

City Council members, fellow public officials, department heads, community leaders, ladies and gentlemen—good evening and thank you all for braving the cold to join me for the 2015 State of the City Address. Last year, the State of the City had to be postponed twice because of bad weather. I want to recognize the Department of Public Works for the great job they did making sure we could get here safely tonight; too often the hard work they do goes unappreciated. They're out there day and night to keep ahead of the snow and wind and cold. We lay people think of it as a sprint: how quickly can they get the city cleaned up after a heavy snowfall. But the pros know it's really a marathon: how do we keep our city functioning in the face of prolonged periods of bad weather. That's the real test. When we say the words "public safety," it's usually police and fire that come to mind, but dealing with extreme weather like we've had these last several weeks is a reminder that our plow drivers and equipment operators and all their support staff are part of the public safety team, too. Join me in giving them a big hand in appreciation.

You all know that there's a friendly rivalry between our Police and Fire Departments. Of course they are a seamless team when lives or property are at risk, but has anyone here ever been to one of their hockey or football games? Ouch! I try as much as possible to channel that energy in a positive direction. The competition I'm trying to encourage is for them to try to out-do each other in bringing the maximum number of innovative positive changes to their departments. I'm excited about some of the things we've done already, but I'm even more excited about what we're going to do next.

(3. Police Cover Slide)

Our Niagara Falls Police Department was an early adopter of a scientific approach to policing, using the Compstat system first developed in New York City. Compstat uses statistics to reduce crime, to improve quality of life and to manage resources.

(4. Calls and arrests slide)

What can you learn from the statistics? Some very interesting things. The total number of calls for service to NFPD in 2014 was 56,000. As you can see from the chart, only 4000 of those—7% of all calls—resulted in an arrest. 93% of the time, our officers manage to resolve the

situation without having to arrest anyone. And of those arrests, only 8% are at the discretion of the officer. So most of our arrests are cut-and-dried situations. Note our arrest rate is over twice the national average—if you don't want to get caught, Niagara Falls is not a good place to commit a crime.

(5. Number of Complaints vs Calls for Service, Use of Force Incidents, and Police Vehicle Accidents)

Now look at the next slide. Of those 56,000-plus calls for service, only about 30—that's .05%-- result in complaints about our officers' conduct. About half of those are internal vs. citizen complaints, which shows that we do a good job of policing ourselves. Next, look at use of force incidents. Even in the 8% of calls where an arrest is made, only 6% of those arrests resulted in a use of force. About 94% of the time, the arrest is made without force being used. At a time when so much attention is focused nationally on interactions between officers and the community, especially when force is used, those are great statistics. Our NFPD is getting the job done effectively while avoiding the types of situations that create the danger of a flare-up the vast majority of the time. How do we know they're getting the job done?

(6. Comparison of 2013 total part one crimes and 2014)

We know because we scientifically track the data. Last year, I was able to report a 6% decrease in Part I crimes; those are the more serious crimes, the ones most citizens are most concerned about. That's a tough act to follow. I am happy to be able to report a further 6% reduction for 2014. It didn't happen by accident. And the success we're having is getting some much-deserved recognition.

(7. NFPD Receiving the HIDTA (High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area) Award for Game Changers)

I am proud to report that just a couple weeks ago, at a ceremony in Washington, D.C., our NFPD and our partners at the Drug Enforcement Agency received the 2014 High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area award for the best community outreach program in the nation.

(8. 2014 Game Changers slide)

NFPD was recognized in this way because of innovative outreach programs like Game Changers, that uses developmental basketball programming as a hook to get kids exposed to positive values and positive role models. Over 100 youths participated in at least one of our Game Changer events, and over 40 attended all of the events. Thanks and congratulations to Michelle Spahn and all our friends at DEA, and to my friend and colleague Byron Brown, mayor of Buffalo, who helped introduce us to his program so we could start our own and win this award.

(9. Body cameras slide)

NFPD has always been an early adopter of new technologies. We've been using cameras mounted on patrol cars for over a decade. Now, our Police Department has purchased 48 body cameras and will be issuing them to Officers in the coming months. This was a process our department started before Ferguson became a household word. I am proud our officers supported it. This shows they have confidence in their own skill and training. The majority of officers are abiding by the regulations the majority of the time, and they're not afraid to have the world see how they do their jobs. But it's a benefit for the community as well. If a situation does develop where an officer's conduct is called into question, it won't be a case of one person's word versus another's. NFPD's adoption of body cameras is just one more proof of our department's dedication to the principles of community policing.

(10. GIVE grant slide)

The New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services GIVE (Gun Involved Violence Elimination) Grant recently replaced the long-running IMPACT Grant. We were leaders in implementing IMPACT, and we're going to be leaders with GIVE as well. This grant focuses on gun violence and community engagement, involving key stakeholders.

(11. NFPD GIVE slide)

In addition to the crime analysis and intelligence gathering, the GIVE Grant has a pro-active intervention component where top offenders are brought in by law enforcement and told what could happen to them if they continue with their violent behavior like increased Federal Charges, and so forth. They are then provided opportunities to meet with service providers to help them change their life style.

