



CITY OF AMSTERDAM, NEW YORK

Office of the Mayor

Mayor Michael Cinquanti

2022 State of the City Address

In addition to being my responsibility as Mayor, it is also a privilege for me to present the 2022 State of the City address to the residents of Amsterdam.

I have had the bulk of the address ready for two weeks now. In it I discuss the key accomplishments of 2021 and the goals for 2022 for each area of City government. There is however one department for which I do not have direct control over and that is the Controller's operation. The City Controller is responsible for managing and keeping track of the finances for the City. I believe it absolutely essential that City government provide residents with consistent and clear descriptions of our City's current financial status, especially in a State of the City address.

For example, I want to be able to accurately report the current amount of our City's deficit. It was reported to be \$8.3 million when I took office in January of 2020 and about \$6.1 million at the end of the 2020 fiscal year. I'm optimistic, based on the measures we implemented and the information I do have, that the deficit was significantly lower at the end of the 2021 fiscal year. But I am still waiting for our City Controller and independent auditing firm to complete the 2021 audit, which ended over six months ago on June 30th of last year.

Last week the Controller informed the Common Council that his office could be receiving a draft of the audit by January 31st. With that date in mind, I've decided to begin releasing the text of my 2022 State of the City address in chunks.

This week I will release the sections on blight remediation, roads and our water infrastructure systems. Next week, I will release the economic development, public safety and recreation portions of my address. And then as soon as the Controller provides me with the numbers I need to do so, we will talk about our City's finances and capital projects.

The first thing I'd like to emphasize is that each of the accomplishments and initiatives I'm about to describe were made possible by groups of very talented people working together to do good things for our City. The vast majority of individuals who work for this municipality are conscientious, hardworking and skilled at what they do. It is an honor for me to work with them. I also thank our Common Council for their support and I thank the elected officials who represent Amsterdam in Albany, Washington and Fonda and their staffs. During the past year, their advocacy, their involvement and their cooperation have made the difficult challenges we face as a City easier to navigate. And I also need to very much say thank you to all of the volunteers who fulfill the critical roles in our City government. These are individuals who selflessly serve on City boards, agencies, authorities and commissions, who play a huge role in helping make our City government work, and who receive no pay for their time and efforts.

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In last year's State of the City address I established the theme "Make It Better" to describe our strategy and plans for our beloved Amsterdam during the 2021 calendar year. The goal was to come to work every day with a plan to work hard on things that would make Amsterdam a better place to live. So in this address, I'm going to highlight how we did with that "Make it better" strategy in each of the major City service areas.

My theme for 2022 is "Kicking it up another notch". As I will explain, we did very well this past year in our efforts to make things better but there were important things we still need to accomplish. I'm referring to objectives that are more difficult and complicated to reach, which will require more effort on our part to attain. So after I've summarized how we did this year, I will explain how we intend to build upon each City Service's 2021 accomplishments by "kicking it up another notch".

The Fight Against Blight - I am very proud of the fact that during the last 12 months, 46 blighted properties have either already been remediated or are under contract to do so. These include a select group of homes sold to individuals who have submitted proposals to renovate them within a 12-month period and the demolition of 40 of this City's most decayed and unsafe structures. In addition, we have just submitted the completed application for New York State's new Legacy Program which, when approved will provide funding to an already selected private developer, who will then match those funds and renovate 10 more blighted homes in our City, sell them to first-time homeowners and get them back on the tax roles in the process.

This will bring the remediation of a total number of 56 blighted properties which have been resolved since January 1, 2021. My target when taking office was to average 50 per year and more than one person told me we were aiming too high. But thanks to the help of a lot of dedicated people and a grinding, never-give-up effort against blight, we are reaching and will actually surpass that ambitious target.

These properties being remediated are located throughout our City and every time one is completed, the value, appearance, safety, and quality of life of the neighboring properties and neighborhood are enhanced. The renovations referred to above will also add over two dozen new residential units to Amsterdam's housing stock, which working families can again inhabit.

Again I need to emphasize that this accomplishment would not have been possible without a great effort of a dedicated group of City employees and our Common Council. Fire Chief and Head of the City's Codes department, Anthony Agresta, my administrative assistant Michele Jackson, City Engineer Mike Clark, our dedicated team of building inspectors, their support staff and all the members of our City's Property Disposition Committee deserve a special thank you for staying focused on the task of better managing our City's vacant properties. And the City's grant-writing URA Director Nick Zabawsky and the Schenectady County Land Bank have been invaluable partners in our efforts to improve neighborhoods.

And a tip of the hat to the DePaul Project which has eradicated a full square block of some of the worst blight in the East End and is in the process of turning it into a beautifully designed residential complex. And ditto to Joe Sise and Bob Abdella, who have creatively converted one of upper Market Street's worst eyesores into a beautiful new home for their growing law firm.

We have successfully reenergized the City's Property Disposition process this past year in an effort to focus the marketing of both city-owned vacant lots and re-habitable homes to the folks most likely to take care of them and get them back on the tax rolls. This resulted in 28 transactions and generated

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about \$60,000 in additional revenue. When our City sells a city-owned vacant lot to a neighboring property owner, good things are much more likely to happen to that property. Not only does it go back on the tax rolls, the grass gets cut, the sidewalk gets shoveled, garages or additions can get built, driveways get installed, streets become easier to plow etc. etc.

As we rid our City of blighted property it is essential that we make the investments and improvements necessary to help our staff better monitor and manage this City's building and housing stock. We completed a huge step in that direction by completing a successful conversion of all of the ownership, permit, inspection and code violations history for all City properties into a new database powered by a software program called Muncities. Our Code inspectors will now be able to do all property inspections on smart tablets using forms, checklists and reference data all preprogrammed into the system. Instead of having to return to City Hall and entering their handwritten inspection forms into a computer, they will be able to submit their findings right from the inspection site and move onto their next assignment.

All building permit data will also be entered directly into this same system. And having all of our City's commercial and residential active property history reside in one database means faster more accurate research and fewer errors made when trying to inspect, service or sell these properties in the future. Plus, we will be able to share our data with nearby communities who also use this same software which means for example if we have a new property investor come to our City we can research if that investor has any negative property history in those communities. With the assistance of the New York State Reconstruction Board, we were able to secure the funding necessary to subsidize the cost of the software, training and data conversion necessary to achieve this important goal.

We also enacted with marginal success a new vacant property ordinance for the City, modeled after one that has worked with success in the City of Gloversville. The goal of this ordinance is to encourage owners of vacant houses and buildings in Amsterdam to keep them maintained and/or get them occupied before they become blighted. The vast number of City-owned blighted properties start out as privately owned vacant properties so we are also trying to address this problem at the root of it. We are still working out the wrinkles of this program but we are determined to get it running smoothly.

The above is a summary of how we made the blight situation in our City significantly better in 2021. Now, how can we turn it up a notch in 2022?

