

STATE OF THE CITY 2011

DELIVERED BY MAYOR LINDA WITTE
DURING THE JAN. 3, 2011 ANNUAL MEETING OF THE
OLEAN COMMON COUNCIL

Welcome to Fr. Greg Dobson, members of the audience both here in the Council Chambers and you who have tuned in at home, city department heads and staff, members of the Common Council, and the media.

2010 was a productive -- and at times challenging -- year. 2011 promises to be no less (with New York State in its present financial condition). I served with nine different aldermen, appointed two new Common Council members, hired a City Auditor, Fred Saradin, hired Tom Windus back as our Department of Public Works director and now I will be appointing another alderman for a vacancy in Ward 4. I have held off replacing every retiree and I will continue to justify doing so in the future.

At this time I would like to welcome Mrs. Kamery and Mr. Brady to our City Council. I look forward to working with you.

The theme of 2010 was “working together” and this theme will extend throughout this New Year. By working together we have not always agreed but we worked to come to a consensus. In that way we accomplished a great deal, as you will hear. It is important that I extend my thanks to each city employee, department head, the Common Council members, and the city attorney, as well as to our outside council. The theme includes transparency. Let’s keep talking about it. I want to thank Dan DeRose for finishing up our tax cases that he started. The City Attorney cannot do all of the work, with possible conflicts of interest.

In the spirit of working together, I do not believe the proposed New York State tax cap will be helpful. It could handicap all municipalities unless the state tackles pension reform, and this is also the New York Council of Mayors’ position, which I endorse.

Working Together means we must cut costs and expand shared services. The City of Olean already provides waste water treatment to certain entities and the city’s consultants, Municipal Solutions, will make a presentation on the possibility of forming a sewer authority. Doing so would ensure that everyone using the city’s wastewater treatment plant is treated fairly and operates on a level playing field.

The continuing theme includes financial issues. 2011 will be a challenge as we anticipate unknown actions of the state legislature and government officials. The city’s 2011-2012 budget needs to reflect any number of potential negative impacts to be handed down by the state. Because of our progress in improving our financial position and our deficit we saw an upgrade in the city’s bond rating to A2. We also ended the 2009-2010 fiscal year with a total surplus exceeding \$4.8 million, the highest amount in eight years and a figure which enabled us to increase our contingency fund line for emergencies to more than \$600,000 (by Common Council action). These two factors will enable us to better weather problems in the future including those that could come down to us from the State.

Among our 2010 accomplishments I can point to excellent services provided for our youth and seniors. For example this past summer, we saw William O. Smith Recreation Center swimming pool

admissions of 12,000 swimmers overall, or 1,000 swimmers weekly; and in the Franchot Wading Pool public and party attendance was more than 5,000 children and adults. The annual City Cup Softball Tournament drew more than 30 teams and about 400 men and women softball players, and the more than 200 boys and girls participated in the Olean Area Youth Hockey Association.

Our Senior Center enjoyed another good year providing programs for our local seniors. The doors are always open for lunch if you make a reservation and provide a small donation. And Olean continues to attract visitors for some superb events, such as the Taste of Olean, Rally in the Valley and Santa Claus Lane, ethnic festivals throughout the summer, also adding this past summer the Theater in the Park.

Our Police and Fire Departments and Department of Public Works deserve our continued praise, both for keeping us safe during the summer's high winds that brought down trees and branches thundering down in our neighborhoods and during the flooding in December when we anticipated a state of emergency and set up a temporary command post in the Municipal Building. The Police Department's DWI road checks and the resulting six DWI arrests and related activities earned it a Mothers Against Drunk Drivers MADD/STOP-DWI Agency Award in November. Also, with the help of the county and state law enforcement officials, the Department resolved within 48 hours its single homicide case.

The Olean Police Department issued over 3,700 traffic citations during 2010. That averages approximately 10.15 tickets each day of the year. Approximately 1,850 parking tickets were issued by the Police Department only, and that doesn't include Mr. McGinnis's parking tickets. The Olean Police Department responded to over 12,000 calls for service (not including traffic stops or follow-up investigations) which generated over 7,000 new cases in 2010. There was a 1.2 percent increase in collected fines and forfeiture monies. The homicide case resulted in an arrest within 48 hours. And members of the Olean Police Department force worked to improve the appearance of the station through a major renovation

Finally, the Department agreed to negotiate a one-year contract that will put all of our unions on the same schedule for contract renewals. The Fire Department began the year with promotions of three part-time firemen to full-time positions with the goal of saving money. This cut overtime to one-third.

The Olean Fire Department had a total of 2,737 Prehospital care reports, generating revenues (figures to be supplied) . The Fire Department also responded to a total of 1,561 incidents in 2010, with an overall response time of two minutes and 48 seconds. This includes 59 calls for fires of which 14 were structure fires. The breakdown is as follows: fire calls, 59; explosion, 4; emergency medical assist, 945; hazardous condition, 76; service calls, 229; good intent calls, 69; false alarms, 176; special incidents, 3.

