

2017 STATE OF THE CITY

YONKERS

MAYOR MIKE SPANO



March 22, 2017

Yonkers Riverfront Library

Good evening Council President McLaughlin, Majority Leader Larkin, Minority Leader Sabatino and members of the City Council, members of the Judiciary, the Board of Education Trustees, our Superintendent of Schools, teachers and students, State and County representatives, City commissioners and board members, and fellow Yonkers residents. I'd like to thank those watching live on News 12, Fios 1 or online. And a special thank you to my wife Mary and our children, Michael, Alexandra and Christopher who are here with us tonight.

Before we begin, let's give Yonkers' Children's Choir another round of applause.

This is the sixth time we've gathered here to talk about our City. I hope you feel, as I do, that you are among family and friends. Many of you know I come from a very large family, but I tell people they don't know the half of it. I am really part of the biggest family of all, the family of Yonkers.

The idea that Yonkers is a family has always guided me as Mayor. A family looks out for one another, works together, stands together in good times and bad, and is always working toward a better future.

The family of Yonkers seems more important than ever. The national discussion seems to be about division. Our leaders appear more interested in pointing fingers than extending a hand.

Here in Yonkers we do better than that. We can be scrappy and passionate about our politics, but we don't lose our respect for one another. We have more ethnic and political diversity than most, but we don't let it get in the way of our common goals.

We speak many languages in this City. But the one language we all have in common is respect. Respect for one another and a determination to work together which makes Yonkers a better community.

And how is Yonkers doing? After five years of telling you where Yonkers is headed, I can say today we have arrived. After five years of plans to solve our problems, we can now say those solutions are working. After five years of steering past the storms, today we are on a favorable course with the wind at our back.

Let's begin with public safety.

Yonkers remains one of the safest cities in the nation. According to FBI statistics, Yonkers moved up from the third safest city to the second safest among cities of similar size.

We plan to do even better.

We know that 22% of all crime in the city takes place in just two sectors of the 3rd and 4th precincts. By creating a new police precinct, which we will call the 5th precinct, and using

existing resources, we can target these areas and drive down the crime rate even lower. The existing precinct and sector car boundaries were drawn up many years ago, and it's time to adjust them to deal with today's facts on the ground.

Our police department has acquired its first bloodhound. Her name is Cali, and she's already helped us find a person who was threatening suicide. Using a piece of his clothing, she tracked him down to a wooded area, from where we were able to get him assistance. She's doing such a great job that I recognized Cali as our first non-human employee of the month back in December.

Cali is with us tonight – Cali, please come out and be recognized. You're a great addition to our team.

We are also working to ensure that our pedestrians are safe when walking our streets. Starting this spring, the Yonkers Police Department will distribute free reflective armbands to residents who routinely walk, run and exercise after sundown. We're calling it "Be Seen Yonkers" – be on the lookout for these – they can save a life!

For many years drag racing has been a problem on some of our major streets, Central Avenue in particular. It's a public safety issue, and a few years ago led to a tragic shooting of an innocent young man from Yonkers.

It's not enough to cite drag racers for traffic safety violations. Fortunately we now have a new tool on our side. Going forward we will be able to confiscate the vehicles of those who engage in drag races. Get caught once, and you won't be able to use your car to do it a second time. Special thanks to Majority Leader John Larkin and our Yonkers City Council for helping us out on this critical new law.

If you've been downtown recently, you might have noticed a new member to our fleet. We recently rolled out two new Segway Patrollers. With these Segways, police officers are more visible and approachable than they are in cars. They are also instrumental for larger community events such as the 4th of July celebration, RiverFest and National Night Out.

Take a look at our Segways in the lobby on your way out – but no riding them...That means you, Vinnie. But it's okay for you, Council President, just don't forget your helmet.

Our Fire Department is the other half of our public safety service, and we continue to make sure they have the best equipment to do their job. Last month we unveiled six new pieces of fire apparatus. These new engines and ladders cost more than \$4 million and are specifically designed for Yonkers. They run cleaner and are more fuel efficient. They also have steering

mechanisms and drive trains that are designed to make the tight turns on our narrow streets and climb our steep hills.

