Thank you to all the members of the public for joining us tonight or watching online.

Every year I have the privilege to share with you the state of our City.

As everyone here knows, Hoboken is an amazing city and it’s obvious why more and more families are choosing to stay here for the long term and why people love to visit. It’s why new businesses are opening, from the great new independent bookstore Little City Books to the ambitious e-commerce startup Jet.com.

For the last six and a half years, my Administration has focused on improving the quality of life for Hoboken residents. Road improvements were a big focus in 2015 and will continue this year.

Nearly a fifth of our streets were repaved last year – possibly a new record for Hoboken. Thank you to Hoboken residents for your patience and to everyone in the City that worked so hard to get us all through the construction process!

Another major quality of life issue that we are focused on solving is the flooding. This year the second flood pump will be completed. During a heavy rain event, it will be designed to pump out 40 million gallons of water per day, which will make a tremendous impact on our century-old flooding problem.

Thank you to North Hudson Sewerage Authority for partnering with us on this important project.

I am excited to report that Hoboken is getting greener and more resilient every day. We are working hard on three great resiliency park projects, we planted nearly 200 new street trees, and made zoning code changes that incentivized more than 30,000 square feet of green roofs throughout the city.

We are also building a new rain garden and cistern demonstration project at City Hall that will capture and reuse stormwater, preventing it from overwhelming our sewer system.

While we work to address day-to-day issues, we remain focused on upgrading our infrastructure and preparing our city for a more resilient future. I am proud that Hoboken was named a Role Model City by the United Nations for our efforts on resiliency – only the second city in the country honored with that designation.

Hoboken was also in the spotlight as we celebrated our history with a year-long celebration for Frank Sinatra’s centennial.

Building on the cultural vibrancy of our city, Mile Square Theatre will be opening up new permanent space this spring in the growing neighborhood near the Viaduct. Their first event will be Goodnight Moon on April 7th and I urge everyone to make sure and check it out!

We also have great events on our waterfront like the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, and don’t forget to vote for the films you want to see at Movies Under the Stars this summer. Thank you to Geri Fallo for putting together a great range of cultural opportunities for our community.

I also know how much everyone enjoyed some of the big concerts we’ve hosted like Mumford and Sons, and I want to let you know that we are looking to bring some major concerts back to Pier A this summer.

In addition to expanding cultural opportunities every year, Hoboken’s recreation programming is expanding to unprecedented levels. Our city works hard as a community, and we like to play too! In the last five years, we have nearly doubled participation in our recreation programs.  
We added new programs like lacrosse, wrestling, and mommy and me yoga and we expanded existing programs to even younger children. Our rec program isn’t just for kids – we also expanded our adult basketball program, added yoga sessions for seniors, and we are adding more senior trips, too.

As a growing, active community, we’re focused on meeting our residents’ needs at every age level from toddler to senior, and that means we need more open space and places to play.

Tonight I want to report on exciting progress that we are making on building new recreation facilities and what I call resiliency parks.

I’m pleased to announce that this week, we are going out to bid for construction of the Southwest Park. I started my civic involvement in Hoboken fighting for this park and I’m so glad that we will start construction soon. The park is being designed to alleviate flooding with rain gardens and underground storage capacity for 200,000 gallons of rainwater.

I am also excited to report that we are in active negotiations to buy another parcel of land in southwest Hoboken to more than double the size of the park in the very near term until it can be expanded even further through the redevelopment process.

In Northwest Hoboken, we are on the verge of creating Hoboken’s largest park which will also be designed to hold a million gallons of stormwater. We have reached an agreement in principle which is currently under review. This resiliency park will be even more effective at reducing the impact of flash flooding thanks to North Hudson Sewerage Authority’s plans to separate the sewer system in the area and create a new storm water system that will work with the resiliency park.

I invite all of you to join in the planning process that will begin this year for the new 5-acre park and adjacent parking facility in Northwest Hoboken. We want to hear your ideas for the design of this great new park.

In addition, we are finalizing a developer’s agreement that will add a new gymnasium, park, and plaza area near 7th Street and Jackson Street at the Monroe Center. This new open space is designed with almost 300,000 gallons of stormwater detention and will be a great addition to the area, making the thriving Monroe Center an even greater place to work and visit.

In the last five years, we’ve struggled to keep up with the huge demand for our soccer program, which has nearly doubled in size. Thanks to a grant from the U.S. Soccer Foundation and New York Red Bulls, and in partnership with Hudson County, we may soon have two new small soccer pitches under the 14th Street Viaduct suitable for smaller pickup games.

All of these projects will provide new active and passive recreation opportunities for our community.

These resiliency parks, together with the new pump with a 40-million gallon per day pumping capacity, and other green infrastructure investments, will make a big impact on reducing the frequency and severity of flash flooding while also adding more open space for our community.

In addition to flash flooding, we are also extremely committed to protecting from the threat of coastal flooding, like the devastating impact we experienced when Superstorm Sandy brought 500 million gallons of the Hudson River over our waterfront and into Hoboken.

