

**STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS  
OLEAN, NY  
JANUARY 2, 2025  
WILLIAM J. AIELLO, MAYOR**

It is my pleasure to welcome Reverend Carrie Wolfe, Director of Pastoral Care – St. Elizabeth Motherhouse, the Honorable Nicholas DiCerbo, Jr., Olean City Court Judge, Scout Troop 621, my wife Patty, my family and friends, members of the media, members of the Common Council, City of Olean Department Heads and City Employees. Most of all, welcome to you in the audience both here in the Council Chambers and those of you watching at home.

We have a few honored guests here tonight that I would like to introduce: Former Alderman and current URA Chairman Earl McElfresh, former Alderman and current County Legislator Rick Smith, former Alderman and current County Legislator Kelly Andreano

Thank you for joining us.

In 2025, my goal is to pivot to solutions. Solutions that will guarantee our community's vibrancy for the next generation.

Mayors who served Olean during my adult years have been great role models for me and as I enter my twelfth year as Mayor, I have been reflecting on the problems they faced and their long-term contributions to our community.

Mayor William O. Smith hired me, but he was also very instrumental in the building of the Olean Recreation Center that now bears his name. During the past few years, we have made significant renovations to the ice rink and now we are embarking on upgrades to the pool with the help of a New York State grant of over \$700,000 and adding a splash park. He was also Mayor when the Olean Center Mall opened, at the time it was an incredible draw to Olean.

Mayor Ash has always been a mentor to me. He has had a hand in the revitalization of two corners on State and Union. When he was Mayor, he was instrumental in keeping the Olean Post Office on the southwest corner and getting the building the renovation it deserved. Fast-forward a decade, maybe two, as Vice Chairman of the Urban Renewal Agency, he was influential in saving the old Manny Hanny and selling the property to developer Sam Savarino.

Mayor Jim Griffin continues to help the City of Olean as Chairman of the Charter Review Commission. During his tenure as Mayor, he oversaw the funding and construction of the new water plant and he worked diligently to get Jamestown Community College to build our downtown campus.

Mayor Bill Quinlan was the City assessor, and as Mayor he initiated the Homeowner Assistance Programs. In addition, during his term the City started tackling the Brownfields, you remember that generational eyesore where the Hampton Inn now sits. At that time the city led New York state in working to revitalize contaminated Brownfield properties. It was a long-term project and it paid off. Mayor Quinlan also initiated the first Comprehensive Development Plan, timely as we are just finishing the new 20 year plan.

Mayor David Carucci, stabilized the City after a significant financial downturn, and initiated the Olean Local Development Corporation, originally eyeing the renovation of Bradner Stadium, the OLDC has moved its focus onto neighborhood rehabilitation.

Mayor Linda Witte carries quite a legacy. Under her years as mayor, East State Street, which was a shambles

and had major drainage issues, got a total rebuild. She also bravely initiated Walkable Olean. Mayor Witte continues to help the City as the Vice Chairman of the Urban Renewal Agency and as Secretary of the Charter Review Commission. She is one of Olean's most steadfast volunteers.

These mayors found solutions to the problems they faced and gave us great building blocks for the future.

The problems that plague a small City like Olean are extremely complex. To solve them we need an All Hands effort. Olean is fortunate -- we have a good group who are committed to our community.

That group includes the Common Council. I pledge to continue to work with them to refurbish our infrastructure, keep the tax rate at a minimum, and make our community safer.

The group also includes our staff. I can assure you that they work tirelessly to keep Olean relevant and provide residents with a safe and growing community.

Please let me introduce our department heads

- City Clerk Frank Caputo,

- Community Development Program Coordinator Keri Kerper,
- City Attorney Bridget Marshall,
- City Auditor Lens Martial,
- Fire Chief Eric Maurouard,
- Assessor Gregg Piechota,
- Police Chief Ron Richardson,
- Youth and Recreation Program Coordinator Kris Shewairy
- DPW Director, Ben Slotman
- Superintendent of Water and Sewer, Brad Camp
- Human Resources Specialist Ward Near.

Our department heads are truly dedicated to our community. They are trustworthy and have done an excellent job working with their staff to make Olean a better place for all of us to live. Please join me in thanking them for their efforts and diligence for our community.

If we want solutions, we have to make an inventory of concerns. We brainstormed, checked social media postings and read Common Council meeting minutes. These are some concerns of Olean residents: crime, homelessness, decaying neighborhoods, taxes,

infrastructure, especially pot-holes and waste water treatment. People have also expressed concern about the local economy and activities for young adults.

An increase in crime is high on the concern list of our residents. It is something that our Police Department works hard to curb and contain. This year, the police department handled almost 27,000 calls for service and arrested approximately 1,040 individuals; for a total of 1,790 charges. These charges included 252 felonies, 1,060 misdemeanors, 265 violations, 166 city ordinances and 47 DWI's.

