

Mayor Brown's 11th State of the City Address – Buffalo Rising

“Ladies and gentlemen, we’ve come a long way in a short period of time. By working together, we’ve overcome challenges, we’ve earned a positive reputation, and we’ve begun to truly reimagine this City we love. Never satisfied with second-best, always striving to realize new possibilities, we are still a City of dreamers, innovators and strivers, we’re becoming a stronger and more inclusive Buffalo.

“We’ve become a place for new and existing companies from the around the world to relocate and to expand. We’re a hot spot for millennials to live and work. We are an incubator for small businesses launching big ideas, and we are a welcoming City for New Americans.

“The test of our progress is not whether we added more to the abundance of those who have much, it is whether we provide enough for who have little,” Mayor Brown said, quoting President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

The Mayor cited numerous successes his administration has achieved, including:

- The highest credit ratings in the City’s history.
- A nearly 16 percent reduction in residential property tax rates and a 32 percent drop in commercial rates.
- Delivered 11 consecutive, on-time, balanced budgets.
- Adoption of the historic Green Code, the first comprehensive zoning rewrite since 1953, to ensure smart growth and development that embodies the community’s vision of Buffalo’s future.
- Development of the Buffalo Opportunity Pledge, establishment of the Office of New Americans and appointment of a Chief Diversity Officer to foster a culture of acceptance, diversity and respect throughout the City. Signing of a “local hiring and first source” policy, designed to link local employment opportunities created by City contracts to city residents.
- Launch of the Buffalo Lead Hazard Control program aimed at reducing lead-poisoning through increased education about lead hazards, stepped-up inspection of homes with peeling exterior and/ or interior paint and stricter, self-imposed standards for lead levels in drinking water. More than 130,000 lead education years, in seven languages were distributed in 2016 and the City adopted a “first in the nation” water action standard of 5 parts per billion, matching the FDA’s standard for the bottled water industry. The City is in the process of testing water from all sources, in all City-owned buildings.
- Building strong working partnerships with the Buffalo Common Council, Governor Andrew Cuomo, County Executive Mark Poloncarz, and many others, to reap the greater rewards that come from cooperation and collaboration.
- More than \$6 billion in continued economic development activity, ranging from the burgeoning Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus and Solar City, to the Northland Corridor revitalization and the upcoming transformation of **One Seneca Tower, the City’s tallest building**. Mayor Brown announced several exciting new initiatives, as well as enhancements to build upon on-going efforts. Highlights of the Mayor’s 2017 plans include:
 - No property tax hikes for a 12th straight year.
 - Establishment of **two new Buffalo Police Department sub-stations**, one at the Broadway Market and one at Canalside.
 - Creation of “Bigs in Blue,” a program which will see **police officers act**

as a Big Brother or Big Sister to a child, kicking off with students from Hamlin Park Elementary School.

- The Buffalo Urban Renewal Agency will work with McCormack, Baron and Salazar – the county’s most accomplished developer of inclusive communities – on a new **mixed-income project, near Jefferson and East Utica**, which will include significant community involvement.
- Continuation of investment on Jefferson Avenue, a \$50 million public-private, mixed-use project. The newest component will be the **Jefferson Health and Wellness Center**, a state-of-the-art medical facility to manage and improve the general health of the neighborhood.
- A March 15th start to construction on the \$50 million **Northland Corridor project**, which will include the \$44 million WNY Workforce Training Center, featuring a “Coding School” to assist those pursuing careers in the fast-growing IT arena.
- Expansion of the Mayor’s Summer Youth Employment Program to hire more 17 to 21 year olds. Since 2006, more than 22,000 young people have been employed through the program and by the end of 2017, the Brown administration will have allocated over \$10 million to fund it. The program is also going high-tech through a new partnership with **HigherMe, a recent winner of the 43North business plan competition**. HigherMe’s mobile job application app will empower youth to apply for jobs directly from a smartphone or mobile device.
- An additional **\$1 million commitment to the Say Yes education initiative**, which helps boost High School graduation rates, bringing the City’s contributions to \$2.3 million.
- A new program to **renovate 62 residential properties the City acquired in 2016 from absentee landlords who were not paying their taxes**. The City will partner with the Center for Opportunity to repair and maintain the properties. City residents will be hired to work with skilled laborers to learn on the job. A related homebuyers program will assist City residents achieve the dream of home ownership.
- Coming off a record year for recycling – 27.4 percent – the City’s 34 And More recycling campaign is adding a new incentive program, **“Let’s Do This!”** It

will involve Block Club competitions to raise recycling rates and achieve the 34 percent recycling rate goal.

- Enhancement of the City's highly-successful Clean Sweeps program to add "**Super Sweeps.**" The beefed-up program will work with homeowners to identify neighborhoods that need street paving, sidewalk repairs and other infrastructure upgrades. Another new component will be "Block Club University," a training program to better connect neighbors and provide information about availability of City services.
- Launch of the reinvigorated **CitiStat 2.0**, an issue-based, dialogue-driven process, structured to bring City departments together with outside experts to tackle city-wide issues. The Mayor's initial priority areas will be Public Safety, opportunity, economic development and quality of life.
- Launch of **Open Data Buffalo** in Summer 2017, a free, online portal where citizens, researchers, reporters and others can access data sets from various City departments. The data sets will also be used to measure performance and boost efficiency of City service delivery.
- Creation of a **Speaker's Bureau** through the Office of New Americans to engage Buffalo's foreign-born newcomers and equip them to serve on City board and be advocates for their communities. The City will also partner with Journey's End Refugee Services, Legal Aid Bureau of Buffalo and the New York State Office for New Americans to help more immigrants attain U.S. citizenship.

"Yes, we have challenges, we have problems and we have issues yet to resolve, but make no mistake, we are a world-class people, a world-class City – ONE CITY – with the ability to reimagine a better future for all our residents," Mayor Brown said.

The Mayor announced he will present the beloved Colored Musicians Club, the longest continuously operating African-American musicians club in the United States, with a Key to the City. Members provided musical entertainment to close the State of the City address.

The Mayor also made mention of Buffalo Zoo President and CEO Donna Fernandez, regarding her announcement that she is retiring.

"Donna's vision and her values have guided this institution to a place that is truly re-imagined, and for that, Donna Fernandez, you will always have our gratitude," said Mayor Brown,

Under Fernandez's guidance, the Buffalo Zoo has gone from an institution at risk of losing accreditation to a zoo that saw its highest attendance in 30 years in 2016. During her tenure, the zoo added almost \$50 million in new exhibits and attractions, including the very popular Arctic Edge exhibit.

In summation, key attributes/missions of the administration are currently:

- Not raising residential and commercial property tax rates for the 12th straight year
- Economic development projects including the start of the construction process next month for the
- Northland Corridor project and another major initiative, the Jefferson Avenue Reconstruction project.
- A plan to renovate over 60 City-owned residential properties.
- The addition of two new Buffalo police sub-stations.
- A continued focus on job training, including the announcement of a new Coding School.

- The City will commit an additional \$1 million to Say Yes Buffalo and Buffalo Public Schools.