

**Address to the
Irondequoit Chamber of Commerce
January 15, 2015**

Good afternoon and Happy New Year to all of you. Thank you so much for the invitation to speak with you today, to share some updates on where we are as a Town – our accomplishments over the past year, and some new and exciting things to expect in 2015.

When I came before you a year ago, we were just starting to get to know each other – and I was optimistic that we would work together and form a relationship of cooperation. That optimism was justified and I want to sincerely thank you for working with me, sharing your thoughts on issues facing our town, and embracing a new partnership with your town government. Whether it's hosting public forums together, sharing calendars of community events, and meeting regularly with me and my staff, we are in fact working together – and our collaboration has proven successful.

A year ago, you asked me to talk about where we were as a town, and to kick off a conversation about my administration's priorities. I shared my thoughts on what I thought was going well but I also acknowledged some challenges we faced – perceptions that gave the impression our town might have been off on the wrong track. And I felt that it was important to acknowledge our challenges – because in my view, challenges are really opportunities. They are opportunities to make things better, and do something good for our community.

We were a town that often times was defined by controversy rather than a cooperative spirit: whether it was roadblocks to building our brand new library, millions of dollars in tax breaks for the former Irondequoit Mall – tax breaks that were still in place despite an obvious lack of progress and despite a partner that was clearly not acting in good faith.

It seems like a long time ago, but it was just a year ago that Medley Centre stole all of the headlines – for all of the wrong reasons.

Taxpayers were shelling out millions of dollars in tax relief in the form of a PILOT agreement whose provisions were essentially disregarded, and through tax credits by the state of New York. And how were taxpayers thanked? No new development, no new jobs, and a complete disregard for the town code and rule of law.

In just one year, we moved the ball, and made progress in ways we were told were not possible, because it was too complicated.

In conjunction with the East Irondequoit School District and COMIDA – we terminated the PILOT agreement. With the help from Assembly Majority Leader Joe Morelle – the Empire Zone tax credits – that required job creation – were also terminated. Monroe County took action earlier this summer to start the foreclosure process for unpaid special district taxes, and the town code was enforced, leading to the largest fine in the history of Irondequoit, and proving that no one is above the law.

Our work with Medley Centre is not complete – but – by cutting off taxpayer subsidies – your government has acknowledged what you’ve known for a while now – the project isn’t working. And by closing the door on that chapter – we have opened a new door of possibilities to move forward, and we will continue to open those doors by utilizing every tool in our toolbox to encourage new, local ownership with the resources and vision to fulfill their commitments.

I said it last year, and I will say it now again – the failure of Medley Centre will not define the Town of Irondequoit. There are just too many good stories coming out of our town to allow one bad actor to hijack our agenda. And I think the progress we are making in Irondequoit proves that Medley Centre is the exception – not the rule.

I-Square, on the other hand, is one of the good stories and is the new rule. What once seemed like a dream, is literally transforming a corridor of our town. The first building is teeming with people – exceeding all of our expectations – and it proves that Irondequoit can make the big projects happen – it just takes leadership, cooperation, and a local developer who is acting in good faith--to improve our community.

Another good example of our success is Depot Plaza—a parcel that was once an empty eyesore has been given new life and is now a part of the revitalizing of Ridge Road. And just last month, Culver Ridge Plaza was purchased by a local owner with a reputation for success. This is significant as it is the first step in restoring vibrancy to a neglected property. I am optimistic that here, too, good things are going to happen in the near future.

To encourage more successful development projects like I-Square, Depot Plaza and Culver Ridge, Irondequoit will no longer just sit back and see what happens. Instead, we are going to be actively engaged in making progress happen on this and every other potential project that will benefit our community.

This type of engagement has required a change in the way we do business at Town Hall. Step one was reorganizing our Community Development Department – transforming it to the economic development arm of town government. We reorganized and reconfigured our staff so that rather than developers of new projects being left on their own to navigate through an unfamiliar web of boards, codes, and forms—we have instead developed a process that shepherds projects through their development and streamlines the various layers of approvals and notifications required. In short, we’ve simplified the process – and the fact that Irondequoit – Not Henrietta, Greece, or Webster, opened Western New York’s first SONIC restaurant is proof that it works.

That may not sound like a big thing – but trust me when I tell you, that doesn't happen by accident.

In addition to Sonic, we made significant progress by opening the brand new Aldi's. We anticipate the opening of the new Chipolte and Starbucks in the next few months, and of course, we continue to watch as I-Square progresses on its trajectory of galvanizing a central economic hub in the town.

Just as we have greatly improved the process that makes these projects a reality, we are also introducing a more defined strategy for our economic development. Our mission is to market Irondequoit through intentionally seeking new opportunities to invest in our town, as well as encouraging the way business and government work together—as one community—to grow and expand our commercial base.

We are going to start with a strategy called Market Irondequoit.

The idea for Market Irondequoit really started a couple of months ago when the Town Board approved, for the first time in 30 years, a comprehensive master plan. This plan outlines a vision for Irondequoit – a community vision – including extensive input from our residents – and in particular, members of the chamber of commerce. We even hosted a forum together this past summer, which went extraordinarily well, in seeking input, but also demonstrated that we are working together to move Irondequoit forward. And this was a powerful message to send not only to our current residents and business owners, but to potential residents and those seeking to do business in our town.

