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## STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

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(PHOTO: Rye City Mayor Joe Sack during the inauguration ceremony on January 3, 2016.)

The following State of the City address was delivered by Rye Mayor Joe Sack at Rye City Hall on Wednesday, January 13, 2015.

What do you think? Leave a comment below.

### **State of the City**

**January 13, 2016**

#### **Rye Mayor Joe Sack**

First, as we start the New Year, I would like to welcome two new members of the Rye City Council – Danielle Tagger-Epstein and Emily Hurd. I would also like to welcome back Council member Richard Mecca. Congratulations and good luck to you all.

Further, I would like to recognize all former Council members and current elected officials who are present.

We have as our most special guests this evening, the fourth and fifth grade student government leaders from the Midland, Milton and Osborn schools.

When you hear your name, please stand and remain standing until I have called all names.

#### **Midland School:**

Kyan Cox  
Lucca Cristiano  
Casey Delfs  
Maelin Doran  
Andrew Lukes  
Owen Myers  
Lara Nemeth  
Lily O'Connor  
Charles Reddoch  
Avery Smith  
Ryan Wade  
Charlie Williams

#### **Milton School:**

Thomas Anderson  
Paddy Harrigan  
Hannah Keegan  
James Kennedy  
Ellie Kruijtzer  
Brette Moore  
Maggie O'Connor  
Henry Paul  
Kendall Reidy  
Kendall Scansaroli  
Marra Storey  
Amalie Tuypens  
Nick Vlasto  
Meredith Ward

#### **Osborn School:**

Graham Alban  
Delia Bajuk  
Bri Bieber  
Tyler Canna  
Delia Degnan  
Dylan Garbutt  
Emily Hirsch

Alli Hochberg  
Ian Khemlani  
Samantha Khemlani  
AJ Miller  
Laura Morris  
Noel Regan  
Julian Rozowsky  
Scarlett Russo  
Jake Sammon  
Dillion Schmidt

I would like to thank the school principals, Jim Boylan, Joanne Nardone and Angela Garcia, as well as Mary Partington, Michelle Johnson and Laura O'Leary, for their help in arranging the students to be present. I would also like to thank Superintendent Frank Alvarez, Dr. Betty Ann Wyks, and Board President Katy Glassberg for working as partners on issues that affect us all.

Girls and boys, you have ahead of you: middle school and high school, college and beyond, and unlimited potential. That may seem like a long road, but I assure you, as the parent of three daughters myself, all about your age, it goes by very quickly.

And indeed Katie, Allie and Mary Sack are here tonight. It's not too embarrassing to be the mayor's daughter, is it?

You may someday move away from Rye, but when you put roots down elsewhere, you will draw strength from the memory of the community in which you were raised.

And for those of you who will return to Rye to raise families of your own, as far off as that may seem, you will no doubt take leadership roles in organizations which have served as pillars of our community – the Rye Little League, the Rye Arts Center, the Rye Nature Center, the Rye Free Reading Room.

I am sure that among you right now are future City Council members, a future Mayor of Rye.

Because of you, and because of your families, the state of our City is strong, and will continue to be strong.

My colleagues and I on the City Council play important roles. However, we are volunteers and serve in a part-time capacity. We all have careers and other responsibilities aside and apart from our public service.

The day-to-day operations of the City are run by a full-time professional Rye City Manager, who oversees all other Rye City employees. Therefore, one of the most important responsibilities that the City Council has is to hire a good and trustworthy person to fill this role.

In 2015, we did just that when our long and diligent search led us to Marcus Serrano.

Our top mandate to Marcus has been, and continues to be, to lead City operations in an open, honest and responsive manner. In short order, Marcus has exceeded our high expectations in that regard. Marcus, we are very glad that you are here.

Subsequently, Marcus proceeded to select two new key City department heads, with the hiring of Michael Corcoran as Police Commissioner and Carolyn D'Andrea as City Clerk, bringing fresh perspectives to Police Headquarters and to City Hall. Michael and Carolyn will continue to make significant contributions towards solidifying the public's renewed trust and confidence in our City government.