In an effort to combat the rising drug problem, the Street Crimes Unit worked tirelessly all year. Their hard work lead to the arrest of 22 individuals, who unlawfully possessed and/or sold drugs in the City of Olean, leading to 101 felony charges. Seized from these arrests were an array of illegal drugs, including: fentanyl, heroin, cocaine, crack cocaine, prescription pills, and combinations of fentanyl/heroin. Many of the arrests originated from neighborhood complaints. The unit also obtained 7 search warrants for multiple locations within the City of Olean.

**Please note this: Of the 22 people arrested for selling drugs, as well as 1 person arrested for selling an illegal handgun, 18 individuals were released due to the New York State Bail Reform.**

Despite this, the Street Crimes Unit continues to work diligently to make our community a safer place.

The Department's Drone program has proven to be quite an asset. Over the past year, the officers deployed the drone on sixteen cases and used it to observe when officer safety was a factor.

The Civilian Review Board is up and running. In 2024 the board had one referral to investigate.

With security in our schools being a concern, the Olean City School District worked with the City of Olean and the Olean Police Department to add a second School Resource Officer in the Olean Intermediate Middle School. We now have a SRO in the Olean High School and in the Olean Intermediate Middle School.

We also have Special Patrol Officers in Washington West Elementary School, Eastview Elementary School and one is shared by the High School and Olean Intermediate Middle School. The SPO's primary duty is to provide security in the schools.

Homelessness is another concern of our residents and we are taking a hands-on approach to the subject. We put together a task force of professionals who understand the problem and how it effects both the community and the individual struggling with homelessness. At our meetings, the taskforce members have shared information that is both educational and enlightening. The task force will continue to meet in 2025.

Decaying neighborhoods is a problem that we do not take lightly. Revitalization started in our business district but it is moving in to the neighborhoods.

Alderman Vernon Robinson presented a vision for Marcus Park to the Council. We took that vision to Mari Howard, the CEO of InTandem, to form a partnership. Today I am very pleased to report that the City has received over \$1.2 million in NYS grant funding for park facilities. In addition, Intandem will separately fund a new inclusive playground for the park. When completed Marcus Park will have new accessible restrooms and picnic area, a fenced in dog park, a neighborhood field, and a shared use path that will connect with the Allegheny River Valley Trail.

In addition, our new Comprehensive Development Plan will be completed soon and as a recipient of a Smart Growth Community Planning and Zoning Grant of \$150,000, we will be able to update the Zoning Code to plan for future development, revise key regulations and rectify discrepancies between the new Comprehensive Development Plan and the existing zoning code.

Our Zoning Code has not been updated since 1999 and this will help jumpstart revitalization in our neighborhoods.

I would like to Congratulate Keri Kerper and the Community Development staff for securing these grants and others for a total of \$2,125,000 for the City.

Code Enforcement has been working with Community Development and the Cattaraugus County Land Bank in an all out effort to flight blight and worked with the City Attorney to hold property owners accountable for the damage that they create.

Code Enforcement demolished two buildings due to safety concerns, opened and investigated 520 complaints. The department closed 480 complaints, and issued 505 orders to remedy. There were 6 complaints that were referred to the courts and the department

hired third party contractors for 105 of the orders. If the landowner does not immediately pay for the work, the City collects by placing a lien on the owner's property tax bill. Codes also completed 423 inspections, and issued 384 permits for a total project value of over \$11 million dollars.

Increased property taxes are a concern for everyone and I can attest that all of our departments work hard to contain expenses where they can. Unfortunately, inflation is a problem in many of our annual, standard and necessary purchases. In addition, our New York State retirement expense has increased. We are pleased that we saw a 3 percent decrease in our health insurance premium.

I would like to thank Senator Borrello and Assemblyman Joe Giglio for putting through the legislation to allow the City of Olean to institute a hotel occupancy tax to be used for tourism and economic development.

The Assessor reports that for the third year in a row, we have had an increase in the taxable value of the city. This has been a challenge as most new commercial construction is not on the taxable roll due to PILOT exemptions granted by the Cattaraugus County Industrial

Development Agency. In addition, this is the first year of the Cymolai-Hy PILOT, which reduced the taxable roll by \$6 million.

He also stated that our home values have plateaued this year with the average home sale being \$110,000, nearly identical to last year.

The City Clerk's office reported 557 births and 407 deaths. In addition, the department received a grant to renovate the records rooms in the basement of the Municipal Building.