Tonight I am pleased to present the design for the long-awaited new downtown firehouse. It will be located on School Street and cost an estimated \$10 million. It will replace Station 1, which has become not only unsafe, but is economically beyond repair. I intend to present this to the City Council in this year's budget.

It's essential that our public safety forces represent the diversity of our City. In recent years we've made great progress in recruiting minorities. Since 2012 we've seen a nearly 200% increase in female applicants, a more than 50% increase in black applicants, and a nearly 90% increase in Hispanic applicants. The word is out – Everyone has an opportunity to protect and serve the City of Yonkers. That's the way it should be.

Let's give our first responders who routinely risk their lives for us a special round of applause.

Let us also not forget those who take care of our streets, schools and help run our government facilities. Thank you for your service.

Let us also recognize the ultimate sacrifice made by one of our own Yonkers residents, New York City Fire Chief Michael Fahy, who died in the line of duty in September. A humble, generous family man, Chief Fahy exemplified what it means to be a public servant. He never hesitated for a moment to put himself in harm's way to help others. His wife Fiona and their children, Michael, Anna and Cormac, continue to carry on in Michael's memory.

Fiona joins us tonight. Thank you for your service and we will always keep Mike in our hearts and prayers.

We know Yonkers is a great place to raise a family, and it seems plenty of other people know it too, because our schools continue to grow with more students every year. This year we enrolled 26,607 students, an increase of approximately one hundred from the year before.

Our schools are growing not only in size, but in achievement. Once again we led the big 5 cities in graduation rates. Our current high school graduation rate of 82% is not only the best among the big 5 school districts, but is above the average for the entire state.

Our schools are doing incredible things. And why not? We have incredible teachers, incredible administrators, and most of all incredible parents and students.

We also have some wonderful partners, such as Yonkers Partners in Education, which brings people from all over Westchester to act as mentors for our high school students and prepare them for college, which provides after school tutoring at the College Zone.

This program is doing so well that we have more high school seniors wanting to take part than we have mentors available. So if you can spend an hour every other week with a high school student to help them get into college, call Yonkers Partners in Education. They'd love to have you.

For years, we've talked about bridging the digital divide that can be prevalent in our community. This year, the talk is over. We now have another partner in education, Altice USA, which recently merged with Cablevision. We successfully reached an agreement in which Altice will provide a reduced price modem and discounted internet service to every child whose family's economic status qualifies them for a free or reduced price lunch. That's about 79 percent of all our students, and it means they will be able to get high speed internet at home for schoolwork. Utilizing e-rate dollars, the City will also contribute toward the cost of internet service for low income students, so that the ultimate cost to their families will be less than \$6 per month.

The digital divide can seem as wide as the Grand Canyon to a student who can't use the internet at home. This partnership will close the digital divide here in Yonkers. Thank you Altice for helping our young people become scholars.

We continue to improve our efforts to help the newcomers to our schools learn English, which is the first step toward succeeding as a new American.

To help the growing number of older students who are coming to Yonkers from other countries, our School District has created a high school International Academy for recently arrived English language learners in grades 9 and 10.

The International Academy will provide the best possible transition to English for these newcomers.

We have also created a dual language program for kindergarten and Pre-K children. The purpose behind this, is that by the time these children are in elementary school they will already be proficient enough in English so that they won't fall behind.

Immigration policy is a national debate these days, and seems to be dividing our nation.

Here in Yonkers we have our own immigration policy, and it consists of just three words – You. Are. Welcome.

Yonkers has embraced immigrants for as long as we've been a City, and we are not about to stop now. If you are a refugee fleeing persecution, a parent who wants a better life for your children, or a laborer who wants nothing more than to earn a decent wage for an honest day's

work, we do not turn you away. We do not fear you. We do not demonize you. We do not blame you for problems that are not of your making.

Instead we welcome you. We are honored you chose our city as a place to start your new life, and we look forward to enjoying the benefit of your contributions to our community.

