

2019 SOTC – Syracuse, New York

In the same way a spark can kindle a roaring fire, the right job experience for a young person at the right time can change the trajectory of a life. It can change a community. Even the world.

Taveon Stenson spent his early childhood years in Pioneer Homes on South McBride Street on the city's near Southside. He grew up under the watchful eye of his mother, Kimberly, in various neighborhoods in the city during his middle and high school years. Taveon played basketball, loved art and as a student at ITC, he considered a career in digital media. He started down that path after high school.

But a summer job with the city-supported Onondaga Earth Corp, a youth program that focuses on caring for our environment, pointed Taveon in a different direction. He worked in parks and gardens and wooded areas, alongside residents of the city and other young people. He learned new skills and saw new possibilities for his passion for art.

Two months ago, Taveon represented the city of Syracuse and Earth Corp as a speaker at the Partners in Community Forestry program in California.

At OCC last month, Taveon finished his first semester of study in Agricultural Technology. He currently lives on the Southside near Kirk Park and is now an assistant leader of an Earth Corp pruning and tree crew. At 21 years old, Taveon is a strong, confident person. And he is set on completing his prerequisites at OCC and earning a degree in Landscape Architecture at SUNY ESF. His artistic talents will make a lasting impact on the sites and spaces here in Syracuse or, perhaps, elsewhere in the world.

Taveon represents the importance of giving young people in our city meaningful job opportunities. Taveon, Kimberly, and Greg Michel of Onondaga Earth Corp, are here with us tonight. Please stand up so we can recognize you.

Madam President and members of the Common Council, in accordance with the Charter of the city of Syracuse, it is my honor to deliver to you tonight the State of the City of Syracuse as we begin 2019.

We have many important partners here with us tonight: Assemblyman Bill Magnarelli, Assemblyman Al Stirpe, Senator Rachel May, Senator Bob Antonacci, many representatives of our federal and state government, including the Governor's office, County Executive McMahon, Chairman Knapp, members of the County Legislature, Superintendent Alicea, President Dorsey, Vice President Sojewicz and members of the school board, members of the Youth Advisory Council, Deputy Mayor Owens,

Chancellor Syverud, President LeMura, all of my outstanding Department Heads, and many city employees, thank you for joining us this evening, demonstrating your strong support for the city of Syracuse.

I especially want to thank Joanie Mahoney, our former County Executive, for her support and partnership. Of the many accomplishments over the past year, there is none more important than the expansion of our Summer Youth Employment program. In partnership with County Executive Mahoney, we increased the number of young people getting paid summer jobs from about 800 to more than 1,100. Joanie, you made my transition easier, provided help whenever we asked and laid a strong base for progress well beyond your service. Both the City and County are better today because of your leadership.

Special thanks the Redhouse for hosting us here tonight. This incredible complex officially opened in June of last year creating another amazing attraction in Downtown Syracuse. From theaters and performing arts centers, to museums and galleries, arts and cultural institutions are powerful forces of quality of life and economic growth in our city and I am honored to be here tonight.

Finally, I'd like to recognize a few special guests in the front row. I'm excited to one of my best friends, Joe Fruscello, here with his mom, Cathy. Joe recently moved back to Syracuse after over a decade in Washington D.C., and he represents what I believe will be a growing trend of young professionals coming home to Syracuse. I'm also thrilled to have my sister Maureen here, who drove in from Rochester just to give her big brother a little moral support. Thanks, Moe. And last but certainly not least, I'd like to acknowledge my wife Lindsay, who is always by my side and without whom none of the accomplishments I highlight tonight would have been possible.

The State of the City

As I embark upon my second year as Mayor, because of the hard work and dedication of city employees, municipal leaders, neighborhood volunteers, and countless city residents, I am pleased to report that the state of our city is stronger than it was when I stood before you a year ago. We continue to face many of the challenges that existed the day I first took office – but we understand them better now. We've built a foundation from which to address them, made progress in many areas in the near-term, and developed a strategy to make even more significant impact over time.

Throughout this year, I've learned a few things about what it takes to solve deep-rooted, even entrenched challenges.

First, you have to have a "True North" – a vision for what a bright future looks like and objectives that all team members can work toward.

