

## **WELCOME**

Good morning and Happy New Year. Thank you for joining us to celebrate Pittsfield's 2022 Inauguration and State of the City. A rousing performance by the Eagles Band is the perfect way to usher in today's ceremony and the New Year.

Let's look back for just a minute to January 6, 2020, the date of our last Inaugural Ceremony. It seems like a hundred years ago. At that time, we had absolutely no idea of the utter devastation that was to come in the weeks and months and now years to follow. COVID-19 totally upended our way of life, and as we know, the pandemic rages on. I am especially grateful that Berkshire Community College opened its doors for today's ceremony, ensuring a safe and spacious environment for us to

gather. I extend my thanks to President Kennedy and her team for their hospitality.

Welcome to our distinguished guests. Father Gregory, thank you, as always, for gracing us with your rich blessing.

Congratulations, Councilors. Your presence here today reflects the deep faith and trust that the people of Pittsfield have put in each of you to do the work of moving our city forward. It is a great and honorable responsibility, and one that requires active and thoughtful engagement, a willingness to keep an open mind and open lines of communication.

It is my hope that the new members of the City Council will spend time getting to know me and the city's leadership team. We view ourselves as your partners, not your adversaries. Please join me in starting the new term with that mindset. Our future ultimately serves as the historic record depicting how and when

we were able to dig deep, find common ground, and embark on solutions to enrich and better the lives of our citizens – young and old.

President Marchetti – congratulations on being elected, once again, by your colleagues to serve as President of the Pittsfield City Council. You and I have spent many years together and I am honored by your friendship, I admire your commitment to our city, and I look forward to even more collaborative and productive work in the two years ahead.

Congratulations Councilor White on being chosen, once again as well, to serve as the Vice President of the Pittsfield City Council. Your consistent, thoughtful, and careful analysis speaks to the way in which you have embodied your leadership role.

To my honorable friends on the School Committee, congratulations. The work that we do matters a great deal to the

children and families of Pittsfield. As we gather today, our number one priority is to do all that we can to keep our schools open so that our students are engaged in learning, enjoying extra-curricular activities, and strengthening their social-emotional well-being. In the midst of ongoing uncertainty, one thing is for sure: our children deserve the best education, our teachers and staff must have our support. It is our job to strengthen our school community by making smart and sound decisions.

Congratulations Madam Clerk. Once again, the people of Pittsfield have chosen you because throughout your tenure, you have demonstrated an unwavering commitment to maintaining and preserving Pittsfield's history. Your dedication to keen and judicious oversight of elections ensures an accessible and streamlined experience for voters and elections outcome built on absolute integrity.

Today's Inaugural Address and State of the City will highlight accomplishments and challenges from the past year setting the stage for a year of promise and possibility – and we are ready.

Before we begin, however, please join me in a moment of silence to honor and remember those we loved and lost to COVID-19 – pause here . . .

And just one more moment of recognition. Would all of you please stand . . . and join me in a round of applause to thank all of the front line worker who adapted quickly, never skipped a beat and kept us all protected over the past two years . . . applause.

Thank you.

Looking back, as we entered 2021, the public health data showed a significant spike in positive cases. This was happening against a backdrop of persistent COVID fatigue. It was discouraging, to say the least.

But there was a reason to be optimistic. A COVID-19 vaccine was on the horizon. The extraordinary teamwork put forth by the Berkshire Vaccine Collaborative – a county-wide endeavor that created the first vaccine collaboration of its kind in the state – meant that thousands of men, women and children have been vaccinated right here at the Patterson Field House on BCC's campus. When boosters became available, one thousand people immediately signed up for the vaccine and booster clinic held in mid-December. And, it's not too late - another clinic is scheduled for January 8.

On December 13, the City of Pittsfield learned that we would receive over eleven thousand at-home rapid test kits from the Baker-Polito administration. Our state partners in government - the governor, lieutenant governor, our state senator and representatives - have never forgotten about Pittsfield. This doesn't just happen. Over the last six years, my team and I have built a strong, productive network all throughout state government that benefits our city in countless ways. I am exceedingly grateful for their partnership and collaboration.

Upon confirming the news that we would receive at-home test kits, I immediately convened the COVID-19 Task Force to discuss distribution. As usual, great and dedicated minds came together to create the most efficient way to get the free test kits into the hands of our most vulnerable residents. Sheriff Bowler and his team agreed to serve as the distribution center. The city's

Health Department took the lead in connecting with our community agencies. In the first week of receiving the kits, the Health Department distributed more than five thousand at-home test kits to seventeen organizations in Pittsfield. Vulnerable residents now have another weapon in the battle against COVID-19.

