

**2017 State of the City Address**  
**Monday, Feb. 27 at 7:00 p.m.**  
**Binghamton City Council Chambers**

Thank you Councilman Scaringi.

Members of City Council, including our newest member, Tom Scanlon, distinguished guests, and those watching at home — good evening.

Three years ago, I was sworn in as Mayor of this great city. On day one, I outlined a simple philosophy for my administration and how we could be successful in a short period of time.

“Back to basics” I called it. We immediately made changes to make City Hall nimbler and more proactive, leveraging new approaches, data and technology to better our critical municipal services.

I heard back from residents who had taken notice of those changes. The stronger police patrols in their neighborhoods with the hiring of seven new officers; the vacant eyesores they’d been forced to look at for years, torn down; the smooth ride to work down Chenango Street, Riverside Drive or one of the 42 miles of streets paved in the last three years; a city tax bill, which actually decreased for the first time in 20 years; bipartisan government cooperation for a taxpayer-first agenda.

Residents were happy with this “back to basics” approach, and in fact halfway through my term, elected a new majority of City Council who shared that style.

We’ve dialed in on the fundamentals and rebuilt city government from the ground up.

However, our focus remains on the horizon and how best to tackle the challenges ahead. Tonight will no doubt be an update on the progress made since my last address, but will be less about the past and more about the future — the long-term objectives only possible because of our new and solid foundation.

This vision doesn’t have a catchy name, nor does it come with political platitudes or pet projects that will divide the community. It comes with only an affirmation, that this Administration has proven to have the unique combination of leadership, creativity and work ethic to get it done.

I will begin where I left off at my last address, capping off our ‘Year of the Neighborhoods.’

### **Neighborhood Investment**

Last summer, hundreds of kids, parents and community volunteers joined the opening of OurSpace at Recreation Park. This project is more than an attraction — it’s a regional

destination as the largest fully accessible playground for people with special needs for hundreds of miles.

Opening day was a chance to reflect not only on what the community had built, but also on the barriers being torn down. Barriers keeping individuals with disabilities from enjoying recreation with their families, barriers for wounded veterans, seniors or anyone wanting the opportunity to independently enjoy life to its fullest.

On Friday, I will join Parks Department officials as they accept the Exceptional Park Design Award for OurSpace from the Central New York Recreation and Parks Society. The City landed three additional awards, including one recognizing the elected official who has best led parks and recreation programs. I will humbly accept, knowing the true thanks belongs to our entire Parks team, from Commissioner Bill Barber and Carol Quinlivan, to the maintenance staff, laborers, youth coordinators and volunteers.

Improving quality of life is at the core of what neighborhood investment can do.

There's no further proof than the City's North Side, a struggling neighborhood with some of the toughest poverty and unemployment challenges in the Southern Tier.

The City has stepped up in new ways, spearheading the Fresh Mobile Market with C.H.O.W. to deliver fresh fruits and vegetables across the North Side. We broke the transportation barriers to affordable healthy food and created an oasis in a long-standing food desert. While the program started small, it has distributed more than 28,000 pounds of produce and served more than 3,100 customers since last summer.

While the mobile market provides a significant service, and will continue in 2017, it was never intended to be a substitute for a permanent North Side grocery store. I have committed myself to this issue and one way or the other, the City will make sure North Side residents have reliable access to a grocery store.

I'm pleased to announce tonight the City and C.H.O.W will team up again in a pilot program to shuttle North Side residents directly to a nearby grocery store. The shuttle will operate two nights a week from the Lee Barta Community Center and provide service to the Weis Supermarket on the Robinson Street. If the demand holds, which I believe it will, we will expand the shuttle service with additional weekly trips. We expect shuttle service to be up and running within 45 days.

Our efforts to site a permanent grocery store on the North Side continue, but in the meantime, we will make every effort possible to provide results for residents.

On both these initiatives, C.H.O.W.'s Mike Leahey, who is in the audience tonight, has been instrumental in identifying needs, engaging residents and managing programs. He is on the

front lines of combating hunger and promoting nutrition in our community and we thank him for his service.