First of all, we will continue to strive to improve upon all of the successful 2021 initiatives I just summarized.

In the next few weeks we will finally be able to conduct a public auction of the City-owned homes we foreclosed upon in late 2021. COVID restrictions on court proceedings and eviction avoidance mandates have prevented us from doing so until now. We used this forced delay wisely by making sure the history of every property on the foreclosure list was reviewed and inspected to determine the best path to take in order to optimize the the property's benefit to the neighborhood in which it is located. All vacant lots were removed from the auction list and will be sold via property disposition assuring neighboring property owners most likely to improve them and care for them get first shot. Unsafe and beyond repair structures will be scheduled for demolition and those structures like Crystal Bar, which have been auctioned repeatedly in the past and keep ending up back in the City's hands in even worse shape will either be taken down or sold through the property disposition process depending on their condition. That leaves us with a list of 28 properties that will go to auction. Every property our City

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sells either via auction or Property Disposition includes a reverter clause giving the City ownership in the event the buyer does not follow through with their proposal. As soon as the auction of 2021 foreclosures has been completed, our City will begin the foreclosure proceedings on the newest batch of properties.

We will also put more new tools in our City's property management toolkit this year. We'd like to again copy something another nearby community is doing that has been implemented successful there to see if we can emulate that success here in Amsterdam. Our City has been using special grant money we receive to help remediate ZOMBIE properties. While certainly an important mission in the war against urban decay, our City's inventory of ZOMBIE properties is not significant enough to warrant our full-time attention. Schenectady has used these same funds to help add muscle to a program that gets local realtors, contractors, financial institutions and community service organizations involved in the effort to rejuvenate and find buyers for vacant properties in that community. We will be meeting with the officials in Schenectady who steer that successful effort to see if and how we can emulate here in Amsterdam.

We will also continue to brainstorm and try new ideas and retry old ones in slightly different ways to fight blight in our City. We are constantly trying to improve the way we remove snow and maintain vegetation growth at both City owned and privately owned abandoned properties. We are currently in the process of working with the County to form DSS property maintenance crews who can be used to work on projects and tasks currently not being performed by City staff. I'm researching for a formalized way for City employees who travel the streets of our City on a daily basis to report unacceptable property conditions they see during their workday. Sanitation workers, police and fire professionals, our DPW crews drive the streets of this City on a daily basis and work in all of our neighborhoods. I'd like to come up with a reporting mechanism that permits users to not just report problems they see festering but also rate them by severity. For example, an un-shoveled sidewalk in a high-pedestrian-traffic area would be rated a higher priority than an un-shoveled sidewalk on a dead-end street. Having these city employee eyes on the streets with the rating/reporting system in place eliminates the need for concerned citizens to have to go through the complaint process. Plus, the reporting and rating mechanism will permit the appropriate City staff to make better decisions as to how to more effectively apply their limited resources.

Which brings me to an important point with which I'd like to close this section. Just because something isn't getting done instantly to fix a situation you are aware of does not mean your City government is ignoring it. Some things are easier to get resolved than others. Remember the ugly shattered gas station sign that screamed out "nobody cares what this City looks like" every time you passed it on the corner of Guy Park and Wall Streets? It took just one visit from a City official this past year to get it repaired. The clearance of those ugly truck trailers filled with old tires on the corner of Main and Pearl and the chronically uncared for front yard of that former Guardian Photo building on Forest Avenue took longer to get cleaned up but look at them now. The Five Corners strip mall, the old paper plant on Forest Ave, the brownfield in the West End, are examples of bigger and more complicated challenges but there's plans in place which include road-maps for both cleaning-up and developing those properties and I promise you, we will keep working those plans hard. The important things are to better organize and secure funding for the effort, keep grinding at the problems in a priority order, help those who want help to solve the problem and for those who don't, hit them with everything we've got. Never surrender, make it as difficult as possible for new blight to occur and for existing blight to survive.

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Roads - One of the most significant City-wide improvements in 2021 has been the huge increase in the number of streets we were able to get repaved and patched in our City. 7.3 miles of the most neglected and most heavily traveled streets in Amsterdam were completely resurfaced this past year. That compares to 4.3 miles repaved in 2020 and just 3.5 in 2019.

We had received a bit over \$700,000 in road aid from the State in 2020 and I had been anticipating a similar amount in 2021 when I did my first draft of this year's budget. I was determined to expand upon the previous year's level of road repair so I initially included an additional \$125,000 in the road repair line item of the City budget. But New York State came through in a big way with road funding this year, providing our City with over \$1.7 million. NY state would not have been in position to provide that increase without the ARPA funding disbursements Washington finally approved for state and municipal governments. I don't want to sound partisan here but for over a year, the Republican led Senate blocked direct COVID relief aid to state and City governments. The rationale was that they didn't want to bail out debt-ridden corrupt blue states and blue cities. Well I'd love for those partisan politicians to come to Amsterdam and I will show them how every penny of increased state and ARPA aid we finally received was and is being spent on improving our City's roads, the physical conditions of our neighborhoods and the infrastructure which provides citizens essential services. So I will thank Congressman Tonko, Speaker Schumer and Senator Gillibrand, Assemblyman Santabarbara and State Senator Hinchey for their undying support of this critical funding just as I would thank any Republican representative had they voted for it when they had the ability to get it approved.

Our City road crews also made a conscious effort to improve the quality of road patching utilized on isolated problem spots in our City's network of streets. And after a spring and summer's worth of digging into Market Street to find and replace aging water valves and pipes, the County, DOT and the City partnered together to put a top coat of new asphalt on the much traveled thoroughfare, which will make the ride up and down the city's section of Route 30 much smoother until we can get a complete resurfacing project in place, like the one started on Church Street this past Fall.

And speaking of Church Street, it has been one of my biggest frustrations. To have funding available but not be able to complete the project was for me like getting a brand new car delivered to your driveway without keys to its ignition. First we couldn't bond for seed money and then after quoting the job a first time prices came in well over the amount of funding we had available and then after bidding a second time with a reduced project scope it took months for the winning bidder to conform to the DOT contractor requirements for minority and women owned businesses. But the slightly less ambitious than originally planned project did get underway late in 2021 and we are determined to make sure the finished product meets everyone's expectations.

Can we kick it up another notch in our road repair program in 2022? Yes we can. How? First of all, I'd like to start the process earlier this year so that the work is completed by no later than the beginning of October at the very latest. Second, we are anticipating receiving similar amounts of street repair funding from the State and Governor Hochul's recent budget message introduces a new state funded pothole repair program that I'm very excited to learn more about. I have not given up on the possibility of working with other area municipalities to put together a shared CHIPs bidding situation and co-purchasing new road-patching technology that could be used by each community.

