
Syracuse State of the City: Read the full text of Ben Walsh's speech

SYRACUSE, N.Y. -- Mayor Ben Walsh delivered his first State of the City address Wednesday at the Public Service Leadership Academy at Fowler High School.

Walsh focused on education, Interstate 81 and [city finances](#).

He was introduced by 4th District Councilor Latoya Allen.

Read the full text of the speech below:

CITY OF SYRACUSE

State of the City | Mayor Ben Walsh

Remarks

Jan. 31, 2018 | 7 p.m.

Public Service Leadership Academy at Fowler High School

Councilor Allen, thanks for those kind words.

Commissioners of Education, Superintendent Alicea, State Senator Valesky, County Executive Mahoney, Chairman McMahon, members of the County Legislature, City Auditor Masterpole, City Clerk Copanas, Deputy Mayor Owens, and many representatives of our federal and state representatives, thank you for being with us tonight, demonstrating your support for the city of Syracuse.

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 my first message on the state of the city.

Being here at PSLA at Fowler is special to me. This neighborhood was home turf for my grandfather, who prepared his first State of the City about 57 years ago. Bill Walsh, the 48th mayor of Syracuse, was born and raised just down the road on Rowland Street in the heart of "Skunk City." He then moved up the hill on Schuyler Street where he raised seven kids, including my father, Jim.

Even closer to home, my mother, Dede, who is here with us this evening along with my wife, Lindsay, spent two decades working here at Fowler as a tutor for the Liberty Partnership Program. I've encountered many former students whose lives are far better today because they had my mother's caring guidance. I know how they feel. Thank you, mom, for your years of dedication to our city's children and for your constant support of me.

It really wasn't until today, however, that I appreciated what kept you coming back here year after year. I spent time with nearly 60 Syracuse high school students, the members of the Superintendent's Student Cabinet, and they are an impressive and inspiring group of young people.

I delivered a short preview of my remarks tonight and spent time talking with the students. Honestly, they asked some of the hardest questions I've faced as both a candidate and as mayor. They also broke in to groups and went to work on ideas to address some of the big challenges and opportunities we will talk about tonight, the I-81 viaduct project; community-police relationships; and neighborhoods.

These young people are smart and passionate and, most important, I found them to be truly vested in the future of Syracuse. They want our city to succeed, so the challenge to all of us is to deliver a city that is attractive to them for the future.

Will all of the Syracuse City School District Students, please stand?

To all of you I say, challenge accepted, and to the Superintendent's Cabinet, thank you for a great afternoon.

I have promised to be a cheerleader about the many great things happening in the Syracuse City School District. So let me share some with you tonight:

Graduation rates: in 2013, the graduation rate over a four year period was 51.9%. The seniors who graduated this past summer were just starting high school then - and it was about 50/50 odds they would graduate.

Fast forward to today: with the support of their teachers, administrators and parents, they not only beat those odds, they blew them away. The graduation rate rose to 64% -- a 12.1% increase in just four years. We have a lot of work to do, but that is a great start.

How about career readiness: The Syracuse City School District has CTE - or career

and technical education programs that are so robust and so rigorous that they are the envy of suburban school districts throughout the state of New York. In 2014, when last year's graduating class were sophomores we had six CTE programs.

Today, we have 26 offered in some of the fastest growing industries in Central New York - from computer forensics and electrical trades, to culinary arts and cybersecurity. With active partnerships with Onondaga Community College, our students earn college credits and even associate degrees while in high school. Teenagers in our schools can choose to attend the school with the CTE program that is right for them. We also have a task force working right now to explore how we can make these same opportunities available for middle school students.

How about pre-kindergarten: did you know our Pre-K enrollment is higher than it has ever been? Today, we have 2,100 three-and-four-year-olds in programs preparing them to be grade-level-ready by the second grade. Soon, you will see a snowball effect of improved academic achievement as they move through elementary middle and high school.