Our vision: Syracuse will be a growing city that embraces diversity and creates opportunity for all.

This is our vision because it is what we need. For decades we have been losing population, losing jobs and, for some, losing faith in our collective future. To realize this vision of growth and prosperity, we are focused on executing four objectives:

- Achieving fiscal sustainability
- Delivering city services effectively, efficiently and equitably
- Increasing economic investment and neighborhood stability
- And, providing quality constituent engagement and response.

We set these objectives because they epitomize government's responsibility to have a meaningful and positive impact on our lives. There is a direct connection between the way we execute the daily business of managing this government, and the way each one of you experiences the city as a contributor to your own personal and family well-being. Whether your streets are plowed when you need to leave for work; whether your neighborhoods are well lit and safe for your children to play; whether you can turn on your faucet and know you are drinking clean and safe water. I'm proud to say we've made significant progress on these goals.

The second thing I've grown to appreciate more is that you can't fix what you don't fully understand. We have to dig in to the most difficult challenges, and use data to help us truly understand their drivers and ways we might impact them.

In the early months of my administration, we created the new Office of Accountability, Performance and Innovation.

The API, with support from Bloomberg Philanthropies, is helping spread a data driven culture throughout city government. As its first task, the API created a comprehensive Performance Management program for your government. Using a simple traffic light dashboard system, the program constantly measures and publicly reports our progress in delivering on our vision and objectives. The API team uses data to help us challenge the status quo. It helps us identify key areas to address, develops pilot programs to test solutions, and supports us in measuring the outcomes of the change so we can efficiently scale those that work, and quickly pivot from those that do not.

Finally, and hardest for me to accept, you can't turn a ship – or in our case a city - on a dime. As much as I want to see positive change happen immediately, true community transformation takes time. By leveraging the force of partnership, we have, nonetheless, completed many programs and projects that support critical and immediate needs.

As is customary in a State of the City address, I've prepared a report on the accomplishments of the past year and information on plans ahead in 2019. Something exciting, though, happened earlier this week in Albany. In his 2019 State of the State, Governor Cuomo took special note of what is happening in our city. He reported on a "resurgence" occurring here. And he committed strong support for the Syracuse Surge, a new strategy to ignite growth and economic opportunity in Syracuse and the region.

So before going into what we accomplished in 2018, I'll begin with the story behind the Syracuse Surge and how we believe it will help us achieve our vision of being a growing city.

The Syracuse Surge

The world is changing at a breakneck speed, and virtually every scholar tells us the pace of change in our global society is only getting faster with each passing year. Think about it – this was a car in 1960. Here is a car from 1990 with automated locks and airbag safety technology. Now, here's one from 2018 – this one drives itself around town. And by 2023, we anticipate that a "car" that looks like this will be making its way into cities across the country. The future promised in the Jetsons is finally here.

Technology, the environment and the economy we face in 2019 will be vastly different within even the next five years. Succeeding in these new realities requires us to turn away from the status quo and embrace new ways of doing things. This isn't a "nice to have." It is an imperative for the survival and sustainability of our city. Change is hard, but we've risen to the task of embracing opportunity in new technology before, and I'm certain we can do it again.

The City of Syracuse has a rich history of industrial innovation and leadership. In the First and Second Industrial Revolutions, we experienced unmitigated economic success lasting for more than a century. Driven by innovations in the salt trade, and later manufacturing, the city attracted and sustained a growing, diverse and prosperous community. But during the Third Industrial Revolution, as computing and the internet rapidly changed the economic landscape, the city struggled to capture the progress offered by new technology. For decades, we've felt the results of this decline. It is core to the entrenched, generational poverty that plagues our city and our citizens. Today, Syracuse has a once in a generation opportunity to leap into the future, to avoid decades of further division, growing income inequality and declining quality of life.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution depends on connectivity - to one another, to jobs, to the internet, devices and data. We connect with each other from far corners of the world through a smartphone. We learn through online communities using real-time data feeds. We innovate, build businesses and find jobs through online platforms. We compete in a marketplace based on faster internet speeds and higher quality data

connections. This landscape will continue to grow, evolve and change. Through investment and planning, the city can influence how quickly and equitably the changes occur here, and we can prepare our workforce and businesses to capture the prosperity they offer.

