

**2018 State of the City Address  
by Mayor Richard C. David  
Binghamton City Council Chambers  
Feb. 22, 2018**

President Matzo, members of City Council, including our newest councilmember Sophia Resciniti, local elected leaders, those watching at home and in the audience tonight — good evening.

Over the last four years, I've talked a great deal about the need for City Hall to do the things that matter in local government: strengthen and modernize our police department, repair crumbling infrastructure, combat neighborhood blight, and deliver property tax relief to some of the highest-taxed homeowners in New York State.

On the surface, these are the most basic responsibilities of local government. But they required bold action to become reality. Our success in these areas, and many others, has strengthened the City's foundation and created a momentum you can see downtown, in our neighborhoods and in the projects happening across the City. Binghamton is different now than it was four years ago.

Downtown has new and exciting restaurants, breweries and shops. Our neighborhoods have fewer eyesores and newer streets. Binghamton University has a bigger footprint, and soon, SUNY Broome will, too.

Binghamton is emerging as a city ahead of the curve. We are a place where young professionals want to live, entrepreneurs want to start their businesses, and visitors from across the region want to experience the growing arts and culture scene.

This momentum has set Binghamton apart as a leader in the Southern Tier. It has also created a diverse set of new opportunities and challenges.

Navigating this has required a spirit of bipartisan cooperation, which this Administration and City Council have shown time and again. Our discussions and disagreements have always yielded a constructive path forward. We are partners in progress and have collectively put an end to the partisan nonsense that too often plagues local governments.

Binghamton can still be safer and more vibrant. Our neighborhoods can be stronger. And our local economy, while clawing back after years of job losses and decline, has a long way to go to be more resilient and diversified.

But with a more solid foundation than before, we are optimistic that over the next four years and beyond, Binghamton will continue its march toward a brighter future.

As Binghamton goes, so goes the Southern Tier. So let's lead the region in the 21st Century and make the impacts that will resonate for decades to come.

## **7 Hawley Street Project**

Late last year, the City selected PIKE Development to advance the \$12 million project at 7 Hawley Street downtown. The new mixed-use development will include a six-level parking ramp with more than 300 parking spots, a housing component with 18 market-rate units and 6,000 square feet of ground-floor commercial space.

PIKE representatives met with City Council last month, and site plans are currently working their way through various City commissions for review. A \$3.45 million state grant will support the project, and necessary bonding legislation will head to City Council in the next few weeks. We expect to break ground on the parking ramp this construction season and have it open to the public in January 2019.

This project will transform our downtown landscape and provide relief to the parking demands caused by new business development and the demolition of the Collier Street ramp.

Headquartered in Rochester, PIKE has developed mixed-use projects and parking ramps across the nation, including here in New York State — in Syracuse, Ithaca and Rochester.

The new ramp in downtown Binghamton won't be a hulking concrete structure of the past. It will be a well-designed parking facility with an attractive facade, bright lighting, safe and easy pedestrian access, electric vehicle charging stations and user-friendly automated payment technology.

### **50 Front St.**

Construction is ongoing, even through the winter, on the \$30 million mixed-use 50 Front St. project. This stretch of Front Street will no longer be defined by a towering, deteriorating eyesore that was the former Sheraton Hotel. The project will fortify the neighborhood and act as a catalyst for revitalization on that side of the Chenango River.

It also will provide high-demand market-rate rental units in the City, close to all our downtown amenities.

### **6 Emma St. Project**

Last summer, we announced a \$20 million historic rehabilitation project at 6 Emma St. in the First Ward.

Paulus Development of Syracuse is moving forward with plans to transform the former Ansco camera factory into a mixed-use building with 96 market-rate lofts and 50,000 square feet of commercial space.

Renovations will celebrate the history of the building, and help to attract and retain the young professionals our local employers need.

When the project is finished, the four-story building will have new life as a First Ward anchor once again.

For an example of Paulus Development's work, look no further than the company's historic rehabilitation of the Dietz Lantern factory in Syracuse. Completed last year, the project transformed a similar manufacturing space into an impressive mixed-use building with more than 90 market-rate apartments and 50,000 square feet of commercial space.

Now, thanks to a collaboration with the City and the County, Paulus Development is bringing that revitalization focus to Binghamton.

These three projects will help address an identified shortage in market-rate housing across the County. Over the next several years, we would like to work with private sector developers to add another 100 units of market-rate housing in the City of Binghamton. From adaptive reuse of our historic downtown buildings to brand new construction, the opportunities — and existing market demand — are clear.

