

CITY OF COHOES

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Good evening and welcome to our State of The City Address as we review our progress and challenges from 2013 and prepare for the year ahead.

I truly appreciate your taking time to join me and thank you for your concern and commitment.

To my partners on The City Council, (recognize *other elected officials*), Our City Work Force Team, and members of this wonderful community, it is my privilege and pleasure to offer The Cohoes State of City.

This evening's presentation is of particular significance for me as it marks the completion of year 1 in the mayor's office. I remain most appreciative of this opportunity and thank our voters for their support, allowing me to continue. I'm happy to say it's not "Year one and done" but that I can look forward to continued service as your Mayor. Thank you.

As I look back on my first year in office I do so with a respectful sense of pride and progress which of course only happens through a strong commitment from many people in this room and beyond.

Yes, there are challenges, but also very meaningful accomplishments and progress. While I'll highlight some that stand out I believe it's important to be mindful of the day to day efforts that may not make the news but clearly make a difference. I want to thank those in our city work force who simply show up every day and take care of the "little things" that become "big things" if not addressed.

To our **unsung hero's**; driving the trucks, picking up your refuge, helping our children cross the street, answering city hall phones, responding to the midnight call for help, and so many more I want you to understand you are appreciated and you are important. Without your commitment, the state of the city would be a sad state.

But tonight I bring to you a State of The City which is anything but sad. I've seen progress and promise and a community driven to succeed.

A shining example of a city headed in the right direction occurred in October when **Standard and Poor** issued Cohoes a **Double "A"** long term financial rating. Cohoes was recognized, and I quote, "*for strong management conditions, good policies and responsible practices.*"

This of course is not the culmination of a 12 month commitment but more like a 15 year charge to get our fiscal house in order. Dare I say "mission accomplished?" In any event a double "A" rating sure feels a whole lot better than the junk bond status we started with in 2000.

This conveys the type of image which helps bring about very real economic development. In the area of housing for example we've experienced a growth of nearly 2,000 units and one of our largest developments ever is ready to break ground very soon.

The Lexington Hills project will potentially offer 400 plus housing units in the western section of Cohoes. This is quality upscale housing. Combine this with the nationally recognized Harmony Lofts and the ongoing river front development and you have a city on the brink of prosperity. Our river front development continues with Captains Lookout and Sherwood Forest planning to add yet more housing development. And we're still very committed to a River Front Park to provide additional public access to this natural treasure.

All this has occurred at a time when we seem to be surrounded by economic down turns.

Speaking of our river front we saw the long awaited completion of The **Black Bridge** Renovation.

Our bikers, walkers, and joggers can now continue their river front enjoyment along the bike path from Waterford, past Peebles Island, through Cohoes and into Green Island. This will join the bike path in Watervliet and into Albany's Corning Preserve.

We're blessed with miles of river front which we should celebrate and enjoy. The Black Bridge represents a big step but we're far from finished. River front development remains a very serious priority.

I realize however things don't always have to be serious and discovered we can get the job done and even have some fun in the process. Our first ever **Safe Summer Festival** provided much fun while sending a message of safety first to our community. With the help of my and Cohoes' very good friend District Attorney David Soares we were able to bring in Albany's Pastor Charlie and his highly successful Summer Carnival to Lansing Park. It was a great afternoon attended by hundreds and I was especially happy to see so many families enjoying the day together.

Thank you Pastor Charlie. Thank you Davis Soares.

Another special event for our community and entire region was the dedication of our Canal Square Stage as **"The Ernie Williams Band Stand"**. I hate to use the word "Huge" but it really was. Hundreds showed up for a community celebration and tribute. Ernie lived in Cohoes for more than a decade and was a beloved blues legend. The entire music community looked at Cohoes with respect and appreciation as we rightfully recognized the great Ernie Williams.

While we all love the special events, 2013 was also a very good year for the services which might not get headlines but are very necessary.

I believe we have a dedicated work force and are getting the most from our departments across the board.

There's not time for all the detail I'd like to cover but I will summarize some departmental activities:

Starting with paving and our **public works department** we realized a substantial increase by going completely in house with street paving. By using our own crews we were simply able to reduce costs and **pave more streets.** Beyond our paving program The Department of Public Works completed a number of Capital Improvements, Building Projects, Recreational Improvements, and Construction Projects to numerous to cover. And of course the garbage gets picked up the snow gets plowed, again, doing more with less. Additionally, the initiation of a special projects crew also allowed us to take on a number of additional projects such as Lansing Park and Music Hall improvements. I could spend the entire night elaborating on DPW services but I'll just say they are clearly getting the job done. I appreciate their hard work and commitment.

