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ERIC WAGENAAR
CITY MANAGER

City Manager's Annual 2024 Report

January 2025

As we begin a new year and I complete my first year as the Watertown City Manager, I would like to provide you a close-out report covering 2024. I have enjoyed my year immensely and look forward to what the next year will bring. It did not take long to realize that we have an incredibly dedicated staff that works hard every day and is committed to this City. On top of providing day to day essential services to the city, last year was a very dynamic year starting with the windstorm in the first week of January, followed by two significant snowstorms, the April Eclipse, major summer construction projects, August flooding, key personnel changes, numerous community events, and closing out with another snowstorm with over 3 feet of snow. I appreciate the Mayor and Councilmember leadership, support, and guidance as the city staff navigated through these challenges while continuing to seek out ways to improve our support to the residents of Watertown.

The city staff responded to all the unexpected weather events with incredible professionalism. Starting with the January windstorm that left almost 13,000 residents without power in the dead of winter, and then followed by two snow events that exceeded 4 feet each, the DPW and our first responders handled these major events with poise and professionalism. This level of outstanding support carried through to the August flooding and the most recent snowstorm in December where we received over 3 feet in a 24-hour period. As I write this report, our Water Distribution team is finishing up its third water main repair over the holidays. One of the breaks occurred on Christmas morning and the team missed most of their Christmas day to restore service. It is this kind of reliable and dedicated support that makes me extremely proud of the entire City team.

While the eclipse attendance fell short of statewide projections, the months of planning and preparation put the city in the best possible position to handle any crises that might have occurred during that event. The supportive efforts of our residents, and key partners were amazing. We were READY and that is what is expected of our city staff. The event at Thompson Park was amazing and the positive responses were overwhelming.

We completed our Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) projects on time and with remarkable results. The City's downtown looks great and the street projects that were completed addressed numerous issues with water, sewer, stormwater lines, paving, and sidewalks. These projects made major improvements to those neighborhoods.

The city was fortunate to hire four new Department Heads in 2024: Tom Compo - City Engineer, Erica LeClerc - Human Resource Manager, Aaron Harvill – Water Department Superintendent, and Kim Johnston – our City Assessor. I am also excited to announce that our Confidential Secretary, Erica Anderson, was selected as the new Assistant to the City Manager. These leadership positions, along with several other key positions, ensured that our City Team could sustain our daily operations while also looking for new and enhanced ways to accomplish the City’s business.

An overview of what the City Staff accomplished in 2024:

CitiBus/Transit

Transported over 125K passengers in all weather

Completed the Federal Transit Authority triennial audit

City Clerk’s Office

Processed 3,473 various certificates and licenses

Performed 450 wedding ceremonies

Processed 6,973 certified copies of official documents and completed 51 genealogy searches for 2024.

City Comptroller’s Office

Processed 24,361 property tax bill payments totaling \$31M

Managed 8,073 water/sewer account payments totaling \$13M

Provided payroll for 550 employees for \$26M in wages and 6,577 accounts payable checks totaling \$52M.

City Engineer Department

Prepared 32 projects with construction costs totaling \$59,985,025.

Code Enforcement issued 1,366 permits, 4 new construction permits and 1,666 violations (trash & debris, snow & ice, property maintenance, infestation, and unsecured building) in 2024.

City Human Resources and Civil Service Office

Civil Service processed 800 personnel action forms, administered 39 civil service exams, processed 799 electronic employment applications, held 11 Civil Service Commission monthly meetings, and attended 11 recruitment events in 2024.

Fire Department

Responded to 5,650 incidents so far this year. This is approximately an 8% increase from 2023.

Reached full staffing at 72 Firefighters (Line Personnel: 48 Firefighters; 20 Captains and 4 Battalion Chiefs) and 4 Staff Personnel

Completed two recruit academies graduating 10 and 14 recruits, respectively.

Achieved ISO Class 1 rating. Fewer than 1% of all departments achieved ISO Class 1. This provides lower insurance premiums in our city, confirms we stack up well against industry best practices, and is tangible evidence of the hard work our people do.

Completed Assistance to Firefighters Grant - training 65 employees as hazmat technicians.

Flower Memorial Library

Welcomed 89,332 patrons through its doors so far in 2024. A total of 74,967 books have been circulated, with 91,484 materials circulated overall.

Hosted 605 programs for ages 0-adult with 15,058 participants

Information Technology Department

Completed over 1,800 Help Desk Tickets (Various Sizes and Flavors) (from 1/1/2023 - 11/21/2024)

Installed Security Camera System @ Flynn Pool

New Database Server Deployments

Completed staff work for new city phone system

Parks & Recreation

Hosted more than 43 types of events and activities, attracting over 150,000 participants. Some of the different events include:

Concerts: 3

Sporting Events:

- 4 Professional
- 12 Youth
- 10 Family
- 14 Other Entertainment events

Golf tournaments: 18 plus the Championship Dinner

Flynn Pool & Splashpad opening

Statewide Recognition: I Heart NY website names Watertown Municipal Arena 10th best in NYS

Planning Department

Processed 13 development applications for Planning Commission review; reviewed and processed 86 Zoning Compliance Certificates and processed 6 applications for review by the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Successfully applied for Pro-Housing Community designation through New York State

Completed the Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) Streetscape Enhancement, Public Art and Public Square Fountain Restoration projects

Completed the Thompson Park Bandstand Roof Construction and West Sector Trail projects

Police Department

Responded to 26,196 calls so far this year

WPD was assessed by the NY Division of Criminal Justice Services and was awarded reaccreditation on 12/12/2023. Accreditation is evaluated every five years. We have been an accredited agency continuously since 1998. Only about 25% of NY police agencies are accredited.