We don't say go away. We say welcome neighbor.

That's the Yonkers way.

There is no place more important to demonstrate that than in our schools.

We are also expanding our career and technical education programs in the high schools. We want every student who wants to go to college to be able to do so. Yet many of the good jobs in our economy do not require college, but instead adequate trade and technical training. You cannot just show up and get a job as an auto mechanic these days, because there's a lot more to modern engines than changing the spark plugs. We are providing more technical training so our graduates will have the ability to go on to the specialized trade schools that can lead to a lifetime of success.

I also want to talk about sports in our schools. It was such a shame when sports were virtually eliminated in many of our schools several years ago. Sports build character and provide lessons in working together.

We have begun to bring sports back to our schools. This year we instituted an intramural program for grades 7 and 8. In the future we plan to bring back the JV teams. We will not stop until the young people of Yonkers have full opportunities for sports once again.

In 2014 President Barack Obama issued the My Brother's Keeper challenge to the mayor of every community in America. In 2016 Yonkers became one of 250 communities to accept his challenge and established a My Brother's Keeper program.

My Brother's Keeper recognizes the harsh reality that young men of color are at a higher risk to fail in school. That's often the first step to a lifetime of poverty, as well as an increased chance of incarceration.

The goals are simple. We want our young men of color to graduate from high school ready for college and career, to complete postsecondary education or training, and to successfully enter the workforce.

Led by our Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Edwin Quezada and Dr. Jim Bostic, executive director of the Nepperhan Community Center and Yonkers Thrives, MBK Yonkers has already hit the ground running.

Please join me in recognizing our Yonkers Public School students who are engaged in My Brother's Keeper – we know they will make a difference.

We also know that unplanned pregnancy among young people continues to be a problem. That's why we are entering into a nationally recognized partnership with Montefiore Health System and Planned Parenthood to ensure the health of both mothers and their newborns.

The nurse-family partnership program will assist first time mothers in low income families. A nurse will be matched with an expectant mother, providing guidance through her pregnancy and continue until the child is two years old.

The first-ever in Westchester County, this program will concentrate on maintaining a healthy lifestyle, avoiding future unplanned pregnancies, and working on strategies for the mother to continue education and employment. Working with Councilmember Corazon Pineda-Isaac, Yonkers will provide funds to get the program started.

The Board of Regents has joined our long-standing call to address the disparity between wealthy districts and poor. Why should a student's zip code determine whether he or she is in a modern classroom with a teacher for every 20 students, or an ancient classroom with a teacher for every 30 students? Why should a student's zip code determine whether or not they have access to a library, to enough guidance counselors, to adequate special education to overcome a learning disability, or sports and extracurricular activities?

It is time for the State of New York to recognize its constitutional duty to provide an adequate education for every child in the State. That means ending the divide between wealthy and non-wealthy districts. There should be no reason why a Yonkers student receives 25% less than a child who lives on the other side of the Bronx River Parkway.

Our schools are also among the oldest in the state, and we once again turn to our plan to rebuild our schools. Last year we made great progress with our Rebuild Yonkers Schools campaign, and we thank the Governor and the Legislature, especially our State delegation, for establishing the Yonkers School Construction Board that can issue bonds and begin the job of rebuilding our schools.

But we need to be clear, we need the State to take the next step, which is to provide Yonkers with the same amount of building aid that goes to upstate cities such as Buffalo, Rochester, and Syracuse. It is wrong that the state pays up to 98% of their reconstruction costs, but less than 70% of ours.

I want to thank the parents, teachers and members of the community who continue to reach out to our elected representatives in State Government to remind them how important this is for our children.

We are urging our community, especially our students to share and tag their state legislators with the hashtag Fund 2 Rebuild. Let them hear your voices – I promise you it goes a long way.

I hope you all grabbed a Rebuild Yonkers Schools wristband on the way in tonight – let us be united and display our school pride.

I know I do.

