

MINORITY SPEECH FOR CITY OF KINGSTON, MARCH 2013

Mayor Gallo, Mr. President, my fellow council members and to all of you here tonight, I want to thank you again for this opportunity to update and share our hopes & visions as we are still trying to meet the challenge of this tough economic cloud which is slowly lifting here in the Mid Hudson Valley and the City of Kingston. We are moving forward.

In recent months the council has worked together to address the most pressing issues confronting the city. Jobs, taxes and quality of life issues. The sidewalk café Legislation was enacted to make it fair to all restaurant owners and pedestrians to use the sidewalks in a safe manner and at the same time promote sidewalk café dining. In this same piece of legislation we also addressed the liability issue of sidewalk dining which was a concern for the City of Kingston. Most recently we passed legislation to confront the destruction of landlord's property by some of their tenants. They will now be held accountable. This makes the tenants and the landlords all part of the plan to reduce decay and the disrepair of housing properties. They all have a stake in cleaning up the city and its image.

The current administration and council has undertaken "clean up the City" agendas to rid the city of blight, revitalize Mid-Town. More code enforcement has been done in recent months than had been done in past years.

We are no longer going to throw platitudes at these issues . We are currently working on a policy to address abandoned buildings in the many neighborhoods in and about the city. It is time to make banks who foreclosed on homes to be responsible for property maintenance. Nothing brings a neighborhood down like a neglected structure in their midst. For a lot of homeowners their house is their refuge, where they raise their families ; an investment for their future and retirement years.

We passed a budget that had a slight increase on taxpayer's taxes which still is a major concern for all who reside and own a business in this city .We kept it at the 2% cap. This Mayor and council worked with dept. heads to see where we could cut expenses.

We are having to work harder to address financial issues here in the city . We also acknowledge that revenue is not always keeping pace and that state and federal aid is being reduced significantly. We have had to undertake some major repairs of our infrastructure . One in particular is the notorious sinkhole on Washington avenue. Fortunately for us, the economic development office of the City of Kingston was able to obtain a grant to defray the cost enabling us to further repair possible future issues underground at that site. During Super Storm Sandy our waterfront downtown took a hit from flood waters. In particular the sewage treatment plant which was just recovering from the hauling of sediment making

its way there from the Washington Avenue sinkhole. The sewage treatment plant is going to need major repair and upgrades and that needs to be addressed in the real near future. The City Engineer is currently creating a capital improvement plan. I know that Mike Schupp and the DPW workers get criticized when things go awry but in the last storm there were dedicated and innovative employees who risked their safety to keep the plant up and running. The same went for the water department. I know that city residents appreciated having their water supply intact, uninterrupted and with being able to remove waste from your home during that crisis.

Hence a Waterfront Flooding Commission has been formed to study how we will deal with this and future development on the Rondout. Many volunteers from different backgrounds are a part of this project as are elected officials. But along with bad news there is always a light at the end of the tunnel. Two businesses are in the process of getting ready to expand their business and personnel. The Seven21 media Center in Midtown notice an uptick of space being rented. With the closing of Kingston Hospital there is speculation that there are developers who are interested in the possibility of converting it into different entities. Sitting on the horizon is the opportunity of converting the Bank of America building into a new police station which would be a boom to midtown businesses and homeowners. All part of the hopes & vision of Kingston re-inventing itself. This growth is slow but steady.

Part of this process is the Comprehensive Plan which is moving forward. We are at the survey stage and I am encouraging all to get on board and complete the survey. This is a great way to glean information from our citizens and business owners as to where they want the city to go into the year of 2025 . We are interested in the compliments & suggestions just as equally as in the complaints. This data is needed to formulate the plan, for zoning updates and revamping. We want to be able to tell future developers what we need, not what they want or think we need . This current administration and council is committed to bringing businesses back to Midtown ,Uptown and Downtown. We want to encourage our local entrepreneurs and urge the local population to “Shop Local”.

Our parks in the city are finally going to get the needed funds to improve and restore them. We have been awarded grants for this project. I firmly believe that these parks are the treasures of the city. Unfortunately, they have been neglected far too long. Parks are important to the citizens as it is a way for all to enjoy the outdoors , to relax , listen to concerts and converse with people. It enhances a sense of community. Movies under the Stars which was very successful last year is an example of people turning to the parks for entertainment venues. Some of the parks have magnificent views of the Hudson River and the Catskill Mountains. These parcels of land were deeded to the city from past land owners for our benefit with the hope that the parks would thrive. We have been a poor steward in past decades due to inattentiveness, change in priorities or lack of funds. But

that is now going to change.

I would be amiss in not noting and thanking the many civic and volunteer groups for contributing time and energy into making the City of Kingston a great place to reside and visit. This includes festivals that lure tourist to our great city by the many artistic organizations ,and civic groups. One group in particular is the Kingston Land Trust that has focused on making the city accessible with their visions for biking and hiking on our local rail trails. This is now an exciting possibility for major hook ups along the Hudson River and connecting it to trails already in place. Along with that we have the potential to reap economic benefits for the city and Ulster County. Recently, the Mid Hudson Valley was listed as one of the top choices for hiking and biking trails in NYS.

A thank you needs to go out to the Kingston Police dept. Once again another round up of drug dealers was conducted last month. I stood here at the podium in April last year and congratulated them for a job well done in Operation Clean Sweep. It just goes to show that the KPD is responding to the need to be ever vigilant in going after crime. Our Police Chief Tinti is innovative in fighting crime in the 21st century, has created a transparency in the KPD whenever possible and he is responsive to the concerns of residents. Recently he held a public safety summit at City Hall involving all local law enforcement agencies in Ulster County.

To the Kingston Fire Dept and Chief John Reinhart we give a big thank you for your part of the rescues in the recent floods about the city created by Sandy. You responded in a quick and professional manner which we all appreciated. There is nothing worse or frightening than to have flood waters lapping at your property with the possibility of being trapped. During Sandy I and fellow council member MaryAnn Mills spent time at the command center. We were impressed how all dept. heads handled unexpected situations. Kudos to the fire dept. for also handling fire and medical emergencies throughout the year .

This year negotiations are still ongoing between the different unions. This will have to be the year of some concessions. We as a city along with other municipalities in NY state are suffering financially with many shortfalls looming on the horizons. As I have stated before we need a contract that we can support within our financial constraints. We have taxpayers who are suffering financial losses along with the possibility of losing their homes. I have a problem with life long citizens in our city especially the elderly losing their homes in their later years. I feel for and I am concerned for young families who desire to buy a home and stay in the city but cannot. These families are our future for Kingston. Some of these individuals are your neighbors, relatives, friends, or people you grew up with. A lot of them do not have pension plans or health insurance coverage but

their taxes pay for yours. Some are underemployed or unemployed. I ask that all parties at the negotiating table be mindful and sensitive to that issue.

As I have said before, the City of Kingston has many things to be proud of in its past, in its amenities, in its civic life, its historic properties and architecture, and an innovative spirit with the new residents who call Kingston their home. It's all good! Now is the time to move the city forward in a spirit of "we are all in this together". Not divided by political parties. We are too small of a city to stake our future on just one political party or ideology. We all have a lot to contribute.

Respectfully submitted,

Deborah Brown, Councilwoman, Ward 9

Minority Leader

