



CITY OF AMSTERDAM, NEW YORK

Office of the Mayor

Mayor Michael Cinquanti

2023 State of the City Address for Amsterdam, NY

We should be proud of ourselves. We've accomplished so much in such a short amount of time. It feels good to be able to begin this year's State of the City Address by telling you that the City of Amsterdam no longer has a deficit. Thanks to the hard work and support of many dedicated city employees and elected officials and thanks to the patience and cooperation of the residents and businesses who call this City home, as of the close of our City's last fiscal year, the \$8.3 million dollar deficit that existed when I became Mayor on January 1, 2020 has been resolved and we now have a \$3.6 million surplus.

That represents a positive swing of over \$11 million, accomplished over two and a half years, without the exorbitant property tax increases, mass layoffs of employees, or drastic cuts in City services so many feared had to happen, when I took office. And that \$11 million swing was accomplished during a once in a century public health crisis that forced our City to change the way we delivered just about every municipal service.

So how did we do it. Well first of all, I want to thank Deputy Controller Cassandra Kinowski. Before she straightened it out, this City's capital projects bookkeeping was an absolute mess. Ms. Kinowski was able to balance the accounts and close out the books on projects that had been initiated years ago. What was discovered was that several million dollars was left over from projects which were completed and paid for or never started and the New York State Comptroller's Office approved us applying those monies to our deficit.

Receiving close to \$1.8 million worth of ARPA Aid from the Federal Government has helped us pay for emergency expenditures that would have otherwise had to be taken out of contingency accounts. Much higher than anticipated Sales Tax revenue helped provide an additional \$1.6 million plus in revenues. The Muni Golf Course Clubhouse sale enabled us to wipe out another \$1.6 million in debt. Add it all up and you have \$8 million of unbudgeted revenues, which could be used to offset the deficit or, at the very least, make sure it did not get bigger.

We've also compassionately and strategically eliminated positions, and selectively chose not to fill certain vacancies and we've monitored every ordinary everyday expenditure exceeding \$400 to make sure it was essential and properly budgeted.

And as you will hear throughout this address, we have been and continue to be focused on creative partnerships and performance-based funding strategies to pay for major investments in infrastructure, blight remediation, public safety and public transportation. This has enabled our City to simultaneously set the stage for future growth while we were digging out of a major financial hole.

The bottom line is that managing our City's finances requires constant attention to proper procedures and details. For too many years those procedures and attention to detail have been permitted to get

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sloppy. Instead of fixing mistakes in budgeting those mistakes were carried forward year to year. Instead of reconciling accounts regularly, they let the reconciliations slide to much longer intervals. Capitol Projects planning and accurate budgeting ceased to exist.

It has taken us three years to get out of the mess we were in. It is no coincidence that during those three years we have had the New York State Comptroller's office looking over our shoulder and we hired a new independent auditing firm. Their assistance in pointing out what we were doing wrong was critical to us getting our financial footing back under us once again.

So now that we have addressed these problems, the goal is to make sure we don't go back down that same rabbit hole. Which is why I proposed, the Common Council approved and the voting public passed the referendum this past November, which changes the provisions in our City Charter for selecting all future City Controllers. From now on, the position will be filled by Mayoral appointment instead of an election and to be considered, candidates will need to possess appropriate financial management accounting experience and credentials.

This evening, I will be submitting the name of Loise Biron to the Common Council for approval to replace Kim Brumley as a consultant to our Controller's Office, as a first step in this transition. Subsequently, we are seeking the special legislation necessary from the State to permit us to appoint a non-resident of Montgomery County to the post of Controller. Mrs. Biron resides in Gloversville and is a CPA with several years' experience in public accounting. She has developed, updated and maintained the same sorts of financial policies and procedures our City lacks or has done a less than perfect job enforcing for years. I look forward to working with her to optimize the use and management of our City's financial data to ensure we have the plan and resources in place to assure Amsterdam can achieve our short and long-term objectives.

This past year we have also addressed the single biggest driver of financial uncertainty and stress in our City's annual budget, the cost of the health insurance benefit provided by contract to our City's employers and pensioners. It is the most costly, non-salary item in our budget, amounting to between \$5 and \$6 million expense per year. During the past six years, we have exceeded the City's health insurance budget by an average of \$600,000 per year. Why. Because we were self-insured, meaning if an employee or pensioner of the City visited a doctor, emergency room, urgent care center, a specialist or had to be treated as a hospital patient, the City and not an insurance company paid the bill. And for the last six years, those bills have averaged \$600,000 more than we anticipated. Making the situation even worse was that because it took weeks to be billed for these services, for many of those years, the City did not realize we spent most of that additional money until a month or two after our fiscal year ended and a new budget was already in place. So we set up a monthly health insurance expense reporting mechanism which helped us prove we could instead go to a fully insured model, offer the same level of coverages, avoid these massive budget shortfalls and make a better deal for taxpayers.