We can never be too concerned about school safety, and so we must be best prepared for the worst case scenario. This year, we are establishing a new state of the art school security system which links all cameras, alarms and lights to police and to a citywide security platform. We've held numerous interagency tabletop exercises, active shooter drills in the schools and new school security officer training – all under the supervision of our Yonkers Police Department. We hope the scourge of violence never hits Yonkers, but we are and will be prepared in the event that it does.

A city is where a lot of people come together to live, and there are more people coming to live in Yonkers than ever before thanks to our successful effort to work with investors and builders. The statistics tell the story.

As recently as 2014 the Planning Board approved just 104 units of new housing.

In 2015 that number increased to more than 1,000 units, as HPR Club, the RXR tower, the Mill Creek development, and others were approved.

Last year an amazing 2,800 units of new housing were approved, including the waterfront Avalon Bay project, Warburton Avenue, Extell, and Jackson Street.

That's nearly 4,000 units under development -- about a five percent increase in the city's total units. That's an incredible record, and we aren't done yet.

There are also more people than ever who come to stay in Yonkers for a day or two, since we now have more than 1,000 nationally branded hotel rooms throughout the city.

The online magazine "The Real Deal" is the bible of the regional real estate industry, and Yonkers seems to be showing up in it more than ever these days. Most recently they said our City was part of the Hipsturbia vertical growth trend. Millennials and empty nesters alike are expected to fill up the new high rises the developers are building.

We have begun the next phase of our Generation Yonkers regional ad campaign. Yonkers has drawn the interest of more than 50 new businesses since we began those ads telling the entire New York area what a great place Yonkers is to live, work and play. That means more jobs, more tax revenues, and continued strength in our city's economy.

The message is working. The Generation Yonkers campaign is resonating beyond the regional market. Yonkers was one of only three cities in New York State to make the list of "Top Cities for Millennials."

We have to compete with the entire tri-state area when it comes to attracting investment, and telling our story is an essential first step in generating interest.

Let's pause and take a look at one of the latest ads.

Thank you, Christian Petroni, for joining us tonight. We look forward to Fortina opening up next month.

Although we welcome new housing and development, we also recognize our obligation to provide quality homes for our public housing residents. Most of the city's public housing is between 45 and 60 years old, and almost all of it needs upgrading.

That's why the Yonkers' Municipal Housing Authority is investing up to \$250 million over the next five years to repair and renovate 1,773 units throughout the city.

I want to thank MHA's director, Joe Schuldiner, Chairman Judge Doran and the rest of the board for leading this project. I know our residents are in good hands.

We also recognize our responsibility to help the homeless, so we refused to stand by and watch the County Government run overcrowded and unsafe shelters in our downtown. We succeeded in getting the County to agree to safer conditions at one of its shelters. We've instituted new regulations which will require fire safety training for all shelter operators, just as they do in New York City. It is my goal to ensure safer and more humane conditions in our shelters. We've made great strides when it comes to caring for the homeless, and I vow we will continue to be vigilant.

We are expanding our award-winning Saw Mill River Daylighting program, which has already transformed the character of Larkin Plaza. Construction on Phase Three will begin this spring as we extend this unique urban park to New Main Street, behind City Hall. The Saw Mill River Daylighting is becoming the central feature of a newly-rejuvenated business, recreational and residential district.

To heighten the experience for anyone visiting the daylighting, we recently launched Experience Yonkers – an urban light and sound display featuring music and video relating to our community. Experience Yonkers can be seen and heard on the exterior wall of the Riverfront Library, on the sidewalks of Getty Square and under the Main Street overpass. Popular in Europe, Yonkers is the first city in the United States to permanently install and display this type of technology on a full-time basis.

Another continuing attraction to the downtown is also right here at the Riverfront Library. We recently opened Tech Central at the Library, which is a series of labs for learning, creating and communicating. You can take courses, you can hold conferences and workshops, and you can create media projects – all using the latest equipment. Among my favorites are the 3D printers. If you can think of something, you can design and create it in plastic using a 3D printer.

I've already printed my very own bobblehead collection. What do you think?