The first step in our surge forward has already been taken. Thanks to a partnership with the Common Council, the City of Syracuse is purchasing the more than 17,500 street lights that are located through our city. This smart investment immediately helps us further our progress toward each of our goals, while also providing us a platform to achieve our vision.

The acquisition of the street lights will deliver more than \$3 million in annual savings to our operating budget, based on maintenance and energy efficiencies, helping us take a meaningful step closer to fiscal sustainability. Part of the upgrade also includes the installation of a network that connects every light to a central operating system. We have sample units in the lobby you can take a look at after.

We'll know the moment a light goes out, allowing us to provide a better, proactive service – you won't have to call us anymore with your light post number to let us know a light in your neighborhood needs attention. The quality of lighting will be better – more natural and attractive. And we'll be able to control the brightness of the lights so in the event of an emergency, our first responders can see the situation more clearly.

Tonight, I'm pleased to announce that in partnership with Governor Cuomo and the New York Power Authority, we have selected Cimcon Lighting, along with Presidio and Cisco, to implement the street light project and also to make Syracuse the flagship smart city in New York State. Cimcon is the world's leading provider of intelligent wireless outdoor lighting and is on the cutting edge of smart city solutions.

You may have heard the term "smart city" before – and like me, you may have had some questions about what it means and why it matters to Syracuse. Being a "smart city" increasingly means leveraging technology to advance our economy and create opportunity for all of our citizens.

The city and region are already taking steps to invest, modernize, and build. In recent years, Syracuse has positioned itself as a national leader in smart technology development. The Central New York Region, with support from Governor Cuomo and New York State, are leading industries of the future, like Unmanned Aircraft Systems and Cyber Security, which align well with two of the premier Career and Technical Education programs in our school district.

The plan to capitalize on those decisions and to make Syracuse a world leader in the Fourth Industrial Revolution is the Syracuse Surge. It will jumpstart investment to create economic growth, shared prosperity and neighborhood transformation.

The Surge will be fueled by more than \$200 million in public and private funding committed already. With Governor Cuomo's strong support for the Syracuse Surge and additional support from New York State, Syracuse will surge forward, bypassing old divides, and connecting our people, our businesses, and our region to the future.

The Syracuse Surge will rise on a signature investment: The Southside Campus for the New Economy. The Campus will comprise several properties in the area Southeast of downtown, leveraging the momentum created by the more than \$125 million invested there over the last six years.

The Southside Campus will provide opportunity for a section of the city that was devastated by decisions of the past. This neighborhood sits in the shadow of the hulking Interstate 81 Viaduct. A new organization, Blueprint15, has been formed to develop a bold vision for the holistic revitalization of this neighborhood. The city in partnership with the Syracuse Housing Authority, Syracuse School District, the Allyn Foundation, along with community leaders and residents, intends to restore the neighborhood to a place of hope and optimism that was the hallmark of the old 15th ward.

The Campus will have best-in-class broadband and the ability to seamlessly pull data from sensors across the City, enabling unparalleled opportunities to teach and learn in innovative new secondary, post-secondary and vocational programs.

The predominant feature of the campus will be a new regional Science Technology Engineering Arts and Math – or STEAM – school. It will be built in a fully restored and modernized former Central High School, an historic gem that has awaited reuse for decades. The school, planned in a partnership between the city, the county, school district and OCM BOCES will capitalize on the city's success in career and technical education, making it available to students from districts throughout the region. Additionally, the Southside Campus will house an expanded workforce development center in the fully renovated and expanded SUNY Educational Opportunity Center complex adjacent to the STEAM School.

The Campus and adjacent investments will combine a strong private sector employment base with policy, research and development centers, fueling growth from new and established businesses. Two strategic investments will support this growth.

The New York Center for Smart Cities will be a first of its kind space in the State and the Country. The Center will allow for maximized service delivery and minimized costs, while generating revenue for the City. It will be home to a Municipal Command

Center, where practitioners from across regional government departments can come together to learn from the data captured by the Street Light network in order to make better realtime decisions on the best way to deploy municipal resources.

