Last year, we all but wrapped up the Riverside Drive Reconstruction Project. With a final top coat added this spring, the \$5.8 million project will be complete for new pavement, sidewalks, curbs, and water and sewer line improvements on one of Broome County's most heavily-traveled thoroughfares. It's the first full reconstruction in Riverside Drive's history.

The Exchange Street Bridge received \$3 million in structural repairs, painting and a new concrete deck — welcome improvements to the ten thousand vehicles that cross the bridge every day.

All 1.6 miles of Prospect St., the spine of the First Ward, was milled and paved this past summer. We split the work in a partnership with the New York State Department of Transportation, led by Regional Director Jack Williams, who has been instrumental in steering state resources to help road upgrades in Binghamton.

In the last two years, we've secured more than \$360,000 in NYSDOT funds for paving and emergency repair on City streets impacted by the I-86 Prospect Mountain Project.

This year we will once again have neighborhood paving projects in every corner of the City — Chenango St., Mygatt St., Felters Rd., Chestnut St., micro paving for Roosevelt Ave., plus dozens of other neighborhood streets — and we will once again hit our goal of 15 miles of road improvements for 2016.

15 miles is the magic number — and here's why.

15 miles is roughly 10 percent of all roadways in Binghamton. With that pace, the City should improve all of its transportation infrastructure system on a 10 year cycle, which also happens to be the average life span of a mill and pave project.

This strategy is financially sustainable and allows the City to plan for its long-term infrastructure needs, upgrading our roads and the water and sewer systems running below them.

We will also again target our bridges, gateways and other critical infrastructure.

Design and environmental planning work for the \$5 million Front Street Gateway project is complete. Large scale work for full street reconstruction, new curbs, sidewalks, period lighting and water and sewer upgrades will begin this year. The funds for this project were awarded 10-years ago.

This spring, work will begin to paint and repair the historic South Washington Street pedestrian bridge, costing \$2.1 million. Once that work is complete, the City will explore future improvements to the bridge, such as lighting and landscaping to enhance this waterfront treasure.

Last year, I announced the City secured \$480,000 in federal funding for the State Street Improvement Project for new pavement, traffic signals, and enhanced landscaping just steps from

here outside City Hall. The design phase is currently underway, and this project to improve pedestrian safety and aesthetics for this Downtown gateway should break ground this fall. It's another step in creating a cohesive feel to our Downtown streetscape.

With more than \$6.6 million secured in funding from NYSDOT and the Upstate Revitalization Initiative, work will begin this fall on the 434 Greenway Project — a bike and pedestrian trail connecting Binghamton University and Downtown. It will serve as a critical link in the multi-use trail network across the Southern Tier, promote alternative modes of transportation, and showcase to the community the City's growing bond with our University.

### **Green Initiatives**

In upgrading our infrastructure, we're showing it's possible to advance projects that are both good for taxpayers and good for our environment.

It all starts with a game-changing infrastructure project — and one gaining statewide attention — to convert nearly 7,000 streetlights to LED technology.

When I announced this project shortly after taking office, some said it couldn't be done. City Hall couldn't possibly marshal the resources and coordinate a project of this scale. Others had tried and failed and the cynics wanted us to split up the project, slow it down, rethink it being a priority.

Those cynics were thinking of the old City Hall — and those cynics were wrong.

As of tonight, 93 percent of the City's streetlights have been converted to LED technology, illuminating streets and sidewalks like never before in one of most comprehensive infrastructure upgrades Binghamton has ever seen. Remaining work to replace decorative lights downtown and in other areas of the City should be complete in a few weeks.

Crystal clear LED streetlights are symbols of Binghamton's emergence in the 21st Century. That orange haze is gone and our streets are safer, brighter and more welcoming.

And let's talk numbers.

Before this project started, 10 percent of the City's streetlights were out of commission. They've now been restored with modern fixtures.

It's a \$4 million project, with \$700,000 in rebates thanks to NYSERDA and NYSEG.

And in 15 years, the project will save \$1 million in lighting maintenance costs and \$5.2 million in the City's electric bill.

That type of savings is unprecedented and it's exactly what this new City Hall is focused on.

Our commitment to sustainable development doesn't end with LED streetlights.

I pushed to promote installation for electric vehicle charging stations — cutting through red tape and adding incentives for developers to incorporate this green infrastructure in new construction so Binghamton has a charging network in place when electric vehicles become mainstream.