In all seriousness, many of our successes as a city would not be possible without the great work of our City Council. I want to extend my appreciation to each and every one of you.

We are also completing the effort to sell the many vacant buildings and lots that the city had acquired for non-payment of taxes over the years. A vacant building or lot is not only an eyesore, but it's a drain on the tax rolls. In the past five years we have sold surplus buildings and land in the amount \$20 million and have collected \$9 million from the sale of property acquired through tax lien foreclosures. The days of deadbeat properties are over as we aggressively put them back in action. And for buildings that are vacant but whose owners are still paying taxes, our vacant building registry is proving a potent tool to make sure they are properly maintained in the meantime.

Next month, one of our most well-known vacant buildings of all is opening as a new mixed use office and retail center. I'm talking about the Boyce Thompson property along North Broadway, which was vacant for nearly 40 years. For most of that time city leaders have been promising to revive it, and it's one of the first promises this administration made. I'm proud to say we got it done.

Let's take a look at what Boyce Thompson looks like today. Let's also thank the Simone Development Group for having the vision and the dedication to make a showcase out of this property, while managing to preserve its historic character.

Last year, we discussed the expanding Ridge Hill shopping center. I'm happy to say we will soon cut another ribbon on a national retail store – this time at Lowe's – the first in Westchester.

Despite all that is happening, there are even more plans for the future. One of the most exciting is the proposed Yonkers Sports and Events Center at I-Park, which is the location of the former Otis Elevator Factory. The Center would be developed by the non-for-profit Armory Foundation.

We have already received \$2 million toward the \$25 million estimated cost from the State Regional Economic Development Council. The center would include a 5,000-to-6,000-seat complex, as well as an educational center and restaurant.

The Center would attract people from throughout the tri-state area, and we pledge our full support to the Armory Foundation to make it happen.

I should note that unfortunately, last week, founder, president and CEO of the Armory Foundation, Dr. Norbert Sander passed away. Dr. Sander was a pioneer in track and field – he was the only New Yorker ever to win the New York City Marathon, and until his untimely passing, continued to be one of Yonkers’ loudest cheerleaders in promoting running, health and fitness. We pledge to continue his work in his name.

We have also auctioned a long-vacant City Building at 70 Pier Street, directly adjacent to the Ludlow train station.

I’m happy to announce the winning bidder is the Ginsberg Organization, one of the region’s major developers and one that has built a number of successful projects in Yonkers. Ginsburg proposes apartments whose residents could walk out the door and travel to jobs in New York City or points north. The Riverfront views would be astounding.

This new market rate housing on the north end of Ludlow Park will provide a revitalizing anchor for one of our City’s oldest neighborhoods.

Our economy continues to evolve, and tourism is becoming significant. And why not? We have a great museum, a casino, some of the best shopping centers, a magnificent waterfront with outstanding restaurants and galleries, a historic botanical garden, and biking and hiking trails.

We established the Yonkers Tourism Alliance a year ago, bringing together the hotels, restaurants, retailers and cultural centers to promote the City’s ever increasing offerings. Now we’re taking the next step and will be holding our first ever Yonkers Tourism Expo in April at Empire City.

Our waterfront continues to be the focus of our revitalization efforts. With expanding commerce and new housing popping up along the Hudson, it not only makes sense to bring people to our water’s edge but also to bring boaters there as well. So I’m excited to announce we are working with the development community to access grants to expand our piers along the downtown waterfront and at JFK Marina. A new pier can serve as a launch point for dinner

cruises, river excursions and private boaters. The Hudson is Yonkers' greatest asset – let's all enjoy it.

A centerpiece of our City's growing reputation is being a center for the Arts. Three years ago we established Yonkers Arts weekend, which we began as an experiment. It now attracts more than 10,000 visitors a year to our downtown galleries as well as art exhibits throughout the City. We just announced our call for artists' submissions to exhibit at this year's event, May 6th and 7th.

We also know our Hudson River Museum continues to reinvent itself. Earlier this year, we welcomed Yonkers native and resident Masha Turchinsky as the museum's new director. Welcome Masha and thank you for promoting Yonkers as a destination of diverse arts and culture.