There have been a few locations in our City where heavy rains do not properly drain from street surfaces. We've been able to address a few of the most severe such spots successfully but based on financial restrictions and a heavy backlog of work we have been forced to put some of these problems

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on the back burner. I am going to ask our City's engineering department to propose fixes for these situations and together we will attempt to get those fixes budgeted and scheduled.

Water systems Infrastructure - Major investment and upgrades in both our City's drinking water and wastewater systems continued pretty much unabated this past year as did the effort to secure the funding necessary to continue to enhance upgrades to both in 2022. The refurbishment of our City's giant water storage tanks were completed this past spring. We fought thru COVID-caused work delays and added expense to complete an upgrade to our City's major drinking water pump station located on Water street. The pump stations which drive water to our wastewater treatment plant are in the final stages of a major upgrade. We are more efficiently disposing of the sludge byproduct which is generated by our City's wastewater process and as a result we were able to lower the cost of that disposal for the first time in a generation. After upgrading the SCADA system at our Water filtration plant we are in the process of doing the same thing at our Wastewater Treatment facility. SCADA stands for Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition and these new systems permit our Plant Operators and personnel to maintain constant monitoring of each system's operation both on-site and remotely via a smart phone. This level of comprehensive oversight will certainly permit us to better manage each and make it possible to uncover and address potential problems before they become higher costing emergency situations.

As for kicking our water systems infrastructure up a notch in 2022, hold on to your rubber duckies ladies and gentlemen. We will be installing a new corrosion control system at our Water Filtration plant which will permit us to add a process to our drinking water treatment system designed to reduce the level of lead in our drinking water. For the past few years, a slightly higher level of lead than permitted by EPA regulation has been found in our water. Engineers have examined the possible causes and one of their findings was that our drinking water was just corrosive enough to interact with the lead supply lines that carry drinking water to many dwellings in our City. This new system is designed to reduce that corrosive behavior and 90% of the \$1 million cost of the project will be funded by a state grant.

Meanwhile, our City water is safe to drink but should you have any concern about the lead level in your home's drinking water, go to our City Web site and e-mail or call our water filtration plant. They will tell you exactly what you can do to get a free analysis of the lead level of your water.

Amsterdam's drinking water supply originates in the foothills of the Adirondacks at three City owned reservoirs in the Glen Wild reserve. This reserve is located 15 miles north of the City connected to our water filtration plant by a single 24" cast iron pipe, which is over a century old and traverses a fifteen mile path though a diverse topography of both heavily wooded and rural areas, including significant stretches of wetlands. If that pipeline breaks, our City will run out of drinking water in 24 hours. We have to have a system in place that guarantees we can locate a break, get to it with the equipment necessary to repair it and make the repair within that 24- hour timeframe. This project, which we are making shovel ready now, will involve locating, GPS marking, environmental permitting, clearing and implementing monitoring technology tools along the entire path of the pipeline.

Our City-owned wastewater treatment system was also built in the 1970s. Based on its aging infrastructure, limited capacity and a NYS DEC Consent Order, Amsterdam is faced with the necessity to perform a large capital expenditure upgrade to this system. The upgrade plan I inherited upon taking office would have cost the City \$20 million and when completed we would have had pretty much the same plant performing the same processes but with greater capacity.. Instead we hired a

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new Engineering firm to redesign the upgrade using a performance based model. They integrated an anaerobic digestion process using components of the plant which have been idle for decades, which will generate operational savings and new revenue generation of approximately \$700,000. Under the performance based model, the contractor guarantees the savings which is then used to finance the project. When factored in to the financing it cuts the City's net present financing cost for the project up to two thirds. Later on in this address I will discuss how we are using the same performance based investment strategy to replace all of the street lights in our City with super efficient LED lighting and pay for the project in five years using the guaranteed energy savings from the conversion and not a penny of taxpayer money.

I also need to mention that Senator Hinchey has been leading the way in the effort to get more state funding to municipalities in order to fund the very type of water projects I've just described. In December, I was invited to give testimony to a NY State Senate roundtable on this topic which was chaired by Senator Hinchey. I deeply appreciated the opportunity to share our City's very real challenges with key state senators who were directly involved in this funding effort. I also want to acknowledge the great work of Water Plant operator Randy Gardinier, Wastewater Treatment Plant Operator Kevin Gorman and City Engineer Clark for being willing to always strive for ways to improve the quality of their plant's output.

Community and Economic Development (CED)

If you don't realize it by now, I'm a "glass is half full" kind of Mayor and not one who incessantly complains it is half empty. If you're the sort of person who honestly feels this beloved City of ours has or must accept a mediocre future, that it has to aim low instead of high than please, stay away from me, especially if you think there's more bad about Amsterdam than there is good. The way we make our City better is to constantly work on trying to fix the things that hurt our quality of life and our image and expand and build upon the things that do the exact opposite. Nobody said that the work is easy or the results come quick. Just the opposite, good governance is a grind-it-out process that never ends and seldom if ever gets easier. You need to have clear goals and a constantly updated plan to achieve them and then every day everything you do needs to focus on moving closer toward those goals and regularly measuring your progress. And that's exactly what our City's Community and Economic Development effort is all about.

In essence, we want to position our City among the very top hometown choices for working families in the Capital District area and to be a City where existing businesses want to invest and expand and where new businesses want to locate.

We are moving forward into these positions by putting our City finances back on solid footing and becoming known as a City that got itself out of debt instead of the one in fiscal distress. We are getting there by eliminating blight at record levels as a first step in rejuvenating our neighborhoods with the objective of establishing more affordable living spaces and a better quality of life. We get there by reshaping, redefining and reinvigorating our downtown core to get more pedestrians spending time and money there, and actually living there. We get there by continuing to build upon the development of Amsterdam's waterfront. We will get there when our effort to bring affordable, top-shelf public transportation back to our City is successful. We get there by continuing to expand and enhance our recreational facilities, activities and events. We get there by coordinating with local, county and state economic development agencies to integrate and coordinate the services and investments we need to attract, assist and retain businesses and more jobs. And we get there by making sure we make it

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known that Amsterdam is back in business, reaching out for new families and businesses to call our city home.

Now there's no doubt that "getting there" when it comes to CED projects became more of an uphill path during the past two years because of COVID. In 2020 our state government and economy were placed on pause, slowing down the state's funding and administrative oversight of many development programs. Most if not all of our City's DRI projects were adversely impacted to various degree as were several other CED initiatives we were trying to push forward.

The hope entering 2021 was that the worst of the pandemic and its slowing impact on our development progress was in our rear view mirror. But then the longer term impacts of the virus introduced themselves. The worst of these has been the dramatic increase in the costs of construction. The difference between those costs now and what they were when the budgets for each DRI project was formulated almost four years ago can be as high as twenty to thirty percent.