The comprehensive plan developed a number of recommendations for the town, including a marketing strategy to better communicate with potential residents and developers the benefits of moving to Irondequoit, and a strategy for how we are going to make them successful.

This year, we are going to put these recommendations into action by doing a number of things. First, through Market Irondequoit, we are going to partner with the Chamber of Commerce to produce a new, first of its kind, proactive publication that will distill for visitors what it is that makes Irondequoit a great place to live, work, and raise a family. This publication marks the beginning of a much more assertive recruitment effort that will help reshape how people view Irondequoit, define our place in the greater community, and signal to those seeking new opportunities that Irondequoit is open for business.

Last month, I submitted legislation that expands on a little known program – our capital exemption program – to include commercial properties in Irondequoit. The way it works currently is that if you make an improvement to your home which increases its assessed value, those corresponding taxes will be phased in over the course of several years – softening the initial tax implication for making those improvements.

I am proposing town legislation to expand this capital program to include commercial properties – encouraging businesses to invest in their properties – and ensuring that new investments are not met with something akin to a penalty.

Furthermore, this legislation creates an industrial and commercial incentive board charged with studying the exemption, and reporting to the Town Board a recommendation on an enhanced exemption that could be applied to commercial properties based on their geographic location – to benefit certain areas of town in most need of revitalization – or to target certain types of commercial enterprises – to target certain industries. Our goal is to make sure that Irondequoit is positioned as the best place to grow and expand you business.

Tonight there will be a public hearing on the legislation, and town board approval is expected in February.

In the next two months, we will also be working on a new initiative – our troubled properties legislation. For many of us, our homes are the biggest financial investment we will ever make – and we cannot allow our property values – our tax base – to be undermined by the negligence and irresponsibility of a few property owners. This is not a problem unique to Irondequoit – but in a community such as ours that is largely residential, it becomes that much more important.

Therefore, the town will be making improvements to the property maintenance code when it comes to absentee landlords, property maintenance scofflaws, unsafe structures, and abandoned properties. The legislative process will kick off next month, at the February town board meeting, with a public hearing so that we can hear from and gather information from residents, business owners, and professionals. We will use that information, and look to other municipalities across the state and country as we put the legislation together, and present it in a couple of months.

In addition to business needs – we are taking care of the quality of life issues that make us a unique community. And this is important, because we ask our residents to pay enough in taxes. We are entrusted with your hard earned tax dollars – and for that – you deserve to get something in return. If town hall exists only to push paper and file forms, then I couldn't look you in the eye and tell you we are doing all that we can do to improve our town.

That's why, to kick off the New Year – we opened the first public ice skating rink in a generation. It's right on the front lawn of town hall for everyone to see, and is free and open to anyone who wants to use it. In addition to the recreational benefits, the rink is restoring that small town – village like feeling our residents are looking for. The rink will be open daily – weather permitting – until the winter thaws.

And just because it's winter – and it's cold – it doesn't mean we have to hibernate indoors and put those festivals we are known for on hold. On January 31st – we are

going to have our inaugural Irondequoit Winterfest. The Winterfest will include horse drawn wagon rides, ice sculpture demonstrations, snow boarding demos and simulations, working husky dog demonstrations, a petting zoo, arts and crafts for kids, food trucks, ice skating, and more. It's going to be the best Winterfest in our area – and live up to our reputation.

In the coming months we will continue and expand the work we have begun on new, much needed athletic fields – making sure our kids have all the opportunities available to them that are offered in other towns. We are also making much needed improvements the cabins at Camp Eastman. The cabins are small and outdated, and have outlived their lifespan. A couple of months ago, the town board decided against spending good money after bad by approving, as part of our capital improvement program, funding to start replacing the cabins with new buildings that we can be proud of.

The town is also making strides this coming year by making significant investments in our parks and recreation programs, updating aging playground equipment, and replacing the town's spray park.

We are making progress toward improving the economic climate and quality of life issues in Irondequoit. And I believe that's because we are changing the way we operate. We no longer let controversy dictate our actions but instead work together, encouraging cooperation and mutual advancement.

Which brings me to the construction of Irondequoit's new, consolidated library. It is a project that at one time was not certain – but we had the resolve and resilience to overcome obstacles and get the job done. I'm happy to report that construction is on time and on budget. The library will open its doors to the public this fall –and will be a first class resource in a first class town.

The town government will no longer be closed off from engaging the community. We just launched the town's first true community calendar – encouraging organizations and the public – including the chamber of commerce – to share their events and activities. Whether it's Kiwanis, Rotary, Lions Club, the Chamber, or community service foundations – the more we work together – the more successful we will be.

To show how serious I am in continuing to build on our relationship, and in moving Irondequoit forward – I, myself will be the town's liaison to the Chamber of the Commerce. In my mind, there is no better way to demonstrate our commitment to success.

Part of that success is better communication through the community calendar. In addition to the calendar we have launched another new initiative called Inside I-town – the town's first video newsletter. Each month, we will release a new video newsletter on relevant topics, informing residents on what is happening in town. It's another way of communicating with residents – and again – marketing Irondequoit.

As I begin this New Year, I am renewed in my sense of optimism. Irondequoit is on the right track. We will open a new library this year, we will continue to attract new businesses and developments, we will grow our recreation – and quality of life programs and services – and we will persist in making necessary changes to the town code signaling that Irondequoit is the best place to do business. And we will accomplish this by working together.

I look forward to it!

Thank you.