We know that New Jersey is impacted by a major hurricane every 5 to 6 years, and we are extremely lucky to have $230 million in funding to protect our City’s residents, businesses, and critical assets.

I understand there are concerns from the community about how we are going to protect from coastal flooding, but I hope that we can all work together to find consensus on what works best for Hoboken. The idea of the Rebuild by Design project is to integrate a flood protection measure into the urban landscape of our beautiful City.

Let’s put our City’s creative power together and follow the lead of the Dutch. Flood protection does not have to come from an ugly wall; it could be a planter, a landscaped park, a vertical garden, a beautiful mural, a boathouse, outdoor seating, a playground, a dog park and more, depending on the community’s design ideas and preferences.

We are also very fortunate to have experts right here at Stevens who understand coastal flooding and know our community well who are playing a formal role in the Rebuild by Design process.

The State is hosting a meeting on February 18th at the Wallace School, and I encourage everyone to attend and bring your creative ideas, along with a commitment to protect Hoboken for the long term from the very real coastal flooding threat our City faces. Thank you to all the community members who have attended meetings and provided great feedback throughout the Rebuild by Design public process, and I hope you will remain involved in the months ahead.  
In addition to flood protection infrastructure, we are also making real progress on improving our streets and transportation system.

As I mentioned, in the past year, we have repaved nearly 20 percent of our roads – an almost unprecedented amount. This year we will be launching a mobile parking app to let you pay for parking or add more time from your phone without needing to go to the meter.

We launched a bike share system with over 3,000 registered members who have so far taken over 22,000 trips since October and have surprised us with strong ridership even through the winter. Soon, there will be stations within a 5 minute walk of nearly every resident and business. It’s a great way to explore Hoboken, shop, and visit new neighborhoods.

And since we launched new Hop buses about a year ago, ridership on the shuttle system has increased 67 percent.

To help people get around and to support our business community, we will be installing gateway and wayfinding signage to welcome visitors to Hoboken and help guide them to business districts, parks, our waterfront, and other destinations. This project will take place along with the streetscape revitalization on First Street, which will repair handicapped ramps and crosswalks, add rain gardens, trees, benches, and other street furniture.

I want to give a special thank you to County Executive DeGise and Hudson County for agreeing to repave First Street at the same time that we move forward with the streetscape part of this project.

We also want to get Washington Street redesigned in a way that makes it safe for everyone and paved as soon as possible. Washington Street is a great street – it is the heart of our city and home to many great businesses, however it also has a number of challenges. The unfortunate reality is that it is also the most dangerous corridor in Hoboken with more than 300 crashes in the past three years. There were 20 pedestrians struck by cars, and sadly we lost a Hoboken senior who was crossing Washington Street last year.

I want to thank the City Council for carefully considering the proposed plan developed through an extensive, multi-year community planning process. I thank the members of the public and business community for their feedback, including those who have expressed concerns about the project, and I am confident that we can move forward with a plan that is in the best interest of our city.

While most of the focus on Washington Street is on repaving the broken roadway and safety issues, it is just as important that we fix what’s underneath, too. That’s why this project will also fund the replacement of the 100-year-old water main along the entire length of Washington Street. This will ensure that we won’t be ripping up the roadway to fix a water main break right after we finish paving it.

This $5 million investment in replacing the water mains on Washington Street is just the first step in upgrading our water main system. We are also negotiating better contract terms with SUEZ Water to provide for more proactive investment in our infrastructure.

We are able to make all of these investments in our infrastructure because we are on solid financial footing. We’ve cut costs, established a responsible surplus, and passed gimmick-free budgets. As a result, we increased our credit rating from near junk bond status to AA+, the second-highest possible rating. At the same time, I am proud that we have kept municipal taxes stable since the start of my Administration. Unfortunately as many of you know, while we have kept our municipal taxes stable, our County taxes have continued to increase. I will continue to advocate for Hoboken to receive our fair share of County services and for a reduction in County taxes.

I am also committed to the safety of our community, and I want to thank Chief Ferrante and the Hoboken Police Department for making our City one of the safest in the State. Under his leadership, we have added more police on the streets on weekend nights, expanded outreach to the homeless, created a 24/7 waterfront and parks unit, reinstated bike patrols, and expanded the Traffic Unit’s coverage to improve pedestrian and traffic safety. We just put 10 new officers on the streets and are currently sending 8 recruits to the police academy.

A big thank you also goes to Director Pellegrini, James Davis, Joe Bucino, and the entire snow team for their great work keeping us safe during a near-historic blizzard. Through amazing teamwork, our roads were almost all at blacktop by the morning after getting more two feet of snow.

I want to recognize Tommy Molta and Joel Mestre of the Office of Emergency Management, Chief Ferrante and the Police Department, Chief Peskens and the Fire Department, Director Morgan and the Parking Utility, and the entire Community Emergency Response Team for working tirelessly 24 hours a day to keep us safe.

I also want to thank and congratulate the members of the Community Emergency Response Team. This week we graduated the fifth class of 25 new CERT volunteers, bringing the CERT team up to 114 members. They help during community events like the Arts and Music Festival and during emergencies like the blizzard.