Also on the North Side late last year I announced the Lee Barta Community Center on Liberty St. would triple in size, thanks to support from Senator Fred Akshar, United Way of Broome County, Healthy Lifestyles Coalition and Visions Federal Credit Union. The \$450,000 project will bring new hope and opportunity to residents. At the new center, we will focus resources to empower hardworking families to pull themselves out of poverty, reach their education goals and improve quality of life.

The first phase of the project, demolition of a vacant property next door, was completed a few weeks ago.

Here is a first look to see what the Lee Barta Community Center will become later this year. We expect to break ground in April and have the new center open by year's end.

I am so proud we can continue to honor the legacy of Officer Lee Barta, the building's namesake, who in 1995 was shot and killed in the line of duty on the same block.

But as we build back Binghamton's neighborhoods, we fight a constant battle with blight. Vacant, boarded up homes hurt property values, attract criminal activity and ruin the character of residential areas. All it takes is one blighted building to ruin a block. Every resident can identify with blight and I will continue to put our War on Blight front and center.

Binghamton has been at the forefront of combating zombie properties, homes that are vacant but haven't been foreclosed on by a bank, sitting in legal limbo. They are magnets for code violations, squatters, and a host of quality of life issues.

In one of my first press conference as Mayor, I joined Attorney General Eric Schneiderman to team up against zombie properties. This year, we're putting in motion a multi-year, \$250,000 grant from the Attorney General to reduce this trend — keeping homeowners in their homes and holding banks accountable. Banks will quickly clean up properties, sell them, or donate them to the City for demolition.

Since I've taken office, 54 blighted structures have been demolished, ranging from small residential homes to infamous eyesores like Magic City Ice, the former Department of Public Works garage, and the Collier St. parking garage — which has reshaped the skyline of downtown. As aggressive as we've been, it hasn't been nearly enough.

By securing a \$3.8 million FEMA grant last year, the City will purchase and demolish 27 properties in flood hazard areas. It's a transformative project to reduce blight and make our community more resilient to natural disasters. This project also advances a "blight cluster" policy focus, targeting multiple blighted properties in a single neighborhood. A cluster of 15 demolitions

south of Susquehanna St. will redevelop a long blighted residential area into open green space. This project will be completed over the next two years, but initial demolitions will begin in 2017.

For the scale of Binghamton's blight epidemic, more is still needed.

Tonight, I'm announcing that in 2017, the City will execute three demolitions waves — some two dozen properties — to eradicate blight in neighborhoods across the City.

Every Binghamton neighborhood has at least one property that is a symbol of blight — a black eye for the streetscape. These symbols of blight have come to define certain neighborhoods in a negative light. Many have languished for years because local government lacked the determination and creativity to take control and tear them down.

In the First Ward, 76 Glenwood Ave. — formerly Yonda's — is one such blighted property. A commercial building without a plan situated at a First Ward gateway. It's sat vacant since a fire and has hurt nearby commercial and residential areas. Councilman Scaringi how many calls have you and I both received on this eyesore? The City has purchased it on the cheap from a private seller and the building will come down this summer.

On the North Side, 423 Chenango St., known to the community for years as the big white house with crumbling walls and chipped paint — also coming down this summer.

These are just two examples, but there are many more we are focused on. Just like the demolition of the Collier St. garage changed the landscape of downtown, the demolition of infamous neighborhood eyesores will restore morale and increase property values. Most importantly, these demolitions will give hope to the thousands of residents I've met from going door-to-door, town hall meetings and phone calls, who say blight is their number one city issue.

By the end of 2018, the City will have executed more than 100 blight demolitions under this Administration's plan. We are showing residents in this City, as well as officials at the local, state and federal level that Binghamton is unrelenting in its war against blight. We can and will restore integrity to our neighborhoods.

But what happens to those vacant parcels once the blight is demolished?

Tonight, I'm announcing a first of its kind long-term effort with Habitat for Humanity to build new, affordable homes in Binghamton on those vacant plots of land.

This summer, Habitat for Humanity will build two homes on vacant City-owned lots — 16 Second St. and 5 Williams Place — where blighted buildings once stood before we tore them down. The City will provide the properties and some seed funding, and Habitat will take care of the rest.