And we are in the process of putting the finishing touches on the very first complete and professional three-year capital projects plan our City has seen in the past decade. Every department in our City participated in its generation under the guidance and supervision of Kim Brumley and Cassandra Kinowski. There is no possible way for a \$36 million organization to operate cost effectively without such a management tool. It is the fiscal roadmap we need to make sure we get our City's most important big things done and once we've got a complete and solid three-year plan in place it will be extended to a

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five year plan and that plan will be updated continuously so that we consider and resolve the financial challenges our City will face before those challenges become crisis and new deficits.

I need to thank our City's personnel director Kim Brumley for stepping into the void created when our previous City Controller resigned, to help me and our Controller's office effectively deal with the financial issues of this City. Her implementation of a meaningful controller's report at Common Council meetings, her coordination of a real and badly needed capital projects planning and funding schedule with our department heads, her troubleshooting financial issues that have arisen, are just some prime examples of her great work in a difficult and unwanted role and I am forever grateful to her for that contribution.

I also want to thank the staff of the City Controller's office for putting up with the upheaval caused by the runup to the vote on the City Controller referendum and its aftermath. Change is often difficult and I appreciate the fact that you have dealt with it in the way you have.

And finally, though our deficit is gone, the balance on the restructuring bond we issued to refinance that deficit stood at \$5.2 million as of the end of our last fiscal year. Yes we have more money in the bank, a positive cash flow and less financial stress but we must still pay down that bond and keep our spending squarely in the black. And that believe me, will be an ongoing challenge.

So now that I've given you a summary of the accomplishments your City has made with its financial management, let's take a look at what was accomplished in the key functions of City Government last year and what our plans are for each in 2023.

I will begin with our City's master plan. A master plan is a municipality's roadmap for the future. The last Master Plan our City developed was created in 2002 and I carry a copy of it in my briefcase.

The good news is that this past year we were awarded a state grant for right around \$100,000 to create a new master plan for Amsterdam and the timing could not be better. We have so many projects and initiatives that are moving forward or are partially funded or are hitting other roadblocks and delays that now is an excellent time to do this total analysis of what our priorities should be.

A lot has changed in Amsterdam in the last 20 years but the broad bottom line wish list for what we want our City to be has not. We want to stabilize and grow our City's population by getting working families and young people to stay here and by giving our seniors an affordable option for maintaining a presence here. We want to attract new working families, young people and retirees to live here. In order to do that we must make sure we have compelling reasons and necessary resources in place or at the very least in the works for these groups of people to do these things.

I'd like to help get Amsterdam moving fast enough and far enough in a positive coordinated direction so that our City becomes one of the top two or three answers whenever the following question is asked; "What community is the number one hometown choice for working families in the Capital Region?"

We will get to the top of that list by providing enough valid reasons why we should be. As we review our City's accomplishments and challenges of 2022, it is clear that we made important progress. Now we'll review some of that progress.

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Roads

Residents of our City have noticed their ride around Amsterdam has become quite a bit smoother. In the past three years, we've paved over 26.2 lane miles of road or approximately 13 miles of city streets and that doesn't include the Church Street rebuild, the River bridge or the new Route 5 arterial project. We've invested close to \$4 million in our streets program during that time. Our City has roughly 88 miles of streets, which means we've paved 15% of them within the last three years. This year that figure will exceed 20% as we pave the worst most heavily used sections of at least another 20 City streets. I want to emphasize funding for these street improvements came from State funding and that state funding started flowing at record amounts only after Congress finally approved and a new President signed a bill which finally brought ARPA aid payments to New York State, which in turn enabled our State government to dedicate record amounts of money to the CHIPS, Highway and Pothole repair aid programs.

Streetlighting

Late this summer, contractors will begin the project to replace every streetlight in this City with LED lighting fixtures that will provide much higher quality illumination for a much lower cost. Thanks in large part to a \$1.1 million grant from the State, the annual power cost savings realized from the switchover will pay for this project in just five years. And we will use that annual savings on our utility bill to pay off the bond we will issue to finance the rest of the project. The goal is to make sure the cost for the project does not require new property tax revenues to be raised. The target date to start the actual project is this summer. All 2,000 plus lights should be operational by the summer of 2024.

Blight Remediation

Our City's efforts to rid blight from Amsterdam's neighborhoods have achieved record results. Three years ago, we made a commitment to use every possible approach and strategy to demolish or rebuild this City's most distressed properties. Today I am pleased to report that those efforts have resulted in 40 structures being demolished, 40 more getting sold to private individuals and developers and we are currently working on closing transactions that will see \$3.5 million to \$5 million more dollars of private and public monies invested in the renovation of 10 and possibly 30 more city-owned, distressed multi-family homes.

These efforts have had and will have a positive impact on the appearance and property values of neighborhoods throughout Amsterdam and when fully completed, will not only restore these properties to the tax rolls but also add between 150-200 more badly needed residential living spaces to our City's inventory.