## **Poverty**

We need to make sure the brighter future we are creating for Binghamton is brighter for all residents.

The harsh reality is that even as our City experiences a resurgence, a third of all Binghamton residents and half of our children live in poverty.

Those statistics should alarm all of us, no matter how many times we hear them. It's been said before, *"The world in which we live equally distributes talent, but it doesn't equally distribute opportunity."*

Binghamton cannot truly emerge as a leader until we make progress battling poverty in our community. It will take a collaborative effort.

This spring, Binghamton will see an infusion of nearly \$1 million of state money directed at programs to help low-income residents climb out of poverty. The programs were selected by the Binghamton-Broome Anti-Poverty Initiative, which brought together a coalition of elected officials, non-profit leaders, school district administrators and community members from across the county.

To the United Way of Broome County, serving as the backbone of the initiative, and to the other BBAPI members in the audience tonight, thank you for your work. Let's all promise to continue it.

## **Lee Barta Community Center**

The City will continue to make investments that strengthen neighborhoods, especially those with high poverty rates, and we will keep supporting programs giving low-income residents a ladder to improve their lives.

Case in point — the \$500,000 expansion of the Lee Barta Community Center on Liberty Street. This project will significantly expand the reach and impact of a vital neighborhood anchor. When the Barta Center reopens in a few weeks, families and individuals will have access to free nutrition and exercise classes, youth programming, enhanced learning opportunities, a computer lab, a monthly legal services clinic, and community space for neighborhood meetings. Both Senator Akshar and Visions Federal Credit Union stepped up with funding, and I join residents in thanking them both.

Staffed by the United Way, the Center will be a hub for programs and services offered by nonprofits and community partners like the YMCA, CHOW, Promise Zone, Cornell Cooperative Extension and Legal Services of Central New York.

This is how we start to break down the barriers created by poverty — by tapping into our resource-rich community and encouraging collaboration to ensure residents have access to the resources they need. The programs are out there. This building will bring them all together.

Last fall, I joined Binghamton City School District Superintendent Tonia Thompson for an announcement about a \$2.9 million grant the district received from the New York State Office of Child and Family Services.

This funding will significantly expand after-school programming for Binghamton students through the next five years.

Not only will more students have a safe and welcoming space to spend time after school, they will have greater access to programming focused on science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics, and an expanded opportunity to participate in athletics.

As part of the expanded programming, the School District and City are teaming up to hire more high school students to serve as Recreation Attendants in after-school programs at elementary schools.

Another harsh reality is there are young people living in the poorest areas of our City who have never seen the first-class university that sits just across the river. Some are hardly aware of its existence, let alone the resources it has to offer and the pathway it can provide to a better future.

That's one of the reasons we partnered with Binghamton University last year to create the Town Gown Advisory Board, which brings University leaders and students together with City residents and staff to work on strengthening the ties between BU and the broader community. It's about making the bridge between campus and the City wider, so it can accommodate all of our residents.

I look forward to the positive initiatives generated from this partnership and how it can improve the lives of residents of all means in neighborhoods across our City.

### **Homelessness: Family and Children**

My first year in office, I committed to ending homelessness among our veterans. Working with federal officials and a dedicated local committee, we found shelter for every veteran in our community without a home, doing our part to take care of those who served our country and earning Binghamton recognition as the first U.S. city to accomplish that goal.

Our work culminated last year in the opening of the Southern Tier's only homeless veteran housing facility — just a short distance from here on Pine Street.

Now, we're shifting the focus in our fight against homelessness to children and families.

In the Binghamton City School District, there has been a 40 percent increase in the number of students facing homelessness since 2012. Last year alone, approximately 280 Binghamton families accessed emergency shelter. Think about the far-reaching impact that experience has on a child's life. The effects touch their education, their health, their overall well-being.

At the same time, our community faces a shortage of supportive housing for homeless individuals — the kind of housing that provides not just a roof over people's heads but direct access to the

resources they need to help with the significant and lasting consequences of homelessness and poverty in general.

Tonight, I'm announcing a partnership with the Family Enrichment Network to build new supportive housing on the North Side specifically for families experiencing homelessness.