(12. & 13. Maps slides)

As Part of the GIVE Grant, targeted areas of the City, or “Hot Spots,” are tracked, and chronic offenders are targeted. This map was created by the NFPD Field Intel Unit’s Crime Analyst with mapping software provided through the GIVE Grant.

Niagara Falls is one of the first cities that is using 3D mapping, as seen here, to display crime data and “Hot Spots.”

(14. NCAC slide)

The Niagara Falls Police Department and the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services are teaming up to implement a Crime Analysis Center for Niagara County. The center will be housed in the Niagara Falls Police Department. The goal of the center is multifaceted. One part will take all the crime data from all the cities and towns in Niagara County and analyze it for any patterns that may help identify a suspect or predict crime. Another will track prolific offenders through government and public databases and social media. A third segment will provide real-time crime information to all local law enforcement, as the crimes are happening. Expanding on the ongoing efforts of our Niagara Falls Police Field Intel Unit, DCJS has provided thousands of dollars in funding for cutting edge technology like facial recognition software, a TV surveillance wall, and link chart analysis software that will make this center one of the best, if not the best, in the state.

(15. CPTED)

But there’s more. Members of NFPD attended two different Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) Trainings provided by the U.S. Department of Justice. The cutting edge concept here is that over time, as CPTED principles are incorporated into infrastructure and economic development projects, our city of the future can become safer by design. Currently NFPD and Community Development are working together on future development projects, and applying the concepts of CPTED for a safer crime free environment.

(16. Cultural Diversity slide)

Ours is a very diverse community, and NFPD is taking diversity training to help keep up with the times. The Police Brass have already received training through the U.S. Department of Justice, and in the coming weeks, all members of the force will be going through the training. As a segment of the training, the trainers met with the community to address their concerns.

(17. & 18. Animal Control)

Finally, Niagara Falls Police have expanded the services they provide to the City of Niagara Falls by adding an Animal Control Officer (AC1). By having an Animal Control Officer, the Department can investigate crimes and address situations that we never could before. In order to help the Animal Control Officer to do the best job possible, a truck was purchased and outfitted with the latest animal rescue and transportation equipment.

(19. Cat slide)

This is kind of painful to look at, but here is a picture of a cat that was found injured with a broken jaw and a bullet fragments lodged in it. I know what you're thinking—Sparky the Fire Safety Dog has a solid alibi. We know. We checked. But crime statistics show that cruelty to animals is often associated with later violent behavior toward humans. By getting into the animal control business, the City will have the opportunity to address-first-hand a wide variety of quality of life issues for humans and our furry friends as well.

(20. Pastors and Politicians on Patrol)

Recently, at the initiative of Pastor Craig Pridgen of True Bethel Baptist Church and County Legislator and NFPD Community Relations Officer Owen Steed, a group of pastors, community activists, elected leaders and police officers took to the streets to help bridge any gaps between the department and the community it serves. This is just part of ongoing efforts in the community to make sure that members of the community who may have been witness to a crime are not afraid to come forward to help law enforcement break the cycle of violence.

You all remember last year's State of the City, when we debuted Sparky the Fire Safety Dog—people said it was the highlight of the evening. Truth is, I inserted it at what I was concerned

was a particularly boring part of the speech, because I figured I would need a shot in the arm about then, and it seemed to work out great. But there was just one problem.

The Niagara Falls Police Department does not like to be outdone—not by career criminals, not by drug dealers, not by gang members—and most certainly not by the Niagara Falls Fire Department. So this year, we have been very certain to feature a number of new hi-tech innovations being introduced by our innovative and very competitive Police Department.

Now finally, let me introduce the NFPD’s answer to Sparky the Fire Safety Dog, our own pint-sized police patrol car, affectionately known as Donut.

So what are the hallmarks of the transformation going on in the NFPD? Fact-based, data-driven, innovative, community-based, compassionate, maybe even a little fun.

(21 NFFD logo slide)

In my 2014 State of the City, I told you the Fire Department set a record in 2013 by making 6,433 response runs. Guess what?

(22- NFFD Stats Slide)

In 2014, they responded to 6,537 emergency calls—another new record. Counting all responding vehicles, since sometimes more than one responds, the total number of actual responses was 9,694. For historical comparison, in 2004 we responded to 3,875 emergency calls—that’s a 69% increase in the last decade.

(23 Levy Brothers award slide)

Finally, it would not be appropriate to leave the subject of the Fire Department’s 2014 year without acknowledging the extraordinary heroism of some of its members. The Levy Brothers

Memorial Award is the NFFD’s highest honor but it is not awarded every year—only when there is a special circumstance that rises far above the call of duty. More on this later.

(24 Fire Ground Survival Training slide)

Last year, we announced we were receiving a “Train the Trainer” grant in Fire Ground Survival. We were able to cover our costs for implementing the grant by charging outside fire departments to attend. All our members are now trained in these methods.