Next year and beyond, the City and Habitat will identify additional locations for transforming vacant lots into owner-occupied homes — strengthening neighborhoods and expanding our tax base. Legislation will head to City Council next week on two of these properties, which are located in Councilman John Matzo's district. I thank him for supporting my aggressive demolition program and his years of leadership cleaning up the South Side.

### **Safer Streets, Supporting Our Police**

For neighborhoods to be vibrant they must be safe.

City Hall has a comprehensive approach to public safety, with all departments joining the efforts of the police in cracking down on criminal activity.

The City's Environmental Policing Task Force, announced at last year's address, has continued to target hotbeds of crime. Not only do police patrol the area, but all City departments focus resources to combat contributing environmental factors and potentially shut buildings down.

Some of the properties successfully condemned include an illegal after-hours nightclub and a vacant residential property that was the site of drug dealing and late night disturbances.

Separately, the Lockdown Law has, and will continue to be used forcefully and responsibly to hold landlords accountable and eliminate nuisance criminal activity. It's a tried and true application, which most recently resulted in the closure and sale of the troubled Elks Club Antler Lodge on the North Side.

Under my watch, the City will use all means necessary to tighten the grip on crime and restore integrity to our neighborhoods.

This Administration's public safety focus meant not only building back the police department ranks after years of cuts, but revamping the force for the 21st Century.

Our technology upgrades have ensured Binghamton is on the cutting edge. 40 patrol car cameras, 93 body-worn cameras for officers and enhanced data collection have provided new layers of accountability and protection. A new prisoner transport van equipped with cameras and safety technology is another example of this Administration being proactive, instead of reactive, when it comes to sensitive matters of public safety.

I appointed the highest ranking female officers in both Binghamton Police and Binghamton Fire Department history. 150 years is far too long without women in top public safety positions. Diversifying our ranks must be a continued effort.

Rethinking our recruitment strategies has already yielded results. At the police officer exam last fall, 1-in-4 applicants were a minority and 1-7 were female. As the largest local law enforcement

agency in the Southern Tier, the Binghamton Police Department is a great place for young men and women to succeed. We've done more than ever to attract young and talented individuals from all walks of life to become police officers.

More officers have been dedicated to neighborhood patrols and community policing. One of my first actions as Mayor was to expand the Community Response Team. It's a specialized 7-member unit focusing on proactive and engaged policing. Talking to neighbors, developing relationships and showing an active presence where criminals congregate.

In the three years before I took office, the City experienced 6,984 property crimes — these are burglaries, larcenies and motor vehicle thefts.

In the three years since, under an expansion in police personnel, we've seen a 14 percent drop in property crimes — a thousand fewer crimes over three years.

In 2016, Binghamton had the fewest property crimes since the state began collecting data in 1990. Overall, 2016 had fourth-lowest crime index in the 27 years we have data. We all owe a round of applause to the men and women of the Binghamton Police Department for these efforts.

What has not dropped is violent crime, and I'd like to talk about that for a moment in greater detail.

### **Operation: Safe City**

Binghamton's central location and proximity to New York City, Philadelphia, and other upstate cities, as well as immediate urban access to three major interstates has long been a strategic selling point for our economic development potential.

Likewise, these attributes make our City an attractive destination for criminals looking to establish a base of operations, traffic narcotics and commit violent crimes.

A short time ago, Binghamton was a hub for one of the most violent and dangerous gangs in America: the Mac Ballers. Called "a ruthless Bronx-based cabal of drug dealers and gunrunners," the Mac Ballers operated freely from their 17 East headquarters on Clinton St. before being brought down by law enforcement, and their building locked down in 2014.

Our police do a great job of catching criminals after crimes occur, but residents are rightly concerned about big city crime encroaching on our neighborhoods. We must do better in deterring criminals from coming to Binghamton and setting up shop. We need a bold new initiative to keep our community safe.

That's why tonight, I'm announcing the City of Binghamton will install a sophisticated and secure network of license plate readers encircling our perimeter at nearly every entrance.

We're calling it Operation: Safe City. Each vehicle entering Binghamton will be scanned and automatically cross-referenced with local, state and federal law enforcement databases, as well as DMV records.

When wanted criminals, stolen vehicles, or suspected getaway cars enter Binghamton, alerts will sound at a command center monitored 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Patrol cars will be at the ready to nab suspects in the field.