Some of the most significant eyesores eliminated in the process include the crumbling and dangerous former Bowler Brewery building on West Main St, the dilapidated pair of former diners on East Main St, a rejuvenation of the former Crystal Bar Restaurant on Lyon St. And late last year we received the fantastic news that our City's application for a \$2 million Restore New York grant to finally demolish the decrepit five-corners strip mall has been approved and by the end of this year that abomination will be gone from the landscape of that historic Fourth Ward intersection

I want to thank all our partners in this blight remediation effort including DePaul Properties, the Schenectady County Land Bank, and A.I.K Property Group headed by Pam Swanigan and of course the State of New York and Montgomery County for their faith in the future of Amsterdam.

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Thank you also to Cranesville Properties for demolishing the abandoned parking garage that once served Riverfront Center and the Garcia family for taking down the long-neglected buildings on the corner of Market and Storrie Streets to create a prime corner location for new development on the busy Route 30 pathway.

Waiting in the wings for 2023 are negotiating development deals we hope to reach with experienced housing development partners which will focus on converting distressed properties and vacant lots in the most vulnerable sections of our City into modern, well maintained and supported new living spaces. And New York State has just announced a new round of land Bank funding which means Amsterdam will be taking down another half dozen or so of our very worst eyesores this summer.

On the front line of our City's fight against blight is our City's Building Inspection and Code Enforcement team and I thank each of them for the effort they put forth. These are the folks who have the responsibility for making sure any new construction and renovations are done according to code and they also are responsible for making sure unsafe and hazardous building and property conditions are either remediated or cited and prosecuted. It can sometimes be a thankless job, but when I assigned leadership of the department to Fire Chief Anthony Agresta, we agreed on a philosophy: We would do everything we could to help property owners who wanted to do the right thing do it and as long as they kept making progress, they would receive our support. At the same time, we were determined to do everything in our power to prevent property owners intent on doing the wrong thing from doing so and if they persisted, to make sure they paid a price for their transgressions.

We have reenergized our City's property disposition process, which is designed to get blighted and foreclosed city-owned properties into the hands of the people with the best plans and track records for getting them remediated and back on the tax rolls. The best example of property disposition success is the previously mentioned Dan Nelli-driven reincarnation of the former Crystal Bar into the Lyon Street Bar & Grill. I thank all the folks on our Property Disposition Committee for their engagement in and contributions to this process.

Public Works

Our department of public works is the most familiar face of our City Government. They are constantly in the public eye, collecting our garbage, fixing our potholes, plowing streets in the winter, and sweeping them clean the rest of the year. They have to work underground, overhead, inside, outside, in the freezing cold, drenching heat, pouring rain, and when necessary knee deep in clogged sewage and soggy mud. When they come home from work they are typically filthy dirty and often times, like when a water main breaks or a snowstorm hits, they are dead tired too. They are not perfect, not one of us is. They have bad days and good days like all of us do. They are like baseball umpires, when they do their jobs well, they don't get noticed but God forbid make one mistake and boom!

But make no mistake about it, our DPW crews are the heart and soul of this City's public services and I'm proud to be Mayor of the City they work for. I thank each one of them who come to work every day get the job done and take pride in the work they do. And I thank DPW foreman Phil Bracchi for his leadership as well.

Now having said all this I do think our City can improve upon the quality of some of the less basic services DPW provides on its own or in conjunction with other City departments. In 2023 for example,

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we will work on finally coming up with a more efficient way of managing vegetation and snow removal on city owned properties. We also need to tear down the old public works headquarter building and construct a pole-barn structure to store our City equipment.

Wastewater

One of the things residents have not probably noticed is the complete turnaround our City's Wastewater Treatment Plant operation has made recently. When I took office three years ago, the outgoing Mayor told me my biggest problem would be trying to fix the problems the City was facing with wastewater treatment. Pretty much all the news was bad news. But thanks to new management we put in place at the plant, thanks to the plant's employees stepping up to the challenge and thanks to a commitment by the Common Council to make the investments necessary to begin upgrading our City's wastewater system, the situation has turned completely around and DEC has noticed, to a point that I actually look forward to receiving their inspection reports and updates.

In 2023, we will continue the effort to fund and upgrade our wastewater treatment plant while simultaneously pursuing an inter-governmental partnership that will enable us to significantly reduce the crippling cost of wastewater sludge disposal. We have received one \$4 million grant for the proposed \$20 million dollar upgrade project already and we should be hearing any day now if we will be receiving another \$7 million grant for that upgrade, for which we've applied.

Thank you WWTP Plant Supervisor Kevin Gorman and the entire WWTP crew for the work you are doing.

Potable Water

In last year's State of the City, I listed two priorities for improving our City's potable water supply, filtration and distribution. These included:

- Finally addressing the fact that the 15-mile pipeline that delivered our City's drinking water from Glen Wild Reservoir was ancient; that the City really did not know its exact location in many spots; and that if a break occurred in one of those locations, we would be in danger of running out of drinking water before we could find or fix the break.
- Obtaining the funding for and completing a Department of Health and US EPA mandated corrosion control project aimed at reducing the trace amounts of lead, testing found in the City's drinking water supply.