(25 Training 2014 slide)

Remember all the alarming news reports about Ebola last year? NFFD was prepared. All personnel were trained in dealing with and treating suspected and confirmed Ebola patients. New Ebola kits were assembled and response protocols were established. This was just part of a whole series of different training projects done in 2014, from trench rescue to confined space training to ice and water rescue.

(26)

(27 Bell and paver slide)

We’ve been making a major effort over several years to make sure we never forget the lessons learned about courage and sacrifice, on September 11, 2001. At this year’s ceremony, we unveiled new improvements to our memorial park and 911 memorial, including installation of more personalized pavers. Joint efforts by the Mutual Aid Association and the Department of Public Works resulted in the restoration of two historic fire bells to their original glory, and they rang again at their new home on Royal Avenue for the first time on September 11, 2014. Congratulations to all on a job well done.

(28 Fire tower slide)

We're continuing efforts with other Niagara County fire departments to break the logjam to build a new fire training tower on Hyde Park to replace the dilapidated one that had to be torn down.

(29)

(30)

Last year, NFFD had some spectacular fires to deal with. In early September, an explosion at 440-7th Street led to a large fire, quickly spreading to a total of four buildings. It took at least a couple days to extinguish the fire. And just a couple of weeks later there was the massive conflagration at Norampac.

(31 Greenpac fire slides)

The fire somehow got started in the acres of stacked bales of recycled cardboard awaiting processing outside the newly-completed Greenpac mill—a \$463 million project that had taken years to accomplish. It was an inferno so large and intense the plume showed up on regional weather radar. The NFFD, joined by firefighters from 27 different volunteer fire companies and the Niagara Falls airbase, held the line, prevented the spread of the fire to the new mill and other surrounding industries, saving millions of dollars of investment and hundreds of jobs at the plant.

(32)

On May 6th of this year, the NFFD responded to the Falls where a possibly-suicidal 33-year old man was standing in the icy rapids a mere 40 yards upstream from the brink. Truck 1, Engine 4 and Car 80 responded to the scene to gear up for a possible rescue. State Parks Police talked to the man for over six hours, trying to narrow the distance as he vacillated between compliance and agitation. Suddenly, he dove into the rapids, towards the precipice and certain death. Captain John Carey and Firefighter Bart DeRosa Jr. jumped the railing and ran to get ahead of the man. 30 feet from the brink, DeRosa stepped into the cataracts and grabbed the man, who was panicked, cold and helpless. Carey then entered the water and together they prevented the man from drifting past them and over the Falls. They were able to lift him onto the bank, where firefighters and Parks Police were able to secure him. Several firefighters and Parks Policemen

performed admirably that day, but Captain John Carey and Firefighter Bart DeRosa Jr. were singled out to receive the Levy Brothers Award for 2014.

(33 New Equipment & Training slide)

Major work was also done in 2014 to refurbish and modernize the Fire Administration Building at 3115 Walnut Avenue, where the roof had been leaking for years. With a lot of hard work from DPW and some help from casino and capital funds, we can once again be proud of this historic and stately facility.

We've also installed Smart Boards in the first and second floor training rooms, so that now they're capable of supporting the latest hi-tech training---and I've heard Chief Colangelo is willing to share with other departments. Of course, anyone else wanting to use the facility will have to fit themselves into some very tight scheduling windows, because the NFFD is going great guns on all sorts of innovative training.

I'm particularly proud that NFFD has taken the lead for the City in dealing with the ongoing epidemic of heroin overdoses. Following training during the month of May, Narcon/Naloxone was deployed on all our apparatus, so that our EMT's can administer the antidote to patients who have overdosed on narcotics. Numerous lives have been saved already.

Another exciting new piece of equipment coming on line with NFFD are thermal imaging cameras. Previously these had been deployed only with the truck companies. They are currently installed on all our apparatus, and are being used for a variety of purposes including search and rescue and looking for hidden fires in walls and other confined spaces.

Other initiatives underway at NFFD in 2014:

(34 Used reserve ladder truck slide)

We found a used reserve ladder truck in Brockport. It was a steal at \$40,000. Thanks to Lou Michaels.

Capital investments continued as we systematically upgrade our firehouses, with Firehouse 3 at 11th and Ontario and Firehouse 8 at Hyde Park and Royal getting some much-needed attention.

We continued our aggressive efforts to teach fire safety throughout the City, with Life Safety Educator Al Hornung reaching over 2,500 children and adults through community events like Kids and Kites Day and Crime Night Out. Over 8,000 people were talked to in our community fire safety programs.

Perhaps most exciting of all, our new rescue truck and command center was ordered in 2014. It is currently being built and the chassis is at the factory with an estimated completion date in the summer of 2015. It will include a command center that will incorporate some of the computer technology that will be used on all apparatus by the end of the year 2015.