Graduated 12 police recruits, which is the largest class since at least 1988 (and likely in WPD history).

WPD has the highest percentage of female officers (20.9%) in Department history. The national average is 13.8%.

Public Works Department

Maintained over 100 miles of streets which also includes the maintenance of sidewalks, curbs, and street signs

Coordinated a City-Wide Hazmat disposal effort for years of stored waste, with several pickup days. Eliminated old, unknown waste materials that had been in the DPW for many years.

Salt Storage Building - First ever City of Watertown covered Salt storage building.

Chips Street Projects - DPW completed 5 street projects.

Flynn Pool – City was building a new pool/splash area, but the parking lot was not considered during the project. DPW took on the challenge and rebuilt the parking lot to last another 20 years.

Huntington Street TV and Cleaning – Worked with Engineering and a outside contractor to install a camera and used advanced technology to physically clean sewer pipes on Huntington Street.

City wide Sanitary/Storm cleaning – The city (DPW) is in a 10-year plan governed by EPA/DEC to fully clean the collection system every 10 years.

Purchasing Department

Purchasing has had 37 bids (25 awards, 4 rejected, 2 cancelled and 6 pending); 6 RFP's (3 awards, 1 rejected and 2 pending) and awarded 11 annual RFQ's for 2024. They have also processed 3,091 purchase orders.

Review and successful cancellation of the Avaya support coverage agreement (obsolete) for an estimated \$20,000 savings per year.

Created a Purchasing – Reference Materials share drive folder as a staff tool when purchasing items.

Completed five (5) auctions on Auctions International for the sale of declared surplus items. Sales totaled \$55,735.50.

Staff Support to Council:

221 Resolutions processed in 2024

13 Ordinances approved in 2024

8 Local Laws passed in 2024

Adopted and passed the \$57,714,496 budget for 24/25

Negotiated two union contracts

Water Distribution

Maintains over 100 miles of water pipes ranging from 4 inches to 24 inches and over 9000 service connections off the distribution system, over 2000 gate valves and 875 hydrants.

While conducting the valve exercise program throughout the city, distribution crews discovered 12 valves that were either leaking or needed replacement all 12 were repaired or replaced.

Over 100 service repairs were conducted throughout the year and 15 service replacements or new installations were completed.

East Reservoir Water Inflow Line Repaired

Street Water Line Replacements

Water Treatment Plant

Serviced approximately 50,000 people per year.

Supplied water to the Towns of Watertown, Leray, Pamela, Champion and Fort Drum.

Filtered 6.5 million gallons of water daily or about 2.3 billion gallons per year.

Provided 4,100 businesses with water.

Progress on the Disinfection By-Product (DBP) Project

Replacement of the Emergency Standby Generator

Wastewater Treatment Plant

Processed 4.2 billion gallons of water in 2023.

Treated 4.2 million gallons of septic and municipal sludge, as well as 34 million gallons of leachate.

Applied approximately 4,000 tons of biosolids to farmland

Five of the city's lift stations received upgrades which included communications and level controls. The upgrades standardized half of the facilities 10 lift stations.

New grinder pumps were installed at 5 lift stations, reducing clogs from debris entering the sewer system.

Congratulations to the following City Employees that have served our City for 30 or more years:

- **Tom Maurer – Civil Engineer II, Engineering (38 years)**
- **Chief Charles Donoghue – Police Chief, Police (31 years)**
- **Ronald Gatch – Detective, Police (30 years)**
- **Vance Trapp – Police Officer, Police (36 years)**
- **Deputy Chief Mike Kellogg – Deputy Fire Chief, Fire (30 years)**
- **Troy Chisamore – Fire Captain, Fire (33 years)**
- **Stephan Ososkalo – Street & Sewer Maintenance Supervisor, DPW (34 years)**
- **Mark Esposito – Crew Chief, Parks & Rec (30 years)**
- **Mike Lumbis – Planning & Community Development Director, Planning (31 years)**
- **Rosemary Fredenburg – Senior Account Clerk Typist, Water (31 years)**
- **Daniel Ososkalo – Water Distribution Systems Operator, Water (34 years)**
- **Todd Nottell – WWTP Process Worker III, WWTP (35 years)**
- **Matthew Fiorentino – Fire Captain, Fire (30 years in 2025)**
- **James Spencer – Police LT, PD (34 years)**

In addition to normal operations, here is a quick look into other upcoming key activities for 2025:

- **Burlington Street reconstruction**
- **Huntington Street Water main replacement**
- **Begin construction on the grant funded Black River Trail Western Extension.**
- **Continue to repair storm water and sewer system deficiencies in the Western Outflow to address the DEC Consent Order.**
- **City Court renovations begin in City Hall**
- **Water Treatment Disinfectant Byproduct Plant design completed.**
- **City Budget completion by 02 June 25**