We've made solid progress on both:

- Engineering services were enlisted to locate our raw water transmission line from NY Rt. 29 south to the city and provide satellite mapping. Maps along with wetland identification and plans were submitted to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation for review and approval. Once approved, a project to clear the right of way to this critical piece of infrastructure can proceed.
- Our corrosion control optimization project was funded and the project awarded in 2022. Components are being fabricated for installation and projected completion in 2023. State of the art chlorination equipment replacing our almost 50-year-old chlorinators has been installed with some of it already online.

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Meanwhile, significant effort and attention was directed to remediating a problem discovered with the filtration plant's carbon contactor underdrains. The engineering plans for the rebuilding of these underdrains has now been submitted to the department of health for review, comment and approval. When approved, funding and bids can be sought for this important aspect of our process. The rebuilding of the contactors will help to reduce byproducts of disinfection in the city and neighboring towns we supply water to.

The COVID factor has presented a major obstacle in our City's effort to assemble the funding necessary to proceed with residential water metering. That effort had been given a \$2.115M boost with a GIGP grant announced last November. But when we met with vendors to update the cost estimates for purchasing and installing those meters, we found we were facing a \$5 million bill instead of a \$4 million investment.

There is absolutely no doubt that Metering would provide significant benefits to the residents of our City. They would ensure that residential users were being treated fairly with respect to paying only for the water they used. In addition, metering would allow the city to use our water resources wisely, conserve water, chemicals and electricity while identifying lead water service lines that must be replaced in the process. Meters would also benefit our sewer treatment plant with reduced flows and other savings.

The challenge is that the hard dollar value of the estimated savings our City would realize if metering cut our water usage down by 1 million gallons per day, would be a bit less than \$150,000. That would not come close to covering the finance costs for the \$3 million we would need to come up with to fund the project. But that calculation places no dollar value on the water itself. It assumes our City's fresh water supply is limitless and will remain limitless forever and I believe that is a short-sighted and potentially dangerous assumption for our City to operate under. So in the next few months we intend to try and secure \$2 million of additional grants and revenues to move forward with the residential metering project. And I won't kid you. That will not be easy to do.

Thank you Water Filtration Plant Chief Operator Randy Gardinier and all of the employees at the Plant and our City's Glen Wild Reservoir for your continued hard work and dedication.

City Engineer Mike Clark is responsible for overseeing the operations of DPW, the Wastewater Treatment Plant and the City's potable water distribution and filtration system. His expertise is highly valued in each of these operations. He also is responsible for supervising and in some cases providing engineering services for all the capital projects the City undertakes. With the impending retirement of the department's senior engineering aide and with the City dealing with over \$20 million worth of infrastructure improvements during the next few years, Mike is orchestrating a reorganization of that office, which commenced with the hiring of our City's first assistant engineer late last year. As part of that reorganization, the City will make a concerted effort to transition the City's engineering drawings to a GIS system, utilizing a \$200,000 grant from the State Restructuring Board to help fund this major conversion.

Public Safety

Thanks to the skills and bravery of a dedicated group of professional men and women, Amsterdam residents wake up every morning in a safe and well protected City. While I wish we had none at all, our

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crime rate is low when compared to those of cities throughout our state and our response times to emergencies, within acceptable levels. I do not profess to know anything about law enforcement, firefighting, EMT or ambulance services. So as Mayor, I see my job as providing these vital departments with the tools and resources they need to be able to do their jobs with the management oversight our residents deserve to make sure these vital services are provided fairly across the board to all residents and as cost effectively as possible. I am thankful that two of my appointees, Fire Chief Anthony Agresta and Police Chief John Thomas have proven to be outstanding choices for the very challenging roles each fulfills for our City.

Across our County, State and the entire country, ambulance services are being challenged like never before. With rising costs, a shortage of skilled workers and more and more responsibilities being forced upon them by a healthcare industry still convulsing from the impact of the COVID pandemic, many of these services are going under or getting sold. Since in our City, the fire department is also the provider of these services, it presents certain advantages with a slightly different set of challenges. We have to balance the needs of the two services with the resources at our disposal.

This is one of the reasons why I am grateful for and proud of the men and women of the AFD. They handle two of the toughest and most stressful jobs in the public arena. Last year, we restored six man minimum shifts to reduce the possibility that they would be required to initially respond to a fire or medical emergency understaffed. And we added a new second ambulance, funded by a State grant, so that when the department had a full eight man shift, the Chief had the option of putting the second ambulance in operation. We used the additional revenue derived from the second ambulance to help pay for the additional overtime expense caused by the return to six-man shifts. That's what I mean by balancing need with resources; finding an affordable way to keep our residents and our firefighters safer.

Assemblyman Santabarbara is helping us do that again in 2023. Last year, the AFD's hook and ladder truck started breaking down much too frequently to be considered reliable. Unfortunately, we were hoping to get one more year out of the rig but the damn truck had other ideas. We are taking delivery of a new \$1.8 million replacement this spring. We are fiscally able to afford to do so because our Assemblyman got us a \$350,000 grant so that we could use it as a down payment on the truck and structure a much more affordable financing strategy for the balance. Thank you again Angelo. By the way, our Assemblyman was also instrumental in helping us get the \$200,000 grant for the new ambulance.