So led by our City's CED Director Amanda Bearcroft and Assistant Director Gina DaBiere-Gibbs, we needed to develop new strategies and new timelines to deal with this reality and we have. And there was a silver lining to the horrid virus for Cities like ours as well. It caused people and businesses to appreciate places that are less densely populated but that still offer all the amenities of urban living. Homes in Amsterdam are currently selling as soon as they hit the market, at record prices. Since just this past November, I've had meetings with three different developers/investors who are interested in building residential housing here, investing in the waterfront and bringing a business to our City.

We now approach the future with confidence but not overconfidence and with a willingness to continue to do the planning and hard work necessary and exhibit the patience needed to get to where we want to be. There is after all a lot to manage. Our City is simultaneously coordinating all the DRI component projects, three active Brownfield Opportunity Areas, the State's Microenterprise program, major neighborhood improvement initiatives, and several promising private developer investment opportunities. So let's take a look at what got accomplished in 2021 and also outline how we will kick these CED projects up a notch in 2022.

It starts with some good news we received late last year. Two decades have passed since our City last updated its Comprehensive Plan. No modern municipality can hope to sustain successful economic growth or enhance and sustain the quality of life in its neighborhoods without a current one in place. This is why the news in December that we were the recipients of an \$81,000 grant from the State to help us do just that was most welcome.

As I described above, our City is involved in a host of projects simultaneously. Our shelves and hard drives are crammed with different project and developments studies. We've conducted binders full of brainstorming, community needs assessments and citizen input sessions with residents and businesses throughout the City. A new Census has just been issued. What we must do now is update this data and connect the dots from each of them into a comprehensive and current planning document that prioritizes and integrates the vision and goals for our City. The finished document will help us remain focused on those goals, seek funding for them, and make sure the efforts to reach them are conducted in concert with each other.

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While our CED staff is aggressively seeking additional funding to fill the gap between pre-pandemic construction budgets and post pandemic construction costs, they have also been creatively working with designers and engineers to divide some of the projects into smaller components so that we can both proceed with construction and seek funding simultaneously. We are about to break ground on four DRI projects which will make a positive impact on the economic activity and the quality of the pedestrian experience within Amsterdam's DRI district.

Project 1: We are expecting the Board of the Amsterdam Free Library to hire a general contractor soon for the exciting renovation and expansion planned for that historic edifice.

Project 2: We have just reviewed the architect's renderings for Phase 1 of the much anticipated public access boardwalk, which will connect the pedestrian bridge to the waterfront along the Chalmers property. When completed, this scenic pathway will instantly become one of the most popular gathering spots in our City, perfectly complementing Riverlink Park's outdoor concert venue, the Pedestrian Bridge and whatever private project AIDA is able to finalize for the Chalmers site.

Project 3: We are now advertising for proposals for an engineering firm to do a final design of the new Community Center, which will be housed in a completely renovated version of the former Johnny's Seafood building, located across from St. Mary's Church. This project is fully funded. The Center will be managed by the Boys & Girls Club of the Capital District and IBERO/Centro Civico and it will offer a whole menu of new community services for people of all ages and backgrounds.

Project 4: We will also begin the expansion of the Chuctanunda trail, which when completed will permit residents and tourists to take a beautiful creekside stroll of the same pathway followed by the industrial evolution of our City.

This past autumn, DOT started the work necessary to redirect the east/west Route 5 arterial from south of East Main Street to just north of it. When completed a portion of the old arterial space will be used for the construction of the new Downtown Recreation Center. We are still seeking the significant additional funds necessary to complete this multipurpose recreational facility and we are grateful to all of our City's elected representatives at the federal, state and county level who are working hard on our behalf to secure that funding. The rest of the open area created from the closed off arterial will be converted to green space and we are brainstorming options for developing it.

Our DRI plan does not just focus on "big" projects. Small existing businesses and commercial property owners within the DRI boundary spanning the downtown core surrounding Main Street and on the south side surrounding the Mohawk River can take advantage of the Downtown Improvement Fund component of the \$10 million initiative. This resource is in place to provide assistance for renovation, restoration and improvement projects of these existing downtown commercial properties. The city will provide a 50% reimbursable grant of up to \$50,000 for eligible projects. The maximum funding award may be increased in the future depending on the number of applicants. There's also help for small businesses throughout the City looking to expand and that program got off to a solid start in 2021. Nine small businesses in Amsterdam were the successful recipients of micro-enterprise grants this past year totaling \$205,000 and creating 17 new jobs. Small businesses are the backbone of this country's economy, the biggest producer of new jobs and the key to our City's future. Another round of micro-enterprise funding is scheduled for this year as well.

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Last month Governor Kathy Hochul's 2023 proposed budget was released and as we hoped, she included significant funding for expanding CDTA's transportation services to our City and County. Assemblyman Santabarbara, Senator Hinchey, County Executive Ossenfort, and I have made the effort to bring CDTA's transportation services to Amsterdam one of our top priorities in 2021. We needed the County to approve it and we needed to get the recurring funding to pay for it into the state budget. On our side in this effort was the Greater Amsterdam School District. GASD Superintendent Richard Ruberti has been negotiating with CDTA to provide to and from school transportation to all of the Amsterdam High School students who live in our City.

I reached out to a bunch of key businesses and social service agencies to ask that they provide statements of their support to this effort and they responded in a big way. The administration and members of Creative Connections Clubhouse helped us organize a "Bring CDTA to Amsterdam" street rally that garnered critical media attention. We brought John Sumpter of Creative Connections and David Jordan, the Executive Director of the Montgomery County Office of the Aging to Fonda to explain to the County legislature how both the youngest and the oldest generation of our City would significantly benefit from CDTA services. County Executive Ossenfort and the County legislators who represent the City of Amsterdam have led the effort to secure that essential County Support. Assemblyman Santabarbara got me on the docket to speak at a hearing of the State Assembly's Transportation Committee and the Assemblyman and Senator Hinchey have advocated hard and consistently for their respective houses of state government and the Governor's office to include the recurring funding in the upcoming State budget. I personally met with Governor Hochul's staff to make it clear that being the largest City in New York State without public transportation was a serious detriment to Amsterdam's economic and social development.

We are nearing the finish line. We are very hopeful that when the budget negotiations between the Governor, Assembly and Senate are completed, the recurring funding for CDTA services in our City & County will be included in it and public transportation will be back in Amsterdam once again.

It is the right time and we have the right opportunities to transform not just the physical appearance but also rejuvenate the neighborhood spirit of the East End of our City. I've made it clear that I would like our City to make a coordinated sustained effort to take advantage of those opportunities.

The DePaul Group's new residential project called Veddersburg Village is now quickly taking shape on the East Main Street block between Lark and Swan Streets, which was once dominated by Lou's, Amsterdam's very first Super Market. When completed, not only will this beautifully designed complex make our East End neighborhood look dramatically better, the affordable new and safe residential units include on-site support services. This combination will instantly improve the quality of life of some of the most vulnerable people in our City.