Here with us tonight, Elana Stroman knows what it's like to help elementary school students reach their full potential. She's a 5th grade Social Studies teacher at Huntington, where I am told she "lives" for her students and for Huntington. Elana doesn't stop there - she helps her fellow teachers as the STA representatives in the building. Elana is loved and respected by students, parents and teachers, alike. When Elana saw that our Transition Team needed a city school teacher, she stepped forward again to give even more to her community. Elana also happens to be a United States Air Force veteran.

Elana Stroman represents all that is good about our teachers. We thank you and teachers across the district who are helping our children be their best.

I'll have more about the path to even greater school progress before closing tonight. Now, I'd like to talk about some of the challenges and opportunities we face as a community, and what we can do together to address to them.

One of the highest hills we have to climb is the structural operating deficit that our city government faces. The financial reality we confront is precarious. Simply stated, the city spends more than it takes in in revenue. None of us can live this way, and neither can the city.

Here is a short description of the fiscal challenge before us. It's a story facing many other cities like Syracuse across the country.

The City's total annual operating budget is about \$290 million, not including schools.

For the past five years, the city has run serious deficits. The deficit for the fiscal year ending in June 2018 is budgeted at \$16.5 million. Rough projections looking ahead are even larger.

Fortunately, over time the city amassed a sizeable fund balance - at one point, a "rainy day fund of nearly \$70 million. Previous administrations and Common Councils were wise and, resisted pressure to spend those dollars quickly. Instead they used them to balance budgets without increasing property taxes. Today, it is that fund balance that stands between the city and insolvency. But it could effectively be gone in two years.

So what is causing these revolving deficits? Broadly speaking, three things:

First, the city's ongoing, revenue base is stagnant. We have not experienced growth.

Next, the city's second largest revenue source - state funding referred to as Aid and Incentive for Municipalities - AIM - which is \$71.8 million dollars, has not increased since 2010. Based on the inflation rate in the same time period, city costs have gone up about 12 percent. We appreciate the Governor keeping AIM steady during this tough fiscal year, but the challenge remains.

And third, the major areas of cost the city incurs are very difficult to control. Labor costs, health care, pension, utilities, waste and trash fees all continue to go up.

When you look ahead, the prospect is daunting.

One of the city's biggest revenue sources is ending in March. We will receive our final payment of the Carousel Center - now Destiny USA - expansion fee in the amount of \$3.4 million. That puts a big hole in our next budget.

At the same time, we have eight expired labor contracts to be negotiated with the many good, hard working city employees.

Without growth, generating new tax revenue is very difficult. The city operates under the terms of the state property tax cap, so the property tax levy can only go up 2% or the rate of inflation - whichever is lower. We simply cannot cut or tax our way to prosperity.

It is a precarious situation, but as I said at my inauguration, the outcome is not predetermined.

Everything I have told you is based on the realities that existed, yesterday. Not tomorrow. We can change course and put the city on a healthy fiscal path.

Of course, the city cannot solve these problems on its own: we need to cooperate with federal, state, county and local government partners, as well as the private sector.

To invite this cooperation, I have convened a Fiscal Summit Advisory Committee in partnership with faculty at the Maxwell School at Syracuse University. I spoke to Chancellor Syverud yesterday, and he offered his strong support to the city. The Committee will meet monthly, seeking input and providing updates. Its draft recommendations are targeted for early fall 2018 with the first recommendations implemented in the 2019 city budget.

We will not nibble around the edges of this problem. We will attack it at its core. The solutions will not be easy, and hard sacrifices are coming. Although it is still too early for details, the leaders of the Fiscal Committee already see solutions that can begin to reverse the path toward insolvency.

In running for Mayor, I spoke with thousands of people. I saw resolve to face down these serious challenges and bolster the integrity of our city. For this reason alone, I know we will get through this. And when we do, there is no limit to the heights we can achieve.

For the rest of my time with you tonight, I will talk about how we will rise. My motto over the past year has been Rise Above, and my platform was called Syracuse Rising. The formula to rise is both simple and complex:

Working together, we will ignite Inclusive Growth to enable Stronger Neighborhoods and Better Schools.