Engineering – The Engineering Office is involved in nearly every project we undertake and must contend with federal and state regulations which range from bizarre to near unmanageable. But they more than manage. They enable important projects and keep us moving forward. Projects like the City Hall Entrance Facelift (including a handicap ramp), The Black Bridge Renovation, Reservoir Rehab, and so many more make for a very busy office but busy in that office means progress.

Treasurer's Office – The good folks in the treasurer's office represent the unsung heroes I referred to. There's nothing glamorous about water and sewer bills and insuring payment of our ever so popular property taxes, but we're in serious trouble if the important work of the treasurer's office is not done and done right.

Public Safety – Ask most any Mayor to tell you their number 1 priority for their city and you'll get the same response; Public Safety. It is on my mind every day and I can confidently assure you Cohoes is well served by a dedicated and prepared Fire Department and Police Force. While the **police department** is a busy place and our officers responded to **over 16 hundred calls** last year I'm pleased to report that the actual arrest rate was lower than we've seen in several years.

It's gratifying to see our public safety efforts recognized as Cohoes was recently named to a **state** wide **safe city** list.

I'm not sure people understand the scope of services provided by our fire fighters. Yes, they did respond to 93 fires in 2013 but when you include Rescue & EMS along with weather related issues and so much more, our Fire Department handled over 3,000 community calls for help. If you didn't have to make that call be grateful and if you did I expect you're appreciative. I am.

2013 was a very productive year for our **Human Services Department**. Most recently Cohoes celebrated our 50 year anniversary for the Cohoes Turkey Trot with a record number of more than 1,200 participants.

The Turkey Trot is one of many special community events coordinated or supported by our Human Services Department including The Easter Egg Hunt, Halloween Parade, Pumpkin Festival as well as many summer specials. While the city is committed and very involved with these specials they would not be possible without the help of so many caring and capable community volunteers.

Summer represents a particularly active time for this department with Lansing Park a center of summer fun. People seemed to appreciate to the revitalized Lansing Park & Pool as we saw a record attendance of over 12,000. Additionally our summer sports academy celebrated year 30 with more than 400 children taking advantage of this well respected program.

I need to reference and remind you of the important work of our **Building and Planning Department** which includes the crucial responsibilities of Code Enforcement. Our code enforcement officers have conducted more 2000 inspections as we pursue an all out effort to keep of housing up to proper standards. This is a quality of life issues and a message to current and future land lords. Most of our property owners are respectful and responsible but all land lords need to understand the seriousness of this commitment.

I meet weekly with a special task force including police detectives and code inspectors for regular updates and enforcement strategies.

Back to our unsung heroes theme I must also recognize the tireless efforts of **The City Clerk's Office**. Managing so many certificates, licenses, and vital statistics represents a great volume of effort dealing with information which residents must have. And there is no room for errors in that office. Thank you.

I've tried to highlight the activities of our city work force but merely scratched the surface. I hope you get the idea.

I'm not sure what next year holds as I never imagined what I'd be hit with this past year. But I do know my priorities. They remain a commitment to public safety and a stronger economic base. We must also have an appreciation and commitment to the businesses that call Cohoes their home which will lead to new investments.

I continue to be extremely concerned about the property tax burden in not only Cohoes but the entire state. It really is bad for business. I was pleased to hear such concern from The Governor but very disappointed with the lack of mandate relief or recognition that the state does have the capacity to help control costs. Many of our financial challenges come directly from the state such as the incredible and costly DEC Mandates.

Everyone applauds a property tax freeze but that becomes smoke and mirrors without mandate relief. Be it The City or our Schools, it all comes from the same pocket and our property tax payers are in serious distress.

If you've received any emails from my office recently you'll notice a phrase at the bottom which simply says, "Be the Best We Can Be". That's not just a nice way to end an email but a commitment I take very seriously. Whether it's evaluating past or existing services or preparing for new challenges, the question is always the same; is that the best we can do?

Could it be done better or for less? That's the approach we took in 2013 and for 2014 I say let next year be our best year.

Thank you for joining me tonight and God Bless.