This initiative will be the most powerful crime fighting tool yet as more criminals will either be immediately caught or intentionally avoid Binghamton altogether.

The first phase of Operation: Safe City will begin this spring — installation of 10 license plate readers as well as high speed fiber optic infrastructure to support the network. Next year, more cameras and fiber optic cable will be installed at the remaining entrance points to the City.

Binghamton is just the latest city to invest in this technology. Currently operating in parts of lower Manhattan and the Village of Freeport on Long Island, this technology is a way for communities to stay one step ahead of those breaking the law. License plate readers, which our police already use, are considered to be the most advanced tool available to fight crime and assist law enforcement investigations, and a crime deterrent when widely advertised.

The Village of Freeport, population 43,000, has shown a 24 percent reduction in crime in the past two years. In the first 90 days of operation, Freeport impounded cars, made several arrests for stolen vehicles and even caught a man wanted for murder in Virginia.

Here's what Freeport Mayor Robert Kennedy, a Democrat, has to say about how the license plate reader initiative has impacted his village.

"This successful public safety initiative has significantly reduced crime in Freeport and I'm confident it will produce similar results for Binghamton."

For far too long criminals have thought they could come to Binghamton and hide out of sight of police in the peaceful tranquility of our community. Eventually they're caught after they commit a crime. I will do everything in my power to stop criminals from establishing roots and moving around undetected.

In the next few weeks, Binghamton Police Officials and I will outline more details on this groundbreaking initiative. I was elected on a platform of public safety, and this initiative is our most advanced step yet in combating violent crime and sending a message that criminals are not welcome here. Period.

## **'Binghamton Model' For Heroin Crisis**

There's no greater force tearing neighborhoods apart and inciting criminal activity than heroin.

The Special Investigations Unit Task Force has completed many successful narcotics investigations leading to arrests and drug seizures.

In October, a yearlong investigation into a heroin trafficking operation resulted in six arrests and felony kingpin charges for some of the most violent drug dealers in Binghamton.

In July, 2,700 bags of heroin worth \$40,000 were removed from our streets after a multi-month investigation and drug ring takedown. We're talking thousands of hours staking out suspects, confidential informants, undercover buys, and SWAT "no-knock" search warrants.

While these operations have dismantled major drug trafficking operations within our community, these law enforcement actions alone will not fix the heroin crisis.

In 2016, there were 76 overdose deaths in Broome County — 27 in the City of Binghamton. These numbers were compiled by our community's first dedicated overdose death investigator, a partnership between the City and District Attorney's Office to better share intelligence from multiple levels of government to better understand the deadly heroin epidemic.

Announced at last year's address, the City is funding an Intensive Care Navigator position that supports clients who are leaving Fairview's Addiction Crisis Center and awaiting placement at a long-term care facility.

At Fairview, 40 percent of addicted individuals fail to enter a long-term program after being discharged from a detox or crisis center. Data from Truth Pharm released last week paints an even more ominous picture for addicted individuals. Beds are in such high demand patients have to return home and wait — in many cases returning to the lifestyle they're trying to escape.

Our Care Navigator helps Fairview's discharged clients find safe housing, provides transportation to medical and counseling appointments, and stays in contact through the entire treatment process.

Since the program started last May, 41 individuals have been successfully discharged to long-term certified inpatient programs or continued treatment locally with their next level of care. Kim Cary, that Care Navigator who's doing all this great work is in the audience tonight. Join me in thanking her for her efforts.

The program's success rate is 91 percent, compared to 60 percent on average.

The Binghamton model is improving outcomes. It's a concept I will take to lawmakers and policymakers at all levels of government, showing a cost-effective method to fill this gap in care.

## **21st Century Infrastructure Investments**

Across this region, Binghamton serves as a model for smart and aggressive investments in transportation infrastructure.

In both 2015 and 2016, the City hit its goal of 15 miles of street improvements, setting a sustainable tract for the next decade of repairs and reconstruction.

After years of inaction, broken promises and undriveable conditions, Chenango St. from Port Dickinson to Bevier St. was reconstructed with water and sewer improvements, new curbs and road surface.