The Parks and Recreation staff has done an excellent job to market City facilities, which offer a wide range of activities for residents of all ages. From the fields in Forness Park to four season activities at the Rec Center, from disc golf at Gargoyle to the Concerts in Lincoln and Oak Hill Park. There are a numerous activities for people of all ages.

I would like to add that a milestone is on the agenda for this summer, as the Olean City Cup Softball Tournament will celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in August. This past summer we celebrated another milestone: the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Women's bracket being added to the City Cup Softball Tournament.

The Recreation Center has had a boom year; both advertising and usage have increased significantly at the Center. There are 25 dasher board ads, 4 banner ads and advertising on both Zamboni machines; 20 percent of the advertising revenue is passed on to Olean Youth Hockey to assist with promoting their program.

We had the longest skating season ever—August through March with 10,000 customers participating in public ice skating sessions.

The Bartlett House hosted many events including two psychic fairs, numerous tours, a vintage fashion show, pie on the porch, Victorian Christmas and a visit with Santa. In addition, we are pleased that the Bartlett house received a grant through Assemblyman Joe Giglio of \$75,000 that will help fund a new roof on the facility.

The Senior Center continues to be a hub of activity for seniors with well over 450 monthly participants.

At the Fire Station, Chief Maurouard reports that both ambulance and engine call volumes reached record highs in 2024. There were over 3,400 ambulance calls, which is a 5% increase over last year. There were 2168 engine calls, which is a 15% increase compared to last year.

The City's Department of Public Works continues to work on keeping our infrastructure up-to-date. During the last year DPW milled and repaved 14 streets or 3.44 miles; they replaced 100 feet of 15 inch sanitary lines and 200 feet of 24 inch storm sewer; they refurbished two City wells and removed one from service; they pruned and removed trees from Oak Hill Park; and they replaced the City Building's HVAC well pump.

The City was lucky to receive a \$1 million grant from Congressman Langworthy to repair the wall on the water filtration plant.

In addition, funded by a grant of \$400,000 from Cattaraugus County, fields 8 and 9 in Forness Park got new lighting. Lighting upgrades in fields 1 and 2 are in process. Repairs to the press box in Bradner Stadium were also completed.

There is a lot on the docket for DPW in 2025. Including finishing the South Union Street portion of Walkable Olean; upgrades to the Airport and the Water Filtration and Distribution system, levee accreditation, improvements to the underpass on Buffalo Street, and the lead service line replacement project.

The City of Olean is very conscious of our position on the Allegheny River. We are working to alleviate the problem of the storm water overflow during extremely heavy downpours. I will work diligently with the Common Council to find a solution and secure the necessary funding to put an end to this problem.

I cannot fail to mention the involvement in the community of City departments.

Every year, the City of Olean Police Department participates in a variety of programs in an effort to assist the community and bolster their relationship with the public. As in past years, officers were involved at the Easter Egg Hunt, Halloween safety talk, and Shop with a Cop.

School Resource Officer McGraw spent over 338 hours this year ensuring the safety of school-aged children at events and enhancing the department's relationship with the community. Police officers participated in numerous Car Seat Safety Check events and provided the service as needed for new/expectant parents.

The Fire Department provided fire prevention education to 736 elementary students, conducted 27 public events like 'StrOlean' and 'Winning Olean Back', hosted 53

station tours, and completed 60 fire safety building inspections.

DPW works with the Greater Olean Area Chamber of Commerce to get the Santa Claus Lane decorations in place. I think we were all disappointed that the tree on the Main Street Roundabout would not stay lit this year. It will be fixed this summer, and will be lit during the holiday season of 2025. It will make for a bright entrance into Olean from Route 16.

DPW also works with the Olean Beautification Committee to deploy the planters and keep them watered throughout the season.

The Human Resource office continues to be important to our organization. The department helps our employees navigate through contractual benefits and New York State Retirement issues. The department has initiated a safety committee that works to create a safe environment and prevent problems before they occur.

Training is important and HR has provided training for CPR, Narcan use, Stop the Bleed and active shooter. In addition, the department acts as a hearing officer for our Codes office for homeowners cited with a Code Enforcement violation.

Olean is a great place to live, we are lucky to have four seasons and relatively moderate weather.

Working with our employees and groups such as the Greater Olean Area Chamber of Commerce; the CEO Alliance; Olean Business Development; the Homelessness Task Force; and the Beautification Committee, I am reminded that many people who live in Olean and our surrounding area are passionate about our community. They are dedicated to the success of Olean and will do what it takes to keep Olean a great place to live and work.

As we look for solutions to the problems that confront our small city, I know that I can depend on inspired groups of talented and committed people who, while working together, will help Olean overcome any difficulties and complications that it faces.

We should all look forward to 2025--many good things will take place in our beautiful city.

Thank you. Happy New Year and God Bless the City of Olean.

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