Two blocks east of this new complex is Creative Connections Clubhouse. No organization does more to help the at-risk adolescent members of our City develop the confidence, life skills and drive than this organization. They are in the midst of an effort to add to the physical space of their Clubhouse with the addition of a new indoor gym and event center and our City is committed to helping them. And to be clear, the programs offered by the new Community Center to be administered by the Boys & Girls Club will actually complement and not in any way compete with those offered by Creative Connections Clubhouse. In fact the two agencies plan to work closely together in partnership with one another.

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Earlier this month, we traveled to Rochester to visit a neighborhood of that city which was once downtrodden and decaying and which is being gradually transformed into a vibrant, fully supported community space thanks to a program administered by IBERO, the same agency that recently merged with Centro Civico.

IBERO has offered to partner with our City to bring that same successful grass roots driven development program to Amsterdam's East End neighborhood and our field trip to Rochester was our opportunity to see with our own eyes the results of the IBERO neighborhood rejuvenation model in action. There are 200,000 people in Rochester and 20,000 in Amsterdam. IBERO has put over 200 brand new, solidly built and very attractive single and two family homes on vacant lots once occupied with blighted homes in their targeted Rochester neighborhood. The effort started with a door-to-door canvassing of the people living in that neighborhood to find out what was important to them. The first construction project was a highly visible public plaza, where residents in the area could safely gather for all sorts of neighborhood and family activities.

We are in the process formulating a plan to work together with IBERO/Centro Civico to do the same exact thing on a much smaller scale in the most in-need and at-risk sections of our East End neighborhood. This would be another transformational change for that historic area of Amsterdam.

This summer, we will plant the seeds that positive change is coming to the East End by placing the same beautiful flower baskets that welcome those entering our City from the south, so that they welcome those entering from the east as well.

We also have a plan to get the five corners property closer to being a shovel ready site for development. I am confident this parcel alongside one of our City's most historic and heavily traveled intersections will be developed because of its superb location for high traffic commercial applications. Our CED staff is working with Montgomery County's consultants for brownfield assessment grant and conducting testing at the 5 corners site. Once we know what the conditions are underneath the ground, we will be able to ascertain the degree and cost of remediation, seek funding to clean up any serious contamination the results may show and begin marketing the site to a developer. My admittedly very optimistic "personal-kick-it-up-a notch-goal" this year is to have a developer in place and the ugly remains of a strip mall that has been scarring the 4th ward landscape since forever, demolished and hauled away by the end of this calendar year. In the west end of our City we've conducted Phase II testing at the western gateway property (the former Dudka's and All Seasons) and we continue to make every effort to work with a developer to sell and create a mixed use project.

I am also excited about the interest the Amsterdam Housing Authority has in putting up new residential units in the western end of the City. The AHA already owns some vacant lots on mid Division and Union Streets and we are ready to begin work on a plan to abolish some more blighted unsafe structures so we can enlarge these building sites.

Another project that has promising possibilities for the West End of our City is our collaboration with the New York State Power Authority and the State's Canal Corporation to complete restoration of the Guy Park Manor and transform it into a hospitality destination. This project also includes plans to construct a new pedestrian walkway across the Mohawk River via the Lock 11 bridge. which would connect the Manor site to the New York State Trail. The State has approved all the funding necessary to finally complete the Manor's restoration.

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Groundbreaking for the new Amsterdam Municipal Golf Course Clubhouse is scheduled for the spring of this year. This multi million dollar private investment will locate one of the nicest combination banquet/restaurant facilities in our area and help generate both additional golf revenues and private investments for our City.

Our entire City will be brighter at night thanks to our City's performance-based project with the New York Power Authority to purchase and replace all of the street light fixtures from National Grid and replace them with much more cost efficient LED lighting. A \$1.1 million dollar grant from New York State and estimated energy costs savings of over \$200,000 annually means this investment will be paid for in five years without need for taxpayers to put up a penny. When operational sometime in 2023 it will be possible for our City's engineering department to brighten or dim any and every street light in the city with a Smart phone. We have also applied for Smart Cities grants that would subsidize the cost of including cameras and Wi-Fi transmitters with the new lighting.

The City CED is also working on efforts to establish a robust business incubator presence in our City. We want to make it a collaborative effort using all of the organizations both public and private that offer services and resources entrepreneurs and new businesses need to get started and existing businesses looking to expand need to do so successfully. We have several such organizations in place to create this service. They include AIDA, FMCC, BOCES, local realtors, financial institutions, the Chambers etc. The focus of the incubator will be small businesses with precision manufacturing, retail and restaurants and will include an outreach effort to find these sorts of opportunities from outside our area. We are hoping a chunk of funding to help bring this job creation service to our City will come from a grant request we have in process courtesy of Senator Hinchey.

As we work to make this City a better place to live and work, we must also make very sure that we are consistently and professionally promoting Amsterdam's strengths, attributes and progress throughout our region. A new, cutting edge municipal Web site is key to that objective. We need a more robust online presence that leaves user with the impression that they are interacting with a community that has its act together and responds to the needs of its residents, workplaces and visitors. Funding from the DRI and National Grid have provided the money necessary to create a much enhanced Web site and we will be launching it in 2022.

We have also recently created a national marketing commercial that aired in December 2021 both regionally and nationally. Our City has access to the videos in perpetuity and they will be used in upcoming marketing initiatives.

I will close this CED section of my State of the City by emphasizing that the community and economic development effort in our City is well organized, well-managed, and making steady progress toward well established objectives.

There have been and will continue to be setbacks in this effort. The key to our success will be how effectively we can work around them.

Being patient, determined, working hard and working smart is how we will keep the level in the glass containing Amsterdam's future rising in 2022.

Part 3: Public Safety and Recreation
Amsterdam Police Department

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Protecting the safety, property and health of our residents is indeed a top priority of our City government. According to SafeWise a respected online resource that utilizes FBI Crime statistics to calculate the crime level of cities in New York State, the City of Amsterdam has one of lowest crime rates of any City in the Capital District and the Mohawk Valley region of Upstate. We have a professional, well-trained and well led police force and one that enjoys a substantive level of trust and respect among our community. Of course we have crime, some of it very serious and upsetting but the APD's record of solving those crimes and apprehending those who commit it is very strong. Our plan is to keep it that way.

The cost of maintaining this level of police protection represents a significant portion of our City's budget. We work hard to control these costs while fully understanding that competitive salaries and benefits, good training and proper equipment are essential ingredients for professional, sustainable law enforcement. Just as we have an obligation to protect the lives and property of our residents, we also have that same solemn obligation to the men and women who provide that protection.

I let my department heads run their departments as they see fit until such time it becomes evident they are having a difficult time doing so. I have complete faith in Chief John Thomas's ability to manage how APD does its job. He and I do regularly discuss the law enforcement needs of our community and the needs of his department and we collaborate to address them.