We extended the City's land agreements with VINES, Volunteers Improving Neighborhood Environments, an organization focused on supporting sustainable urban food systems. VINES community gardens are providing healthy food for residents while transforming blighted areas into robust community gardens, improving flood resilience in our most vulnerable neighborhoods.

The City secured \$100,000 to study the feasibility of creating a downtown microgrid. A microgrid is a localized energy system in which power is produced and consumed in a small geographic area, leading to high efficiency and cost savings. When the main grid goes down in a catastrophic weather event like a flood or blizzard, this microgrid would continue to provide power to critical municipal buildings and shelter areas.

This month, we're submitting a competitive application for stage two funding through NYSERDA, which could land \$1 million to cover design and engineering costs. This project, if funded, could lay the groundwork for creating a cheap and efficient municipal electric district for Downtown Binghamton. That's something we should all be excited about.

Advancing green initiatives is a mark of any forward-thinking city. In Binghamton, these series of projects show City Hall is on the cutting-edge of green technology and innovation. We're taking a practical approach and unlike Washington, we won't allow ideological battles to curb efforts to build the energy infrastructure of tomorrow and protect our environment.

### **Economic Development**

New families and young professionals won't locate in areas that don't have the jobs to support them. The Southern Tier is no stranger to tough economic times, but that doesn't mean we should simply accept a fate that means less prosperity and economic opportunity.

Last year, I told this audience that things would change, that Binghamton was back in the game. It was a starting point to advance major economic development initiatives and bring home millions in state funding to support our area.

That optimism met reality when the Southern Tier was a big winner in Governor Cuomo's Upstate Revitalization Initiative, or URI, landing \$500 million to strengthen our urban communities, create new jobs, grow tourism and improve quality of life.

Instead of sitting on the sidelines, this administration positioned Binghamton as a key stakeholder in the region's economic strategy. We identified transformative projects and worked with business leaders to bring investment back to the City.

Awardees in the City of Binghamton this round include: Bates Troy, Buckingham Manufacturing, the historic Lackawanna Train Station and the Binghamton Culinary Tourism Alliance, leveraging millions in private investment.



Our flagship economic development project at 7 Hawley Street will advance, thanks to \$3.45 million in URI funding. We will redevelop a surface parking lot into a vibrant mixed-use housing, commercial and parking facility in the heart of downtown. The \$20 million development will be a catalyst for further investments in our historic district.

This, while we shift our development strategy away from luxury student housing toward market-rate housing opportunities for all.

We're partnering with two recent Binghamton University graduates who looked to Binghamton to build their real estate portfolio. That's the story of Syed Ali, who is with us tonight, and Adam Ibrahim, the enthusiastic developers behind City Center Lofts, a \$2.5 million market-rate housing project at 73 Court St.

They're spearheading a 20,000 square-foot renovation of a historic downtown building which has sat vacant for 40 years — transforming dusty warehouse space into 12 state-of-the-art apartments. The development will set a high bar for green energy construction in Binghamton, featuring LED lighting, green roof, solar panels and a rainwater harvesting system.

The plan received more than \$280,000 in Green Innovation Grant funds from the Environmental Facilities Corporation, and \$300,000 in low-interest loans from the Binghamton Local Development Corporation. Crews will be on site within weeks to start cleanup and redevelopment.

Greater Binghamton Development's \$5 million, five-story commercial and housing project at the vacant lot at 72 Court St. continues to move through the planning and engineering process.

Project manager Mark Yonaty has yet another exciting project in the works, a state-of-the-art VA clinic at 203 Court St. set to open in 2017. By tearing down blighted properties and rehabilitating vacant buildings, this \$10 million project will further transform the Court St. Gateway to our downtown and ensure quality healthcare for the some 17,000 veterans who live in Greater Binghamton.

Steel and concrete are in place on Hawley St. for the \$19 million, 35,000-square-foot Southern Tier High Technology Incubator, that will attract the brightest entrepreneurial minds from the nation into our City, and act as a stimulus for new housing and neighborhood businesses in the area.

Last July, just a few blocks away, Red Barn Technology Group opened its doors on Pine Street in the former Greenman Senior Center. Red Barn has become a technology giant. Its customized computer systems are being used by the U.S. Air Force and top scientific research institutions.