Part of the project was to remove trolley tracks buried in the pavement, first installed in the late 1800s. The trolley tracks were last used in 1932, which means it had been more than 80 years since a significant street reconstruction took place.

The project was a symbol of Binghamton's historic neglect of its infrastructure, as well as this Administration's philosophy in taking on big infrastructure challenges to improve neighborhood quality of life.

In the three construction seasons since I took office, more than 42 miles have been paved — nearly a third of the City — as part of tens of millions of dollars in infrastructure investments.

With the completion of the South Washington St. pedestrian bridge historic rehabilitation in 2016 — on budget and ahead of schedule — this year's focus moves to the E. Clinton St. Bridge, which will receive a \$2.5 million rehabilitation.

By the end of this construction season, in four years the City will have fully rehabilitated the Exchange St., South Washington St. and E. Clinton St. Bridges, investing more than \$7 million to upgrade critical bridge infrastructure.

In 2017, 15 more miles of street paving projects are planned, with a renewed focus on residential neighborhoods.

We're also advancing game-changing infrastructure projects on our gateways.

Breaking ground this construction season, the State Street Gateway Project will begin with new pavement, traffic signals, and enhanced landscaping just steps outside City Hall. This \$500,000

project to improve pedestrian safety and aesthetics has already received a lot of buzz and positive feedback. It's another step in creating a cohesive feel to our Downtown streetscape.

A \$2.7 million federal grant will fund design and implementation of safety improvements along the City's Main St. corridor. High traffic volume and multiple modes of transportation meet along this urban corridor, and these improvements will enhance capacity and safety for pedestrians, bicyclists, transit operations and vehicular traffic.

Twelve years ago, federal funding was secured for the Front Street Gateway project — a \$5 million grant for full street reconstruction, new curbs, sidewalks, period lighting and water and sewer upgrades. Construction will begin this year, complementing the recent housing upgrades in this corridor and fixing the most talked-about stretch of road in the City, now that Riverside Dr. and Prospect St. are completed.

In a few weeks we will break ground on the \$6 million Phase I of the 434 Greenway Project. This bike and pedestrian trail connecting Binghamton University and Downtown will serve as a critical link in the multi-use trail network across the Southern Tier, promote alternative modes of transportation, and showcase the City's growing bond with our University. Design configurations are being reviewed for Phase II, which will be the bulk of construction work from Pennsylvania Ave. to the Vestal line.

As Mayor, my commitment to infrastructure means not only paving roads and fixing bridges, but rethinking our entire transportation network. How do we re-imagine the movement of people at essential junctions? Is our infrastructure built for future changes to the environment? Do our investments assist and leverage other growth and development?

Those are important questions to ask when thinking about Rt. 363 and North Shore Drive — elevated roads that effectively move vehicles passing through our City, but do little for the residents and businesses within our City.

North Shore Drive's design has cut access to the river for thousands of residents. Redundant and expensive infrastructure has also prevented riverfront development for 50 years. Some of the most strategic land in Broome County is blocked. It's a perfect case study on the effects of elevated urban highways.

I'm very pleased to announce tonight, in partnership with the New York State Department of Transportation, we will undertake a \$30 million project to rebuild Rt. 363 from Frederick St. to South Washington St. downtown. In a transformative boulevard concept, the project will bring this road to grade and give it back to our community. It will open access to the Susquehanna River in downtown, and reconnect our neighborhoods business districts.

This plan is in preliminary design phase, and will take many more years of planning, public input, and construction to complete. It is fully state-funded and will become a reality,

transforming a major gateway into the City and the area around it. We are truly redesigning downtown.

With this project, and the Greenway initiative discussed earlier, it's clear the commitment of the New York State DOT, specifically Commissioner Matt Driscoll and Regional Director Jack Williams, to the City of Binghamton and its people.

I'm proud that in Binghamton, we've been focusing on infrastructure long before hearing flashy proposals from the federal level, although I'm glad to hear our partners finally recognize there's an issue.

This Administration has proved to have the capability and drive to implement large and complex infrastructure projects. The last three years have only been the beginning, and I look forward to reshaping and rebuilding Binghamton for the next century.

### **Binghamton Open For Business**

Our local business climate is improving greatly because of contributions from this City Hall.