They have joined top-notch veterans on the City staff, who are also here tonight:

- Assistant City Manager Eleanor Militana;
- Recreation Superintendent Sally Rogol;
- Assessor Noreen Whitty;
- Planner Christian Miller;
- Engineer Ryan Coyne;
- Building Inspector Maureen Eckman;
- Comptroller Joe Fazzino;
- Golf Club GM Jim Buonaiuto;
- Personnel Manager Maryann Cianci;
- Corporation Counsel Kristen Wilson

- Fire Lt. Kurt Tietjen;
- Boat Basin Supervisor Pete Fox; and
- Cable Coordinator Nicole Levitsky.

Thank you to all City employees for the great work that you do, day-in and day-out. Like Fred Astaire dancing, you do it so well, that you make something quite difficult look rather effortless. Your service helps make Rye such a terrific place to live.

In 2015, together we achieved good outcomes on a number of long-standing issues, including:

- the passage of historic new rock-chipping legislation;
- the creation of a new downtown historic district;
- the implementation of the innovative new off-leash dog policy at Rye Town Park;
- the successful search for and retention of a new insurance broker;
- the investment of \$1 million dollars in repaving our roads;
- the approval of rezoning for a senior housing project on the site of a vacant building on Old Post Road; and
- with the help of Council members Terry McCartney and Kirstin Bucci especially, the navigation of a difficult summer at Rye Golf Club which saw the closing of greens, but which culminated in a positive financial resolution.

How did we do it? In the words of former Mayor and Judge John Carey: hard work, team work, imagination and guts, from all seven members of the Council. And by the way, John has been a tremendous resource and role model for me as I have developed in my role as mayor.

For the past two years, the City Council has worked very hard to set a new trend in how we conduct our business.

In dealing with the public, the Council has been committed to listening to and considering all good-faith points of view. While residents sometimes hold passionately to one perspective or another, which is their right, Council members do not have the luxury of serving only as partisan advocates.

In dealing with the City Manager and his staff, the Council has chosen to encourage creativity and to allow our professionals the leeway to do their jobs, while also appropriately exercising a necessary level of guidance and oversight.

In dealing with each other, the Council has made an affirmative effort to develop consensus around workable solutions. Members of the Council have had, and no doubt will continue to have, differing points of view on the substance of issues. But we have been united in supporting a process of productively working through disagreements.

Moreover, the Council has learned that achieving buy-in from all members on controversial issues carries greater moral value, and garners wider and deeper acceptance, especially when public opinion is initially divided. We have found that it is better to be personally effective, than to take uncompromising stands or to engage in political posturing, which serves no beneficial purpose.

Collaboration and equanimity have been our hallmarks. This has generated good will and mutual respect in our community. Residents appreciate it, expect it, and deserve it. Let's keep the positive momentum going.

At the end of the day, we are one community. We are One Rye.

This approach will continue to be essential as we address other new and continuing issues in 2016, including:

- the negotiation of new collective bargaining agreements, which deal with unchecked long-term health care liabilities;
- the re-structuring of our fire department, to provide for appropriate supervision and to re-calibrate the dynamics between professional and volunteer members;
- the establishment of better emergency preparedness protocols and

- procedures;  
the publication of a revised Master Plan for the next 30 years;
- the continued monitoring of Port Chester's plans at the former United Hospital site;
- the resolution of the continuing litigation at the Rye Golf Club;
- the activation of a comprehensive deer control strategy;
- the development of a plan to meet sewer line influx and infiltration requirements;
- the maintenance of forward progress at Rye Town Park, in partnership with our neighboring municipalities, as we look to negotiate new contracts for park amenities;
- at the Boat Basin, a continued search for new revenue and planning for the future;
- at Playland, a continued commitment to protecting Rye's interests;
- the purchase of energy efficient lighting and green technology;
- the study of a City-wide 25 MPH speed limit;
- the implementation of flood mitigation strategies using the promised New York Rising grant money;
- the funding and prioritizing of other needed infrastructure improvements;
- the consideration of a Charter change to increase our relatively low debt limit;  
and
- the overall achievement of preserving both essential and desired City services in a tax-capped environment with ever-increasing costs.

This presentation summarizes just a partial list of our past highlights, and our new challenges ahead. We have a lot on our plate, but we look forward to rising to the occasion.

Sadly, 2015 marked the loss of two of Rye's most prominent citizens: John Carolin and Judge Peter Lane.

John was 99 years old when he passed, but he was one of the youngest people I knew. He was a kindred spirit – we both benefitted from a Jesuit education – and I admired his unique combination of rectitude and irreverence.

