



City of Niagara Falls, New York

PO Box 69, Niagara Falls, NY 14302-0069

State of the City Address 2019

City Council members, government officials, community leaders, activists, members of the business community, residents, teachers, staff, ladies and gentlemen, and students.

Welcome to the 2019 State of the City address, which I am proud to deliver to you today, once again from the Performing Arts Center here at Niagara Falls High School. We made the decision to deliver the State of the City here last year as a symbol of solidarity in the wake of the terrible incident at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida on February 14, 2018, where 17 students and staff were killed and another 17 injured. That event inspired anti-gun violence rallies here and around the country, culminating in the March for Our Lives in Washington, D.C.—but I'm sad to have to report that, although New York State has taken some steps to keep guns out of the wrong hands since last year, there have been over 350 mass shootings in the U.S. (nearly one a day) since Parkland.

We as a country have got to do better. We owe it to you. At the very least I thought I should return here to NFHS once again to talk about our future with the people it matters to most—you, our young people.

The address I deliver today will chronicle many accomplishments in the City in the past year--and speak of some exciting things still to come. I'm sad to say it also marks my 12th and final State of the City address that I will deliver to you as your Mayor.

Over the course of the past 12 years, I am proud that my administration has accomplished a great many things, enacting significant changes from environmental restoration to economic development.

But more on that later. For now, I want to turn our attention to the accomplishments and challenges of the past year and what is to come in the future, thanks in large part to the many dedicated members of my Administration who work tirelessly as change agents within their own issue areas. Our goal as a team has been will continue in 2019 to be to improve our residents' quality of life, and build the City that you—our future residents—want to live in.

In just the past month alone, my Administration has undergone a change of its own, welcoming two new members into the fold, new Fire Chief Joe Pedulla and

new Police Chief Tom Licata. Let's discuss these new leaders and their departments, starting with Chief Licata and the Police Department.

Chief Licata brings with him 28 years of experience within the department. He takes over from former Superintendent Bryan DalPorto, under whose leadership the Niagara Falls Police Department continued to lead the way in 2018 in making our streets and our schools safe.

In 2017, before the incident at Parkland, the City entered into a partnership with Superintendent Mark Laurie and the Niagara Falls City School District to provide for Student Resource Officers to facilitate a safe and open environment in our schools, and more closely interact with you, our future leaders, on a daily basis.

Since I last stood before you, I am proud to announce that we have expanded upon that partnership, and our commitment to your safety, with the addition of three more Student Resource Officers. Given the thoughtless violence we have witnessed, especially over the course of the past year, it remains the paramount concern of your Superintendent, the Niagara Falls Police Department and myself, that our city remain ahead of the curve when it comes to your safety.

That dedication has not gone unnoticed. I am proud to report that, in their continued efforts to address gun

violence, the Niagara Falls Police Department has recently once again been awarded a \$100,000 Homeland Security Grant. This critical funding will allow the brave men and women of the Department to continue state-of-the-art Active Shooter Response Training, including the use of drills and exercises to protect our schools should the unthinkable ever occur.

Through GIVE -- the "Gun Involved Violence Elimination" initiative -- Niagara Falls Police, in cooperation with the State Police and County Sheriff's Office, regularly target people known as "top offenders" to remove violent individuals from our neighborhoods, while working with residents like you to identify ways you can help our efforts succeed.

While there is still work to be done, initiatives like GIVE and many others continue to yield encouraging results. Take a look. From 2017 to 2018, we experienced a 13.6% decrease in shooting incidents involving injury, a 9.5% decrease in the overall average from the past 5 years.

Of those incidents where a person was actually hit by gunfire, there was a 20% decrease in the past year, and an average 11.5% decrease since 2013.

It is because of this initiative and many others that I can proudly report that the City's crime rate is down 10%, robberies are down 9%, and use of force incidents

continue a steady decline from 2014, for a total decrease of 61% over five years. We can't ever say we're satisfied, but while one violent incident is one too many, we're making progress reducing violent crime, and I'm sure that will continue as a top priority for new Chief Licata.