From the regional level, we have forged great relationships with members of the Southern Tier Regional Economic Development Council. Binghamton has a seat at the table to make strategic economic development decisions and land significant state resources.

There's the \$500,000 to the Binghamton Local Development Corporation for rehabilitation of commercial buildings near the Court St. Bridge, bringing new life to local landmarks as the footprint of activity grows wider in our downtown district.

We secured \$2.5 million in state and private funding for improvements to NYSEG Stadium — the largest capital investment ever for this City-owned facility — enhancing fan experiences, modernizing critical stadium infrastructure, and providing a first-class environment for top Major League prospects.

Our thanks to Senator Akshar and Rumble Ponies owner John Hughes who have delivered for Binghamton's baseball fans on this project. I visited the construction site last week and crews are working day and night to get the stadium ready for first pitch in April.

In our downtown, new parking kiosks are a welcome sign of the future. The old 1950s mechanical meters should have been scrapped years ago, and will be replaced with forty-five new kiosks over the next several weeks.

The demolition of the Collier St. Parking Garage, one of Binghamton's most infamous eyesores, has been a visual and economic boost for downtown. The number one comment I hear about

this project is how we've opened up our historic skyline and changed the landscape of downtown for the better.

With regard to parking, designs are underway at 7 Hawley St., the site of a \$20 million mixed-use commercial, residential and parking development that has secured significant state funding. In addition, the City will invest \$3 million in our existing Water St. and State St. garages to improve their structural integrity, lighting and overall appearance.

Whether it be parents taking their kids on college visits to Binghamton University or out-of-towners attending concerts or hockey games, visitors' first impressions of downtown have been much improved and will continue to get better.

Building off the growth of downtown, over the next several years, the focus will shift to expanding existing neighborhood business districts and creating new ones. Each neighborhood is unique with its own identity, strengths and challenges. Parts of the First Ward, North, South, East and West Sides should experience the economic growth seen in the urban core, and we're going to commit the resources to make that happen.

Working with individual Council members and business leaders, the City will dedicate funds for targeted economic development activities — infusing neighborhood business districts with grants, low-interest loans, facade upgrades, demolitions, and street repairs.

The Binghamton Local Development Corporation, Economic Development and Planning departments will spearhead this effort, which will be the most dynamic neighborhood investment strategy to date.

### **Housing Opportunities for Everyone**

To ensure housing opportunities for all residents we have made it our goal to move past the student housing bubble. City taxpayers should no longer subsidize luxury student housing developments through Payment In Lieu of Taxes, or PILOT, agreements. The market is established and these incentives are no longer needed. We should be incentivizing affordable and market housing for everyone else.

Right now, standard 10-year PILOTs are approved by The Agency, Broome County IDA. In the past, tax breaks have been granted for luxury student housing which did not have the support of my office or this Council. In the coming weeks, I will take steps to ensure all student housing tax breaks in Binghamton be approved by City Council and the Mayor. Those elected by taxpayers should decide if and when tax breaks are warranted.

That being said, we are seeing momentum away from student housing, which is a great sign.

On the North Side, two housing projects are reinvigorating the historic railroad district.

At 26 Eldredge St., a \$2.5 million mixed-use project is underway to transform a 128-year-old building into market-rate apartments and an organic farm-to-table cafe.

Nearly nextdoor, developer Josh Bishop is restoring a blighted industrial structure with 70 studio loft apartments and commercial space. The plan to redevelop this massive building has received low interest loan support from our Binghamton Local Development Corporation and \$1.5 million in state economic development funds. In total, One North Depot is a \$8 million project.

Another transformative project, the \$30 million development at 50 Front St., is seeing more progress this spring. A \$2 million asbestos abatement and demolition plan will take place over the next few months. Groundbreaking on the mixed-use riverfront development will be this summer, bringing needed market rate housing to our City.

Also this spring, doors will open at our homeless veterans' home at 27 Pine Street, our latest effort as the first U.S. city to end veteran homelessness. The rehabilitation project includes 10 apartments and space for support services. Opportunities for Broome will manage the site and coordinate services, such as job placement and substance abuse counseling for the veteran tenants. I couldn't be prouder of this initiative and what it says about the City of Binghamton to be on the front lines of this national priority.