In the City Clerk's Office the plan is to develop the potential to pay bills on-line and make our city more user-friendly. The Public Works Department has nearly completed full installation of water meters and is working on attracting new water customers to create more revenue. The Wastewater Treatment Plant's efficiency is increasing with the update of pumps and more of our streets are getting repaved or replaced, thanks to the Common Council's allocation of sufficient funds. The City received more than \$1 million in stimulus funds for the West State Street paving project. The state DOT provided \$300,000 was to resurface Main Street, with another \$300,000 spent on the Woodview Ave. paving – and only one-third of that cost was paid for by the city. The Cattaraugus County-Olean Municipal Airport benefited from some in-house maintenance work by our Parks Division staff. We will continue doing more in-house repairs and maintenance in 2011.

In the Community Development Department work has begun on a zoning update process, and public transportation is on the way to expansion through the OATS (Olean-Area Transportation System) partnerships with The Rehabilitation Center and St. Bonaventure University. This will generate more people in the community seeking services and shopping and contributing to our revenue.

A State grant of \$360,000 has launched the second phase of public input and planning in our *Brownfield Opportunity Area Program* for redevelopment of environmentally-challenged properties in the northern industrial corridor of Olean for an expansion of the City's tax base and more jobs for our residents. The *East Olean Sewer Project* was completed in 2010, with new gravity sewers, a new pump station and force main, and the existing pump station improved. East Olean residents no longer have to contend with decades of surprise sanitary sewer backups. We are completing the 40-year Master Plan for all of the City's critical wastewater and storm water infrastructure. Some field drainage and other improvements were seen at Bradner Stadium, and in a related development, the Olean Local Development Corporation's will soon be launching a fundraising initiative to update the Stadium. And, finally, the Olean Urban Renewal Agency acquired 3 distressed parcels in the center of the downtown's critical renewal area, an effort that includes stabilizing and developing the old Manufacturer's Hanover Trust and other buildings, while also updating an Urban Renewal Plan for implementation of its planning, design and economic objectives.

The Assessor reports the city's total value is \$745,843,897 for 6,556 parcels. 64% of that value, about \$479 million, is taxable. Exempt from taxation are 32% of properties, or 241 parcels, with a value of about \$239.5 million. Veterans, seniors and businesses account for the remaining 4 percent that make up the partially exempt category. Last May the Board of Assessment Review considered 145 petitions for reduced assessments. 78 of those were successful in reducing the value to \$1,276,750, with a tax impact of about \$18,000. Four Small Claims cases for residential properties reduced values by another \$62,500 and shaved another \$902.50 off the city's tax revenues. Several industrial properties have yet to be settled and could have a \$183,497 impact on the city's taxes.

While the city continues to lose population and our assessed property value has diminished, the city is trying to improve our neighborhoods and upgrade the housing stock for the future. I have established several new committees that are forging ahead in creative ways. Our Neighborhood Preservation Committee mobilized volunteers and picked up trash and sent police and codes officials door to door, spearheading an effort to bring people together and improve safety where we live. We also passed landlord registration that will be in effect this year and succeeded in making a healthier atmosphere for our children by gaining approval for Young Lungs at Play signs in our city's parks. The Safe Routes to School Project at present. Lighting is in place and we will start sidewalks in the spring. All is being done in conjunction with the school district to save costs and increase safety. A Water and Sewer Committee is updating the utilities billing, the fees and fines committee will be reviewing some of the outdated fees for service. A Labor Committee has had input in regards to hiring. Thanks to the work of a Fleet Management Committee a dedicated funding line will save money and a Historic Preservation Committee is updating the community's role in preserving our historic properties.

In addition to the bond rating upgrade to A2 and our anticipated move out of deficit financing and fiscal stability, we can look forward to an increase in sales tax and ambulance service revenues. We have also saved more than \$100,000 in interest costs by refinancing a portion of our debt. In the 2010-2011 fiscal year we have held the line on spending in a budget that contained a tax levy increase of 5.6 percent. We have stayed within our budget and paid down \$1.5 million on the debt. We saw no increase for the water rate in the 2010-2011 budget and we've brought our sewer rate structure more in line with a 9% increase sewer rates. New budget lines to fund police equipment and Bartlett House maintenance

will assist in preventing more costly emergency spending, while the new contract with SDS provides additional services such as yard waste disposal which saves money for taxpayers.

2011 will be a challenging year. My first proposed legislation will seek Cattaraugus County's Legislature support after that I will draft a resolution to send a message to NYS legislature and governor's office. A tax cap sounds good, but only if you work together to reform the state's pension system.

The final goal for all should be making our city stronger, working toward practical, common sense solutions, increase revenues and hopefully decrease taxes. Let's work together to make Olean a place we can be proud to call home. I would like to encourage continued public involvement -- always to cause change for the greater good. Please support our local businesses and community organizations. I would encourage all to volunteer when able. In the past year we had over 200 individuals help pick up/paint.

These folks were truly community minded young and old alike. I thank you all again. We will be more productive lending a hand rather than criticizing or spreading empty rhetoric. Let's roll up our sleeves and make 2011 one of our city's best years. Thank you and God's blessings for our fine city and its residents.