For example, in the case of a major building fire, the municipal command center would be able to quickly pull up the history of incidents at that property. They'll have information about its most recent inspections, the number of people currently in the building, and a live feed of the incident from a drone flying above and transmitting video over the network.

Second, the Center City Innovation Hub – an expansion of the innovation infrastructure at the Southern end of downtown. On Warren Street, the spine of the Center City Innovation Hub, there has been unprecedented growth, fueled by the organic expansion of our tech industry. Right now, it's bursting at the seams, with local companies like TCG Player, SpinCar, and Ephesus growing in our innovation district. The Center City Innovation Hub will provide the infrastructure necessary for ongoing growth of our innovation economy. Future plans include expanding the Tech Garden and executing major improvements to the street scape around AXA Plaza and the nearby convention district.

The Southside Campus will build on the formative work of Assemblywoman Pam Hunter and her tireless focus on the needs of the Southside neighborhood. Her Southeast Gateway initiative is the spark that has touched off other important projects in the area already, and I look forward to working with her complete the transformation.

The Surge will benefit business corridors and neighborhoods across the city. Development happening along West Onondaga Street and South Avenue; on the Northside around St. Joseph's Hospital; through the Near Westside Initiative; and even emerging on the near Eastside provide starting points for similar investment and growth strategies. Ripples of opportunity from the Southside will spread to every quadrant of the city.

The signs of progress are already happening. Look no further than West Onondaga Street where there is significant development activity occurring, including the expansion of Medical Answering Services, the successful Salt City Coffee, and the announcement this week of a new Pathfinder Bank branch, to be located across the street in a soon-to-be-restored mansion on West Onondaga.

The Syracuse Surge is a big plan, probably the biggest economic growth initiative ever put forth by the city of Syracuse. But it is not a city program alone. Over the past few months, we've been working in close association with our partners in the government, business and the non-profit community. These discussions represent the unprecedented partnership our community needs to prosper. And I have great

confidence in its promise and am determined to spend every minute I have as Mayor making it a reality.

I also want to thank my colleagues at City Hall for helping construct the Surge strategy – my senior staff, department heads and many city employees who have worked very hard this year analyzing needs and coming up with solutions.

Fiscal Sustainability

If you haven't picked up on it yet, I'm pretty excited about the Syracuse Surge, and I hope you are now too. But I'm also proud of all of the other actions we've taken this year to stabilize our fiscal condition, improve city services and strengthen our neighborhoods. These actions are essential to be sure the city of Syracuse is on strong enough footing to undertake the Syracuse Surge.

When I started this job, I promised you that I would do everything in my power to put each dollar to its highest and best use. That is the basis of our first objective – achieving fiscal sustainability. It is the foundation of delivering city services, achieving economic growth, supporting our neighborhoods and responding to our constituents. I also believe it is the foundation of growing the city's relationship with each of you. After all, we are the stewards of your money - taxpayer dollars - which I consider a sacred trust and responsibility.

Last year, with unanimous support from the Common Council, we passed a budget that kept departmental spending flat, which required tough choices and sacrifices across the City. We will never solve our fiscal problems, however, by continuing to make cuts to our departments. Instead, we must invest in our workforce and the important work they do for our city, which is where we have focused our attention.

One example is the work we've undertaken to centralize the city's financial operations – a key recommendation from my Transition Team. Currently, we have over 100 fiscal staff city-wide, including 57 employees assigned within individual departments. These are dedicated public servants, many of whom have spent their careers serving the city of Syracuse. But they often operate in silos – an outdated model of doing business, which leaves room for inefficiencies and inconsistencies.

With partnership from our employees and their unions, I formed a financial operations "Tiger Team" – a dedicated group of our top financial talent. They've spent the last four months piloting centralized purchasing and bill paying, to test whether a new system will work for the city.

So far, it has. We've increased the number of bills paid on time by 30% and decreased the number of errors in our purchasing requests by 62%. We're not only saving the city money, we're also saving employees time and ensuring they have the tools they need to do their job effectively and efficiently.