From high-performance data centers to consumer-focused lines in custom printing and PC repair, Red Barn has redefined what it means to be a small business in Binghamton — serving local customers while being an international player in a highly competitive business.

That's the same story for ScottTech, which opened its doors last summer on the East Side. The high-tech manufacturer of warehouse management systems invested more than \$400,000 to rehabilitate a vacant factory. The firm employs 33 individuals and has recruited top engineering minds from Binghamton University as part of the expansion.

I've said many times that City Hall cannot create jobs, but rather the environment where job creation and investment can flourish.

In the past two years, Binghamton's business roots have grown plenty strong for John Hughes to confidently invest as the new owner of the Binghamton Mets, keeping the team in our community for years to come. Jim Weed, B-Mets General Manager, is with us tonight representing the new ownership group.

Jim, I remember being on the field as the team won the Eastern League Championship two seasons ago. You can bet this community is ready to support the organization and its new owners from first pitch, through the summer double-headers, to the final out of its next championship win. The season starts in 44 days. We couldn't be more excited.

Hometown baseball, downtown lofts, craft breweries, art galleries, unique restaurants, events like the LUMA Projection Arts Festival, a vibrant business district and thriving neighborhoods. This is what economic development in the new Binghamton is all about.

## **Finances**

Part of attracting new businesses is ending the stigma that Binghamton is the tax king of New York State. With tighter fiscal controls, this Administration has ended the wild tax increases of the past.

In my first two years in office, we have held the line of taxes with a less than one percent combined increase. In 2016, residential taxes increased just 0.41 percent. Commercial taxes actually decreased by 0.01 percent. While I understand it's negligible, it's the first time since 1999 the City has cut property taxes and reminds residents and businesses that tax stabilization is our key fiscal priority at City Hall.

The City's overall financial state is improving.

When Moody's downgraded the City's bond rating in 2013, there were negative consequences for our interest rates and your checkbook. As a result, residents pay approximately \$50,000 more in interest payments each year. The downgrade also sent a poor message to developers and businesses who desire confidence in the communities where they invest.

The two main reasons for the downgrade were delayed submission of annual audit and other financial statements to the State, and the grisly state of our Sewer Fund, which had a \$4.2 million deficit the day I took office.

We immediately addressed one of those areas: the City's state and federally-mandated audit documents are now filed on time.

For the Sewer Fund deficit, our City Finance Department, led by Comptroller Chuck Shager, worked diligently to close that gap.

We caught up on billing, reducing the deficit by more than \$1 million.

We took back funds not being used at the plant for repairs and other projects. Binghamton, Johnson City and all municipal users split \$4 million of unused funds. The City saw \$1.8 million back in our coffers.

We pursued and secured FEMA refunds still outstanding from the 2006 flood — \$225,000 in the bank.

And we took the lead to lower the Joint Sewage Treatment Plant's operating costs, leading to \$900,000 to shrink the deficit.

With these improvements, and continued strict fiscal oversight, we can expect to balance the Sewer Fund's budget by the end of this year — that means in three years we turned around a \$4.2 million deficit to make this fund profitable. It's remarkable work from Comptroller Shager. I join all taxpayers and ratepayers in my appreciation for this turnaround.

We've grown the general fund balance, or reserves, to \$15 million, which puts the City within the State's recommended limits — a key contributor to the City's healthy fiscal stress score from the State Comptroller's office. As many municipalities succumb to financial pressures, we've improved our position.

That position has allowed the City to pay off more debt than we're borrowing in the 2016 budget — a positive step toward the City's long-term financial health.

### **Parks & Neighborhoods**

2016 will be the year of the neighborhood in the City of Binghamton. This administration has worked hard to improve the integrity of neighborhood environments across the City, but our work is far from over.

The neighborhood where our children grow up is a key determination of their future outcomes when it comes to education, income and crime.

Neighborhoods with concentrated poverty, an aging housing stock and run down infrastructure leave residents with little hope their community will turn around.

Binghamton battles poverty like many post-industrial upstate cities. One third of Binghamton residents are living in poverty. It's a statistic not enough people realize, and one I myself have not spoken enough about.

The \$500,000 in state funding announced earlier this year for Binghamton to develop anti-poverty strategies is just the start of our efforts to help those in need.