Over on the other side of the Public Safety building, this was the first full year the officers of the APD worked with body cameras and I again want to thank both Chief Thomas and the men and women of the department for making it a smooth and productive transition. We were just notified that the Department is being awarded an \$80,000 grant to retroactively cover the cost of acquiring those cameras. That's another huge win for our City.

This spring, Chief Thomas came to me with a proposal to increase the starting salaries of the newest officers in the department. Across the country, fewer and fewer people are entering careers in local law enforcement. The significant physical and mental challenges and stress levels of the profession, combined with the negative aspersions that widely publicized and disheartening abuse incidents of bad cops have on good ones are certainly part of the reason but so is the pay. Locally, we were losing candidates to other agencies because our starting salaries were significantly lower. So I and the Common Council supported the Chief's proposal to fix that and we did.

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I thank all the men and women who wear one of our City's public safety uniforms for everything they do to keep our residents safe.

Public Transportation

Certainly a highlight of 2022 was the introduction of CDTA transportation services to our City beginning this past September. We had been the largest City in our State not to have public bussing and then this fall Amsterdam became part of the premier transportation system in the northeastern part of our country. This provides evidence of what can happen when people elected to represent a constituency's best interest represent it. When they put their heads down, come up with a plan and work together regardless of party, special interests and politics and deliver an affordable solution to a real quality of life problem. I thank everyone of them from the Common Council, the County Legislature, our Assemblyman Angelo Santabarbara, our former State Senator Hinchey, and Governor Hochul for their critical and essential support in bringing this service to our City. Also, big shoutouts to the GASD Board of Education and Superintendent Rich Ruberti for opening the CDTA door by using the provider to transport high school students who live in the City to and from High School. And Congressman Tonko was an influential and vocal advocate as well.

In 2023, CDTA will be using the initial ridership data they are gathering along with inputs from community stakeholders to make service adjustments and enhancements. They've already added a Bicycle service and we're expecting electric scooters follow this spring. They are also considering route adjustments as they become more familiar with the needs and gaps of our community's mobility patterns and needs.

Community & Economic Development

The past few years of trying to administer and implement our City's development strategy has required both patience and flexibility. Part of the reason is that there are so many moving parts involved in the development process. We are constantly searching for new projects, seeking funding for existing projects, working on the implementation of fully funded projects, and doing the paperwork and grunt work involved in closing out completed projects.

Add in the fact that we are actively trying to coordinate and implement a Downtown Revitalization Initiative that includes 15 major components while also moving forward on three Brownfield Opportunity Zone initiatives in three different sections of our City and you can appreciate the amount of work that goes into keeping everything in synch.

Sometimes, the process can seem maddening and get frustrating. For example, this past year our City secured approximately \$10 million in State and Federal economic development funding in 2022. The most ever received. Yet we still have not secured enough targeted funding to build the new boardwalk along the shoreline of the Chalmers property or construct the downtown Recreation Center.

So even though it may not look like progress is being made with the naked eye, when you dig into the layers of activities in the development process, they tell a different story.

After another year of delays construction is scheduled to begin on the Chuctanunda Trail Expansion project, the Library expansion, and new Community Center this year. The Trail Expansion is fully funded. The Amsterdam Free Library has sufficient funding to proceed with phase 1 of their project and

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are in the process of securing the additional monies needed. Congressman Tonko secured a \$469,000 grant for the Library which will be used to develop the business incubator space that will be incorporated into the expansion project.

Congressman Tonko also was able to secure a \$2 million community grant to help Centro Civico/IBERO move forward with their \$3.5 million Community Center project.

I admit that I am frustrated by the slow pace of the progress we are making trying to get the DRI's Board Walk and Recreation Center projects moving along faster. With the Boardwalk, we have the building site along the shoreline of the Chalmers property ready and the engineering plans completed, but the roadblock is the constantly escalating cost to build it. Talk about sticker shock! We thought we needed \$1.5 million in additional funding to get it done and the quotes coming back are closer to \$3 million and \$4 million.

This is not a unique situation to Amsterdam. Cities throughout the state, who were awarded DRI's just before the Pandemic hit, submitted pre-COVID cost estimates for completing them as part of their DRI nominations. Those awards are capped at \$10 million. Portions of that \$10 million were spread over 15 projects in our City's DRI. The costs of the construction necessary to complete any of those projects has increased by 30% to 40% in between the time our City received the DRI award and now, which means what was \$10 million worth of construction in 2019, when we were awarded the DRI, now costs about \$14 million. So DRI cities like Amsterdam, are being forced to seek gap funding to cover these shortfalls and at the same time trying to get stalled projects started by phasing them in and building them in stages.

We are doing both with the Boardwalk project. Unfortunately, the architects hope was that we could get a first phase of the Boardwalk built with the \$650,000 we have secured for the project, but costs have risen so rapidly, even that proved to be underestimated. So now the plan is to secure the gap funding with what is called a New York State Consolidated Funding Application in May of this year, for the total amount of money necessary to complete this critical piece of our City's DRI master plan in May of this year. Meanwhile we will continue to piece together whatever funding we can muster to push forward with a phase I boardwalk section.