In 2021 we worked together to get body cameras approved by the Common Council and added to the standard equipment and operating procedures of the APD. We had been one of the very few municipal departments in the State not to be utilizing them and now that we are, just about everyone agrees they are a valuable tool, which serve to enhance public trust and confidence even more in our City's policing. The availability of real-time audio/video recordings of their calls has also proved to be a valuable resource for officers in the effort to document critical details and evidence.

As Mayor, it is my responsibility to make sure the residents of this City not only feel safe from crime but also feel they are being treated fairly and respectfully should they have interaction with the APD. Whenever I receive any citizen inputs about such interactions, good or bad, I immediately bring them to Chief Thomas's attention and if necessary, we research and discuss them before responding to the sender. In 2022, our City will launch a new and more robust Website, which will include an interaction tool which will make it easier for residents to submit comments, observations, praise, complaints, etc. about our City services including law enforcement. Chief Thomas and I will review each of them and if and when a response is requested or otherwise warranted, we will make sure one is provided.

The Amsterdam Fire Department

Under the able leadership of Chief Anthony Agresta, our City's fire department continued to fulfill the crucial roles of providing our City with fire protection and EMT/Ambulance services. Our highly skilled and well-trained firefighters have both my utmost respect and admiration for taking on this dual responsibility. Like with the APD, the cost to provide this City with fire protection and ambulance services represent a significant but essential investment for our taxpayers.

I have worked closely with Chief Agresta to develop a clear understanding of how both services are provided simultaneously and the challenges involved in doing so. Based on the costs for leasing, operating, equipping and maintaining the one ambulance the AFD has in service and the estimate of the percentage of time AFD personnel spent on ambulance related tasks as provided by the Chief, I roughly calculated it took right around a half million dollars per year to keep that ambulance in

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service. What is happening is that we are transitioning from a fire department that also provides EMT services in the direction of an ambulance service that also provides firefighting and the department now has to be managed that way.

What makes it doable for the City to have the AFD provide ambulance service is the revenue we receive from medicare, medicaid and private insurance carrier claims for the service. The amount has averaged right around \$625,000 per year for the previous two years and is on an upward trajectory. This is a critical source of revenue which makes the financial burden of spending over \$3 million annually for a professional fire department more manageable. But when you have a City in as fiscally distressed a situation as Amsterdam has been, every penny of that additional funding gets eaten up pretty quickly and that is what has been happening to the ambulance revenue up until now.

The challenging part of providing two essential emergency-on-call-based public safety services with the same manpower comes in when you try and balance the City's needs for fire protection and our needs for ambulance services. Firefighters on an ambulance call are not immediately available to fight a fire. Whenever absenteeism on an AFD Shift reduced manpower from 8 to 5, we were facing the possibility that fewer than four firefighters would be available to initially respond to a fire. We do have an agreement with GAVAC to back us up in such situations but there have been instances when GAVAC did not have the available rig needed to do so. It was pretty clear that the biggest motivation for the previous administration in making the AFD our City's primary ambulance provider was revenue because at the same time they made the switch, they also reduced the minimum permissible AFD shift level from six to five firefighters to keep the overtime costs to a minimum.

I met with the Director of GAVAC this past fall to make sure they had the resources and intentions to continue their mutual assistance pact with the City and he assured me GAVAC did. But he also reminded me that his organization had just been sold to a national company. They had recently signed a half-million dollar deal to provide coverage to Fulton County. He was at the same time experiencing staffing shortages, stiffer regulatory burdens and a need to look for additional sources of revenue outside the City. It was clear that it would be wise to not add to our dependence on GAVAC at this time.

But at the same meeting I also learned that GAVAC supported eight ambulances with close to 100 full and part time employees and it became just as clear to me that our City was not nor could we be in a position to afford assigning the entire burden of ambulance service in our City to the AFD, especially under the current terms of our labor contracts. We need to continue to rely on the support of GAVAC.

This past November, Assemblyman Santabarbara delivered the welcome news that the Reconstruction Board's recommendations for \$1.65 million worth of funding for City investments had been approved. This included a \$200,000 grant to finance the purchase and outfitting of a second fully equipped ambulance for our AFD. A review of the history of AFD ambulance calls that couldn't be responded to due to absence of a second fully equipped rig had indicated the availability of such a vehicle would have had a significant positive impact on revenues. The Reconstruction Board agreed with this finding and provided the funding necessary to purchase and equip that second ambulance.

But to underscore what I just stated earlier about giving the AFD more ambulance responsibilities, the State Board included the following statement of caution with this grant; "It is important that the City operate a potential second ambulance within existing personnel levels to ensure that costs do not increase and outweigh the potential benefit. Increased overtime may be an additional concern and

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would need to be managed closely. The modest additional margin could be wiped out easily and quickly.”

To help understand what that warning was about, you need to understand that the average cost for a fireman in our City when you include salary, benefits, training and retirement is in excess of \$100,000. If adding an additional ambulance would require our City to carry additional firefighters to staff the ambulance and still make sure we have four available to respond to structure fires, we could quickly get into a situation where the second ambulance is generating negative cash flow.

But getting this funding certainly makes the addition of a second fully equipped ambulance more doable and attractive. Our City’s existing ambulance is not always in service due to mechanical breakdowns and servicing needs. For every week it is unavailable for use, the City loses between \$15,000 and \$20,000 worth of revenue. Chief Agresta calculated that having a fully equipped second ambulance available would by itself provide the City a significant portion of the additional revenues needed to subsidize the increased cost in overtime that would be necessary to restore six man minimum shift staffing in the AFD.

As soon as the State confirmed we were getting the funding, I directed the Fire Chief to go back to the six-man shift standard. I told him to move forward ASAP with equipping the secondhand ambulance we have in reserve to make it call-ready and I told him the only time I expected both ambulances to be on call at the same time was if shift levels were at a point that in his professional opinion would not effect the ability to respond safely to a fire and if the provisions of our labor contract with the firefighters permitted it. At all other times, the City would have one ambulance on call, and continue to depend on GAVAC for backup. At all times there will now be four firefighters responding initially to house fires.

It needs to again be emphasized that our firefighters do difficult and dangerous jobs for the people of this City. Jobs that carry huge amounts of stress and responsibility. I don't believe I could do what they do for a living and I respect the hell out of them for doing it as well as they do. So I feel really good that we have in place a sustainable strategy for re-instituting the six man staffing level, which had been rescinded by my predecessor. This move enhanced the safety of our firefighters and the safety of our citizens and permits us to reinvest a portion of the ambulance revenues back into the Department responsible for producing those revenues.

And speaking of reinvesting in public safety, our City is making several repairs and enhancements to the public safety building. This past year we completed a repair of the buildings long-leaking roof. We are also completing a multi-phased effort to replace the facility’s air-handling and climate control system. This year we will also replace the very old telephone system used by both the police and fire departments with a new and better system which will also pay for itself quickly because the City will no longer be saddled with the very high annual maintenance cost we were paying for the old phones.