2018 marked a year of great success and change within the Niagara Falls Fire Department - but also great loss. On December 24, Christmas Eve, we suffered the loss of Captain Keifer Stahlman in a tragic motorcycle accident. A 19-year veteran of the department, Captain Stahlman served the people of Niagara Falls with honor and integrity, and was respected by his colleagues as both a leader and a friend, who loved his career and served the community.

It is with that same spirit that the men and women of the N-F-F-D carry on in his honor, guiding the department to the forefront on critical issues any time there is a threat to your health, safety or quality of life, including staying abreast of new technology and resources that can improve their response to incidents that threaten you.

Leading that charge in 2019 is another new face, because we also have a new Fire Chief: Chief Joseph Pedulla, a 25-year veteran of the Department, who takes over from former Chief Tom Colangelo.

The coming year promises a major new addition in the area of training: construction on a new fire tower located at 1746 James Avenue is expected to get underway in April. Thanks to \$500,000 in state funding, the tower will provide the men and women of the N-F-F-D with new, environmentally-friendly training opportunities, using artificial smoke to preserve realism while producing zero emissions.

In addition to required safety training and exercises, in the last month our smoke eaters have taken on additional monthly evaluations. These drills go above and beyond regularly scheduled drills conducted by the Department, and are geared toward keeping basic but essential firefighting skills sharp.

Why would something like that be considered important? Well, in 2018 alone, the Niagara Falls Fire Department responded to 7,573 calls for all types of emergencies. That's quite a workload, and one that's been growing steadily. In fact, to put it in perspective, it is a 93% increase over the last 15 years.

To help streamline the efficiency of their response and improve response time, 2019 will see the addition of some much-needed support to the department in the way of added and improved technology.

Currently, fire apparatus are equipped with tablets that report back to a larger computer system located at dispatch that helps to track and organize calls and minimize response time. But as we all know, in this day and age, even the most advanced technology quickly becomes dated. Always striving to be a leader in new technology, this spring the N-F-F-D will welcome updated tablets that operate at a higher speed -- and at no extra cost to the City, thanks to a pre-existing agreement with the manufacturer -- ensuring a more dynamic department and a safer City for all of us.

The folks over in the City Engineering Department are working to keep our City safe in a different manner—by improving our infrastructure. In order to secure funding to do so, we rely heavily on state and federal partnerships. As I mentioned last year, President Trump promised a trillion dollar infrastructure bill - we're still waiting on that, but we've tried to take matters into our own hands in the meantime.

The City's Engineering Department has been instrumental in not only obtaining but administering millions of dollars in project funding that others just haven't been able to deliver. We've still got a long way to go, but every little bit helps, so let's break it down by the numbers.

In 2018 alone, Engineering partnered with the Niagara Falls Water Board obtaining \$250,000 in funding for water

main replacement on Bollier Avenue, and assisting on the remediation of water main and sewer lines to the tune of more than \$660,000. On the roadways, the department administered to completion two federally-funded projects along Cayuga Drive and the Buffalo Avenue Bridge at a total of \$970,000 and \$565,000, respectively.

Over the winter, work has started on the reconstruction of Buffalo Avenue from Cayuga Drive to the City Line at 102nd Street, incorporating a brand new walking and cycling trail and a new, safer dedicated cycle/pedestrian bridge over Cayuga Creek. A new restroom facility and fish cleaning station finished at the end of last year will also cut the ribbon along the trail at the City Boat Docks.

And speaking of roads... it's no secret 2018 was a year in which we had to do more with less, because of the casino dispute and subsequent delay in funding. But that didn't stop the Department of Parks and Public Works under the direction of John Caso from paving more than 40 City streets, cleaning up more than 356 properties of non-compliant property owners through the City's ZOOM and Clean Teams, and successfully repairing and removing deteriorated railroad along Hyde Park Boulevard and College Avenue in partnership with C-S-X.