Tonight I want to especially recognize and thank CERT Captain Maggie Shields, who is stepping down from her leadership role but staying involved with the team. She was there during Sandy, she’s helped open up emergency shelters, and she’s led the emergency operations center during the latest blizzard. I remember she was working 24/7 during Sandy and telling her to go home and get some sleep. With every major event we’ve had, she has always been willing to step up to make sure Hoboken is prepared. She is a model of someone really committed to the community. Maggie, please stand so we can all thank you for your service.

As more and more people learn about the great City of Hoboken, it’s also important that we keep a focus on ensuring that we have sufficient and accessible affordable housing for those who need it.

That’s why I am fighting to make sure that Hoboken is an affordable place with economic diversity. We have included affordable housing into all redevelopment zones and require that 10 percent of units in new larger buildings be set aside for affordable units. We fought to defend our affordable housing ordinance to hold developers accountable for the 55 units of affordable housing they are supposed to create. We won at the appellate level and are fighting at the Supreme Court.

While some developers are unfortunately still fighting our ordinance, others are doing the right thing. I specifically want to highlight the Wonder Lofts project which was recently approved and which will be creating six new units of affordable housing.

Also, for the first time, thanks to our efforts with the census count, we qualified as an entitlement community, which allowed us to receive an additional $600,000 in federal funding to support our low and moderate income population. As a result, we are funding a $375,000 elevator project at the Fox Hill senior building and over $300,000 in improvements at the Hoboken Shelter, among other projects.

We are also working in partnership with the County, American Legion Post 107, and the Hoboken Shelter to end veteran homelessness in Hoboken. I am glad to announce that thanks to community support, we have received funding to create six new units of veterans housing. I especially want to thank Post Commander John Carey for working with us on this important project.

Part of ensuring the economic diversity in our community is preserving and expanding the broad range of jobs that employ residents of all skill levels. A major focus on that front this year was the adoption of the redevelopment plan for Neumann Leathers.

While not too long ago that building was threatened with demolition and the tenants feared eviction, I am proud that the plan both preserves and will rehabilitate the historic architecture and protect the artists and industrial uses that enrich our community.

As we move forward this year with a redevelopment plan for the Southwest Area and other areas, my focus will be on facilitating commercial development that preserves and expands jobs in Hoboken — the kind of jobs provided by places like the Pan American Coffee Company, which sources coffee beans from all over the world. They are a great company that has been in Hoboken providing local jobs for 50 years.

As we’ve seen from the transformation that’s underway at the Monroe Center, there is tremendous demand for space from a wide variety of businesses that want to open in Hoboken.

Our schools are also an extremely important part of our community. As a former Elysian Charter School parent and with my youngest son at Hoboken High School, I care very much about the future of our entire public school system. I want to congratulate the School Board on its choice of Superintendent Johnson. Under her leadership our schools are improving even more.

College scholarship totals more than doubled from $1.2 million dollars offered to the class of 2015 to over $2.6 million already offered to the class of 2016.

Thank you Superintendent Johnson for your leadership, and congratulations on an outstanding first year.

I look forward to continuing to partner with Superintendent Johnson to support the progress of our schools.

And congratulations again to the Red Wings football team on their 10th state championship! You make Hoboken very proud!

I also want to congratulate Shirael Pollack, Erica Gavin, and Jackie Dowd – three moms with children in our public schools who created a non-profit — the Hoboken Public Education Foundation. They have worked with the public schools to understand the needs that may be outside what is possible within the budget and are raising private funds to ensure our public schools have the facilities, technology, and programs needed to succeed. I look forward to seeing everyone at their Inaugural Gala on May 19th!

Our charter schools also had an exciting year. I want to congratulate Elysian Charter on their beautiful new space and HoLa on being one of the first schools in the state approved for a weighted lottery system to favor low-income students.

And thank you to Hoboken Charter for keeping Dr. King’s legacy alive with the annual March on Washington Street.

Hoboken remains a center for learning and culture for all ages. I want to congratulate the Library on moving ahead with renovations that will protect their largely unused basement space from flooding and convert it into program rooms that will be a great resource for the community.

The Library’s rising circulation – more than a quarter million items were circulated in 2015 – reinforces the need for continuity of service during construction and temporary closures.

The Library has carefully planned so that circulation and most programming will be available during temporary closures, and the City will be providing the Library with twenty-five hundred square feet of space in the Multi Service Center for core functions.

So let me close by just sharing how much of an honor and a privilege it is to serve as mayor of what I believe is one of the greatest cities in the world.

I will fight for Hoboken, no matter what, and will always work to make our city better: to provide more cultural and recreation opportunities; to expand economic diversity; to make our streets safer; to create new jobs, diversify our economy, and support our existing businesses; to support those who are struggling; to end flooding and make us more resilient; to create more open space; to budget responsibly and to invest in the infrastructure we need for the long term.

That is my commitment to you because that is what our great city deserves.

Thank you.