On several vacant City-owned lots on Virgil Street, where last year we demolished a terrible eyesore, Family Enrichment Network will construct a \$4.5 million, 19-unit housing development for homeless families. These families will have access to on-site services and constant support from professionals there to help them toward better, more stable lives.

Just steps from the Lee Barta Community Center, this project will build on our North Side investments and further stabilize the neighborhood. The project will also take multiple City-owned vacant parcels that are off the tax-rolls and put them in private hands to help a vulnerable population while also generating revenue to the City.

With us tonight is April Ramsay from Family Enrichment Network. Also with us is Rebecca Rathmell from the Southern Tier Homeless Coalition. Join me in thanking them for their work battling homelessness in our community.

In the pipeline are additional homeless housing initiatives, which we will announce in the coming months. In the next four years, our goal is to create at least 50 new units of housing for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. As demonstrated, we take this issue seriously and will mobilize City resources to make an impact.

### **Affordable Housing**

We also must address the shortage of safe, quality, affordable housing.

On Crandall Street, our partnership with the First Ward Action Council has produced a major initiative, with construction now underway on an \$11 million affordable housing project. The project will renovate 10 dilapidated multi-family homes into 40 units of housing for income-eligible individuals and families. Once completed, one of the most crime-ridden areas of the City, for years home to some of the area's poorest living conditions, will be completely transformed and ready to meet our region's great demand for quality affordable housing.

The project also saves the historic 47 North St., once slated for demolition, for a future community space. A special thanks to Councilwoman Dani Cronic, whose passionate efforts with nearby neighbors saved 47 North St. from the wrecking ball.

City Hall was in the driver's seat on this project. From securing Land Bank and other federal funding to advocacy efforts in Albany, we brought partners to the table to make it a reality.

The City took the lead again last year, when we demolished the vacant Big Lots plaza on the North Side to make room for another affordable housing project, this time from the Binghamton Housing Authority. We secured more than a half million dollars for the demolition through the Restore New York program, with help from Senator Fred Akshar and Governor Cuomo.

The project calls for 48 residential units, plus commercial space on the ground floor. We await a final award of tax credit financing from New York State, which we expect in April.

## **Foreclosure Auction**

One of the primary obstacles to improving our neighborhoods is the Broome County auction process, which sells tax-foreclosed properties to the highest bidder. Not only is this process an impediment to building stronger neighborhoods, it is a root cause of the erosion, instability and decline some City neighborhoods have experienced for years.

Most of these auction bidders don't buy the foreclosed properties to live in them. They invest in them minimally, despite the fact that many of the properties need significant work, and they use them to provide substandard living conditions to tenants.

In fact, some buyers in the auction process never even pay taxes on the properties, which leads to a second, and in some cases, third foreclosure. And then the process starts over again, creating an all-too-common cycle. And every year many neighborhoods slip further and further into decay.

I've been talking about this problem for years. In 2016, we successfully worked with the County on a partial solution to prevent the sale of City properties that need to be demolished. We now acquire those properties for \$1, demolish them, and prevent them from becoming substandard or dangerous housing. That was a good first step.

But many of the remaining properties on the auction list are in decent condition, and with moderate investment could become great homes for young families. Unfortunately, that's not what's happening when they're sold to the highest bidder.

The homes that are in decent condition now will be the same homes we demolish in a few years when landlords let properties slide into further disrepair and fail to pay their taxes.

The long-term integrity and stability of City neighborhoods should not be up for auction.

I have a plan to address this issue that involves the City taking the lead and bringing financial resources to the table. We should promote homeownership so the same people owning these properties also live in them. Owner-occupied homeownership is the number one way to stabilize a neighborhood. This is the year we must make significant changes to the County's foreclosure process and take back our neighborhoods. I will discuss details of my proposal in the next few weeks. Support from the County Executive, Legislature and City Council is critical.

The alternative is the status quo, and we've seen where that's gotten us.

## **Public Safety**

In the last four years, the City of Binghamton has made important strides in public safety.

Our police department finally has the support it deserves when it comes to manpower, with the addition of nine officers to the force. Body-worn cameras and patrol car cameras have increased accountability and transparency. These tools are among the new technology that has brought our police department into the 21st Century.

But the Southern Tier's largest and most sophisticated police department still has facilities from the 1970s. Many mayors, including myself, haven't done enough in this area.

That's changing. We want to create a state-of-the-art headquarters purpose-built for the technology and workflow of our agency. Physical renovations that will help our officers do their jobs better are now underway.