I believe when you find something that works, you should build on it, replicate it, and maximize its impact. I'm proud to announce that we will expand our pilot in the year ahead, adding in management of accounts receivable for the city and forming additional Tiger Teams to examine centralization of other city functions, beginning with human resources.

Two members of our original Tiger Team, Jenna Vendetti and Denise Bajish, are here with us, and I'd like to ask them to stand, and be recognized for their effort.

In my State of the City address last year, I announced the formation of a Fiscal Advisory Committee, comprised of a cross section of experts on government and finance from our community. Based on their advice – including dedicated work by Common Council Finance Chair Tim Rudd – we applied to and were granted assistance from the New York State Financial Restructuring Board. At no cost to the city, the FRB conducted a comprehensive data driven analysis of city finances. Its report, with non-binding recommendations, will be released early this year and the state will provide up to \$5 million dollars in funding to implement recommendations we accept.

Only a few weeks ago, I announced the most consequential step we can take to achieve fiscal sustainability for the city of Syracuse. The city-county sales tax sharing agreement provides the single largest source of revenue to the city, accounting for about \$85 million this year to fund the operations of city government. The current agreement expires at the end of 2020, but working with County Executive McMahon, we were able to reach an agreement to extend the current terms through 2030. This is a good deal for the city of Syracuse. Following the recent approval by the County Legislature, the agreement is now in the hands of the Common Council, and I commend you all for closely analyzing the terms. As you complete your analysis, I think you will find, as I did, that the proposed agreement is in the best interest of the people of the city, and I urge you to expeditiously approve the extension.

We have Syracuse's fiscal condition heading in the right direction and approval of the sales tax agreement will keep us that way.

Before leaving the topic of our relationship with Onondaga County, I want to recognize Ryan McMahon. He understands both the city and the county deeply and has hit the ground running since taking over as County Executive ten weeks ago. Ryan and I believe strongly in the importance of collaboration, and I look forward to continuing to work with him for the betterment of the city and county.

City Services

Taxpayers care about fiscal sustainability, but I also know they want to see improvements in the way the city provides services. There is good progress to report here, too. If you haven't noticed, winter is officially upon us, so let me start there – with snow removal.

I'm pleased to report all of our plows are currently equipped with new GPS-style devices, and with our fleet now fully equipped for snow removal, DPW put the new technology to work in the most recent storm. In doing so, they were able to accurately check where plows had been and deploy crews more efficiently. If the performance last week is any indication, it's working. We're not where we want to be yet, but with each event, we're making progress. And we are going to keep getting better.

Winter and roads don't always work well together. We all know following the winter season the roads are spotted with potholes. After months of snowplows fighting to keep commutes safe by clearing the snow, the roads have taken a beating. Until now, finding permanent ways to fill potholes in the winter has been difficult. This past fall, though, DPW and the Water department began testing a new kind of asphalt. It can be used in the hottest or coldest temperatures and is meant as a permanent fix. We are currently piloting the new asphalt solution, and if it performs well, we'll use it more widely, reducing the number of times we do repeat fixes on the same potholes, and ultimately leading to smoother roads. The team has already started calling it, "magic asphalt, but I've warned them we may want to manage expectations and make sure it works first!

Roads are essential to our daily well-being, and so is our water system. There are significant challenges to maintaining a water system that, in many places in our city, is a century old. The average of one break per day means we are spending more time chasing problems rather than fixing them before an emergency occurs. I'm pleased to report that this will begin to change this summer. Thanks to support from our state and federal partners, we're repairing and replacing large parts of our water infrastructure. Assemblyman Bill Magnarelli secured \$10 million dollars for major "Dig Once" projects in our city - meaning we will be able to replace the water main, but also fix problems with sewers and reconstruct the road itself - the most cost effective and complete way to take on major infrastructure challenges. There is much more investment needed to truly tackle all our aging infrastructure problems, but as we collaborate and test new approaches, all can be assured that we can execute on large scale projects that will improve the experiences of Syracuse residents and visitors alike.