Our City's finances continue to be a challenge, and it's one we must meet head on. Our bond ratings were upgraded once again this year, by both Moody's and Standard and Poor's. Both now give us an "A" rating with a stable outlook. The immediate effect of these improved ratings is to reduce our cost of issuing bonds.

But there's a bigger message here. That message is that, after years of financial instability, Yonkers is getting back on track. We are living within our means, our economy and tax base are growing.

Yonkers, not unlike most other major cities in America, has a city budget that will require us to look at every city service to see where we can save dollars. The cost of health care, union contracts, and pensions continue to outpace revenue growth. And not to mention municipal aid from New York State has remained flat over the last seven years.

I expect that the budget we will shortly unveil will be another challenging one, and not unlike previous years, we will have to make some hard choices. But we will remain fiscally responsible and continue on a path toward stability.

Among our challenges are our aging sewer and water systems. Like you, as a homeowner, one of my biggest fears is a possible break in an underground pipe along my property and not having it covered by my existing insurance. Well, I'm happy to announce, help is on the way. Partnering with American Water Resources, we will soon create a program in which homeowners can take out low cost insurance that will cover the cost of repairs. It will be voluntary, but will provide peace of mind against the possibility of unforeseen damages that can cost a homeowner thousands of dollars.

We know that the property tax burden remains high, especially for moderate and middle class homeowners. Rather than look to raise taxes even higher, we are turning our attention to those who currently pay no taxes at all. Many major property owners, such as colleges, hospitals, cultural institutions, and not for profits, are exempt from all property taxes. Yet we must still provide services to them to the tune of \$20 million a year. Our police and fire respond in emergencies, we maintain the roads that they use, provide streetlights to light their way, and collect their garbage. The list goes on.

We are going to propose that any institution with property worth more than \$1 million consider a voluntary payment in lieu of taxes. We would expect no more than 25% of what they would otherwise pay in property taxes. Many other communities, like Boston, Baltimore and Pittsburgh, that face financial challenges, have partnered with their major tax exempt institutions in this very same way.

Knowing how dedicated our many great institutions are to this city, we are hopeful that this voluntary effort will help keep Yonkers a great home for them many, many years into the future.

Among the crown jewels of Yonkers are our parks. And again this year we continue to improve them. We are rehabilitating the playground at Gramatan Hill, resurfacing the tennis courts at Schultz and Kinsley parks and renovating the restrooms at Redmond Field. You may also have noticed the new digital welcome sign at Murray's skating rink.

Our parks department is also partnering with our schools to begin an educational horticultural program. Special education students from Lincoln High School as well as the Westchester School for Special Children will assist the parks department as they grow and nurture plants in our greenhouses to be planted at Untermyer and throughout the city. What a great way to connect our children with our environment.

The environment is important to us all.

We continue to reduce the City's carbon footprint – not to mention our electricity bills – by replacing even more older lights with energy efficient, and brighter, LED lights. We're now moving this project into our schools. Again, partnering with the New York Power Authority, we replaced 10,000 light fixtures in our schools with LED lights and over 30,000 citywide. That will save us an estimated \$356,000 in energy bills each year – not to mention all the time we save by not having to constantly replace bulbs.

We also established an environmentally preferable purchasing policy in all city departments that emphasizes products that minimize health impacts and the use of toxins. We are also

installing 9 more electric vehicle charging stations free for public use, and we will be incorporating electric vehicles into the City's own fleet.

We also want to increase our City's refuse recycling rate. We currently recycle 45% of our waste. That's well above the EPA's goal of 35%, but it's still below the Westchester-wide average of 53%. So, to encourage more recycling, we will provide free, new recycling bins to interested residents on a first-come, first-serve basis, along with information on what and how to recycle.

Recycling is not only good for the environment, but it's good for the taxpayer. Every ton we recycle saves us money in dumping fees at the County's resource recovery plant.