Binghamton's designation as a high intensity drug trafficking area, or HIDTA, has opened new doors for funding and collaboration to fight crime. That designation also reminds us of Binghamton's role alongside other Upstate communities in the statewide effort to curb narcotics trafficking and violent crime that rips our families and neighborhoods apart.

In last year's State of the City address, I outlined our plan to install stationary license plate readers, or LPRs, at gateway locations around the City. Seventeen are now active, with more on the way this spring. The real-time alerts to our patrol division about cars passing into the City — like the one last fall that netted a stolen pickup truck from Tennessee and a loaded .380 handgun — remain an important aspect of the LPRs. In addition, they provide regular investigative support to our Detective Division and Joint Special Investigations Task Force, assisting criminal investigations large and small.

Working with other New York State Crime Analysis Centers, organized through the Department of Criminal Justice Services, is assisting police intelligence across Upstate New York.

Being on the front lines of cutting-edge technology means we must continue to have important conversations about the intersection of public safety and privacy, and keep exploring the best and most responsible use of the technology. We will continue working with agencies around the state to stay prudent about best practices as this technology evolves.

In Binghamton, it's not just technology that's helping us fight crime.

I've talked before about the creation of the CPTED Task Force — Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design — which focuses the City's enforcement arms to address the physical environments where criminal activity takes place. Participating departments include the Mayor's Office, Building and Code, Zoning, Police, the Fire Marshal and Corporation Counsel.

Thanks to CPTED, we've closed after-hours clubs that were the source of neighborhood distress, and in some cases violent crime — 153 Susquehanna St., 56 Orton Ave., 124 Broad Ave., 153 Conklin Ave., and 201 Chenango St. Working in conjunction with the State Liquor Authority and other law enforcement partners, CPTED has also prompted the shut down of taverns, like T. Mulligans and The Clinton Hotel, that had become magnets of violence.

Our officers hear it on the street: Criminal hot spots are relocating outside of Binghamton because there's too much heat from law enforcement in the City.

With boosted police manpower, new equipment, smarter strategies and the community's support, we hope to turn the page on crime in Binghamton.

But we can't just push this activity out of the City and into our neighboring municipalities. Binghamton's CPTED team can serve as a model in our region.

Over the next few months, we'll bring law enforcement leaders from across Broome County to City Hall and open our playbook so they can duplicate Binghamton's success in their respective communities. We have a proven track record dealing with hubs of criminal activity. Collectively, our goal should be to push crime out of Broome County.

## **Infrastructure**

In the next four years, multiple large-scale infrastructure projects will have immediate and noticeable impacts on major Binghamton gateways.

The \$20 million project to reconstruct Rt. 363 downtown will upgrade early-1960s infrastructure, improve access to the river, and re-imagine the experience of coming downtown. The new boulevard will better connect existing businesses and neighborhoods, doing away with dated infrastructure that isolated certain communities from a thriving downtown, and open up more land to create new opportunities for development and resiliency.

A few weeks ago, we hosted the first of many public meetings on the project. Preliminary designs and alternatives are being worked on now.

Last fall, initial utility work began on the Front Street Gateway Project. Next month crews will be back to work and advancing a more-than-\$5 million project to finally fix the worst stretch of road in Binghamton and transform another gateway.

And this summer, the City will break ground on the State Street Gateway Project.

When finished, State Street from Susquehanna Street to Hawley Street will have new pavement, signals, and bike lanes, safer crossings for pedestrians, and enhanced landscaping.

The project will advance a larger vision for our downtown, enhancing infrastructure to spur new economic activity in Binghamton's core. It is another example of how City Hall continues to leverage federal funds for local projects.

Small cities — like Binghamton — cannot accomplish their infrastructure needs alone. We've built the partnerships with our state officials to bring exciting infrastructure projects off the drawing board.

These projects represent direct work with the Governor's Office and New York State Department of Transportation. Our regional DOT team, led by Jack Williams, continually produces results for our residents.

Look no further than the 434 Greenway Project. This spring, work will finish on the project's Phase One, which improved pedestrian access and safety on Conklin Avenue and Pennsylvania Avenue. The second phase will pick up where that project left off, creating a true bike and pedestrian path from the South Side to Binghamton University that will serve as a showcase of our County-wide rivertrail network. Final design for Phase Two is underway.

We have a wide-ranging slate of other infrastructure projects this year meant to improve the foundations of our City.