Fire is currently working with the Police Department staff on a project involving apparatus computers and dispatching. In 2015 we will be installing, in all of our fire apparatus, a laptop or I-pad similar to those that the police are using in their new police vehicles. We'll be updating our dispatch systems to be able to coordinate with this type of system. This technological transformation will multiply the effectiveness of our fire response, allowing our firefighters to access necessary information like hydrant locations, building preplans, directions, any special hazards of the building, and much more while on route to a fire scene.

(35 Refuse & Recycling)

As you all know 2014 marked the beginning of our City's new Recycling program. Launching the program has not been without some bumps in the road. We never said it would be easy. We listened to residents and businesses, we made some changes. I am proud to say, the program has been implemented, our rate of recycling at the end of 2014 has doubled. Remember we pay to

have our trash collected but we get paid for our recycled material. I am confident 2015 will see even more improvement in our recycling rates and more cost savings to our city.

(39 Griffon Park Kayak Launch)

In 2015 we continued our work to improve LaSalle's parks, including a handicapped accessible kayak launch at Griffon Park which was removed for the winter and will be reinstalled as soon as the ice clears.

(40 Jayne Park)

We also completed the long awaited handicapped accessible trail at Jayne Park and early reviews from the neighbors are very favorable.

(DPW Paving Map)

It isn't quite as dramatic as jumping into the raging waters to save someone from going over the Falls, but there has been no rescue effort here in Niagara Falls that has impacted as many people as the effort we've made over the last several years to rescue our streets from potholes, so paving has got to be a main focus of my presentation on DPW.

Since I took office, we've taken a systematic, fact-driven approach to street repair and reconstruction. We were fortunate to get our two big, largely state-funded road reconstruction projects--Lewiston Road and Buffalo Avenue Phase I—completed in 2013 before Congress held up the transportation bill. That took two of our worst pothole-producers off the list for a long time to come. Last year, left largely to our own devices for funding, we still did some impressive road reconstruction. At long last, Macklem Avenue was rebuilt. Weston Avenue between 18th and 22nd Streets—one of the worst stretches of street in the city—was finally addressed. And to help accommodate the increased traffic resulting from the expansion of the Fashion Outlet Mall and construction of L.A. Fitness, and to allow for future growth at the Tops/Target plaza, we reconstructed Mooradian Drive between Fashion Outlet Boulevard and 71st Street. New Road, between Porter and Packard, on which all of our City vehicles were

taking a beating as they came to the Corporation Yard to fuel up, was milled and overlaid just in time for the opening of the new School District athletic facilities.

(41, 42 City Hall Parking Lot)

And two heavily-used City parking lots that had gotten really rough—at City Hall and at the Duke Center—were paved, the latter partly with funds from an old grant revived by our contract grant writer and administrator, Sherry Shepherd-Corulli.

There's not much new money flowing into the State coffers for paving projects, but we had some good news to report nonetheless. Thanks to a grant announced by Congressman Brian Higgins and some slick horse-trading at the GBNRTC by Senior Planner Tom DeSantis, we now have funding in place to finally address Buffalo Avenue Phase II—from the Grand Island bridges to Cayuga Drive—during the 2016 construction season, including some streetscaping long desired by the business district, and years ahead of when we thought that project could be done.

We plan to once again to use the Pothole Killer and Zipper early on in the 2015 paving season to help repair the damage done by a harsh winter, while we gear up for what we believe is going to be a very productive 2015 in-house paving season. We used to call this “mill and overlay,” but as we expanded the depth to which we took the repairs and added repair or replacement of manholes and catch basins to the program, we decided to call it in-house street reconstruction. From measuring our progress by the number of streets, we drilled down first to square yardage and then to cubic yardage as the best measure of our progress. In 2014, our in-house paving program paved 27 streets, putting down over 99,000 square yards of top and over 92,000 square yards of binder. Along the way, we encountered both hostile weather (too much rain at all the wrong times) and some nasty stretches of road base requiring time-consuming digs at Van Rensselaer Ave. and Crescent Drive. So we contracted out 9 other streets so as not to fall behind our annual plan, for a total of 36.

We're working now to finalize our in-house paving plan for 2015, and I can tell you it will be very ambitious. We're targeting up to 38 streets, including many I'm sure you'd all agree are

needy candidates. In the meantime, look what happens when you overlay 2014 on top of the previous years. We're not done yet—I don't think in truth we ever will be—but over time we're turning the corner on what many people once believed was an impossible problem.

Before I leave the topic of DPW, I want to note the great work done by our Clean Neighborhood and ZOOM Team, which was given 1,016 properties to address (vs. 890 last year). 343 complied (vs. 330 last year); 673 were cleaned (vs. 560). 2,644 miscellaneous calls of complaint were received (vs. 1,678). 1755 orders of clean-up were issued (vs. 1451). The total billed amount was over \$286,000. I thought 2013 was so successful it would be impossible to beat, but guess what? A job well done.

I also want to recognize the great work of the forestry department. We didn't have the storms we had in 2013, but they still dealt with over 2600 routine and 346 storm-related calls. Over 1400 work orders were completed.

Trades also had a busy year, making improvements and upgrades to Legends Park, Caravelle Park, Centre Court pool and basketball court, and the LaSalle Facility gym.