A critical piece of service delivery includes how you can interact with the city. Last year, I committed to creating more opportunity for paying for services with credit cards. Tonight, I'm pleased to announce the first phase of this roll-out. You can now pay for ice skating at Clinton Square with your credit card. Moving forward, we will expand credit card payment opportunities on everything from swim lessons to taxes. Here's another way we're improving the experience of being in the city: I'm very proud to show you tonight -- in collaboration with Gotcha Bike, Adapt CNY and the Syracuse Bikeshare Committee -- the very first new Syracuse Sync bicycle. When the warmer weather arrives in April, we will have 200 Syracuse Sync bicycles on the streets. People can use them to get to work, go shopping, or just go for a ride. Sync bikes can be left at designated 'mobility hubs' that will be located in neighborhoods

across the city for another rider to use. Riders can pay-per-ride or sign up for a low cost daily, weekly, monthly, or annual membership.

Neighborhoods

Syracuse is a woven fabric of neighborhoods, each unique with their own character yet interdependent to ensure their collective vitality. My street on the west side is connected to blocks around us, and, therefore, to neighborhoods on the other side of town. We all have an interest in safe vibrant neighborhoods. When one neighborhood struggles, we all are affected.

While overall crime was down approximately 10% compared to last year, as a city resident, a father, and as your mayor, I am outraged over the violence that has plagued our city this year. I am shocked and saddened by the way guns have so directly affected teenagers and children in our city. One life taken away is too many. We experienced this horror too often in 2018, and it must stop.

It is immensely difficult, though, to break such cycles of violence. Lasting change will, again, take time, but there is a lot we are doing to start the process and make people's lives safer and better now.

As we sought a new police chief in 2018, my administration engaged in deep conversations about crime, safety and policing with people in every corner of the city. Led by Deputy Mayor Owens, we held ten community meetings, received more than 750 surveys, and met with more than 35 elected officials, public safety experts and clergy leaders. We heard both positives and pained cries for change.

Importantly, we used this data to identify the characteristics our community wished for in a police chief, and we searched nationally for the individual best able to meet those requirements. I am proud to say that we found that individual in Chief Kenton Buckner, who has been on the job in Syracuse for the past six weeks.

Chief Buckner is conducting a top to bottom operational and administrative assessment of the department. He's examining all of its policies and procedures, beginning with use of force and pursuits. The Chief is also preparing to reorganize the department in very noticeable ways. He will move core policing functions closer to the neighborhoods and to the people we serve.

The Chief will increase uniform patrol, so you will see greater police visibility and a push to reduce waiting time for calls for service. And he's creating a new public information office to improve communications with residents.

Chief Buckner's efforts will be helped by more officers. Thanks to support from the Council, I was able to authorize one of the largest ever classes of police cadets in the department. 32 new officers graduated last week and are assigned to patrol on our

streets. The new forces are great, but they barely offset the impact of retirements since they started training. That is why we are going ahead with training and deployment of another class of officers this year.

Under the leadership of Fire Chief Mike Monds and First Deputy Fire Chief Steve Evans, our city Fire Department had an outstanding year. The department graduated its own new class of recruits – 26 additional firefighters. Community outreach has never been stronger. The Department staged a Smoke Detector Block Blitz using data to target homes that were more likely to not have detectors. They installed approximately one thousand new smoke detectors this year, surely steering hundreds of city families from peril. Chief Monds also established a new office of public information.

Saving lives is, of course, the business of the people who work in the Syracuse Fire Department. They do it so well, we take it for granted. Sometimes, though, these great life savers are awed by what the people they serve do, especially when people join together to save a life. What happens then, is a lesson in the power of partnership. Let me share a story.

Sarah Sweeney and Marissa D'Arpino were working their Saturday afternoon shift just before Halloween in the American Eagle store at Destiny USA. It was a busy night on the floor, when there was commotion in the back of the store. Their fellow employee, Kayla Scholz had been found by a co-worker in their break room just as she collapsed to the floor. In perfectly good health at 18 years old, Kayla had suffered sudden cardiac arrest. She was unconscious and not breathing. The call went out to 911.

Incredibly, both Sarah and Marissa knew CPR and for the next eight exhausting minutes, Sarah, who was Kayla's childhood friend, and Marissa, who'd only met Kayla once before, performed compressions on Kayla's chest. AMR Ambulance and Syracuse Fire Department squads from Stations One and Two arrived quickly.