But it's not all just roads and railroads, believe it or not there's some fun and games, too. Several years ago, based on input received from citizens during a parks

master planning process, we committed to making sure there were age-appropriate recreational facilities within walking distance for kids in every neighborhood in the City. I'm pleased to report that we've pretty much met our goal.

Recent parks improvements resulting from cooperation among Community Development, DPW, Engineering and other partners include new or expanded facilities either recently completed, under construction or soon to be built at Liberty Park, Jerauld Avenue, Centre Court, 91st Street, Jayne Park and elsewhere. Improvements to the baseball diamonds were completed at Hyde Park, with more slated for 91st Street this year. And care is being taken to ensure that no child is left behind. We are particularly proud of the new Inclusionary Playground under construction near the Hyde Park Ice Pavilion, where every aspect of the design and construction is geared to making sure everyone can benefit, regardless of their abilities.

The Department of Senior Services functioning in house at the John Duke Senior Center and the LaSalle Facility has a plethora of activities and services available for seniors ages 55 and up. Both locations offer a weekday lunch provided by the Niagara County Office of the Aging. As well, offering assistance with **Medicare, SNAP, HEAP, Safe Link, Veterans' Medals Search** and in programs that either financially or personally enhances quality of life.

Our Department of Senior Services also continues to offer activities at both locations. These activities vary from exercise, knitting, social groups, book clubs, support groups and many more. I'm even hearing we now have zoomba, yoga, and euchre, so our seniors are really keeping busy.

On the activities front, our Department of Planning and Economic Development has been burning the midnight oil working to create opportunities and new development to keep residents busy and our City thriving for generations to come.

As a college student, I lived at 1812 Main Street. My buddies and I would often sneak up to the roof of the building for an impromptu barbeque, to take advantage of the views offered by our proximity to the gorge. The general public could not easily attain the views we were afforded by our bird's-eye vantage point, because the Gorge was walled off from the City. In those days, the average person would have to cross four lanes of uninhibited traffic on Whirlpool Street, hop the omnipresent white fence, traverse shrubbery, then play a game of life or death "frogger" through four additional lanes of the high speed Robert Moses Parkway.

This set up essentially cut off our city from its unique and world-class waterfront. At the time, my friends and I

thought, “somebody needs to do something to fix this.” Fast-forward 25 years. Now, I was the father of two young boys, and was returning with my wife to raise our children in our hometown. Nothing had changed. The City’s North End was still cut off from the waterfront. This time, I decided I would get involved and try to make something happen, first as an environmental activist and then as a candidate for City Council in 1999. It has been a long, tough fight, but things are finally changing, and believe me, it will be worth it.

In the downtown core, upstream of the Falls along Buffalo Avenue, we have begun to see what reconnecting our city to its waterfront has done for development. While plans were made to remove the Parkway along the Gorge, work actually started from Daly Boulevard to the State Park. Once the announcement was made, even before work on removal of the Robert Moses Parkway South began, we saw new hotels and investment in the Buffalo Avenue Heritage district explode. Developers built new hotels or reconstructed old ones, and homeowners quickly recognized the importance of direct access to the Niagara River.

Over this past Thanksgiving weekend, without much fanfare, the northern section of the Robert Moses Parkway from Main Street to Findlay Drive ceased to exist as a public roadway. Phase One, including the reconstruction of Whirlpool Street, quickly commenced, and is underway

as we sit here this afternoon. Phase Two, which will demolish the overpass at the Whirlpool Bridge, will hopefully be complete by Victoria Day! (Which in case you do not know is a Canadian holiday, this year held on May 20th.)

If we had removed the Parkway back when I was a young man, we would have been trailblazers. Now, cities all over the country have removed waterfront expressways, and prosperity has followed. Imagine the difference in the experience you will have as young adults in your ability to access our waterfront, by contrast to your parents and grandparents. North Main Street is going to develop in a much different way than downtown, but I *fully* expect a similar explosion of development to follow in the area adjacent to removed section of the parkway.