(44. Code Enforcement slide—currently Inspections)

I'm sorry about the depressing picture, but hey—that's a lot of what code enforcement is about: preventing deterioration of our neighborhoods, so the house next door to your house doesn't look like this one. Revenues for the year were almost \$890,000, 116 new cases were written for Housing Court, inspectors made 200 court appearances, over 10,200 building inspections were done, and almost 3,400 housing complaints were investigated. Sounds like a lot of work. So guess how many inspectors there are in the department? 100? 10? No, 3! Those are some busy people.

Our landlord licensing program has now registered a total of almost 4,700 properties; that's 90% compliance. And it generates revenue to cover its costs - \$150,000 for the last 2 year period.

(45-46. Assessor’s office slides)

From the Assessor’s office comes unexpected good news. There was an increase in the Homestead taxable total for the 2014 assessment roll, due mostly to sale or transfer of many city-owned properties, putting them back on the tax rolls. Kudos to Law, Finance, CD, the Assessor’s office— who made that happen. And special thanks to the ordinary citizens who are helping turn things around. Whether you’re buying a vacant lot for a vegetable garden or taking on a full-scale renovation of a vacant house, your confidence in our city’s future is making a difference.

The Non Homestead taxable total was down slightly for 2014, but again an increase was seen in the PILOT totals. This should not be the case for 2015, when approximately **\$30 million** of new commercial property will be added to the assessment roll.

The new Homestead and Non Homestead base proportions were calculated and adopted by the council on December 9, 2013. This again represented a 10% shift to the Homestead class, which confirms the administration’s diligence in adjusting the commercial rate in the city’s present two tier system.

The challenge in shifting these two rates is the effect of IDA properties. Since IDA properties include a PILOT payment, they are considered non taxable, and therefore not included in this calculation. This takes millions of dollars out of the Non Homestead figure. In spite of this, the city has remained focused on shifting the percentages while still holding down taxes for the residential property owner.

The Military Road corridor continues to boom with new business construction. The LaSalle Center, a new 114,000 square foot retail plaza is complete and approximately 60% of the facility is presently leased. Tenants include Petco, Bed, Bath & Beyond as well as several other retail outlets. This is on top of L.A. Fitness, Starbuck’s, Harbor Freight, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Popeyes and so forth. Sam’s Club is also complete, a 136,000 square foot retail facility. This new development is not exclusive to Military Road—look at the many new hotels currently proposed or under construction downtown, including the new Wingate Hotel and Fairfield Inn along Rainbow Boulevard, and the Courtyard Marriot and Doubletree on Buffalo

Avenue, and along Route 62 we have the La Quinta Inn in front of Home Depot as well as a new Microtel where the former Captain’s Cove Restaurant was located.

Because incentives were required to get some of this development started, it will take some time for the full effect to be felt. But make no mistake—we are turning around the tax base in this city. I’m excited about what we’ve been able to accomplish so far, but I’m even more excited to think about the future positive impact of all these developments coming on to the tax rolls.

(47. CD logo slide)

(48. CD Video: “Changes”)

It’s no secret that our energetic and creative CD director, Seth Piccirillo, has gained a reputation for being on the cutting edge. The Department is very active on social media, and some people have even started referring to CD Director Piccirillo as “the Director of Cool.” So I thought you might like to see this “cool” video that CD put together to highlight some of the changes going on in our community.

(49. CD stats slide)

Now look at this slide: CD even found a way to make their statistics slide look cool! That’s not easy, friends, I can tell you. Niagara Falls Community Development looks forward to another productive year in 2015, working with its partner organizations and directly with the public. Over the past three years, Niagara Falls Community Development, Neighborhood Housing Services, Center City Development Corporation and Highland Community Revitalization Committee have completed a total of 99 single family home renovations, 63 multi-family renovations and 165 new home owner closing grants. Home renovation and home ownership has and will always be the core mission of Niagara Falls Community Development.

In that same time period, CD has brought in \$1.1 million dollars in competitive grant funds and used annual HUD to leverage an additional \$20 million in private and public investment in key projects.

2014 was a year of cooperation. On behalf of the City of Niagara Falls I want to thank Neighborhood Housing Services, Center City Development Corporation and Highland Community Revitalization Committee for proving that this community is stronger when we get together. These long standing organizations, in a time of financial constraints, formed a consortium, and did something different – they applied for state funding together for the first time. Well, it worked on the first try, and their teamwork brought in a \$400,000 New York State Department of Homes and Community Renewal grant. **Cooperation pays.**

(50, 51. 3rd Street slides)

If you drive down Third Street you will see local developers renovating a total of 40,000 square feet of mostly vacant buildings, creating 30 new market rate apartments and several new business opportunities. A majority of these buildings were once owned by out-of-town speculators that stopped caring for the buildings or paying taxes. Now they serve as proof that transformation is possible. Thanks to the hard work and creativity of these developers, and partnerships with Niagara Falls Community Development, National Grid and Empire State Development, Third Street is becoming a head turner for all the right reasons.