While COVID-19 was the constant and persistent backdrop, it did not stop us from focusing on other ways to serve the people of Pittsfield especially around economic assistance and recovery. In Round Two of the city's COVID-19 Small Business Recovery Grant Program, and in partnership with the Pittsfield Economic Revitalization Corporation, we assisted thirty-five small businesses with grant funding totaling \$255,400. This critical funding helped our hard-working small business owners pay rent, utilities, payroll, and secure inventory. Since the inception of this

grant program that I established at the height of the pandemic in 2020, the City of Pittsfield has awarded grant funding to ninety small businesses totaling \$935,000.

While we supported many, many small businesses with pandemic relief funds, the Red Carpet Team continued its work. With our proposal supported by the City Council, funding from the Pittsfield Economic Development Fund will assist Hot Plate Brewery to move forward with the buildout of their brewery and tap room in the Onota Building in downtown Pittsfield.

Last year, United Aircraft Technologies, relocated to Pittsfield from Troy, New York and moved into an office building on Newell Street with five employees. Today, they are already up to fourteen employees with the expectation of creating more jobs, and they are working with the city's business development manager to find an expansion location.

A number of our longstanding Pittsfield businesses have seen growth as well. Modern Mold & Tool, Johns Building Supply, and Hallowell EMC, have all purchased or constructed new buildings to accommodate their growing businesses. And, have you seen the remarkable transformation taking place at Bousquet Mountain? Mill Town Capital's purchase and redevelopment of the iconic Bousquet Mountain would not have been possible without the City Council approving our plan and funding request for new water and sewer lines including extra capacity in the system for future development along Dan Fox Drive. This family friendly outdoor recreation amenity will be here for generations to come.

Though plans were delayed due to the pandemic, in 2022, we can expect construction to begin on a \$10 million dollar, 77 room Holiday Inn Express on South Street.

We are also putting focused attention on Site 9, the largest and most visible parcel in the William Stanley Business Park. In March, the city was awarded an \$880,000 dollar Mass Development Site Readiness Grant to begin Phase One of site improvements. Pittsfield was one of 10 communities across the state to be selected for this competitive grant and we received the largest award. This is a starting point and we will draw upon every possible avenue and resource to revitalize this unsightly and unproductive sixteen acre parcel making it more appealing for business development. This matters because Site 9 is directly connected to the Morningside neighborhood. With the ongoing private investments underway all along Tyler Street including housing, streetscaping, and the city's first-ever roundabout, there is a critical mass of investments, improvements and activity happening in this historic neighborhood.

Now, let's add one more project to that list. After many long years of attempted negotiations, the City of Pittsfield has finally entered into a purchase and sale for the blighted eyesore known to all as the Hess Station. Demolition of old structures will take place and the parcel will become green space with an eye toward future development. And it can't happen soon enough because also, and finally, this was the year that we saved the historic Tyler Street Fire Station. Work has already begun on the restoration and development of four market rate housing units by an experienced and valued development partner, CT Management.

This is exactly the kind of deliberate, comprehensive, and robust transformation that is needed to ensure the liveliness of this historic neighborhood.

## **AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN**

Last summer, when we learned that the City of Pittsfield would receive \$40 million dollars from the American Rescue Plan Act, I have to be honest, I didn't believe it was real. So we checked and double-checked and triple-checked and finally confirmed that it was, indeed, real money. That's when the excitement and optimism set in and we got to work. This once-in-a-lifetime infusion of funds has the potential to do so much good in our community, for both present and future generations. Recognizing that funds must be obligated by December 31, 2024 and spent by December 31, 2026, there is no time to waste.

First things first: we needed to hear from the community. My brilliant and dedicated team and I created a community survey and four community forums were held centering on public health and human services, economic recovery, housing and

neighborhoods, and cultural institutions. Each session was well attended and this input, coupled with the twelve hundred survey responses, helped to establish a baseline for understanding the needs of our residents. To learn even more, we recently held four community stakeholder forums to engage directly with our community partners who are providing vital assistance to the most vulnerable people in our city.

Building upon these efforts, I established the Mayor's Advisory Council, a nine-member group that has been thoughtful and diligent in their service and participation. Their contributions have greatly enriched the process and we are eager to continue engaging with the Advisory Council in the months ahead.

First round investments from the American Rescue Plan include funding for the YMCA to expand their child care programs, improvements to the city's drinking water

infrastructure at the Ashley Reservoir, closing the funding gap for the development of a homeless shelter at the First United Methodist Church, air-quality improvements to the city's fire stations, and upgrading the sidewalks throughout Morningside and Westside. Later, this month, we will issue an Invitation to Apply for the second round of ARPA investments. We are curious to see how Pittsfield's community partners and residents have reimagined their future.