Just last week, I joined Binghamton Housing Authority officials to open Cornerstone Family Healthcare in the Saratoga Heights housing projects. It's community health center that brings care into the community, breaking down traditional barriers like transportation and work commitments for low-income individuals. Cornerstone will treat any patient, regardless of their ability to pay. I'm proud to have worked with the Housing Authority to make this facility a reality.

In Binghamton, we need to establish new anchors like this health center to strengthen and revitalize our neighborhoods.

It all starts with City parks — some 34 park locations hundreds of acres of green space in every corner of the City.

Under the stewardship of Commissioner Bill Barber, the City of Binghamton has revamped and transformed once run-down park locations into pristine regional attractions residents can be proud of.

For me, park investments are a matter of principle — what my priorities are as a government official. For the poorest children in our City, parks offer the only recreational opportunity they have. These children don't take trips to theme parks or sleepaway camps. Long afternoons at the First Ward ball fields or Recreation Park swimming pool are where they spend their summers. They deserve the best facilities we can offer. That's exactly what Commissioner Barber and his team have delivered.

We recently demolished a blighted property to expand the South Side's Alfred St. Park by one third. There were many smiles of neighborhood children that day who now have a bigger space to play and make memories.

We boosted financial support for the Park Ranger program, an initiative created my first year in office, meaning dedicated personnel are patrolling all City parks, enforcing park rules and alerting police of suspicious activity. That program has been a huge success, and will be expanded again this year.

As Ross Park, a gorgeous new 300-seat amphitheater was completed last year. It's our latest investment on the historic grounds and an exciting park element that will be used by the Binghamton Zoo and Discovery Center for musical performances, animal exhibits and educational events. We thank officials from both the current and former administrations who worked to secure \$300,000 in state funding to complete the project.

Most importantly, we've positioned Binghamton as a statewide leader in dynamic parks and recreation projects.

In the last two years, the City has secured \$1 million in parks capital funding from New York State. \$500,000 for OurSpace Park at Recreation Park in 2014 and \$500,000 for the Ross Park Carousel Rehabilitation Project this past fall.

OurSpace Park will be the only fully-accessible playground of its kind in Upstate New York. I thank Councilman Joe Mihalko for his continued support of this project and coordinator Jen O'Brien for securing tens of thousands of dollars in private donations to compliment grant funding.

With a focus on those with special needs, OurSpace Park will promote physical and social activity for individuals of all ages and abilities. Whether it be a child with autism or a disabled veteran, we're building a safe, accessible and quiet space for families to make memories.

Grassroots support for the project has been overwhelming. Local businesses and community organizations have stepped up with fundraising support and volunteers, gearing up for our groundbreaking next week and project completion by Memorial Day this year.

With that \$500,000 in state funding awarded last fall, the City will restore the historic Ross Park carousel to its original grandeur and relocate it closer to the park's main entrance. Originally installed in 1920, the carousel's jumping horses and original organ have seen better days. By constructing an enclosed structure to house and protect the restored carousel, future generations will continue to enjoy this treasured timepiece.

For the Binghamton Zoo, the 5th oldest in America, the relocation means in-demand space for redesign of its main entrance, kicking off a long-term plan to build a year-round educational center.

A few weeks ago, the City was recertified as a "Tree City U.S.A." — recognition from the Arbor Day Foundation for our commitment to urban forestry and community improvement through planting trees. In 2015, we planted 150 shade trees across Binghamton, which is consistent with past years. I don't think 150 is nearly enough.

Tonight, I'm announcing a multi-year plan to put Binghamton on the map when it comes to sustainability and investing in our environment.

The City of Binghamton will plant 3,000 shade trees by the year 2022. Our work starts this year with 400 new trees for our parks, public spaces and neighborhoods streets.

Trees increase property values, reduce energy costs and clean our air. When it comes to our environment, an investment of this kind has never been made in the City's history. 3,000 trees will quite literally transform the landscape of Binghamton for generations. My thanks to Dani Cronic, who has agreed to be City Council's liaison on this initiative, I'm excited about what we can accomplish together.

For years, many have planned and talked about sustainability in our community. Ironically, it took a Republican mayor to push real changes to improve the environment and turn Binghamton green. Make no mistake, it's something I'm very proud of.

Beyond our parks department, restoring the integrity of our neighborhoods through blight reduction and improving the housing stock is a fight this administration will continue.