At the same time, the city demolished ten blighted buildings on the parallel blocks of 4th Street. This creates the opportunity for residential and commercial growth to feed off of each other, bringing in new tax revenue. Combined with the Housing Visions Walnut Homes Development on the same blocks of 5-7th Streets, we are starting to see for the first time an organic synergy between neighborhood and tourism district development.

Last week, the Niagara Falls Planning Board approved the city's purchase of 425 Third Street. It is a 2,600 square foot vacant lot that can serve as the connection point between the Third Street growth and the neighborhoods that surround it.

(52, 53, 54. Housing Visions slides)

2015 is already the year that we see cooperation pay off on our streets. This is a “show me” year. If you drive down Walnut Avenue you will see the Walnut Avenue Homes project, a 41 apartment units infill development, rising from once vacant lots and long neglected buildings on 5th through 7th streets. 607 Walnut Avenue, the former school district administration building, is being historically renovated while new build construction happens around it. New tax revenue and new life from once forgotten, government owned property.

(55. Alleyways slide)

More than just a well-lit walkway, we want this new alleyway to be a demonstration project. We want to make it an “art alley,” different from any other pedestrian walkway in the country. On the same day, a wedding party may use the space to take pictures; an artist might promote his or her wares, while locals use it to get from their apartments to work, the store or a nearby parking spot. The alleyway project is about the “wow” factor, but it’s also about utility.

Other progressive cities from Austin, Texas to Denver, Colorado to our good neighbors in Jamestown, New York (working with the Gebbie foundation) are adopting a similar approach, making alleyway projects a significant component of the city’s downtown revitalization strategy.

(56. Gill Creek Park)

Another great example of cooperation? Gill Creek Park, where CD, DPW, Trades, the Niagara Street Business Association, National Grid and Niagara Street School are all playing a role in making the park better. The latest improvement? A new playground.

(57. D’Amelio Park pool fence slide)

Here is another example. At Center Court, DPW and trades fixed up the pool and are rebuilding the basketball court. CD pitched in to replace the pool fence, improving not only safety but aesthetics in a big way.

How else can we *show* more success stories from vacant properties in 2015? We can, finally, break the destructive cycle of real estate speculation created inadvertently by our own in-rem tax foreclosure process, a goal that our administration shares with long-time Councilman and recent Chair Charles Walker. We all know how this works. When the taxes are delinquent on a property for long enough, the City takes control of the property through a tax foreclosure and sells it at the in-rem auction. The objective—and it's a perfectly valid one—is to recoup the funds lost to unpaid back taxes, in order to prevent the resulting burden from falling on those taxpayers who faithfully pay their taxes. Through the efforts of the Law Department, we held two such auctions in 2014, raising a total of \$2.378 million for the City coffers. That's great work by the Law and Finance Departments. So what's the problem?

Land speculators and slum landlords have learned how to make the in-rem process work for them. Using their knowledge of how the system works, they purchase properties at auction for pennies on the dollar. They put in the absolute minimum investment necessary to get the property rented out and start the cash flowing into their pockets. And from then on, they may never put another nickel into either repairing or paying taxes, continuing to collect rents as the building deteriorates and the tax bills pile up, until it once again appears on the in-rem list. A reform instituted earlier in my administration prevents individuals who are forfeiting properties in the in rem from showing up at the same auction and buying more, but that doesn't stop their buddies from doing so. And who knows who is behind some of the mysterious front companies that buy dozens of properties at each and every auction. All I know—all we all know—is that when these bad actors start buying properties on **your** block, bad things start to happen, and soon even the die-hard, long-time homeowners start posting “for sale” signs. It's like a cancer spreading throughout our city. It's time to cut out the tumor. The City of Niagara Falls is going into the oncology business.

We recently had a tenant of an out of town landlord contact us for help in keeping her home. For ten years, she has faithfully paid the rent each month. Abruptly, the owner abandoned the property, ended communications with the tenant, and stopped paying the taxes and all other costs associated with the property. It was slated to be sold at the 2014 in rem auction, where, if the tenant wanted the opportunity to purchase the property, she would have been forced to compete with the slumlords on a “bid high or get evicted” basis.

When we learned of the situation, the property was pulled from the list for the in rem auction. So what happens now? We want to sell the house to the tenant so that she can fulfill her dream of becoming a homeowner. Of course, we can’t charge very much for the property, because the property will need a long list of potentially costly repairs to get the place back up to par. But she’s willing to sign an agreement to live in the house for a minimum of eight years as the prime occupant. Over the past several years, \$500 has been established as the sale price for vacant homes and lots sold by Community Development. With the approval of the Planning Board and the strong support of City Council, we propose to sell the place she’s called home for 10 years to her. And when we’re done, we’re going to look for the next person in similar straits until we see that the neighborhoods threatened by out-of-town speculators and slumlords are starting to heal.