The formula actually came from you. It started with what I heard from people in the city throughout my campaign.

It crystalized with the work of our Transition Team which convened right after the election. In fact, many of the ideas and programs you will hear about tonight are born from the work of this diverse and talented group. The committee is releasing this report (*hold it up*) to the public online. It has more than 125 specific recommendations and will be available tonight from the home page of the city website.

The recommendations also come from the experience of employees in city hall and throughout your government. My administration may have only begun one month ago, but we've been given a running start.

As we rise, we must lift up the entire city, especially those most economically disadvantaged. Our duty is to turn back the tide of poverty. And just as it would be futile to try to hold back the ocean with a single sea wall, we will not overcome the entrenched pockets of poverty with a single program. It will require a commitment to inclusive job creation in all that we do - and you will see that throughout the plans we discuss tonight.

Doing things the same old way won't work. So partnering with the Office of Innovation, we will try *new* things and measure what we do. The i-team, formed with the strong support of Bloomberg Philanthropies, has already made a significant impact on the operations of our city. I'm excited about the recently announced results of the TOP Code Enforcement Pilot program. Instead of following complaints, the pilot uses new strategies to more proactively find and address violations.

I'm pleased to announce tonight that we will deliver on our promise of accountability. We will be initiating a new performance management system, to be called the Office of Accountability, Performance and Innovation. The city's API will drive continuous improvement in quality, customer-focused city services. Accountability meetings will be open to the public and will be held in the former SyraStat room, now to be known now as, the iLab.

Thanks to the Common Council's commitment to accountability and their hard work over the past couple of years, we will begin streaming Council meetings online this Spring - in time for 2018-19 budget hearings in April. The Council Chambers are being equipped with cameras and sound equipment so you will be able to see and hear government happening from wherever you are.

I'm also asking for help from the public in selecting the i-team's priority focus area of 2018. Beginning earlier this month, we started collecting recommendations on the innovation challenge that the i-team should go after this year. We've organized your suggestions in to six ideas that, beginning here tonight, we are asking the people of the city to vote on. With your votes as a guide, I will select the next i-team priority area by the end of February.

I think the i-team is one of the city's greatest assets, but I don't think it has a monopoly on innovation in city government.

Last winter, these purple granules of salt started showing up on sidewalks around

City Hall thanks to proactive innovation from the Building Services team. It's "beet salt," which I've learned is more effective at melting snow. That's a good idea. So now, we use less of a product that's also better for the environment. Mujahid (MOO-jhad) Muhammad, a City Hall custodial worker, is here tonight representing the Building Services team and all city employees who are working to find better ways to spend your tax dollars. Muje, thank you and keep up the good work.

If innovation is important to our future, cooperation is, too. Fundamental to our plan to make Syracuse rise is to bring people and organizations and governments together.

I want to make it clear tonight that the city will reinvigorate its participation in the County-wide Shared Services Initiative. Our team has met with county representatives more than a dozen times since January 1 discussing areas where cooperation and shared services are possible. County Executive Mahoney, we appreciate your help already. We've also had meetings with federal and state officials, including both US Senators, Congressman Katko, and Governor Cuomo. And there is ongoing dialogue with our partners in the towns and villages, as well.

I also pledge today that the city of Syracuse will become a more active partner in the regional unmanned aerial systems - or drone initiative. Soon, Syracuse will be the largest city in the nation covered by the instrumentation and software necessary to fly unmanned craft safely and efficiently for commercial purposes. My administration has already met the leaders of this initiative, including private sector employers.

Cooperation within our city will be required to finish the important work that has been done on the overhaul of our city's Zoning Ordinance - a project known as ReZone Syracuse. The ReZone project began in late 2015 and has had impressive citizen engagement - with more than 80 public meetings. The end product will be a smart growth zoning code that is simpler, more flexible and fully protective of residents and neighborhoods.