The parkway removal will facilitate the largest expansion of the park at Niagara Falls since it was created in 1885. It will be a benefit for tourists, and for wildlife, but we residents will be the main year-round beneficiaries. The emphasis in high-growth “hip” cities across the country is on creating unique urban neighborhoods where residents—especially young people setting off on their own for the first time—can live, work and play all in the same locale. With easy access to new hiking and biking trails and an expanded gorge-side park, the north end after completion of the parkway project will instantly

become a magnet for investment and new home ownership. But that's not all.

Two other major factors will help transform this part of the City. First, there is a new Federal tax credit program called Opportunity Zones—a product of a nowadays rare bipartisan initiative out of Washington D.C.—that gives major tax breaks to investors willing to invest in previously under-invested census tracts. It's complicated, but our economic development department is working with developers and investors to make sure a lot of that money comes here. Second, there is a new development in the transportation field that will make this area more attractive for residents and investors. A full four years ahead of schedule, Go Train has started daily commuter service from Niagara Falls, Ontario to Toronto. We're already working to get the service expanded to the U.S. side—part of the plan when we built our new Amtrak station a couple years back. This initiative is still in its infancy, but the expectation is that the frequency and convenience of service will continue to expand, so that eventually the U.S. side of Niagara Falls will be tied much more closely to the massive economic engine of Toronto.

It won't happen overnight, but the likely result is a new, reborn, high-tech Main Street. After years of planning and very hard work, the street that for years has been a symbol of the City's decline is soon to become a symbol instead of rebirth. When we first expressed optimism

about the revitalization of the downtown tourist district, people were skeptical. But just as eventually things have started turning around there, Main Street's day will come. Just be patient a little while longer.

Speaking of the downtown area, this year we will open the doors to Niagara University's Global Tourism Institute's new office and new business incubator, TreK, at 616 Niagara Street. The story of 616 Niagara Street is a microcosm for our city's story overall.

For years, previous owners allowed three historic buildings on Niagara Street to be neglected, denying them their full potential. The city took control of these buildings, and through a creative public bidding process, partnered with the development team at TM Montante to transform these buildings from a picture of abandonment to a picture of progress. Very soon, entrepreneurs will be inside, developing new technologies and creating the jobs of tomorrow. In cities across the U.S. that are leading creators of new, tech-sector jobs, "co-working space" is all the rage. The idea is that someone with an idea for a start-up who lacks capital can get into business quickly and cheaply in a shared space where creative people mingle with each other and share ideas every day. Once the business concept has been proven, the new company expands out of the incubator space into its own bricks-and-mortar home, creating new jobs and freeing up space in the co-working space for another new company

to come in. That's the idea behind TreK. It has worked in other cities—I know, I've gone and looked, from Boston to Seattle—and it will work here too. We have so many great partners with Niagara University, including in the City's South End, and TreK will be the latest and most exciting.

Another poster child of our city's transformation is the Cannon Block, at the corner of Main and Third. The city took possession of six properties there--formerly part of Dr. Mehta's criminal drug enterprise--after federal agents raided his offices. Not only was this a major victory in reducing opioids on our streets, but it provided us an opportunity to reimagine a prominent intersection in our city.

The city has selected PennTerra of St. Catharines, Ontario to develop a multi-million dollar student-housing complex at the corner. They are currently working on the final design plans, and expect to break ground this year. Our team has toured their properties in St. Catharines, and we could not be more excited for them to bring their first class housing product to the Cataract City.

Across Main Street on the 500 block of Third Street, Arista Development is in the middle of renovations at 531 Third Street. The project will consist of a full restoration of the property resulting in 10 high-end apartments and three store fronts. The property will be renamed the Verrazano. We're also working with our partners at USA Niagara

Development Corporation on getting multiple properties purchased by the agency from Smokin Joe Anderson back into productive use. This includes the former Snow Park, the Icehouse—a great concert venue—and Rust and Ultra, two potential restaurant venues. There's even an historic former power company building with great art deco features waiting for just the right project to come along.

If you haven't yet, you should probably sense a theme running through development projects in our city. That theme would be restoration. My administration has been determined from day one to right the wrongs of 1960s and 70s urban renewal, when 13 full blocks of our downtown were demolished to make way for redevelopment that never came. Our city has a rich history that when possible and feasible should be preserved.