Working together with the latest lifesaving equipment, emergency responders restarted Kayla's heart. But in the ambulance, Kayla coded again. Technicians could not revive her, and Kayla arrived at St. Joseph's Hospital not breathing. When her mother saw her on the stretcher, she was convinced Kayla was gone.

Inside the emergency room, they brought Kayla back. After twenty minutes without a heart rate, Kayla made a full and complete recovery. Doctors can only attribute it to the remarkable team effort that began in that break room.

Once Kayla recovered, she and her family asked to be reunited at Station Two with the people who saved her life. Thank you for showing us what true collaboration and partnership can accomplish. Kayla, Sarah and Marissa, the AMR team and members

of the Fire Department are here with us tonight. Please stand so we can recognize you.

While we have made progress as a community this year, I'm also aware that for far too many people, the circumstances they face in life are still too bleak.

Last September, 2017 Census Data was released identifying Syracuse as the 9th most impoverished city in the nation. We know data can help us better understand and address the challenges associated with poverty in our community, so I commissioned analysts in the API and our Department of Neighborhood and Business Development to dig deeper into the numbers. With our research to guide us, and knowledge of the daily reality of the impoverished condition of too many of our neighbors, we are undertaking a smarter, more strategic approach to achieving the vision of creating opportunity for all.

The iTeam's priority area last year, based on input from the community, was housing stability, an issue our analysis confirmed is a serious barrier to opportunity. The iTeam studied this issue in depth and raised awareness of this devastating challenge. It results in about 25% of city residents moving one or more times a year. Let that sink in for a minute. Moving is expensive, causes routine disruption, particularly for children, and forces people to find new methods of transportation to work. The iTeam's recommendations will largely focus on ways to reduce the number of times people have to move unnecessarily because of unhealthy housing, eviction, or other avoidable circumstances.

One of the leading causes of health and housing concerns in Syracuse is lead. Especially found in old housing stock, lead is poisoning children and families every day and contributing to the cycle of poverty. It's a severe health issue that affects learning and academic performance. In a major step to combat this crisis, we restored federal HUD money for lead abatement programs in 2018. Congressman John Katko and Senator Chuck Schumer worked on the front lines to get this funding restored. I'd also like to recognize the work of Council President Helen Hudson and Fifth District Councilor Joe Driscoll in helping us address the lead crisis, along with our Neighborhood and Business Development team and our many other community partners, including Onondaga County, Home HeadQuarters, and The Community Foundation. Thank you for all of your efforts.

We're also going to be better able to address substandard housing in Syracuse because of two major developments accomplished with the Common Council. First, Councilor Khalid Bey led the drive to create an enhanced Rental Registry which will allow us to work with landlords at one and two unit rentals to improve code compliance. Second, the new Bureau of Administrative Adjudication will open this April, enabling us to more quickly process code violations.

For many working families, achieving financial stability in the face of these barriers is daunting. Keeping a bank account with even several hundred dollars seems like an impossibility. Yet that kind of cushion is what's needed to protect from losing an apartment or a car – and then a job. Too often it feels like there is no help available to figure out how to manage your finances. It doesn't have to be. And we're going to provide an answer.

I am proud to announce tonight that in April, Syracuse will become one of only fifteen cities in the United States to open its own Financial Empowerment Center. With startup funding provided by Cities for Financial Empowerment – and additional funding from the Allyn Foundation, the United Way and the HOPE Initiative – individuals and families will be able to get free professional financial counseling. The service will help families create and build the kind of assets that can help them weather unexpected events and separate themselves from the risk of falling in to poverty. This is critical for Syracuse. Almost 75% of households struggle to afford basic necessities like housing, transportation, child care, or food even when employed.

To ensure people can find good paying jobs that lead to a career, last year we announced the creation of Syracuse Build. Syracuse Build is a jobs program designed to prepare our citizens for the opportunities that will result from the 81 project, which will provide a once in a generation chance to transform the economic landscape of our urban core. I remain a strong supporter of the Community Grid option, because I believe it provides the greatest opportunities to transform both the city and the region. When the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) comes out this year, I believe the facts will support that conclusion. In the meantime, we need to keep preparing for the jobs that will result from the project and the opportunities that already exist on construction sites today. That's what Syracuse Build is all about, and I am happy to announce two major steps forward for the program.