Our original Zoning Ordinance was adopted in 1922. The only major restructuring was when the last Walsh was in the Mayor's office - more than half a century ago. I look forward to working with the Common Council to get it done in 2018.

We will also make 2018 an important year for progress on the I-81 Viaduct project. Syracuse and all of Central New York must seize the opportunity now to drive inclusive growth in the city and the region. We have a once in a generation opportunity to transform our community. And thus far, we have failed to grab it. We can't afford to wait any longer.

When I hear discussions about a tunnel, or a new, wider viaduct, I fear the community is limited by thinking focused solely on moving cars. I challenge us to do our homework and place our focus on moving our community and our region forward.

The facts are easily found. Simply go online to i81Opportunities.org. Thanks to the leadership of Governor Cuomo, the State Department of Transportation has done a fine job of studying the alternatives, and they present unbiased data and comprehensive reports for your review.

Case in point. The claim that with a community grid, traffic will simply skip the city and use the current 481 bypass is not supported by the facts. Likewise, the suggestion that the Community Grid will create chaos and congestion is nothing more than a talking point designed to instill fear. Both of these myths are expertly countered by the more than 10,000 pages of studies and evaluation that the DOT has meticulously performed over the last decade.

In reality, the vast majority of all traffic today on Interstate 81 through the city is heading to destinations in or around the city. They will continue to come to our City because it is our region's economic engine. Their commutes will actually be made easier by a street system that stops funneling our entire inbound and outbound daily migration to a major choke point - Harrison and Adams Street.

In my short time in office, I have had elected officials from outside of the City tell me that they understand exactly why I support the community grid, even while they advocate for a different solution. And, to be fair, I understand their position as well. Change is uncomfortable for many, and fear of loss can be paralyzing if we aren't certain of, or comfortable with, what will replace it.

In case you haven't noticed, I reject the idea that people of good will and open mind cannot find common ground. And I reject the idea that our City must suffer for our suburbs to thrive or vice versa.

Instead of contemplating spending several billion dollars more than is necessary on a tunnel to serve only 30,000 cars per day, what if we invested even a fraction of those dollars and the full power of our collective energy and creativity in undertaking meaningful economic and community development initiatives in areas outside of the city?

Instead of pitting our communities against each other, what if we stood together, unified, with a plan that creates wins for all of our communities? I believe the decision before us can and should be a source of a deeper collaboration and a way

to reconnect the economic interests of our City and our suburbs.

In Dewitt, I have heard concerns about increased traffic, additional noise and greater pollution from higher use of I-481. These are legitimate concerns but they are eminently solvable, if we work together.

In Salina, I have heard concerns about the potential loss of tax base from hotels and other businesses if through traffic were to diminish in any way. As Mayor of the City of Syracuse, I know all too well how scary any threat to one's economic viability is, and these issues deserve to be taken seriously.

From points West, we hear about the potential for additional truck traffic through Skaneateles and the Finger Lakes, something I believe we can all agree is potentially disruptive and, frankly, unnecessary. After all, whether we live in a City, a town or a village, our main streets should be designed for commerce and quality of life, not Interstate truck traffic. Together, I believe we can address this issue once and for all.

From Destiny USA, I have heard concerns about the potential loss of visibility and drop-in traffic if the I-81 Bridge were to be relocated. Again, while I understand the concern, I feel our energy and resources would be better spent doubling down on Destiny USA's investment to build a world class lakefront community, as originally envisioned by our urban pioneers.

We should not feel the need to argue over how the current pie is carved up. This city is prepared to work together to make a bigger pie for all. Together, we can do transformative things for our City while simultaneously investing in and strengthening the economies of our suburban communities and improving our region's overall quality of life.

As a community, we have already begun to rise, but handled properly, the 81 project can be rocket fuel to our ascent.

New revenue for our city...Inclusive job growth... A healthier economy and better neighborhoods...All are there. The 81 opportunity is a clarion call for action, and in 2018, the City is ready to answer.

I see three important areas that, when addressed thoughtfully together, create inclusive growth and help overcome poverty conditions.