A pair of South Side bridges over Pierce Creek — at Conklin Avenue and Belden Street — will receive \$2.1 million in repairs. These neighborhood bridges don't always get the same attention as some of our downtown bridges, but they are vital to residents and businesses.

A \$1.3 million Sixth Ward sewer interceptor project, and study of a Moeller Street pump station, will upgrade critical stormwater and sewer infrastructure.

More than \$3.4 million will be spent this year upgrading water and sewer infrastructure that lies beneath our roads. We'll spend a million dollars more improving curbs and sidewalks on streets we pave to meet Americans with Disabilities Act standards.

In upgrading and rebuilding neighborhood streets, most of the cost has little to do with paving and blacktop.

Here's an example: Reconstructing three blocks of Lincoln Avenue on the West Side will cost \$1.1 million because of needed replacement of underground utilities, curbs and sidewalks. That's less than a half-mile of road.

In 2018, more than \$8 million is budgeted for street reconstruction, bridge projects, mill and pave, and underground utility improvements.

As time goes on, it will become more and more expensive to follow a sustainable improvement plan for our roads, staying ahead of their deterioration. We need more federal and state dollars to properly fix existing infrastructure. The current proposal out of Washington falls short, leaving state and local taxpayers to bear most of the financial burden for new projects.

Furthermore, if the planned elimination of Community Development Block Grants is approved, the City will lose a critical stream of funding to fix streets in low-income neighborhoods.

### **Binghamton-Johnson City Joint Sewage Treatment Plant**

Aside from the Prospect Mountain I-86 rebuild, there's no larger infrastructure project in our region than the reconstruction of the Binghamton-Johnson City Joint Sewage Treatment Plant. It's a project of significant size and scope, with heavy technical elements involving biological treatment processes and complex systems. It's also the most significant environmental project this City has ever tackled.

When I was first elected, there was no comprehensive plan to address the problems at the plant. Nor was there adequate funding in place for the handful of projects that had been identified. The projects on the table were short-term Band-Aids that would have led to costlier projects down the road.

We did not start a project that has now tripled in cost. We went in a new direction altogether. Here's why.

The old plan called for spending tens of millions of dollars on a new filtration system, connecting it to a 1950's-era electrical system that had caught fire twice in the last 10 years.

The old plan called for keeping decades-old and poorly configured piping infrastructure with a state-of-the-art filtration system. When the time comes to replace that piping in a few years,

portions of the brand new \$100 million system would have to have been removed to install the piping.

The old plan failed to fully protect against future floods and safeguard tens of millions in new equipment.

The manner in which wastewater is treated was not even the same in these two plans.

The plant is supposed to have, by law, two sources of power, so that in the event of an outage, untreated sewage isn't discharged into the river. This plant has never had two sources of power. As part of this new project, we're adding an independent backup generator system. For the first time since the plant has been in operation, it will comply with the law.

And the list goes on.

A piecemeal approach to fixing the facility hasn't worked, and it's the reason we're in this position today. There weren't tough choices made for the plant. Band-Aids are easy, and issues were left to the next person in charge.

I didn't run for office to take the easy path. I ran to take on the problems and challenges that no one else would. Johnson City Mayor Greg Deemie and I chose to fix the plant in its entirety because it's the right thing to do. Our plan ensures ratepayers won't pay hundreds of millions of dollars more for unavoidable repairs and patches that would have been needed in the next 30 years.

We've also removed politics from the process and created greater transparency and accountability. We installed an experienced public works project manager and engineer, Ken Del Bianco, who reports directly to my office and is doing a great job for the owners. City Council's majority appointed a member of the minority party to act as a liaison. All monthly and quarterly reports and project updates are available on the City of Binghamton website. The monthly Joint Sewage Board Meetings are open to the public. Most importantly, we've worked with the New York State DEC every step of the way. It's too important a project to let political barriers change our course.

## **Clean Energy Community**

Binghamton is a leader in our region because of our action-oriented approach to the issues that matter.

Last year, I proudly accepted our City's Clean Energy Community award from Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul and NYSERDA CEO Alicia Barton during a ceremony here in Binghamton that highlighted the Southern Tier as a clean-energy hub of the Northeast.

Our commitment to green projects — ones focused on promoting clean-energy jobs, building smart and sustainable infrastructure, and reducing carbon emissions — is stronger than ever.

