

State of the City Address- Michelle M. Roman Mayor, City of Lockport January 26, 2022

Good evening. I first 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 keep our residents safe. Despite this continued battle with COVID-19, 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 two years 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. Therefore, it is important that this information continues to be shared. The City just received 600 Home Test Kits for COVID and will be giving them out to city residents this Saturday, January 29, from 10am-12pm, in front of the city police department. To receive an at-home test kit, please enter the one-way driveway between city hall and the old Kendzie's building, from Main Street. Proceed north and the police department will be there to hand off kits through your window, until we run out of kits. You will then exit onto Niagara Street.

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, sewers, and water lines, as well as taking care of ice and snow removal. 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 continuing to offer the ability of residents to conduct most business remotely, as we know not everyone is comfortable coming to city hall, or in public spaces, at this time. If in-person business is necessary, you may contact the individual department to arrange for an appointment or stop in at one of our windows. The 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 communities. If you want to 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. The city now accepts on-line payments for a nominal fee, and you can set up an ACH account with your bank for free. You may also drop off payments in the night drop off box, or you can pay in person in the Treasurer's Office at the window. Our website has many documents and information, including how to contact each department. Office hours with the Mayor continue uninterrupted with appointments. As a reminder, all visitors to City buildings must continue to follow the mask mandate.

City council also continues to work and will continue to hold Common Council meetings, but we will continue to accept public comment via email to the city clerk, as well as in person at the podium during allotted times. We have a new schedule that is in effect with the newly elected

common council, consisting of four new members and two previous council members. All meetings will be on the second and fourth Wednesdays starting at 5:30pm with the finance meeting in m-24, then the work session of the Committee of the Whole is at 6:00pm, immediately followed by the Common Council meeting at 6:30pm. 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. I will continue to provide my monthly Mayoral update every third Thursday of the month on LCTV channel 1303 live on their Access to Government Ask the Mayor program. You can call in direct during the show with questions. Our various committees and boards are also functioning with a hybrid of virtual and in-person meetings, 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 the city, we worked on a budget that was fiscally responsible, yet still fulfilling the obligations of the city to its residents and taxpayers. In November of 2021, the Common Council approved my proposed Fiscal Year 2021 Budget, as amended by their changes. With the supplemental aid from both the state and federal levels we have invested in much needed capital equipment- two new street sweepers have been delivered, a new sewer vacuum, two bucket trucks, one for the city electrician and one for the forestry division, a dump truck with plow and wing, as well as a new pothole truck are all on order and awaiting delivery. We will be installing a new generator at our raw water pump station in NT and hope to replace the apron at the fire and police station areas of city hall with the remaining funds from the federal COVID relief bill. We have plans to improve the traffic areas of Washburn and East Avenue, as well as Lincoln and Locust by the high school. We are partnering with the Lockport City School District on the latter, to ensure the safety of students and pedestrians at that corner. We will also be sending out an RFP soon to have East Avenue milled and paved from Cleveland Place to Washburn, thanks to the additional funding from the state for our touring routes of 31 and 78. Our crews continue to improve the amount of roads that they are repairing and paving each year. Since 2019, they have worked on almost 30 miles of roads, which is significantly more than the previous eight years.

Despite these hardships, setbacks and fiscal insecurities, Lockport has accomplished much in 2021. Lockport has a lot more to look forward to in 2022, 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. Washburn St from Walnut to South, South from Washburn to Locust, and Pine St from Walnut to Main will all be improved both aesthetically, as well as functionally, reducing the storm water and sanitary overflows into our freshwater system. 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. The EPA is gaining the funds necessary to move forward on their clean-up project of the superfund site of 18-mile creek in lower town and the City is cooperating with same. Similar to the partnership with the DEC on

the Gulf project, the EPA is allowing the city to repurpose a pipe they will be using to divert the creek during clean-up for our sewer flow into the wastewater treatment facility, saving the city significant time and money on completing this project. Talks with community organizations for possible public use of the site once it is safe is in the works, as well.

With the support of the common council, we also started re-investing in our parks, which will continue in 2022. Partnering with the VFW and local labor organizations, along with \$5,000 the common council appropriated and \$5,000 from the Grigg-Lewis foundation, the Hero's Way Memorial will be installed in the spring of this year in Outwater Park. Fundraising for a new permanent skate park was completed thanks to our partnership with Lockport Community Services, Inc., and Friends of the Railyard, as well as foundation support by Grigg-Lewis, Ralph Wilson Jr Foundation, Oshei Foundation, Geico, Verizon, and more, thus allowing construction to be complete by the fall of this year. We have been notified of a grant through the Canal Corporation to improve our trail along the Market Street and Erie Canal on the south side of North Adam Street Bridge, and look forward to the completion of this project with another partnership with community organizations like the Rotary Club.

The Downtown Revitalization Initiative projects across the downtown are starting to begin. Including the streetscapes previously mentioned, the city will see improvements at key properties across the downtown area including the Palace Theater, the old Post Office, the Tuscarora Club, the old electric building on Pine Street, as well as many other smaller projects, funded by over a half a million of the ten million dollars that local small businesses were able to take advantage of for improvements on their properties. We are in the final 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. Another exciting project we will be continuing 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.

Our Community Development office has been working diligently to obtain grants to help city homeowners, potential homeowners, businesses, and community organizations. Community Development has been implementing an \$800,000 first time home buyer program, which offers grants in the form of deferred loans for individuals and families that meet income eligibility to purchase their first home. We also applied for a \$500,000 home improvement program, which, if the city were to receive this award, will assist income eligible homeowners in making necessary improvements to their homes to meet codes, including but not limited to roof, window, and door replacements, and updating or replacing furnaces. .

On the business side, Community Development has secured a \$300,000 microenterprise grant program that was launched towards the end of 2021. The City also secured \$845,000 in CARES Act funding to support businesses and public facilities-in this case the Dale Association and

Briarwood. We are waiting for a final “release of funds” from the State in order to launch that program. Additionally, the GLDC has been implementing the DRI Small Project Fund and overseeing about 20 projects that received grant funds for improvements to their buildings, like roofs and façade improvements. Only three projects have been completed thus far, so there is still a lot to come in 2022. Contact community development by phone at 716-439-6686, or check out the city’s website, for more information.

Our finance department, spearheaded by our Director of Finance has been working on continuing to improve the City’s finances. The city now provides detailed annual budgets on-line with clarifications and rationale for financial decisions. For the first time since 2015, the city received an essentially clean audit from the state with minor suggestions for improvement. We have settled the last two outstanding labor contracts in the last year, which helps stabilize the city’s financial future, and helps support a solid plan for moving forward. We are in year two of the three-year plan with hiring twelve firefighters in increments of four per year. Their manning will be at eight per shift after all the new hires are trained. Next year we will complete the court ordered settlement, bringing the Department up to the safety standard minimum of nine per shift. We have been able to comply with this mandate by responsible fiscal planning, which had a minimal financial impact on taxpayers, while still ensuring the safety of our residents.

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. 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 overcome them together. Stay safe, stay healthy, and be kind.

Warm regards,

Michelle Roman
Mayor
City of Lockport

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