We've had success already bringing dead buildings back to life. The former NFHS is now the Niagara Arts & Cultural Center. The former South Junior High School is Niagara Lofts. The former Board of Education administration building on Walnut is filled with new apartments. The former Planetarium building across the street is a BOCES job training center.

Two hotel projects are currently in the planning process to bring two more historic properties back into use. First, Metropolis Properties Management purchased the former St. Mary's Hospital on Sixth Street, with a \$25.6 million

plan to turn the eyesore into a 200-room hotel. The 114,000-square-foot brick building, erected in 1902, has been vacant for fifteen years. This project is expected to create 42 full-time jobs.

For generations the Hotel Niagara has stood high in the Niagara Falls skyline, at times a symbol of prosperity, at times a symbol of neglect. Our team is currently working with Brine Wells Development of Syracuse on their \$42 million plans to restore the hotel. This restoration will undoubtedly serve as a major source of civic pride, while creating jobs and raising the bar for the local hospitality industry.

Saving historic buildings isn't only important to the tourist industry, however.

Back in the 1970s and 80s there was a bumper sticker that read, "Niagara: king of power, queen of beauty." There has been, and justifiably so, a lot of attention paid to the "beauty" of Niagara -- the tourism sector of our economy. However, that does not mean we have forgotten about the "power" -- the reason most of our ancestors decided to come to this city -- our industry. We know not all of you can or want to work in the tourism industry. So we're making sure there are other opportunities out there.

This past year, the City of Niagara Falls selected LifeMax Natural Foods of Pickering, Ontario as the preferred developer for 8450 Buffalo Avenue, the former Wendt's Dairy. LifeMax is expected to begin U.S. operations in late 2019 or early 2020 with a new beverage line creating new manufacturing jobs.

This is an ideal reuse of a former food processing facility in LaSalle. And it serves as yet another example of the restoration of a historic building being returned to productive use in our community.

In the North End, Sandstone Springs has officially moved into their newly restored facility on Highland Avenue. The old Union Carbide factory had been vacant for years. The City acquired it and started fixing it up while we went looking for a new industry to move in. Before we could even complete the renovations, we found what we were looking for: Sandstone Springs. This innovative company uses chemical processes to solve problems in an environmentally friendly way. Basically, they recycle materials left over from manufacturing to eliminate waste and reduce costs. This spring they will introduce a new "green" process, which will allow them to hire approximately 20 additional individuals.

Of City departments, planning, may get the least publicity. However, every success--whether on the football field or stage--starts with a good plan. The City's Niagara

Waterfront Opportunity Area (NWOA) is an environmental planning study grant from the Department of State Brownfield Opportunity Area program covering almost 1,900 acres of the City around the City's old industrial core.

The City was once filled with large, dirty industries. Many of them closed years ago. Some cleaned up and kept operating. We need a plan to encourage clean, new industries to come, and to find new uses for old industrial sites that aren't needed for that purpose anymore. That takes a plan.

What are our goals?

- Reclaiming underutilized, vacant and potentially contaminated parcels;
- Reconnecting the City with almost 3 miles of scenic Niagara River waterfront; and
- Re-purposing and re-imagining the entire plan area for a new future that includes new uses responsive to the market and community preferences.

The study will be finalized and certified in 2019. This study provides guidance for implementation of industrial performance and design standards, along with methods for creating financing tools. In short, it provides a playbook

or script for the next generation—that’s you--on how to deal with a large portion of our industrial area 5, 10 or even 20 years into the future.

In 2019, our Department of Planning and Development will begin to undertake the Niagara Street Gateway Plan to bridge the gaps in development between John B. Daly Boulevard and Third Street. This project has been aided by a \$1.5 million grant from our partners in government at Empire State Development. As noted earlier, Niagara University is a major partner in this enterprise, bringing students and other university volunteers into the neighborhood to “Rock the Block.”