To earn the Clean Energy Community designation, we completed a series of high-impact clean-energy projects, including converting all of Binghamton's streetlights to energy-efficient LED technology, installing electric vehicle charging stations for public use at Recreation Park and streamlining the regulatory process for solar projects.

The City will continue to pursue green initiatives in 2018 and beyond, starting with the installation of a new green roof on City Hall, thanks to \$1.6 million in state funding.

We will also pursue certification as a DEC Climate Smart Community, which recognizes local governments that take action on climate change mitigation and adaptation.

These initiatives matter. In part, they are about protecting our community against the very real and serious long-term effects of a changing environment.

But our focus on green initiatives is also about positioning Binghamton to thrive in the clean-energy economy of the future. With more companies and investors driving job growth in green energy, the private sector will look to Binghamton as a leader in upstate New York.

Binghamton cannot afford to pass up opportunities in a clean-energy economy. Nor can we afford to miss out on the cost-saving benefits of green investments.

## **Power Plant**

One of the most exciting opportunities we have centers on potential uses for the co-generation power plant on Charles Street in the First Ward. Constructed to support Anitec, it was, until recently, used as a peaker plant, which means electricity was generated only in times of extreme hot or cold temperatures.

The plant has changed hands several times over the last decade. When the previous owner, Wellhead Electric from California, decided to cease plant operations, we reached out to company officials to talk about the plant's future. We identified it as an asset and were able to reach an agreement to have the plant donated to the City. I appreciate the bipartisan support from City Council members, who moved quickly to accept this donation in December.

In the month and a half since the City took ownership, we've been approached by developers, energy companies, and others eager to work with the City on a variety of projects at the plant.

At the same time, we're exploring the possibility of municipal electric, which could reduce utility bills for thousands of Binghamton residents. We also hope to leverage private development of the Charles Street Business Park, which is next door to the power plant.

Keep in mind the City is also in the running to be a big winner in the State's NY Prize community microgrid competition, which would award at least \$5 million to build a Binghamton microgrid — a sustainable energy system independent from the main power grid. A microgrid would provide a safeguard in the event of a power outage or natural disaster.

The City has already received a \$100,000 grant to study its feasibility, and \$1 million more for engineering and design. The City is working closely with our Microgrid team, which includes experts from GE Energy and Bridgestone Associates, power plant designers and engineers. An announcement from the state on the final award is expected soon.

These concepts could be combined or advanced separately — it's too soon to say. However, one thing is already clear: The decision to accept the donated power plant has created opportunities that will no doubt benefit Binghamton taxpayers.

## **DECO District**

Anchored by investments from Binghamton University, SUNY Broome and the private sector, downtown Binghamton has experienced a period of remarkable growth. Downtown is this region's cultural and entertainment destination — no doubt.

The arts community has played an important role in sparking downtown's renaissance with new lofts, galleries and reasons for people to visit in the first place.

Just ask the tens of thousands who have experienced LUMA or the thousands more who attend the First Friday Art Walk each month. Ask the sold-out crowds for Broadway in Binghamton or for performances by the Binghamton Philharmonic.

Arts is an economic engine and a central part of a downtown's vibrancy.

In Binghamton, we are fortunate to have so many great events and initiatives, many of which the City supported from inception. But there's more we can do to make downtown Binghamton an arts and culture destination.

Our vision for the future is a beautiful and walkable arts district, investing in the anchors that bring folks downtown and giving visitors a better reason to rediscover Binghamton.

To make this vision a reality, we have applied for funding to the Greater Binghamton Fund, part of the \$500 million Upstate Revitalization Initiative to transform downtowns in the Triple Cities into vibrant urban environments. Our plan hopes to leverage millions from this fund to create the Downtown Entertainment and Cultural Organizations, or DECO, District.

It will be a true collaboration.

The City of Binghamton will fund more than \$1.2 million in streetscape improvements in targeted downtown areas near the Forum Theater and Artists' Row — walkability upgrades, facade improvements for our two parking garages, green infrastructure and a fix for the Washington Street pedestrian mall.

Broome County has committed more than a half million dollars in upgrades at the Forum.

Cultural institutions and the private sector are funding partners as well for public art installations.

To find our vision, we worked with individual artists, the Chamber of Commerce, Broome County Government, the Broome County Arts Council, Friends of the Forum, Binghamton Philharmonic, Tri-Cities Opera, our state representatives, restaurant owners and many other community organizations.