Finally, I'd like to speak amount about the former Big Lots Plaza on the North Side.

When I took office, many said the City should leave this property alone. Controlled by Broome County, \$300,000 in back taxes, unknown environmental issues, the list went on. My response was simple: If Binghamton City Hall was not in the driver's seat on a redevelopment plan, no one would be. This site would continue to sit idle as it has for the last decade.

By taking a more aggressive route, we've negotiated the property for a dollar from Broome County and we're working with the DEC to clean up the property.

With the help of Senator Akshar and Governor Cuomo, we secured a \$534,000 grant to demolish the vacant and condemned plaza. This building falls into the "infamous eyesore" category, and demolition work will begin in the coming months.

After demolition, a \$11 million affordable and supportive housing project, a partnership with the Binghamton Housing Authority and 3D Development Group is on the horizon. It will serve to anchor the block and provide additional development opportunities. We are awaiting final state approvals to make this project a reality, and are optimistic New York State will see the transformative potential this project has.

**Binghamton University**

Across the country, college towns struggle with the demands of growing student populations. Here in Binghamton, we must balance the needs of longtime taxpayers who live here year-round while embracing the thousands of students who call this City their home for a short time.

Recently, state lawmakers have discussed the concept of impact funding. Impact funding is direct aid to municipalities that host universities or other large non-profit institutions — a way of offsetting inherent costs for public safety, code enforcement and other government services geared toward certain populations, like students.

Tonight, I'm pleased to announce the kick-off of a multi-year commitment from Binghamton University to provide that exact kind of impact funding — the first of its kind in the City's history.

Year one, 2017, BU will fund \$200,000 in public safety infrastructure upgrades in targeted West Side neighborhoods. Installation will begin soon on street cameras and 24/7 blue light phones — like you've seen on many college campuses — which will create safe walking routes for students and deter criminal activity for everyone in those neighborhoods.

Moving forward, a task force of City Hall and University officials will review data and make recommendations on how \$200,000 in annual aid will fund future programs. Our West Side councilmembers, Dani Crouce and President Joe Mihalko, will be key stakeholders.

Above all, this City should thank President Harvey Stenger. In a short time, he has built the University into a national academic leader, and his vision for community focused projects are paying dividends in many ways. We are very fortunate to have him.

This partnership with Binghamton University is just the start. With one third of all assessed property value tax free in the City — some \$725 million worth — this is a model we can use in discussions with other non-profits who benefit greatly from city services, but aren't currently picking up the tab.

### **Build A Sustainable Future**

Our climate and our economy are changing, and those municipalities on the cutting edge of green technology and sustainability will prosper in the next century. Our projects to date have been large and small.

We've continued the partnership with VINES to create sustainable food systems, transforming blighted urban lots into beautiful community gardens.

We've streamlined regulations and built incentives for installation of solar panels and electric vehicle charging stations.

Our flagship green project to date — converting 7,000 streetlights to LED technology — has reduced the City’s carbon footprint by 3 million pounds each year. That’s the environmental equivalent of taking 300 cars off the road or planting 400 acres of trees, every year. In addition, over 15 years, the City will save a total of \$6 million in electricity and \$1 million in maintenance costs.

In the coming years, we will advance more green projects the public will immediately recognize and taxpayers will benefit from.

The City remains optimistic we will be a big winner in the State’s NY Prize community microgrid competition, which would award \$1 million to fully design a downtown microgrid — a sustainable energy system independent from the main power grid in the event of an outage or natural disaster. The City has already received a \$100,000 grant to study its feasibility and an announcement from the state will be coming shortly.

Here at City Hall, we are pursuing what will become an immediate symbol of ongoing progress with sustainability, resiliency and innovation.

Above our heads, we will create a vegetative green roof system at City Hall, which can store and evaporate more than 850,000 gallons of stormwater every year. Financing is being secured for this \$1.7 million project, 90 percent funded through state environmental grants. It will showcase to our entire community advanced green technology that can reduce pollution and enhance urban landscapes.

As a community founded at the confluence of two great rivers, better utilizing our natural water resources must be a part of our future. One site in particular — Rockbottom Dam on the Susquehanna River — has long been an integral part of our City’s water infrastructure. Many, including me, have wondered if the river could do more for the City, could we better harness the power of the mighty Susquehanna.

