

## **State of the City Address- Michelle M. Roman Mayor, City of Lockport February 3, 2021**

I want to take a moment to thank you for your continued dedication to our community during these trying times. I appreciate everyone's cooperation in following the guidelines established by the CDC, the State Department of Health, and the Governor, while we try to reduce the impact of COVID-19 in our community. We are working closely with local and State agencies to maximize our response and to keep our residents safe. Despite this Pause, we are working hard to keep our community moving forward while aiming to maximize the safety of all our residents. Normally the following information relating to COVID-19 protocols would not be part of the State of the City, but it has been almost a year since the COVID Pause first came into place, and it has had a large impact on our city government, our community businesses and organizations, our schools, and our residents. It is important that this information continues to be shared.

Our police and fire departments are working at full staff and are available 24 hours a day. Our water filtration and wastewater treatment plants are staffed and functioning to continue to provide fresh, clean water. Our essential workers in the highways and parks and water distribution departments continue to work on our trees, storm drains and sewers, water lines, as well as taking care of ice and snow removal. Our Building Inspection department, along with our planning and zoning boards, are functioning to help our residents and businesses to continue to move forward with plans of improving properties and our community. Our buildings and grounds team are doing a great job disinfecting City Hall, allowing us to continue to provide city services for our residents and taxpayers in all our departments. However, we are conducting most business remotely, as city hall is available with limited access to allow for contact tracing protocols and COVID-19 health and safety for employees and residents alike. If you want to pay a bill, pay for a ticket, apply for a job, turn in a civil service exam application, or submit other documents, please send them in the mail or drop them off in the night drop box on the side of city hall by the main parking lot. However, if in person business is necessary, you may continue to contact the individual department to arrange for an appointment, and all departments are listed on the City website. Further, our website also has many documents and information, including how to contact each department. Office hours with the Mayor continue uninterrupted with appointments.

City council also continues to work and will continue to hold Common Council meetings virtually. The Council and I will gladly continue to accept public comment via email to the city clerk, and residents may also call live during the meetings, for public comment or during public hearings, by calling (716) 434-1733. All council meetings are streamed live on LCTV.net, viewed live on Spectrum channel 1303, or aired live on the FM radio 90.9. If you are unable to catch them live, you may watch them on demand at LCTV.net. Committee of the Whole (COTW) meetings will be aired at 5:00 every Wednesday, and Common Council meetings will be held at 5:30 on the first and third Wednesdays. I will continue to provide my monthly Mayoral update every third Thursday of the month on LCTV live. You can call in direct during the show with questions you may have for me at: (716) 434-1733. Our various committees and boards are also functioning with virtual meetings, and you may contact the city clerk or mayor's office to get access information to attend all public meetings.

With the COVID Pause impacting everyone's bottom line, including that of the City, we worked on a budget that was fiscally responsible, yet still fulfilling the obligations of the City to its residents and taxpayers. On November 24, 2020, the Common Council approved my proposed Fiscal Year 2021 Budget, as amended by their changes. The Common Council reduced funds, either partially or in its entirety, from individual line items in the proposed FY2021 Budget. The total defunding in the proposed

FY2021 Budget is \$ 263,518. I attempted to use the mayor's veto authority to restore \$78,290 into the budget, as specified in the City Charter, specifically subsections 65 and 66, to restore specific line items in accordance with City contract requirements, OSHA regulations, and public service necessities. Despite my efforts, the majority of the council voted to override all but one veto. These reductions may negatively impact city services over the coming year, most significantly those services utilized by our youth, by eliminating the youth and recreation program and the community pool. Another significant city service that will greatly impact many residents is the reduction of our dog control officer to essentially one day per week.

Despite these hardships, setbacks and fiscal insecurities, Lockport has accomplished much in 2020. Lockport has a lot more to look forward to in 2021, as well. We have started the conversation between our police and our community and will continue to see improvements in communication and training for our police department that serves our community. The City is continuing updates to the infrastructure, including updates to our service pumps in our filtration plant, UV disinfection with our wastewater process, and streetscapes through green infrastructure grant program and other funds. Various streets in our City will be improved both aesthetically, as well as functionally, by reducing the storm water and sanitary overflows into our freshwater system, including but not limited to Washburn St from Walnut St. to South St., South St. from Washburn St. to Locust St., and Pine St. from Walnut St. to Main St. The NYSDEC is working with the city for a clean-up project and replacement of our 30-inch Gulf Interceptor sewer project. This was implemented after an engineering study was provided with a joint effort and funds from the Town of Lockport. Fundraising for a new permanent skate park will be complete this fall, and construction will be complete in 2022. We are in the second year of a three-year equity improvement project. The goal of this project is to ensure all properties are assessed uniformly and to ensure the tax burden is shared fairly with all property owners. The City has updated the calendar for the general assessment process to coincide more closely with the rest of Niagara County, so the exemptions are due March 1, as opposed to May 1. We are also continuing to impact on the ten-million-dollar downtown revitalization initiative, including the small project fund of over a half a million dollars to help our small businesses in the downtown corridor to make meaningful improvements to their properties. Another exciting project we will be conducting over the next eighteen months is the update to the City's comprehensive plan, which was last done over 23 years ago. This will include a comprehensive re-zoning of the city to allow for residents and businesses alike to have a level playing field for potential improvements to their properties. This project will also aid in the ability of the city to qualify for even more grants in the future, further enhancing our City. None of this is possible without the hard work and dedication of our elected officials who approve them, collaboration with our community partners, and most especially the city employees.

Lastly, our local businesses continue to need our support more than ever, as we slowly emerge from the fog that Covid-19 has placed on our business owners and our community. Please do your best to support our community's businesses while continuing to follow the social distancing guidelines. This is just another example of adversity that the residents of Lockport face. But we are a strong and resilient community! We will rise to the challenges that we face as a community, and we will overcome them together. Stay safe, stay healthy and be kind.

Warm regards,

Michelle M Roman  
Mayor  
City of Lockport