- Business development and economic opportunity;
- Workforce development and contractor readiness;
- And housing and smart land use.

In 2018, the city will engage fully with DOT, the Department of Labor and other community partners to expand efforts in all of these areas.

In business development and economic opportunity, we need more local companies and more minority and women owned businesses to be ready for the construction activity that is here already. There are job sites in the city and the region that can't find the MWBE contractors and diverse workforce they need today. We have an obligation to fix that.

The city office of Minority Affairs, among other duties, helps local businesses qualify as MWBE's for city contracts. My administration will partner and build the capacity to help local businesses also qualify for state and federal certifications. With that status, those companies can win more business now and start growing to be ready for work on 81.

More contractors and businesses being ready will mean more jobs. But where will the workers come from? The hard truth is, we don't have enough of them today, but we have many able people who want work. Cities all over the country face this problem. San Francisco did, and it created a solution called City Build. Bringing together partner organizations in workforce development, San Francisco created a citywide construction workforce program to train and refer city residents for public and private construction projects.

City Build is a model Syracuse can follow, so tonight, I am announcing we will bring partners together to create, Syracuse Build. And we won't have to do it alone: the San Francisco office of Economic and Workforce Development has offered its full support in helping to build this program here. So has the Syracuse Industrial Development Agency, which can provide needed funding for planning and, potentially, for training on actual development projects.

Syracuse Build will partner with the DOT, the Department of Labor and the many outstanding community-based organizations which are already deeply involved in workforce development. We will ensure quality construction skills training is delivered, that is recognized by employers and unions not just in Syracuse but across the country. Here in Syracuse, the city has already engaged in positive discussions with the local trade unions and other organizations about their apprenticeship, journeyman and training programs.

Construction jobs are important, but they are not *all* that 81 will create. We will also employ similar approaches for the related opportunities in business, health, food and retail services.

With more people working and the viaduct gone, we can foresee housing and land opportunities like Syracuse hasn't seen in a century. This will take careful planning. The Syracuse Housing Authority has already engaged the community in planning for a more walkable, mixed-use community in the surrounding neighborhood. It will include mixed income housing, more storefront businesses and new green spaces.

Fortunately, our planners involved in ReZone also looked down the road, and the changes they are proposing will maximize what we can achieve with land freed up by the viaduct removal. Using proven strategies, true neighborhoods will result, increasing our tax base and creating places in which families will choose to live. When a solution creates more efficient traffic flow to other parts of the city, new, healthier neighborhood corridors can develop in areas impacted by the removal of the viaduct.

As you can see, there is much we can do right now to capitalize on the opportunities that exist today and to prepare for the 81 project in the future.

Again, it is a transformational opportunity. I'm looking forward to moving ahead.

There is no greater responsibility for a city government than the safety of its residents. Without a feeling of security, none of the potential we have described tonight can occur.

My hope is for a Syracuse in which citizens and the people charged with protecting them have mutually supportive and respectful relationships. I want that for our residents and our law enforcement professionals, and I know we can get there.

The Transition team's Neighborhoods and Safety committee developed more than 20 ideas to build healthier interactions between youth, adults and the police. They include recreational and job opportunities for teenagers; implementation of community policing practices and assessment of the Citizen Review Board process.

Tonight I want to say thank you to Police Chief Frank Fowler and First Deputy Chief Joe Cecile - two dedicated and accomplished law enforcement professionals. Chief Fowler and Chief Cecile are here tonight. I thank you for your work and for your commitment to continue to serve.

Under the leadership of Chief Fowler, we are proceeding with the recruitment of a new class of officers. We expect to have between 25 and 30 new recruits on the force before the end of this year. Chief Fowler is focused on ensuring this class increases our diversity, making the force better represent the makeup of our community.

Also with us tonight are new leaders of our police department. I am honored to introduce our three new deputy police chiefs.

- Deputy Chief Lynnette Delfavero, who will lead the Uniform Bureau.
- Deputy Chief Derek McGork, who will oversee our Criminal Investigations Bureau.
- And Deputy Chief Rich Shoff, who will oversee the Community Policing Bureau.