If awarded, we'll seek additional community input on specific projects and proposals.

It's exciting. It's forward-thinking. And it's long overdue to support the outstanding efforts by cultural organizations in our community.

## **Finance**

In my 2018 budget address, I announced the City would create savings funds to offset increases in health insurance and pension costs. This is one of the most important financial policies we can implement to eliminate wild tax increases long after I'm out of office.

When we put together the annual budget, the top two expenses beyond municipal control are health insurance and an annual contribution to the New York State Retirement System. When budgets are tight and these expenses increase, some municipalities raise taxes to cover these costs, which is unfortunately what happened repeatedly in Binghamton over the years.

As we close out the 2017 budget, we're allocating \$1 million to offset future increases in health and pension costs which will be available for the 2019 budget and beyond.

As a member of the Executive Committee of the New York Conference of Mayors, I talk to mayors from many Upstate cities about their financial situations, and how much or little each has in their reserves.

Many cities are forced to unexpectedly drain reserves to address health and pension cost increases. Those cities that are not proactively preparing for these costs will be faced with challenges seven months from now passing their budgets — a cycle that will repeat itself as long as costs continue to rise.

Binghamton has an excellent Comptroller in Chuck Shager, who has spearheaded many of the financial initiatives we've implemented over the years. In the last few months alone, decisions to switch health care consultants and change cash management and investment strategies have saved taxpayers approximately \$375,000 in the 2018 budget. We'll see additional savings next year and beyond.

The LED streetlight conversion project, which I touched on earlier, has been a success story for Binghamton. 2017 was the first full year we could measure the results of converting 6,700 streetlights to energy-efficient LED technology. We've seen the City's streetlight electric costs drop by 60 percent, a roughly \$400,000 annual savings to taxpayers.

But nothing will have a larger impact on residents and businesses than addressing property taxes. Businesses won't locate or expand in areas with high taxes. Employees and entrepreneurs won't live in neighborhoods with high tax burdens. New families are often priced out of homes because of taxes.

Since 2014, we've not only held the line on taxes, but delivered the largest residential tax cut since 1998 in this year's budget, which also had the third-straight tax cut for commercial property owners.

In last year's State of the City, I made a commitment to lower taxes. Tonight I make that commitment again. We'll deliver residential and commercial tax relief again in 2019. I can't give

you the exact decrease until my budget address in September, but our goal is to beat the 2.25 percent residential decrease provided this year.

Binghamton residents pay too much in taxes. The 52 percent increase thrust on homeowners in the eight years prior to my taking office wasn't fair and it wasn't right. Residents should continue to demand tax relief from me, this City Council and future mayors and Council members.

Tonight, I also reiterate my commitment to improve the City's bond rating, which was downgraded in 2013 from its Triple-A status. A bond rating impacts how much interest City taxpayers pay annually on capital projects. When we undertake multi-million dollar infrastructure projects annually, to give you an example, the interest costs alone are massive.

You've heard our plan to address future increases in pension and health care costs, lower taxes, advance multiple housing initiatives, invest in our infrastructure, and much more. We're able to do this while once again growing the City's Fund balance to \$20 million dollars. Ladies and gentlemen, this is how we've run City Hall and how we've restored the financial health of the City.

## **Conclusion**

Last fall, I was honored to be re-elected to a second term as Mayor of Binghamton. Officials are first elected on potential, but they are re-elected on performance.

Voters last fall made a clear statement: The City of Binghamton, under our leadership, is finally on the right track. From the voting booths, they sent the message I am here to deliver to you tonight: The state of the City is strong.

After seeing the results of the first four years, residents chose four more years of action, progress and results. That's what tonight's speech was about and that's what we will deliver.

The initiatives I've outlined tonight range from complex and technical to requiring a great deal of work and cooperation. Some could take years to come to fruition.

American cities are home to the excitement and innovation we don't see in every level of government, and Mayors are on the front lines dealing in real time with the issues being discussed in Albany and Washington.

Tonight's collection of projects and policies transcend political ideology. More elected officials should advance priorities that don't fit solely on one side of the aisle.

We can't be afraid to disrupt the status quo or try innovative approaches to old problems. There's nothing wrong with being bold.

The seeds we plant today will continue to give Binghamton and the surrounding area new life for years to come.

After steering Binghamton back in the right direction, we are now accelerating ahead, ready to lead our community in the 21st century.

Thank you and goodnight!