Councilman Papastrat: How many Park Diner patrons have made those comments drinking coffee and overlooking the river?

Tonight, I’m pleased to announce one of the most iconic projects ever seen in the Southern Tier — which also happens to be green.

The City will finally advance a project to construct a hydroelectric generation station at Rockbottom Dam, providing clean, renewable power for decades to come.

Partnering with industry leader Gravity Renewables of Boulder, Colorado, we will develop engineering designs for generating electricity at Rockbottom Dam. This project is exceptionally

complex and will take years to implement, but initial financial models point to millions of dollars in energy savings over 20 years.

Later this week, I will announce specifics with Gravity Renewables officials and bring the necessary contracts to this Council for approval.

Binghamton is fast becoming a national leader in embracing smart green development while saving taxpayer dollars and positioning for the environmental challenges of the 21st century.

## **Water**

Water is our greatest natural resource. I believe it's the environmental currency of the future.

Tucked away on the South Side is the City's water filtration plant, which has the capacity to produce 20 million gallons of clean drinking water every day. On average, consumers only use about 5 million gallons daily, which means we lose out on selling an additional 15 million gallons of water every day.

Binghamton water far exceeds federal quality standards, and has even been awarded for its chemical composition, which is tested daily at a state-of-the-art on site laboratory.

Municipal officials in Flint, Michigan, Hoosick Falls near Albany and the drought-ridden areas of California, would give just about anything for our clean water supply, to name a few.

This City has historically overlooked the economic development and cost saving potentials for a massive supply of clean water.

This is the year that will change. I'm pleased to announce the City will team up with industry leaders and experts to create a business plan to market and sell our water to more public and private users.

By selling our excess water supply with minimal additional costs, we can generate substantial new revenue to fix our aging water infrastructure and can lower your water rates, which have more than doubled in the last 10 years.

Whether it be neighboring municipalities, national water bottling companies, or opportunities we are not even aware exist, I believe there is a market for our clean water supply and I plan to maximize it for ratepayers.

## **Taxes**

Nothing will have a larger impact on residents and businesses than addressing property taxes. Businesses won't locate or expand in areas with high taxes. Employees, entrepreneurs and residents won't live in neighborhoods with high tax burdens.

Since 2014, we've not only held the line on taxes, but in this year's budget, we provided the first residential tax cut since 1998 and the second-straight tax cut for commercial properties.

With certainty, I can tell you residential and commercial taxes will again be cut in 2018. While I can't give you the exact percentage decrease until my budget address in September, it will be the largest yet, and will be the most significant step in undoing the 52 percent tax increase homeowners bore in the eight years prior to my taking office.

I am also committed to do whatever possible to improve the City's bond rating, which was downgraded in 2013 from its Triple-A status. A bond rating impacts how much interest City taxpayers pay annually on capital projects. When you undertake multimillion dollar infrastructure projects annually, to give you an example, the interest alone can be massive. The bond downgrade will cost taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars more over the lifespan on bonds.

## **Conclusion**

I continue to be incredibly grateful for the opportunity to serve as your Mayor. My decisions are guided by what will make Binghamton better for future generations.

Tonight's address was about how the actions of a forward-thinking government in motion can shape history. My Administration, this team, many of whom are in the room tonight, has one thing on its mind: Action. Every single day. It is a team uniquely qualified to continue the momentum seen in every corner of the City. We've proven it these last few years.

No matter where I go, people stop me and comment about how pleased they are with what's happening in Binghamton. Even people who live outside the City voice their support because they recognize what happens in Binghamton impacts municipalities across Broome County.

This City Council, which can operate in a non-political, bipartisan fashion, is well-poised to pull together and support my ambitious and aggressive agenda for Binghamton in 2017 and beyond. Each of us have only a limited amount of time to serve the public. I hope we can continue to focus on big ideas and not get caught in the political minutia of the day.

There has never been a point in this City's modern history where so many transformational projects will advance during this short time span. It's truly an exciting time to live in the City of Binghamton and a rewarding opportunity to lead it.

Armed with a unified vision and passion we can keep the State of this City strong and provide an even stronger future for generations to come.

Thank you all and goodnight!