The Rec Center is the crown jewel of DRI projects. We have approximately \$3.7 million set aside for its construction but the total cost will most certainly be closer to \$6 million. The Rec Center is being designed to not just serve our own community's indoor recreation needs but also be a venue that hosts niche sporting events that will attract users from across the Tri Valley area. Indoor track meets, indoor soccer, pickle ball, volleyball and tennis tournaments along with basketball, baseball batting and pitching cages, plus indoor festivals and exhibitions hopefully means year-round use of this huge facility and a year-round attraction for our downtown and City. The Rec Center project cannot begin until DOT closes down the Route 5 arterial and conveys the land to the City. We expect the conveyance to be finalized in 2024.

The City is developing a Request for Proposal for the Multi-Modal Transportation Center project to contract with a firm to prepare a new design, cost estimate, and construction documents to move the current Amtrak station on the outskirts of the City to downtown. The project will include a larger facility for Amtrak, CDTA, car share, bikes, and scooters. This work will be funded by a \$3 million community grant secured by Congressman Paul Tonko.

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Another RFP is going out to begin the design and construction of a Complete Streets network along both sides of Main Street and Bridge Street to make the networks walkable and able to be used by more modes of transport other than just vehicles.

We are concluding a successful microenterprise program that has assisted 9 local small businesses expand and created 13 jobs.

The Downtown Improvement Fund is still ongoing and currently has assisted 5 projects and revitalized 7 vacant spaces downtown.

The East End and Northern Neighborhood BOAs received official designations in 2022 and we have just kicked off the effort to get our West End BOA officially designated as well. Both the federal and state governments are making available record amounts of funding this year to assist applicable projects being developed within designated BOA Zones. Our City is extremely well positioned to take advantage of that funding.

A new City website and marketing campaign were launched in 2022 with a goal of attracting new residents and businesses to Amsterdam while focusing on the quality of life and current small businesses and industry located in Amsterdam. These new tools were DRI and National Grid funded.

This past fall, a ribbon cutting took place to kick-off what will be a \$30 million renovation of the Guy Park Manor and the grounds surrounding it. In addition to a complete rebuild of the flood damaged historic structure, a footbridge will be opened connecting the site to the NY State Trail along the southern bank of the Mohawk.

Congressman Tonko also secured a \$650,000 grant to be used by the Centro Civico/IBERO organization to construct Esperanza Verde, a beautiful new public plaza and gathering space on East Main Street, for residents of that neighborhood.

And this past week, we had a meeting with Senator Breslin to secure the process necessary to obtain the final approval and funding access necessary to finally begin a restaurant incubator program in our City, which I am very excited about. But I will wait for that approval before providing more details as to the program's purpose, principals, and structure.

And speaking of the East End, one of the things I am most hopeful about is the transformation taking place on eastern portion of East Main Street. DePaul's Veddersburg Apartments are a physically stunning addition to that neighborhood, which at the same time will provide critically needed, well supported residential solutions for the most vulnerable folks in our community. The demolition of the two long decaying diners on the opposite side of the street, just west of DePaul has also been a huge visual improvement and cleared a key space for more private development. The expansion project at the Creative Connections Clubhouse, which will kick off soon thanks in part to a \$250,000 state grant secured by Assemblyman Angelo Santabarbara, will be another huge plus for that neighborhood. We are putting together a plan to demolish more East End eyesores this year. The new Route 5 pathway provides a smooth new western entrance into the neighborhood and we now extend our beautiful hanging baskets of flowers all the way to the eastern tip of our City. When the new Community Center

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and new Rec Center are open and operating, the transformation of the East End will be on its way to epic.

Which leads me to another important point about our development strategy and progress. It has a city-wide scope. We just described what's in the works in the east end. Downtown and the Southside have the DRI. The West End has the Guy Park Manor reinvention and an active proposal for a multi-million-dollar mixed use development project where the Bowler Brewery once stood. The Five Corners strip mall is coming down to spur new development on Reid Hill. Veterans Park has been rejuvenated on Park Hill. New destination restaurants and an improved Shuttleworth Park in Rockton and a whole host of projects taking shape for the Chuck Trail which runs right through the entire length of the center of our City from the river right up through Shuttleworth Park. We are remediating blight all over town, repaving streets throughout the City as well as beginning the replacement of every streetlight in this community.

Housing

While our City is actively engaged in working with multiple developers of affordable, rent-controlled housing which is critically needed in Amsterdam, we absolutely must also begin and maintain an ongoing effort to build single family market-priced homes within our City. If we are going to make Amsterdam a top hometown choice for working families in the capital district, we must provide more affordable and attractive home ownership opportunities than currently exist.

There is land to do so and what City Government must lead the way on, is bringing together the landowners with all of the stakeholders in single family housing development to create a sustainable strategy to get these homes built and sold. Which is why we intend to initiate such an effort this year.

I thank our City's Community and Economic Development Director Amanda Bearcroft and her assistant, Gina DaBiere-Gibbs for their effort, skill and dedication to our City.