Last year, led by City Council President Liam McLaughlin, we announced the beginning of our anti-littering campaign. We call it Respect Yonkers. You may have noticed the bright, clever signage throughout the city on our garbage cans. But, like recycling, we can still do better. This year, to promote the campaign to those who will inherit our city, the Yonkers Public Schools and the Council President are holding an essay and poster contest to help our kids understand the importance of promoting anti-littering and recycling. Thank you, Council President, for your leadership.

Our city is our home. Let's not fill it with litter.

Just as we don't want our city to be a home for litter, we don't want our magnificent Hudson River to be a parking lot for oil barges.

I am proud that Yonkers took the first steps by forming the Hudson River Waterfront Alliance to stop the federal government's insane plan to create ten new anchorage locations for oil barges near Yonkers and other waterfront areas. There's a surplus of oil, and the barges have no place to unload, so they want to stack them on the Hudson River. Besides increasing the risk of spills, everything we've done to improve our waterfront will be offset by the sight of oil barges moored along our shoreline for months at a time.

And area communities agree. I'm pleased to say over 30 municipalities, representing over 700,000 residents in the Lower Hudson Valley, have rallied for our cause.

We will stop this plan, and I want to thank Congressmen Eliot Engel and Sean Patrick Maloney along with all the other area elected leaders who have joined in our effort.

If our city and our streets seem a little more crowded these days, it's because they are. We've talked about all the new development that has taken place or is underway in Yonkers -- about the new people coming to live and work here.

That also means more traffic. If you are like me, you've noticed how long it can take to drive through Yonkers. We are completing better signalization and turn lanes on Ashburton Avenue, but we need to undertake a study of Tuckahoe Road, South Broadway, Yonkers Avenue and the other key arteries whose travel times are too slow. In some cases it may be a matter of better timing for traffic lights, and in others we may need turn lanes or other measures.

We intend to begin the process this spring and identify a priority list for improvement plans.

We also acknowledge the many sacrifices made by our many veterans who served our country. This year, I had the distinct honor and privilege of meeting a true American hero from our Greatest Generation – former Tuskegee Airman Charles Lovelace Lewis. A Yonkers resident, Mr. Lewis was a communications technician in the first black aviator unit in the US Armed Forces during World War II. Mr. Lewis and his mates battled racism and won. He reminds us that despite any injustices we may face, we must continue to defend our beliefs and freedoms as a country, because we are ONE nation, united under ONE flag.

Please join me in recognizing Mr. Lewis and all our veterans here with us tonight. Thank you for your courage and service.

I've outlined an ambitious agenda this evening. But I've also listed an incredible number of things we already achieved. Each one made possible by the dedication of those who serve our government and our schools, by our incredible community leaders and volunteers, as well as business leaders and investors who have put their time and resources into Yonkers.

We've got 4,000 units of housing built or under construction. Our City's bonds have gone from a near junk rating to an "A" rating. Our unemployment rate is down to five percent, almost half the rate that it was just five years ago. More than a billion dollars in private investment, and dozens upon dozens of new companies have flowed into Yonkers. Our schools are now beating the state average when it comes to graduation rates. We are one of the safest cities of our size in the nation. We have restaurants, galleries, and shopping centers that draw people from all over.

Five years ago we said we wanted to make Yonkers better. Working together I think we did that. In fact we did more than that. Working together we made Yonkers great. But we can't stop now. We have momentum. We have energy. We have the determination it takes to keep moving our City forward.

Most of all, we have the people of Yonkers. We have pride in who we are and in our diversity. We stand together and respect one another regardless of whether your family has been here for five generations or five weeks. We stand for friendship with our neighbors whether they are from Italy, Ireland, Mexico, Eastern Europe, South America, the West Indies, North Africa, or any other corner of the globe.

But regardless of where we come from, we are proud to say we are from Yonkers.

Because we are a family that stands together, stands for respect, stands for hard work, and never loses faith in one another or our ability to succeed.

That's the family of Yonkers. That's my family. I hope it is your family too.

May God Bless you and God Bless Yonkers.

Thank you and good night.