I could not be more proud of these outstanding professionals and look forward to working with them to keep our neighborhoods safe while building strong relationships with our neighbors.

In the weeks ahead, we will actively begin our national search for a new chief of the Syracuse Police Department. I affirm my pledge to actively engage the community in the search. We will consult with law enforcement at all levels both in and around the city. We will listen to the citizens of this community. We will host meetings and offer forums online and in social media for people to have input.

From a timing standpoint, we will have a new chief in place by year end. We expect the public engagement phase to run from February through April. With that input, we intend to define the characteristics and requirements of our next chief in May. The search will be conducted between June and October - considering candidates both here in our community and around the country. We hope to name a new chief in November, so he or she can be on the job in December.

This process will be transparent, and together we will identify the best person to lead our police department in to the future.

On average, twice every hour, every single day, members of your Fire Department are responding to emergency calls. 20,000 times last year, firefighters rolled out of their stations with only this on their mind: helping someone in need. That's heroism every single day. I believe Syracuse is home to the finest fire department in

New York State and certainly one of the very best in the nation.

There may be no better evidence of this than the actions of Firefighter Gary Carfagno (CAR-fag-no) last Dec. 9. On that cold and cloudy Saturday morning, 911 received a report of a house fire on the city's north side. A woman in her 60s recovering from a back injury was trapped on the second floor with smoke and flames spreading. On arrival, Gary, and his partner, Richard Adams attempted to enter the burning house through the front door.

Piles of clutter made entry impossible, so they decided to go through a second floor window. As they hurried to a ladder, Gary twisted his ankle on more debris outside. He was down and badly injured. He could have stayed right there. No one would have questioned it. But he didn't. He rose and with Rich behind him, somehow, Gary climbed up that ladder.

In pain and with limited mobility, Gary -- and Rich -- made their way to the victim where they found two fellow firefighters, Jeremy Burton and Andrew Carducci, who were attempting to rescue the woman. The four men, led by District Chief Jeff Kite, surrounded by smoke, worked together to carry her down the stairs. Sadly, she died at the hospital from her injuries.

Once outside, Firefighter Carfagno - after climbing a ladder and helping carry a victim down a set of stairs - fell to the ground. He was taken to the hospital where he later learned he will require extensive surgery and months of rehab to repair the severe damage to his ankle.

Gary and his fellow firefighters, including Tom Webster, who was burned that day, are heroes who embody the values and strength of our fire department. We thank you for your selfless dedication.

Also with us tonight is our new Fire Department leadership. Chief Michael Monds and First Deputy Chief Steven Evans please rise so we can recognize you and wish you well in your new positions.

If water pipes, sewers, and roads are the skeletal system of a city, then neighborhoods represent its heart and soul. It is in our neighborhoods - in homes, schools, parks and business - that we play, learn, live joyfully and sometimes, mourn. We must join together to create a consistently high quality of life in all our neighborhoods.

After experiencing two major snowstorms since becoming your mayor, I've learned that many of you have been unhappy for a long time with the snow removal service you've been getting. You've told us that the main roads are fine, but that it takes too long to clear side streets. We are determined to improve the city's performance in this area. Our DPW staff does yeoman's work, but we need to give them the support they need to get the job done.

We're also raising awareness that property owners are required to clear the snow from their sidewalks. But we need to do better. So the iTeam is hosting a public meeting to collect ideas on Feb. 15 at 7 p.m. at Dr. Weeks School. I hope you will join us to share your solutions for snow removal on our sidewalks and our roads.

Much has been said in recent years about the condition of the city's pipes and roads. Skeleton is actually a pretty good metaphor, given the age of much of our infrastructure. We begin 2018 with new leadership in our Water and DPW Departments, and I can assure you we will be using new strategies to address this major issue for our city.