Peter was a fine jurist, a caring family man, a trusted confidante, and – truth be told – a first-class schmoozer. As mayor, as in life, Peter always beseeched me to be “presidential.” And I hope that that word does not lose its true meaning in today's world of less than inspiring national political candidates.

It must also be noted that in the last year or so, three former Mayors of Rye have died: Warren Ross, Fred Hunziker and Ed Grainger. On the wall in this Council chamber are affixed their portraits, which now serve as eternal tributes to their great service to our City.

Along with luminaries such as Theodore Fremd, John Motley Morehead, Livingston Platt and Clay Johnson, Ed Grainger is one of Rye's most famous mayors, for his role during the late 1960's and early 1970's in fighting New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller and the powerful Robert Moses over their plans to build a bridge from Oyster Bay, across the Long Island Sound, and right through the heart of Rye. Ed will always be remembered for winning that fight and saving our community.

Not long ago, in December 2014, at the celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of City Hall, Ed regaled us from this very spot, about how he did it. That videotape, which you can find on the City website, is quite a piece of oral history. I'd encourage you students to take a look, and maybe even do a report for some extra credit at school.

I'd like to recognize Mayor Grainger's wife, Mrs. Ginie Grainger. I'd also like to recognize Ed and Ginie's daughter and son-in-law, Kathy and John Hobbins, and their grand-daughters, Samantha and Tori. Kathy serves on our Board of Architectural Review, and the girls attend Osborn school. Thank you for all your family has done and continues to do for Rye across multiple generations.

Unbelievably, the same threat which Mayor Grainger thwarted over 40 years ago is upon us again. Last week, Governor Cuomo announced plans to study not a bridge, but a tunnel, from Long Island, possibly to Westchester, possibly through Rye.

The resulting construction and traffic would have devastating impacts on the Sound Shore region. In Rye, it would forever alter for the worse our quality of life.

Another former Rye Mayor, Steve Otis, whose picture also hangs on the wall, now serves us in the state legislature, as does former Council member George Latimer. I am confident that they will strongly represent our interests on this issue in Albany.

I myself would encourage Governor Cuomo to think more like a mayor. He ought to consider the impacts that this project would have on what matters most to most people – the place we live with our families, the place we call home.

The Governor should know that we will vigorously oppose any bridge or tunnel that interferes with the homes and environment of our City. And we pledge to support other Sound Shore communities in their opposition to any bridge or tunnel running through their towns.

Just as the bumper stickers from decades ago implored the Governor to “Ban the Bridge,” the rallying cry today from the City of Rye’s perspective must be “Topple the Tunnel.”

Earlier this month, at the new Council member swearing in, Resurrection Church pastor Monsignor Dwyer referenced in his Invocation: “We pray especially for the well-being of our young people. Some of our kids are over-worked, stressed out and too busy. This leads to poor judgment and dangerous behaviors. Lord, there are incidents in our community of teen-agers who are playing with fire by abusing alcohol, prescription drugs, and other illegal substances. Oh God, help us to admit that this is a problem, and guide us to a solution.”

At the start of 2016, Monsignor vocalized simply but powerfully in a public forum, what has been in the front of our minds, and what we have been speaking about privately and quietly amongst ourselves. As we set our priorities for the coming year and into the future, we can set none higher than raising awareness about and dealing with this issue.

Girls and boys: You, the children in this room, represent the most precious asset and treasure that we have, and we ought to do more to address this difficult but important topic.

To that end, we should all support the efforts of the newly-formed alcohol and drug coalition, comprised of a variety of local organizations and individuals, called Rye-ACT (Rye Action for Children and Teens) and led by one of our own, Julie Killian. The coalition is committed to promoting long-term health and wellness by inspiring youth, parents and community leaders to foster healthy behaviors and reduce youth substance use.

As we begin 2016 together, there is change, there is always change. Change to the composition of the Council, change to our priorities, and even change to these very Council chambers. Within the next few weeks, this stately room will be completely re-furnished with a new coat of paint, new (and more comfortable!) chairs, and a new floor.

We must always be ready for change, and we must inevitably embrace change. But as we move forward, we may also take solace in the immutable constants in our City, in our beloved Rye. And that always begins and ends with our mutual support for, and fidelity to each other.

Thank you, God Bless you, and God Bless Rye.