First, I'm proud to announce that CenterState CEO's WorkTrain initiative, in partnership with the city, has received a major grant from the National Fund for Workforce Solutions and the Ballmer Group. The funding – \$200,000 a year for three years – will speed the introduction of Syracuse Build in 2019 and support inclusive workforce development initiatives in the city.

Syracuse University drives some of the biggest construction projects that happen anywhere in Central New York and its expansive Campus Framework plan will keep the University state of the art for generations to come. So the second step forward is that Syracuse University has agreed to become the first private sector anchor project partner of the Syracuse Build program. SU will join the City and County in committing to work with its project partners to create more job opportunities for local, minority and veteran workers on our job sites.

Under the leadership of Chancellor Kent Syverud, who is here with us tonight, SU and the Institute of Veterans and Military families have become national leaders in helping veterans return to the workforce, and have made major improvements in local and minority hiring. We deeply appreciate all that SU does for our city, and I look forward to many productive partnerships in the future. Chancellor, please stand so we can recognize you.

Le Moyne College is also an important city partner, and we could not have a more passionate advocate for Syracuse than President Linda LeMura. Le Moyne, with help from the city, will soon be moving ahead with a Neighborhood Master Planning effort that will study ways to improve the connection between Le Moyne's campus and our city. Linda, thank you for being a true friend to Syracuse.

Best Days in Our Reach

These steps forward in fiscal sustainability, city services and in our economy and neighborhoods show how combining engagement, data, and the resources of the community have already started to improve lives in Syracuse in meaningful ways over the past year.

When I took office, there were those who thought our city was on its knees. I didn't believe that narrative.

And neither did most of you. Syracuse has struggled, and we are not out of the woods yet. But we are standing tall. Syracuse, after decades of setbacks, is on the cusp of a renaissance.

It's a renaissance not unlike what has taken place in city-resident Asheena Jennings life in recent years.

A 29 year old mother of three, Asheena hit rock bottom this past summer. Suffering from the effects of anxiety and depression, Asheena and her kids lived in a rundown apartment on the city's Northside. She would have moved, but didn't earn enough money from her job in retail to afford a new place. And the landlord always said he would make the repairs. From time to time she'd call the City's Code Enforcement Office. Codes would respond, but she couldn't keep up with reporting all the issues.

In July, feeling pressure mounting, Asheena's health suffered, and she ended up hospitalized. Stabilized after an overnight stay, she returned home and found new support from a social worker.

Soon after that episode, Asheena called the city for help again. A caring employee, Patty Lynch, talked with her about the future. Patty shared resources and information about housing options, and connected her to our partner, Catholic Charities.

Recently, Asheena completed employment training through the Work Train program and SUNY EOC. She became a certified nurse aide and she now has a full time job at Loretto, and last October, Asheena and her children got out of that substandard apartment and into a four bedroom house better suited to a family.

Asheena Jennings can teach us all a lesson. She faced circumstances that seemed insurmountable. She took small steps to change course. They led to big shifts that even she couldn't have imagined. And today, she and her children are headed in a better, more positive direction. Asheena, thank you for giving us all hope for a better future. Please stand for a moment.

The transformation of the city of Syracuse is, indeed, underway. Tonight, we have shared a vision for growth. I've presented accomplishments on the city's fiscal health, in improving city services, creating economic investment and stronger neighborhoods, and engaging with you.

We have revealed plans to surge Syracuse forward as one of America's great cities through smart investments in technology and people. These actions will give our businesses a competitive advantage, attract investment and prepare our citizens for the jobs of today and tomorrow.

The journey to shared prosperity will be hard, but the path will be lighted by a focus on equity – in the way we deliver services, and how we create opportunity. We will be sure that our partners are with us every step of the way, participating in, and benefiting from our surge forward.

I stand before you tonight thankful for the opportunity to be your mayor. I am appreciative of the support you have given me. And I am confident in our future. Syracuse's best days aren't just ahead of us. Our city's best days are within our reach.

Thank you, everyone. Have a great evening.