If you look at “cool” cities in other parts of the country—places like Seattle or Portland that have seen large influxes of young residents over the last decade—one of the common denominators is their embrace of alternative transportation. Their downtown areas and neighborhoods are energetic, walkable and friendly to pedestrians and cyclists, not just automobiles.

Our Complete Streets and Bicycle Master Plan are two additional plans of importance that are in the implementation phase. We have been studying trends in how people move within our city and other communities. Having a complete streets plan recognizes that our streets belong to everyone—pedestrians and cyclists as well as

motorists—and so enhances safety and improves the aesthetic appeal and quality of life in our neighborhoods.

Here's an announcement I hope you young people will find exciting. Part of our Bicycle Master Plan calls for a bike-sharing program. Shared Mobility of Buffalo, our partner, will begin installing a bike sharing program this spring, right here in Niagara Falls. You'll be able to hop on a bike and ride it wherever you need to go, then leave it there at the end of the day. Overnight, bikes are put back where they need to go to be ready for the next day, and the cycle starts all over. It won't work in a blizzard, but bike sharing represents a cheap and convenient alternative to cars that has been very popular with young people in other cities. Now it's coming to Niagara Falls. Stay tuned for more details on that in the coming days.

We're always looking for new things we can do here that have proved popular with young people in other cities. For example, food trucks. Food Truck Thursdays at the Niagara Falls Train Station completed its first season in September of last year. More than 1,000 people took advantage of the various culinary options these great food trucks had to offer. Originally planned to end in August, Food Truck Thursdays at the Niagara Falls Train Station was so popular that it was extended through September, for a total of 17 weeks. It will be even bigger and better this year, running May 9th through September 26th, with

one or two trucks on site, and live music on selected dates.

The initiative was part of a long-range plan developed under the Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Commission and Office of Planning and Economic Development.

Economic Development is more than just a catch phrase, or a sign on a door at City Hall; it is a barometer of the health of a community. One of our most important goals is ensuring that every person in our community has adequate opportunity to fulfill his or her own potential through gainful employment. Our office of Minority and Women Business Enterprise works every day to open the door for those that may have been disenfranchised in the past.

In 2018, the NF MWBE Program partnered with the Small Business Administration's Buffalo office to host a small business matchmaker event at the NF Public Library. Approximately (14) MWBE certified business owners attended the successful event, which gives them an opportunity to interact with buyers from federal, state, and local government agencies and national businesses.

In 2019, the Niagara Falls MWBE office will continue to encourage MWBE certification, and provide technical assistance and entrepreneurial workshops to MWBE

businesses seeking to start or expand in the city. The first such workshop this year? As part of our MWBE Participation Program, Pathstone Enterprises will host an Entrepreneur 101 workshop on Saturday, April 6th from 9:30am-1:30pm at the Doris Jones Family Resource Center. As a result of positive changes in our economy over the last several years, there are more opportunities than ever for creative, ambitious young people to own their own business. This could be you. Come check it out.

Music and the arts are an important driver of economic and cultural development. Niagara Falls hosts a live music scene as legendary as the roar of the Falls itself! From classic live music venues like the renovated Rapids Theatre, to outdoor venues like Old Falls Street; whether you live in town or you're visiting from the other side of the globe, Niagara Falls has a vibrant live music scene. Music isn't just a fun part of our culture; a vibrant music scene generates jobs for musicians, mixers, stage hands and many others. In 2018, to highlight this important part of our community, the City partnered with the Niagara Falls Music Hall of Fame to host events, and launched the city's new website NFRocks.

This site, along with companion Twitter and Facebook accounts, promotes live music performances throughout the City of Niagara Falls. This initiative will continue to grow in 2019 by building stronger relationships with artists and venues throughout the City. We may not be Austin or

Memphis—yet... but a strong music scene can be an important part of culture, and a strong economic driver here in Niagara Falls.

