**STATE OF THE CITY 2023**

After being in office for a full two years, it is easy to say that the understanding of what municipalities are up against every day is an understatement.

The City Treasurer will begin the 2022 AUDs this month, which will be a regular process; this will be the new Administration's financials. Due to prior administration not filing AUDs, it has taken this administration two years to forensically piece together 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021, and financial professionals state that this was quite a feat considering what needed to be done. The City will be going for bonding in 2024 and will also have the ability to move forward with Grant writing for many projects down the road. Several City projects have been completed through the City's general fund, chips, and other sources. Water rent money has funded water projects such as meter change out, Linden Ave, door and lighting, new boiler, and more. Many projects are in the works, so we are just waiting for the bonding process to start. City Treasurer Tom Herr and Deputy Treasurer Cindy Albertine have worked diligently to bring this City up to date as they bring the Treasurer's Department into the 21st Century. The vision of this department in a year will look very different as far as efficiency goes.

The City has made remarkable strides with past-due tax collection. Two years ago, the City was 6-7 years behind in tax collecting, and as of today, the last of the past due taxes (2018-21) are being processed. This was quite a feat and will make the talks with the County, regarding taking over tax collection, much smoother; this is a service that Fulton County provides all municipalities within the County. Thank you to Carrie, Cindy, and Attorney Albanese for making this happen.

The City has completed a two-year MOA with all the Unions, which will give the City time to get all financials in order and be prepared to negotiate the 4-year contract starting later this year.

I am pleased with the Budget that this Administration passed with a 2% tax increase - an immense achievement! With all that has been done and still needs to be done, our City is in a great position to accomplish many projects this year. We will be back on track and implementing new changes to make the City more efficient. The City's Human Resource Manager has made great strides in finding cost savings in active and retired employee medical plans. This is just one example of cost savings that has helped the City keep the tax increase low. This Administration will always strive to find cost savings and keep us on track to be fiscally conservative of taxpayer money!

This Administration has put the Johnstown Loan Fund back on track. With the partnership of the Center for Regional Growth, we have successfully processed three business loans for City of Johnstown businesses. Without this fund, these businesses might not have had the opportunity or the financial history to receive a loan, so this is an excellent avenue for a potential last loan option. The Center for Regional Growth has formed a committee that reviews each loan and decides on project worthiness and the ability to repay the loan. The City will continue this loan fund as long as the money keeps being recycled back into the fund.

This year, we have seen the Police Department move forward, with the approval of the Council, to get body Cameras and Tasers. Not all Police Departments can purchase these items due to the expense. Nonetheless, with fiscal planning and research on the part of Chief Gilbo and Captain Johnson, the Council approved, this provides a higher level of protection for both the Public and the Police. The City and the School District have partnered with the Johnstown School District to provide a school resource officer. This was an officer on the police force and transitioned to the school, and it has been a great success. This police department has a community approach to policing, and we are grateful for the protection that they provide to this Community.

The Fire Department and Code Enforcement will see changes as they implement new software for Code Enforcement. This will allow them to work together consistently and accurately when dealing with residents. Thank you, Carrie Allen and Chief Heberer, for putting the time in and researching the software to get it right.

While EMS is a challenge and remains a much-needed service in Johnstown - City Residents are not responsible for its funding. The City has successfully maintained this service for the community by having the ability to run this service out of the fire department and using the staff to assist with the day-to-day operations. With the help of Assemblymen Smullen, the Johnstown Hospital Foundation, and the Johnstown EMS, a much-needed new ambulance was purchased. The Johnstown Ambulance service has the second-highest response calls for Fulton County Emergency Services. The Johnstown Ambulance Service will continue the partnership with Fulton County into 2024.

The City must always continue to work on capital improvements and making the City more efficient. The Council approved the demolition of the former Crescendoe Knit Factory. This will allow the Department of Public Works to store and consolidate equipment and supplies near the DPW Garage. The City approved a new roof for the Dept. of Public Works garage, which is also underway. Due to increased Chip money from the State, we were able to pave significantly more streets than in years past. The Department of Public Works continues to work on projects around the City and keeps the parks and streets looking fantastic. I believe we have one of the best departments of public works, and with leadership from Chris Vose and Jeff Putnam, they get things done.

After finishing a full year of taking over complete control of the water system, we have accomplished a lot. The water line on Linden Ave has been completed. We are approximately 80% done with the meter change out - this project was quite an undertaking but has been successful. We had excellent cooperation with City residents and are thankful for the partnership with Hydro Pro, Ty Sales, and Neptune, who continued to tell us that this was one of the best projects to work on. The City has agreed on the Town of Johnstown Aspen Hills Water District contract; this contract had not been in place for over 10 years. The City now has a licensed IIA operator, a licensed Distribution Supervisor, and an IA-licensed contractor, with plans to continue training additional employees on their path to licensing. The City is grateful for all the hard work of John Denmark, the City's head operator. John has kept these facilities top-notch and has trained operators on a complicated system.

There have been many projects completed already this year, and we will be moving forward on the larger projects this spring, such as the replacement of valves, Abel Drive, Route 30A project, and many more when bonding comes into play. Chris Vose, the City Engineer, has been working diligently on projects with other Engineers and the State to be shovel-ready for water infrastructure needs. Chris has also obtained a Water Distribution License to ensure the City is covered by the State requirements when working on waterline projects or water main breaks, which is in addition to the other operators. Thanks, Chris.

The City is looking forward to a great 2024. The Community will soon see new signs this spring at all the entrances to the City. In partnership with the Elizabeth Cady Stanton Consortium, the City will upgrade these signs that read "The Home of Elizabeth Cady Stanton." The City thanks this organization for its partnership to promote the City of Johnstown.

We have added funding for a position to promote the City of Johnstown, City of Johnstown businesses, tourism to the City and the significant history we offer. This position will handle City of Johnstown tourism social media outlets to promote all that the City of Johnstown offers.

The City will complete the extensive process of updating and revising the Code of Ordinance this year. The City Clerk has been working with General Code to complete this project. The Code of Ordinance has not been updated since 1969. Thank you, Carrie. Carrie will also be implementing mass notification software through Civic Plus. This will allow the City to notify sections of the City or the whole City on emergency notifications. All residents should look for the information to come to sign up. The City will begin its street lighting project this spring, ultimately saving city taxpayers money and producing more efficient streetlights. The City will be looking to demolish some properties that have been eyesores for years and create more space for much-needed parking and the potential for property back on the tax rolls. We will also move forward in paving City parking lots and improving the downtown landscape.

As your Mayor, I have many goals for the City. One goal I will be working diligently on is more green space for the City, and there are so many opportunities to accomplish this. I will be engaging with grant writers to begin putting the City of Johnstown in a position of opportunity with State and Federal grants to move forward - like all surrounding communities have benefited from. One of my first priorities is controlling the blight situation in the City. The Code Enforcement and Department of Public Works continue to fight this battle. We will continue to work to make this City clean and welcoming. We will also implement a Landlord Registry, which will allow us to promptly enforce Codes with property owners to be accountable for property infractions in real time, even if they do not reside locally.

I am personally looking forward to 2024 and getting ready for great things for the City of Johnstown! I want to thank all the City employees for working hard and getting things done! You are appreciated.

Happy and Healthy New Year to all!