In May, Niagara Falls Community Development will hold a home ownership auction, complete with renovation and occupancy requirements. We know the community supports it. We know that the City Council wants to break the cycle of slum lord ownership and tax evasion. **It’s time.** We are going to reform the way we market and sell properties in this city on a wide scale. We are going to change how we track accountability.

And to anyone who says, “Well that’s not the way we have always done it”...in all due respect, save your breath.

If there is anything worth investing time, effort and resources to, it’s home ownership ending the cycle of slum ownership. It will take more work. It will take more creative thinking. And most importantly, it will deliver more value to our neighborhoods and the citizens that live in them. 2015 is a show me year.

(58, 59, 60 Health Center slides)

One of the most exciting developments in the City in recent years has been the effort surrounding the Mayor’s Task Force for a Healthier Niagara Falls. This collaborative group was founded several years ago to try to address the determinants of illness and poor health in our community. In 2014, it had a banner year. Niagara Falls was selected as one of only five communities nationwide to participate in the prestigious “Way to Wellville” program, bringing a wide range of resources to bear on community wellness issues. Then the New York State Health Foundation gave the group and its partners a grant to help address food desert issues in City neighborhoods without adequate access to healthy food alternatives. But perhaps the most tangible evidence of the community’s commitment to expanding preventive and primary care is the two community health centers—one well under construction and one to start soon—that advanced last year. A \$3.5 million gift from former Sabres owner Tom Golisano—the largest ever to Memorial Medical Center—will help fund a new Health Center on 10th Street, adjacent to the existing Heart Center. And a Federal grant has led to the construction of another on Highland Avenue. That’s a lot of investment in the community’s health and well-being in a short period of time.

(61 Relationships Montage)

When I came into office, I promised an open and honest government that would overcome past prejudices against our city and establish strong, new partnerships with the business and investment community, and with elected leaders at all levels of government. I’ve kept that promise. By working tirelessly to build strong relationships, and working cooperatively on projects and issues of mutual interest, we’ve created the type of strong, trusting, respectful relations that give key partners the confidence to invest their time, energy and money here. For many years, we’ve had great ideas for how to move our city forward. But only recently have had the dollars—both private and public—come forward to help make our dreams for a better future a reality. Right here, right now, the dollars are flowing and the projects are advancing that are going to transform this community.

Want irrefutable evidence that our stock is rising fast? We used to be the butt of jokes when it came to economic development. That was something that just didn't happen here. But look at what happened just a few weeks ago at Governor Cuomo's State of the State address, in front of a couple thousand people and all the state media in Albany:

(62. State of State video)

How about that? Western New York being held up as an example of how to do economic development right, for all of upstate to follow? You never thought you'd live to see that, did you? But it happened.

Here's an example.

(63)

We tore down our old 3rd Street train station during urban renewal. We moved—supposedly temporarily—to an old warehouse building in a freight yard.

(64)

That's what the building looks like. That's not the welcome we want to give tourists when they arrive. It's a disgrace.

(65)

That's how you get on and off the train. We're an international tourist destination. Look at how we look to the rest of the world.

(66)

Here's what the north end of Main Street looked like a few years back. It was a disgrace too. The bridge over Lewiston Road rusting away.

(67)

Since 1986, we'd been trying to get a station project going, but to no avail. Couldn't get funding. But then things started to change. We used our strong relationships with Congresswoman Louise Slaughter (later with Brian Higgins), Senators Charles Schumer and

Kirsten Gillibrand and even with the White House and Cabinet-level Federal officials to secure a \$16.5 million TIGER II grant to build a new station. We used our relationships with Gov. Cuomo and our state officials to get State \$4 million matching funds.

(68)

Here's what the site looks like as of a couple days ago. You'll see steel go up in the next month. Here's something new for Niagara Falls: we have to worry about how severe the winter weather is, because we have so many construction projects underway. In the dead of winter, laborers and tradesmen and women are working all across our City. It's exciting to see what's happening already, but I'm really excited about what's coming next.

(69)

This is what our station is going to look like when it's done, and it's going to be mostly done by later this year.

(70)

I want to close by talking about what's happening downtown. There's great stuff happening all around the city, but downtown is where we put our best foot forward for visitors. It's the focus of outside investment. It's our front door.

(71)

We made some critical decisions with our partners at USA Niagara to help set the stage for future development. We decided to demolish the Wintergarden to open the City to pedestrians from the park. We restored Old Falls Street, and brought programming there to make the street come alive again. People took notice. Soon there was a TGIFridays, and then Niagara County Community College brought the Culinary Institute. Things were really starting to happen. But it was just the beginning.

(72)

Other projects appeared on the radar. The Wingate Hotel. The Fairfield Hotel. The DoubleTree Hotel. The Hyatt Place, otherwise known as the Hamister project. The Courtyard by Marriott in the old Moore Business Forms. Hotel Niagara restoration. And of course, the \$150 million dollar project coming to the former Rainbow Mall, Wonderfalls. The Governor was here to make the big announcement last June. What happens next with these projects? An announcement gets made. A couple corks get popped. People go home and get busy living their own lives, and forget the project is happening and then start complaining that nothing is happening. One day, they drive down the street, and BAM... there are foundations being dug, old sections of buildings being demolished, concrete being poured, steel girders being erected. So much is going on, the TV people bring their cameras down to film it all. And even the skeptics see this, and say, “wow, I guess something is really happening here!” Finally, the workers who got all this great stuff going, they get to go have a beer.