Getting around our neighborhoods is important, too. It's long past time for us to bring a public bicycle program - or bikeshare - to Syracuse, and I am pleased to announce tonight that we're going to get one in place for this summer. With assistance from the Syracuse Bikeshare Commission, a volunteer group, we will issue an RFQ and select a supplier this spring. Once in place, bikeshare members will be able to rent and return bikes throughout the city. We have bike lanes, and we will be creating even more, so a city our size should have a bikeshare. And soon, we will.

At the center of all of our neighborhoods are our schools. Before closing tonight, I want to revisit the subject of education and tell you about some of the work underway to lift our schools to the upper echelons of American education.

I chaired my first meeting of the Joint Schools Construction Board last week and saw real passion and commitment to create the quality academic and recreational facilities our children deserve. The JSCB is supervising a sprawling, multi-year effort to renovate all of the schools in our district. In doing that, the JSCB is ensuring minority and women-owned business participation, along with that of city residents, so that these public projects create jobs for people who need them most. This year, the JSCB, in conjunction with the city department of Engineering and the District Facilities staff, is advancing the \$300 million "phase two" of the program.

Earlier, I talked about the regional drone initiative, and I'm pleased to report that your school district is already actively engaged. Students in a new P-Tech program here at PSLA are learning the basic skills necessary for piloting, engineering and repairing remotely piloted aircraft. Students earn a high school diploma and a college degree in association with OCC and Mohawk Valley Community College at

no extra cost within five to six years.

Drones are one example of the way technology in the digital age is creating an explosion of job opportunities in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. Our City needs to be better prepared, and I am pleased to tell you that Le Moyne College is answering the call. With the passion and energy of President Linda LeMura and the support of County Executive Mahoney, Le Moyne is pushing forward to address one of our major challenges, education for the modern economy. You can expect to hear more about this initiative in the weeks ahead.

I began tonight by committing to describe the path we will follow to better times.

- That path will be illuminated by the power of innovation and collaboration.
- We will decisively choose the direction of inclusive growth and lifting up all in our community.
- We will steer the city into active involvement in municipal shared services and the regional drone initiative.
- We will be guided by the enlightened land use policies of ReZone Syracuse and we will drive toward an agreement on 81 that creates transformation both in and around the city.
- Our progress will be fueled by Syracuse Build and other job creating opportunities.
- When we encounter stormy weather - including snow - we will push it aside and keep moving forward.

And we will never lose sight of the needs of our children and schools as we travel.

The journey will be made easier if we are all on it together. So tonight, I repeat the invitation to join us. Stay informed. Come to meetings. Share your ideas. Hold us accountable.

Our journey will go faster if the businesses and institutions of our great city get behind us and push us along - investing their resources here in our city, opening their doors to the rich talent pool here in our community and extending a hand to all those who need to be helped along. Because, in the end, isn't all that really matters, the compassion we show for each other?

I will close tonight with a story about compassion that occurred about ten days ago on the North side, in a small white house hidden behind overgrown trees. At first glance, the house looked like many others in the city. Upon closer review, our code inspectors saw it leaned and had become a danger to the occupant and to the public.

As a matter of safety, the property was deemed unfit. When the inspectors knocked on the door, an elderly woman answered and invited them in. As she thanked them for their concern, they heard the house creaking and groaning. They could see walls cracked open and separating from the foundation, and they knew she was in danger. She said, though, she preferred to stay, and they had no choice but leave.

They'd posted their warning. They could have given up. That was not the choice they made. Instead, they marshalled the resources and support of our fire and police departments and called on help from the non-profit community.

After careful consideration and several hours, a small team of police and firefighters returned to the house, were invited inside again by the owner - and at significant risk to their own personal safety - talked to the owner, persuading her to leave. She was transferred to St. Joe's where she is now safe, awaiting permanent housing. And the house is slated to be demolished later this week.

These are the kind of people I am proud to call colleagues and neighbors. In a moment of need, you showed that Syracuse is a compassionate city. Let us close tonight by giving our final applause to these fine public servants, who offer proof that we will come together and lift our city to its best days ever.

Thank you all for coming tonight.