Since I took office two years ago, 40 vacant eyesores have been torn down. Our most impactful undertaking thus far has been the demolition of the Magic City Ice Building on Front. St. — which sparked a standing ovation when it was announced during last year's address. This dilapidated eyesore no longer shapes visitors' first impressions of Binghamton.

This year, we will undertake another major demolition project in a gateway corridor.

The City's old public works barn on Brandywine Ave. has been an eyesore for decades. In fact, the monstrosity was actually built in the early 1900's when the primary mode of transportation was the horse and buggy. Its grubby and crumbling brick walls are getting worse by the day. In a few short months, we will tear this building down.

The property's proximity to Downtown and major highway interchanges make it prime for redevelopment. It's a topic we will explore once the parcel is cleared and shovel-ready.

The public works barn joins more than a dozen residential properties in neighborhoods across the City which we be torn down this year.

An aggressive and efficient Code Enforcement operation is an important measure in protecting the integrity of our housing stock so properties don't get to the point of demolition.

In order to improve the quality of our neighborhoods, we must change the way Code Enforcement functions. This year, the City's code enforcement officers will break into six code precincts — outlined on this map.

Each inspector will be assigned to a specific area of the City and focus solely on those neighborhoods, becoming intimately familiar with the precinct and its property owners.

And that's not all. We are bringing together four enforcement arms of the City: Building and Code, Zoning, Police, and the Fire Marshal, to address crime prevention through environmental design. This is a first of its kind partnership between these departments and the most significant coordination in decades.

It's a concept that means putting a full-court press on the physical environments where crime takes place — an extension of the broken window theory Mayor Rudy Giuliani made famous cleaning up New York City in the 1990s.

If there's a hotbed of crime, not only will police patrol the area, but our other City departments will focus resources to combat the environmental conditions that breeds the criminal activity.

Commercial establishments will be monitored for fire safety regulations and occupancy limits, apartment complexes will fix chronic health and safety violations, and slumlords will be held accountable for illegal rooming houses and overpopulated drug dens that ruin our neighborhoods.

This strategy reinforces the annual code sweeps initiated by this Administration, which last year resulted in more than 1,000 violations. When code enforcement officials canvass a street and bring properties into compliance at the same time, it can have a compelling impact on the quality of the neighborhood.

But the single greatest deterrent for derelict properties remains owner occupation.

The City's first time homebuyer program has facilitated a dozen new home purchases since I announced it last year. The program offers funds for closing costs and up to \$20,000 towards rehabilitation of a single-family home.

It's bringing stability to neighborhoods and assisting families with the dream of owning a home.

Half of the participants are under the age of thirty — an incredibly encouraging statistic as more young professionals and families choose to buy homes and build their futures in Binghamton.

Our work isn't complete. Tonight, I'm announcing a new project to enhance the affordability and livability for City residents to remain in their homes.

With a \$350,000 grant secured by our Housing Department, we will assist roughly 40 owner-occupied single family homeowners with high-demand repairs — like upgrades to heating systems and water heaters, roof repairs and handicap accessibility projects. It's all to improve our housing stock and keep residents in their homes.

Our commitment to quality housing also means supporting communities in need, like seniors, veterans, and low-income individuals. Over the next several months, residents can expect some exciting announcements, including continued partnerships with the Binghamton Housing Authority to make these type of housing opportunities real.

## **Conclusion**

I'll end tonight's address with the words of Mark Twain, who said, "Action speaks louder than words but not nearly as often."

Ladies and gentlemen, tonight was not a speech about ideology or political right and wrong. It didn't pit one branch or level of government against another. It was a speech about getting things done. Moving this City forward. A review of the success we've had and the work that's just getting started.

I was elected to focus on five key areas of City government: public safety, infrastructure, economic development, finances, and parks and neighborhoods.

This administration hasn't deviated from that strategy. As a result, our neighborhoods are safer, our roads are better, and we've held the line on taxes.

Most importantly, and my parting message tonight, is that Binghamton City Hall is now a proven leader in bringing forth meaningful change to this community. Residents trust in their government, feel confident in its ability to improve their quality of life, perhaps for the first time in years.

The evidence is clear in the progress we've made and the vision I've outlined to face challenges on the horizon.

This community knows — the state of our city is strong.

Thank you and goodnight!