While we have \$40 million dollars in local funds, we are also keeping our eye on the state's American Rescue Plan funds. With the help of our state representatives, Tricia Farley-Bouvier and Paul Mark and our state senator Adam Hinds, the city has already received an early first commitment of \$200,000 dollars to undertake a public school master planning process. With this master plan, we will establish a framework to guide our future

decisions and investments in our schools with a special emphasis on Crosby, Conte, and Morningside schools. A master plan is essential because we know our community tells a story. Robust neighborhood engagement will be an essential element of the study and many factors will be considered during the development of the master plan. There will be more to come on this. In the meantime, we will make investments in our school buildings using American Rescue Plan funds. The final designs are in for new heating and ventilation systems at both Pittsfield High School and Reid Middle School.

In addition to these important undertakings. Our school superintendent Joseph Curtis has laid out an ambitious plan for the future of our schools. Following an equity audit, an Equity Task Force has been created to provide guidance on how to dismantle inequities that exist in our schools. School leadership

is currently engaged in a school safety study to examine ways to ensure that all students feel safe and protected at school.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE**

In November, Congress passed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act to rebuild America's roads, bridges, and rails, expand access to clean drinking water, ensure every American has access to high-speed internet, tackle the climate crisis, advance environmental justice, and invest in communities. Along with the American Rescue Plan, the Infrastructure and Jobs Act will provide Pittsfield with significant opportunities to design a city for the future. In the first half of 2022, my team and I will prepare for these opportunities by studying the elements of the infrastructure bill, advancing shovel ready projects for Pittsfield's roads and bridges, and exploring with school leadership the

possibility of converting our school bus fleet from gas to electric vehicles.

## **AT-HOME**

In October, I, along with members of the Community Development team stood alongside Pittsfield resident Barbara Skalski in front of her home. There, I delivered an update on the At-Home in Pittsfield program, one of my administration's signature initiatives that was supported by the City Council. At-Home in Pittsfield is designed to assist residents who do not have access to traditional financing for exterior home repairs. At the end of September, nineteen homeowners were approved for funding, ten are located in the Westside and Morningside neighborhoods.

Barbara is one of those homeowners. At the announcement, she said, "I don't want my home to fall apart, and without this

program, I would not have been able to do it.” This is exactly why I created At-Home. When these investments are made, we stem the tide of deterioration, dismantle barriers that stand in the way of improving the quality of life for under-resourced neighbors, and help to close the wealth gap. There are so many residents like Barbara that we can help, therefore, I have allocated an additional \$1 million dollars from the city’s American Rescue Plan Act, bringing At-Home in Pittsfield’s total investment to \$1.5 million dollars.

## **POLICE STATION**

Progress has been slow and somewhat painful but we will not give up on our goal of building a new police station and a training tower for the Pittsfield fire department. Funding challenges exist. Locations are limited. Questions persist about new construction or renovation of existing spaces. The one thing

that we know for sure is that the current police station has long outlived its usefulness and with each passing day that facility becomes more and more deteriorated and unsafe. For example, recent flooding resulted in fast growing mold that damaged equipment and supplies.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

A couple of weeks ago, Pittsfield welcomed Lt. Governor Polito and Secretary Wood to city hall for a Community Compact IT Grant announcement. Joining us were other communities from around the region. \$99,000 dollars as awarded to Pittsfield for the creation of a free, public Wi-Fi network to boost internet access and equity in our downtown, in Morningside, and in the Westside. Our future depends on these innovative solutions to bridge the technology gap.

## **DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION**

In 2021, I proudly signed an ordinance officially establishing the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion as a new department in the City of Pittsfield. The creation of the office was one of several recommendations and findings produced by a study group that I commissioned. The study group was tasked with providing recommendations on enhancing diversity, equity, and inclusion in the areas of recruitment and retention, leadership and career development, cultural competency training, strategic planning, compliance, advocacy, and education.

The Diversity Statement written into the new ordinance states that the city recognizes its position of power and privilege and the influence of its actions on the community. The City is committed to recognizing, valuing, and responding to the needs

of a wide range of individuals who look to us for assistance, such as language, sexual orientation, race, class, gender, ability. In order to provide effective service, every City employee must understand how to respectfully interact with each other and every community member. By constantly learning about our community, evaluating our work, and adapting our approach to ensure that we continue to deliver quality services, we will create an inclusive and safe community where all people are empowered to live, work, and play—where individuals are respected and valued for their unique contributions. This ordinance along with public school policy is essential in our equity work. In 2022, I look forward to selecting the city’s and the school’s first-ever Chief Diversity Officers.

## **CLOSING**

The trials and tribulations of COVID-19 have made us stronger than ever. Pittsfield has a renewed fighting spirit that is shaped by strong partnerships, willing collaborations, teamwork, and sheer determination. Over the past two years, there were no egos here. People from all walks of life and diverse organizations came forward, raised their hand, said things like “I’ll do it,” and “I can help.” Building upon these powerful networks, we welcome the New Year and the new term. 2022 is filled with promise and possibility. Together, we are ready for good things to happen.