I also want to point out that our fight against blight helps make the challenges faced by our City’s police and firefighters easier as well. Empty, uncared for buildings can easily be converted into places where people up to no good gather to do bad things including starting fires. By eliminating them, we make those gatherings harder to take place.

Another huge boost to the safety and appearance of our community will be the installation of all new LED street lighting here in our City. We secured a \$1.1 million dollar grant for the project late this year.

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There will be a lengthy process involved because as part of this project we need to purchase the lighting infrastructure from National Grid before we can replace it but when it is completed in 2023 there will definitely be fewer dark places for crime to take place in our City.

Recreation

The continued development of Veterans Park as a center-of-our-city outdoor recreational venue was certainly a highlight of a strong year of City-sponsored enhancements and events in recreational programming managed by Tourism Marketing & Recreation Department Director Rob Spagnola and Asst. Director Michelle Pawlik. Kicked off by a super generous initial contribution of \$100,000 from Sticker Mule two years ago, which funded the unique oval of creative outdoor exercise apparatus known as the Mule Track, one donor after another has approached the City to add to Veterans Park's functionality and programming. The Amsterdam Youth Soccer League built two new playing fields in the middle of Mule Track and played their inaugural season at Vets in 2021. The Creative Connections Clubhouse and their Wishful Thinking Basketball program spearheaded a \$40,000 fundraiser to add a fourth basketball court to the three that already existed at Vets and also beautifully resurfaced all of them. Roth Construction built and donated a beautiful storage shed for the equipment used for the Wishful Thinking basketball program. The family of Patrick Cushing, one of the precious lives taken from us in the tragic limousine accident in Schoharie funded the construction of an outdoor amphitheater at the Park, using monies from contributions they received in Patrick's memory. Sticker Mule also paid for the addition of several new pieces of playground equipment at Vets and St. Mary's Healthcare stepped up and is funding several improvements to the Park's pavilion which are still in process and will be completed this spring. Then in November, Alpin Haus notified us they would pay for the addition of a new lighted ice skating rink for the venue, and thanks to a yeoman's effort by the staff of the Rec Department, the new rink opened right after Christmas.

We conducted the first ever Winterfest Event at the rink on February 12th of this year and it was a resounding success!

Just recently, Rob Zyzye Sr. the community-minded owner of both Z Core and Julian's Event Center has offered to build a beautiful warming hut for the Rink.

And how great was it to have enough of a COVID respite to be able to bring back the Italiafest and Octoberfest street festivals this past year. And all of the local restaurants who participated in this year's Soupfest and Taste of Amsterdam Week made them both successful and delicious City-sponsored events.

How will we kick recreation and new things to do in our City up a notch in 2022? Veterans Field's development as this City's center of recreational activities will continue to be built upon. Thanks to a \$100,000 state grant secured by Assemblyman Santabarbara a badly needed new poolhouse will be constructed for our City swimming pool.

Sticker Mule will continue their amazing effort to improve Amsterdam's quality of life amenities by subsidizing the cost of a food and ice cream concession stand in the Park. Both the poolhouse and concession are scheduled to open in 2023.

Alpin Haus has again agreed to make a generous contribution to the Park by funding the addition of a new water attraction, which we are hoping will be ready in time for this coming summer's heat waves.

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A grant long ago submitted by former State Senator George Amedore has finally cleared all the necessary approvals and will be used to fund \$200,000 worth of Capital Project improvements at Shuttleworth Park including new lighting for the baseball field, a resurfacing of the long neglected tennis court which will also be properly lined for the increasingly popular spot of pickle ball. Though I've received no official notification of this from the County as of yet, the City's director of recreation has told me that the County is also providing ARPA funding for improvement projects at Shuttleworth Park. He indicated that some of this funding will be used to pave the park's parking lots.

Hopefully in 2022 we will also be able to finally initiate a city-sponsored Farmers Market on or near our Pedestrian Bridge.

More than just a few golfers who have played there regularly for decades have confirmed that the playing condition at the Amsterdam Municipal Golf Course were never better than they were during the 2021 golf season. Those conditions helped increase revenues at the course significantly this year as we strive to make beautiful Muni a break-even operation moving forward. In 2022 an effort will be made to fund and construct a driving range at the Course which would provide a significant new revenue stream for minimum investment.

Finances

When I became Mayor in January of 2020, our City's deficit had been just been certified as being \$8.3 million by the New York State Comptroller's office. In the just completed independent audit of our 20-21 fiscal year, which ended on June 30, 2021, the City's independent auditor confirmed that deficit had been reduced to \$1,147,009. I consider this to be our City's most significant accomplishment since I assumed the office of Mayor in January of 2020.

How were we able to accomplish this? When I ran for Mayor, I promised City residents that getting rid of this deficit would be my number one priority but at the same time I also promised you that the taxpayers would not be asked to bear the brunt of the burden for doing so. With the help of a lot of folks who were willing to focus only on what was best for the City, we were able to keep that promise. Still, first and foremost the taxpayers of our City need to be thanked for paying the slightly higher tax rates and user fees approved by the Common Council in the two budgets enacted thus far during my administration. But the vast majority of our deficit reduction during the past two years was attained with revenues that were not derived from property tax increases and cost savings. Let's look at how we accomplished this.

First, we made targeted decisions to trim manpower in certain City departments by not filling vacated positions. Second, we negotiated deals involving the golf course's clubhouse and old county tax payments that significantly improved the City's financial standing. Third, we finally got our Capital project accounts reconciled and found surpluses that could be applied to our debt. Fourth, instead of tanking during the Pandemic as most (including me and Montgomery County leaders) expected and forecasted, sales tax revenues increased and have continued to do so since. Fifth, in January of 2021, Congress finally approved direct Pandemic relief payments to state and city governments and our City has been able to strategically use that aid to cover costs that otherwise would have to be covered by budgeted revenues. Sixth, the monitoring and assistance we are receiving from the New York State Comptroller's office has been invaluable in the effort to force us out of poor financial management and budgeting practices. And finally, my administration comes to work every single day trying to find

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better and more cost-effective ways to do the things City government must do to serve the current and future needs of Amsterdam's residents.

So Amsterdam is no longer rated as the most financially distressed City in New York State. In fact, when the State Comptroller's newest list of most significantly stressed municipalities is published later this year, Amsterdam's name won't even be on it. Instead, we are now considered to be a City in moderate financial distress and by the end of my four year term I want our City to be off that list as well.

But just getting off the list won't be the key to Amsterdam's future. That key will be to make the changes and decisions necessary to make sure our City never again gets itself into the horrendous financial position that got us on that list in the first place. I feel very strongly that there is a key structural deficiency in our City's Charter that must be addressed.