You may laugh, ladies and gentlemen. That’s what just happened right down the road in downtown Buffalo. Been there lately? Impressive, isn’t it. Well guess what? We’re up next—in fact, it’s already begun.

(73 Project Chart—Current Efforts)

Take a look at this chart. It summarizes the projects we have ongoing, in the downtown area, that are either under construction or in the pipeline. Let’s focus on the big picture. There are transformative projects on this list. Robert Moses Parkway South—already underway—and Robert Moses Parkway North—in preliminary engineering. There’s a public session here tomorrow that you can attend. They’re reconnecting the City to its waterfront after decades of separation. The Wonderfalls project will bring both accommodations and exciting new attractions to downtown on a scale not seen before. All told, we’re looking at over \$300 million of new investment coming to downtown Niagara Falls in the next 18 to 24 months. Over 1,000 new hotel rooms are in the pipeline, and 58,000 square feet of retail, and over 90,000 square feet of entertainment—including the huge state-of-the-art water park at Wonderfalls. When added up, that’s a lot of development.

(73b, c, d)

Let's focus in on one little detail. Hidden in that project list is a Holiday Inn retail project. You may have driven by there a dozen times, and maybe you noticed some new foundations being poured on the Rainbow Boulevard side before the recent cold snap. I took a quick tour just yesterday. Here is what was going on inside. Once again, construction workers busy working through the winter. (These guys are lucky—they're working inside!) They're totally remodeling the lobby to the hotel, getting ready for the Great American Arcade, which will feature 50 state-of-the-art video games purchased at a total cost of about \$500,000. Then when the weather breaks even a little, they'll get back to work on constructing the new portion outside, which will house a new Tony Roma's restaurant—ribs, seafood and steaks, I'm told, are their specialties. When the project is done, here is what it's going to look like from the outside. Pretty impressive. They're looking to have the restaurant open for Memorial Day weekend, and the Great American Arcade a couple weeks after that. A couple of points I want you to take away from that. First, all these construction projects are creating a lot of jobs, even during the winter months. Second, if this is one of the smaller projects, what is downtown going to be like in just a couple years when all of these projects are completed?

I can show you what it is going to look like, remembering that this is only an artist's conception.

(74)

I don't know about you, but I find that breathtaking. Ever see an aerial photo of Manhattan? There's the green oasis of Central Park, surrounded on all sides by large-scale development. Well, turn that inside out, and you have the Niagara Falls of the future: A glitzy, exciting downtown in the center, surrounded on three sides by one of the world's greatest waterfronts. And with the Parkway gone, you can actually get back and forth easily between the two. That's the vision of the future Niagara Falls that is taking shape before your eyes today.

(75)

It hasn't been easy. Remember what we had to work with after urban renewal. Look at this view. Could you do a better job of cutting off the City from its waterfront if you tried? The roadways are more prominent than the buildings. The City is surrounded on all sides by concrete barriers to its greatest asset. Things had to change. You, the citizens, had the vision. Finally,

using all those strong new partnerships I mentioned earlier, we were able to muster the resources to make your vision a reality.

(76)

I hope I was successful in saving the best for last. Governor Cuomo, the man whose commitment and dedication of resources to Western New York has helped make this ongoing transformation a reality, has often said that the biggest obstacle to revitalizing our region is our own negativity, our own pessimism, our own lack of self-confidence. How can you get the world to love you if you don't love yourself?

In the last few years we have managed to push aside our doubts and fears long enough to lay the foundation for a brand new beginning in Niagara Falls and the surrounding region. The change that we said we wanted so badly, the change that we feared would never happen in our lifetimes... well, guess what? That change is happening now in our community. The examples we showed you tonight are just a sample. The project list is overwhelming. We've waited a long time for this moment. We said the world wasn't treating us fairly. But now the challenge is with us.

Can we overcome our own internal demons, and have faith that good things really can happen to us? I'm really excited about all that we have been able to accomplish in the last several years, working cooperatively to create a new future. We're not quite there yet, but you get that feeling you can finally see the finish line.

I hope that I have been able to convey to you tonight some of my love for this City, and enthusiasm about where it is headed next. To paraphrase one of my sports heroes, if you love Niagara Falls, where would you rather be than right here, right now? If you're still one of those sitting on the sidelines, I hope you'll reach the conclusion that this is not the time for self-doubt, for petty squabbling, and certainly not for listening to the heckling of the naysayers. I'm excited about how far we've come together, but I'm even more excited about where we're going next. I hope you'll all come along. It's going to be a great ride.

God bless you. Travel safely. And never stop dreaming about tomorrow. Good night, ladies and gentlemen. And a big thank you to Chief DalPorto for loaning me Matt Robbins.