Another exciting initiative that could only happen here in Niagara Falls, USA? That's Jingle Falls, of course! Marking its second year in 2018, Jingle Falls encompassed three weekends of bonafide holiday fun, complete with ice rinks, shopping and who could forget the great crowds that turned out for the candlelight procession, Christmas tree lighting complete with fireworks, and the fabulously successful, first-ever "Festival of Slice" pizza festival at the Culinary Institute?

Now I know it's a little early to be talking about the holidays, but the Jingle Falls Holiday Program Committee consisting of the City Clerk's Office, Department of Community Development, the Niagara Falls Conference & Events Center and Destination Niagara USA assures me that planning is already underway to make Jingle Falls 2019 the best yet!

I want to finish by telling you the story of how I got involved in elected office to start with—something I never planned for or had the ambition to do when I was your age. My two sons—who would later go on to graduate from NFHS, by the way—were at an age when they were involved in a lot of youth activities, and I was volunteering as a basketball coach and Boy Scout leader. One night,

we were driving home down Main Street from a Scout meeting at Zion Lutheran Church on Michigan Avenue. It was winter, it was cold and dark, and as we passed the Jenss building (it used to be a busy place, the center of downtown in many ways, but was an early casualty of the construction of the Parkway that bypassed Main Street and had been closed for several years already back then), a gust of wind picked up some junk that was lying in the street—probably from a trash can that had blown over—and whipped it into a sort of garbage and snow tornado that made its way down the street ahead of us for a block or so. It was pretty disgusting. I got mad and banged my hands on the steering wheel of the car, and probably said some things that should not be repeated here in mixed company. My boys spoke up from the back seat: “Dad, if you don’t like it, why don’t you stop just complaining and do something about it?” I guess that was the start of my career in public service.

Cities are like families. They go through a lot of changes over time. Neighborhoods and business districts rise, and they fall. They have good times, and not so good times. There are periods of growth, and periods of retrenchment, or even decay. It is never the case in any city—even the most prosperous ones—that every street will be humming along perfectly all at once.

The goal of local government can’t be to stop these cycles—that would be impossible—but to try to keep good

things happening in places where good things are happening for as long as possible, and to make the turnaround in areas that are suffering through hard times happen faster. It's not easy. It takes a vision of a better future, but also years of hard work, perseverance and sometimes what looks like pointless optimism. But things do change. Maybe not as quickly as any of us would like, but nothing in this world stays the same forever. Not the good things, but luckily not the bad things either.

What is the State of the City as we enter 2019? Over the course of my time in office, we've managed to lay the foundation for some very major changes ahead. We inherited a landscape strewn with abandoned buildings, dilapidated roads and bridges, and rundown parks and public spaces. These are the backbone of a city, the structure on which everything else depends. Over the course of several years, we have systematically laid the foundation for a better future city, but there is much more work to be done.

The task of making the major moves in transportation, environmental restoration and infrastructure is, if not complete, at least well underway. But the challenge of the future is filling in the spaces between these larger developments with the stuff of cities: places where people live, work and play; places that capture young people's imaginations and fire their dreams. People like you. People in my Baby Boomer generation inherited a city with

a lot of potential but a lot of long-term problems. We've made some major progress, but there comes a time when the torch must be passed to a new generation of citizens. For me, that time will come at the end of this year.

And so now today, as I give my last State of the City address as your mayor, I want to throw back on you the challenge my sons offered to me that snowy night long ago: If you see a problem, are you ready to do something about it? I'm not going to lay down on the job. My administration has been known for taking an aggressive approach, and I fully intend the stream of ground-breakings, ribbon-cuttings and positive announcements to continue. I will use every once of my energy every day that I am mayor—and there are 302 of them left, by my count—to try to move our city forward. But when those 302 days are over, there will still be lots of work to do. New dreams to dream. New visions of the future to believe in. New projects waiting for someone with the energy and determination to make them happen. In the long run, the future of the City is your future. What the state of your City will be, will depend on you. As I look over the audience assembled here today for my last State of the City as your mayor, and in particular as I look at the faces of all these amazing young people, the State of the City looks very promising to me, and I am optimistic about the future. Thank you for coming today. God bless you, God bless America. And God bless the City of Niagara Falls.