Currently, under Amsterdam's City Charter, anyone eighteen years of age or older can become Amsterdam's Controller. There are no minimum qualifications required for the position, not a degree in accounting, no professional certifications, no previous managerial experience. Under our current system, a person doesn't even have to pass a high school math regents to be given total control over our City's books! All they have to do is win an election. And if they happen to run unopposed, they can take control of this City's entire financial system with just a couple of dozen votes. And when they do, they have to answer to no one for their actions or inactions on a day-to-day basis. For the good of our City, we must eliminate the possibility of that happening in the future. How?

I will introduce a new local law which will make the position of Amsterdam City Controller a Mayoral appointment to serve co-terminus with the Mayor. Included in the new law will be a minimum set of qualifications an individual must have to be considered for the appointment.

If the Common Council approves this new law, the public will have the opportunity to approve or reject it in a public referendum which would take place on Election Day in November of this year.

If the public approves the referendum in November of 2022, then whoever is elected Mayor in the 2023 election will be responsible for appointing the next City Controller, per the new minimum qualifications criteria set forth by the new law. The appointment would then be subject to Common Council approval. If approved, the appointed Controller would report directly to the Mayor who would become responsible for directing and/or approving how the responsibilities of the office are managed.

The second biggest priority our city must address to avoid future financial messes is to establish greater control over the costs of the health insurance benefit we provide employees and pensioners. To put the cost of this benefit in perspective, consider this fact; the total amount of money the City collected in property tax revenue during the last fiscal year was approximately \$5.4 million. During that fiscal year our City spent right around \$5.7 million on the health benefit we provide our employees and pensioners. That's right, the annual cost for that benefit alone exceeds all the property tax revenue our City collects in a year. This cannot continue.

In five of the past seven fiscal years, we have significantly overspent our budget for this health insurance benefit. The reason our insurance broker gives for the overspending is always the same: "You experienced a higher number of expensive serious illness cases than expected." Compounding this overspending is the fact that it has sometimes taken months after a fiscal year ends to reconcile the claims cost for the previous fiscal year.

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The truth is that our current health insurance model is not insurance at all. Instead, the City basically pays for the majority of healthcare expenses our employees incur out of the City treasury. We do utilize what are called stop loss policies to protect us from the high costs of treating serious illnesses and injuries but those policies are extremely expensive as well and must be renewed every year, which in effect serves to negate the benefit offered by the "no lifetime limit" and "pre-existing conditions" requirements the government mandates for full insurance coverage.

Compounding the financial stress created by our self-insured health insurance model is that our tax rate and our employee contribution amounts are based upon what we budget or expect the cost to be and we depend on our broker to give us those numbers. So when we exceed budget, we have no recourse but to get the money from someplace else.

I am determined, with the help of brokers, consultants and our Common Council to at the very least slow down this runaway freight train of health insurance costs during the remainder of my term in office.

Another huge financial challenge for the City are the steep increases in the tipping fees we must pay for our solid waste disposal, otherwise known as garbage. We use the very conveniently located Montgomery County transfer station to empty our City's garbage trucks but unfortunately, the cost to then haul our garbage to a faraway landfill in western New York State and dump it in a landfill is horribly expensive and continuing to increase. These costs have actually doubled since I took office in 2020 and . Last year, our City was able to lower our disposal cost for the sludge byproduct produced at our Wastewater Treatment plant by shopping for better pricing. Our garbage disposal administration however is handled by Montgomery County so we must work through and with them to negotiate better rates and/or find alternative haulers and landfill arrangements. I intend to make this a priority in 2022.

It is also essential that we transition the financial management mode of our City from one budget year at a time to one that focuses on the next three-to-five years. Short term thinking couldn't be avoided during the past couple of fiscal years because of the huge financial crisis our City was in and a horrid pandemic but if all you worry about is getting through today, eventually your tomorrow's are going to be a real problem.

I also wish to highlight the fact that our City has been awarded over \$11 million worth of federal and state funding since January of last year. Just this past week we received the great news that our City will receive five million dollars for the construction of the new downtown community center and the engineering study for downtown multimodal transportation center. We only need to look east to Schenectady to find evidence of how downtown revitalization can rejuvenate an aging City in the northeast. We don't have a Metroplex in Amsterdam, not yet anyway but the investment of federal and state dollars taking place in our downtown core and waterfront has already begun to attract the interest of private investors there as well. Which is why I keep saying thank you to Amsterdam's representatives in Albany and Washington for going to bat for our City when dollars are appropriated.

The advocacy for our City, which we receive at the State level from our hard-working Assemblyman Angelo Santabarbara has paid huge dividends for our community's quality of life time and again. What a pleasure it has been to also have Michelle Hinchey working for Amsterdam in the State Senate. As you read this, both of them are leading the way to get the recurring funding necessary to bring CDTA to our City approved in this upcoming State budget. And speaking of that, thank you also to New York State Governor Kathy Hochul for recognizing that Amsterdam needs and deserves CDTA funding assistance like Albany, Troy, Schenectady and Saratoga already receive.

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Congressman Paul Tonko has also really delivered for his hometown this past year. He has taken full advantage of his seniority in Congress and his strong working relationship with House leadership to get \$5 million worth of grants for Amsterdam in the just-approved Community Projects Omnibus legislation. Thank you also to Speaker Schumer for getting this legislation through the Senate. This comes after Congressman Tonko and both our Senators in Washington worked to get Congress to finally approve direct COVID relief aid to city, county and state governments. As a result, Amsterdam received over \$1.8 million of direct aid from this legislation and Montgomery County received \$10 million.

Redistricting will change our representation in the State Senate in January of 2023. We will no longer be part of Senator Hinchey's district and instead will be part of a newly formed 51st district. Regardless of who ends up representing us in the State Senate next year I pledge to work very hard to establish a solid line of communication and working relationship with that individual and their staff.

So to summarize this State of the City address I can proclaim the State of our City to be much stronger than it was the day I took office in January of 2020. Our deficit has been reduced by almost 90%, we've come through a Pandemic, our homes are selling at record prices, we have a strong level of public and private investment and investor interest in our City, we are fixing our roads, attacking blight like it has never been attacked before, investing heavily in our infrastructure, and enhancing our City's recreational resources all while keeping property taxes and fees at manageable levels. Together we have made Amsterdam a better place to live during a very challenging time.

But the biggest challenge remains in front of us. Right now, this instant, my priority as your Mayor is to continue to attack the causes of our City's biggest problems. Eliminating the balance of our deficit, working with anyone and everyone to find the revenues needed to continue the effort to update aging infrastructure, providing more and better housing choices for working families, getting the DRI projects fully funded and completed and attracting new businesses with good jobs to our community. With a good plan, some patience and lots of hard work, we can make a City that was the most financially stressed in our State just two short years ago into one of the most popular hometown choices for working families and small businesses in this region. Let's kick it up a notch and do it together.

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