IONICs

When I took office, I had a goal of initiating neighborhood meetings throughout the City, beginning with our most vulnerable neighborhoods. The purpose was to create an ongoing face-to-face and very personable dialog between the residents and City officials about the quality of life issues the people living in those areas were most concerned about. The Pandemic of course delayed the start of this program, but in late summer, we kicked off our new Improve Our Neighborhoods Initiative Conversations (IONICs) in Park Hill in a Church parking lot on VanDerveer Street. It was a success by all accounts.

We've held two more since and are scheduling three more for this spring and summer. Fire Chief Agresta, APD Lieutenant Joe Spencer, City Engineer Mike Clark, Recreation Director Rob Spagnola, a City code inspector and myself are joined by officials from the County and local social service agencies and we listen to residents describe their concerns in a direct filter free manner. Residents then listen to panel members explain what can and cannot be done to address those concerns. And it never fails, we learn of situations that have relatively simple fixes and we get them addressed as quickly as we can. And residents learn how the types of issues they are talking about can and are being addressed.

We believe local government has a responsibility to reach out to residents and give them easier and less intimidating opportunities to interact with local officials. Talking is always better than screaming and

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both the residents and panel members leave these IONICs feeling as if we've all been heard and respected and my hope is that the residents who attend them realize their participation helps their City government become smarter and more responsive so they become more engaged in City government themselves. I can't wait for the next one.

Parks & Recreation

One of the things that always causes me to shake my head is hearing someone who lives here make or post the comment that there is nothing for people to do in this City. I've heard a bunch of variations on this statement such as "nothing for seniors to do...nothing for kids to do...no place to go...etc. and none of them are accurate, especially now.

When our City's Tourism, Marketing & Recreation Director, Rob Spagnola and Assistant Director, Michele Pawlik are not planning and coordinating an event that provides people with something fun, interesting or healthy to do, they are upstairs in City Hall brainstorming new things that can be added to our City's already pretty awesome list.

And this City is most fortunate to have a network of extremely generous and community engaged businesses, organizations, individual volunteers, an entire school district and a not-so secret weapon called Assemblyman Angelo Santabarbara, who are helping us constantly increase the size and the scope of the list of answers to the question "What is there to do in Amsterdam?" And we now have CDTA busses helping to answer the question "How do I get there?"

In fact, when someone asks me "What is there to do in this City?" I love to turn that question around and say "Tell me what you like or want to do and I will show you how you can do it right here in Amsterdam."

Are you a senior who likes to play pickle ball, golf, dance, do yoga, kayak, walk a trail, read, play cards, knit, travel, help the poor, watch a baseball game? You can do it in Amsterdam.

Are you a parent with kids who you want to learn how to swim, play a sport, go to summer camp, need tutoring, learn an instrument, write a song? You can do it in Amsterdam.

Attend a concert, do woodworking, watch great sporting events, learn about local history? You can do all these things in Amsterdam and so much more.

Just at Veteran's Field we have the Amsterdam Youth Soccer program, the Mule Fitness Trail; the Patrick Cushing Amphitheater; four of the nicest outdoor basketball courts you'll find in any City; the city swimming pool, which offers all kinds of swimming programs during the summer and will be improved with a brand new pool house this summer thanks to a grant from Assemblyman Santabarbara and a concession stand thanks to yet another Sticker Mule donation. This year we will finally get to turn on the spickets to the new Veterans Field Splash Pad, generously made possible by Alpin Haus; Alpin Haus also made winter ice skating possible again in our City these past two winters with their donation of the Veterans Park Ice Skating Rink. And we just received word last week that Amsterdam's Wee Men's Baseball program has decided to completely rehab the baseball field at Vets. Just a few years ago, that park was pretty much deserted. This summer you'll find hundreds of people of all ages enjoying it on a daily basis.

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And I want to point out that the lion's share of the money necessary for these enhancements made at Veterans Park these past two years has come from the amazing generosity of people and organizations who want to see Amsterdam become a better place to live and are willing to help make that happen. Anthony Constantino and Sticker Mule have donated \$150,000. Alpin Haus has given us \$35,000. Amsterdam Youth Soccer has spent thousands to build and seed the Park's two new soccer fields; Creative Connections Clubhouse and their Wishful Thinking Basketball league helped raised most of the \$40k for the basketball courts. We've been blessed by the ability of Angelo Santabarbara to secure state money for our City's recreation programs. The Cushing family, St. Mary's Healthcare and the list of generous donors keeps growing.

And huge recent improvements at Shuttleworth Park have also been funded by outstanding partners. The money from a three-year-old grant provided by our City's former State Senator George Amedore, paid for new high efficiency LED lighting at the Park, new locker rooms and will help cover the cost of new pickle ball courts and public restroom upgrades. Montgomery County spent \$250,000 of its ARPA money to make the Stadium where the Mohawks play more comfortable and accommodating for the fans and players and to improve amenities at the park.

Assemblyman Santabarbara has also secured a \$455,000 state grant, which will fund this City's first playground to include special equipment that can be used and enjoyed by Children afflicted with different forms of sensory deprivation, such as autism. This amazing new venue will be built on land leased by the City next to Barkley School in the Fifth Ward.

And the list of things to do in Amsterdam keeps getting longer thanks to huge-hearted people like Mr. Constantino. Not only has his generosity helped make Veterans Field a center-of-our-city showcase for recreation, his new Mule Fitness Gym on Forest Avenue offers free fitness programs for the youth of our community. Local resident Terry Hudson is also leading the effort to introduce Disc Golf to our City this summer.

And when it comes to events, our City's Tourism, Marketing and Recreation Department makes sure Amsterdam's calendar remains full.

In addition to all of the traditional ones, this year, Alex Torrez, the Grammy nominated former Amsterdam resident is bringing his Latin band to Riverlink Park this summer as the highlight to our City's first Latino Americana Fest. The Albany Symphony is returning to the Riverlink band shell on Fourth of July weekend. The Amsterdam Waterfront Foundation has booked some outstanding cover artists for their 2023 Saturday Night Free Summer Concerts. I could go on and on but instead I urge you to visit the new Community Calendar at the City's brand-new Web Site. Our Recreation Department is in the process of constructing the very best calendar of events you've ever seen for our community. The link to this treasure will become my new and forever response to anyone who ever again makes the statement; "There's nothing to do in Amsterdam!"

And of course, there's golf. Playing conditions at Amsterdam Muni have never been better. This year, the Course will be under new management as long-time area pro Scott Warren formally takes over the role after serving as an emergency fill-in last year. Scott and the Amsterdam Golf Commission are committed to making sure playing conditions at the Course remain the very best in this area and he wants to make customer service a hallmark of Muni as well. And though it is a bit premature to mention

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them here, Scott has some new features and programs planned for introduction in Muni's near-term future and I think golfers of all ages will love them.

Like everyone who loves Muni, I continue to be disappointed by the snail's pace of progress with the construction of the new Clubhouse. I and the Common Council are committed to doing whatever needs to be done to get a Clubhouse built as quickly as possible. Meanwhile, Settles Hill Catering continues to do a great job providing food, drink and tournament catering service out of the spacious temporary clubhouse. And by the way, nobody, nowhere serves as good a breakfast sandwich as you can get at the Muni Pavilion.

Before closing this very long-winded address I want to pay tribute to one of our City's longest and most effective public servants. Roseanne Rusnica is our City's Senior Engineering Aide. She is retiring at the end of next month after a thirty-plus-year career with our City. Her service to this municipality has been exemplary. I do not exaggerate when I call her one of the most respected and knowledgeable public servants in Amsterdam's long history. Anyone who has ever worked closely with Roseanne will tell you that her knowledge of a lions' share of this City's infrastructure is unmatched. On behalf of our entire City, I thank Roseanne for her service and her amazing body of work and record of accomplishment as a key member of the City's Engineering Department. She made a difference. We congratulate her on her well-earned retirement.

I want to also recognize the volunteer members of our City's Chartered Boards and Commissions. They make no money to do the critically important work they perform on behalf of this City and they do an excellent job. Each of them deserves the thanks of our entire community for stepping up and accepting these positions.

I want to again thank our partners in County government, including County Exec Matt Ossenfort and the new Chairman of the County legislature, Bob Purtell. Thank you again to Assemblyman Angelo Santabarbara and our former State Senator Michelle Hinchey. A sincere thank you also to our former Congressman and native son Paul Tonko. No one has delivered more state and federal money to this City in my lifetime than Paul. I want to thank Governor Hochul for approving the expansion of CDTA into our City and County and her approval of the Restore NY funding that will demolish the Five Corners Mall. And thank you Senator Chuck Schumer for taking an active interest in our City. For coming here to discuss our challenges personally and for your promise of support in our effort to build and fund a strong brownfields development program. I also want to make clear my intention to establish strong working relationships between our City and the offices of our new representative in the House of Representatives, Congresswoman Elise Stefanik and our new State Senator in Albany, Neil Breslin. We look forward to working closely with both of them.

Special thanks to our City's Common Council members; Deputy Mayor Jimmy Martuscello, Irene Collins, Steve Gomula, Dave Gomula and Kelly Quist-Demars for their service to our City, and for every bit of support each of them has given me over the past year. I've enjoyed working with them to make this City a better place. Thank you also to our City's Corporation Counsel Anthony Casale for his consistent efforts to do the same and our City Clerk Stefanie Gerken.

I would be lost without my right arm, my assistant Michelle Jackson. Simply put, there is no better public servant than she. As I try to remember to tell her every afternoon when she heads home after another day of full-throttle dedication to this City and to me, thank you Michelle.

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And finally, I want to thank the residents of our beloved Amsterdam. Thank you for making this a place where all kinds and ages of everyday people and families can feel safe, at home and among friends. Thank you for giving our City the huge heart we are noted for, for always coming together to help your fellow citizens in time of need, for being patient for the progress so many are working so hard to make happen and for being Amsterdam strong. May God Bless you, May God Bless this great country, and May God Bless our beloved City of Amsterdam

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