



CITY OF RYE

CITY HALL • RYE, NEW YORK 10580
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2017 STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

Joseph A. Sack - Mayor, City of Rye

January 11, 2017

This month, we are celebrating Rye's 75th Anniversary as a city.

On January 1, 1942, the City of Rye was formed. Prior to that, our municipality was a village within the Town of Rye. However, by special act of the New York State Legislature, we seceded from the Town and became our own independent, stand-alone city.

There has not been another city created in the state since then. So we are the latest... and the greatest! We should congratulate ourselves for reaching this important milestone.

This year, I myself am starting my fourth year as mayor.

The most fun I have as mayor, hands down, is a little tradition I started of hosting the second grade classes each year from the Osborn, Midland and Milton schools for tours of City Hall.

As an extension of the tours, I also began inviting the fourth and fifth grade student government representatives to attend the mayor's annual State of the City address. I believe that many of the students here tonight received their first introduction to city government on one of those second grade tours.

When you hear your name, please stand, and remain standing until I have called all names.

Midland School

Lila Byrne
Hannah Cali
Kate Foster
Isabella Garcia
Eli Kerlan
Ryan Lunstead
Charlie Margiloff
Tucker Press
Mali White
Dan Yamaguchi

Milton School

Thomas Anderson
Cami Brooks
Molly Budke
Will Crawford-Rubin
Ava Cross
Drew Dolan
Delia Fuchs
Mackenzie Gillen
James Kennedy
Molly Kennedy
Katie Kmetz
Kiera Ladrow
Kayla Lombardo
Charlotte Lorraine
Henry Paul
Kendall Reidy
Jude Sadler
Kendall Scansaroli
Hannah Slavin

Nicholas Vlasto
Luca Zambianchi
Donna Zhang

Osborn School

Kimaya Agarwal
Parker Canna
Brendan Chapman
Riley Doran
Sofie Fu
Dylan Garbutt
Kiran Gounden-Kobes
Ben Orser
Matthew Pellegrini
Dillon Schmidt
Sophia Shoemaker
Luca Strazzini

Congratulations on taking an interest and active role in student government. Keep up the good work!

During the tours, I have challenged myself to explain to the students what it is exactly that city government does. I have boiled it down to three things: We help keep the city safe, clean and fun.

We do this primarily through our Police and Fire departments, our department of Public Works, our Recreation department, and our Golf Club and Boat Basin enterprise funds. And we try to maintain this high level of service while also keeping increases to the tax rate as low as possible.

Of course that is not all we do, but it helps outline many of our core functions.

This year, during the tours, I could tell the story of many of the recent successes we have had.

For example, in 2016, we did things which have been talked about for ages. But we finally turned words into action.

We spearheaded the passage of a voter referendum – approved overwhelmingly by the residents of Rye – to create a commissioner of Public Safety.

This innovative new position will oversee both the Police and Fire departments. As a result, we will not only save money, but also bring professional management to the Fire department for the first time.

We will of course continue to rely on our volunteer fire chiefs and firefighters, and to respect and honor their long history of service. But this move will balance the needs created by changing circumstances and demographics.

We also approved an increase to the City's debt limit, which had gone unchanged since the current City Charter was first passed a half century ago. This historic debt limit adjustment will allow us to keep up with the changing times, and to have the flexibility to borrow funds necessary to meet our ever increasing public works and infrastructure needs.

And we negotiated a good settlement in the Fair Labor Standards Act class action litigation involving Rye Golf Club. This agreement with the golf club wait staff workers puts to bed the final remnant of the golf club scandal which came to light just over four years ago.

With this unfortunate episode now officially behind us, and as the golf club continues to thrive under new management and a new catering agreement, the future at the club is now brighter than ever.

As we move into 2017, we will continue to address other issues. These are often not new issues, but rather old issues which have either returned or persisted.

We will follow Starwood Capital's application to develop the former United Hospital site, and the Village of Port Chester's consideration of the required zoning change to accommodate that development.

We are cognizant of our limitations in not having approval authority over the application, but we continue to advocate that environmental impacts, including traffic impacts that affect not only the abutting neighborhood but also other areas in the City of Rye, be mitigated to the greatest extent practicable.

We will consider Crown Castle's application to install Distributed Antennae System nodes on pre-existing utility poles in the City's right-of-way. We will also consider residents' concerns that the DAS nodes are unsightly and will have an adverse affect on adjacent property values.

In this situation, while we can exercise some approval authority with regard to placement of the DAS nodes. While we do retain some rights as a result of both contractual agreements and local legislation, we understand that those rights are not absolute, and that our oversight is also limited by the requirements of state and federal laws.

We will maintain in litigation with the County of Westchester regarding Rye Playland, that the County does not have unfettered control over proposed improvements at the amusement park. The County must not only obey the requirements of the State Environmental Quality Review Act, but also allow the City's land use boards to give necessary site plan and other approvals.

We will advance towards a new master plan, with the City Planner last week finally issuing a Request for Proposals to solicit the assistance of outside consultants in drafting the first update to that document in 30 years.

We will work with our neighbors in the Town of Rye to determine the best path forward at Rye Town Park, which is located wholly within the City of Rye, and for which the City covers more than 50 percent of the operating losses, but which is governed by a commission controlled by the Town under state law. The selection of a new restaurant operator is on the agenda this year.

We will negotiate with the City of Rye's collective bargaining units to devise union contracts which fairly recognize the good work of our City employees, but which also confront the reality that out-of-control health care costs are not sustainable and will overwhelm our budget resources.

And we will meet a host of other equally important challenges and opportunities, ranging from flooding, to deer, to sewage and storm water, to freedom of information law requests, to a new agreement with the Rye Nature Center.

The first year I was mayor, when we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the construction of this City Hall, I researched the grand opening of the building by reviewing old copies of the *Rye Chronicle*. Each year since, I have maintained the habit of looking back 50 years.

What I have come to learn through this review is that the hot issues then, are the hot issues now.

It really is uncanny. Whether it be Playland, or residential construction, or teen substance abuse, or parking at the train station. The recurrence of these topics has given me much needed perspective, and some solace, that the issues of today did not begin with us, nor will they end with us.

The repeating nature of these issues does not mean that they are insoluble; rather, it just means that they will always be present, and that we must simply be ever vigilant in addressing them.

This trend extends back more than 50 years, more than 100 years, virtually to the very beginning of public life in Rye.

Recently, a terrific new book was published, authored by local Rye historian Paul DeForest Hicks. Entitled *John E. Parsons: An Eminent New Yorker in the Gilded Age*, the book covers the life of a famous lawyer from Rye during the mid-1800's into the early years of the last century.

One passage of the book recounts a confrontation over an application for a trolley line in Rye.

At a public hearing in 1899, according to Mr. Hicks, "Parsons stated that he had known Rye all his life and that the proposed trolley line would 'destroy the character of the place.'"

Mr. Hicks writes: "Eventually, a compromise was reached, allowing the trolley company to run a line through the village's business district to Rye Beach. In return, the company agreed to a route that ran along a road beside the railroad tracks to Mamaroneck instead of down the Boston Post Road."

"When construction of the line through the business district commenced, the *Port Chester Journal* commented: 'Of course there are some people who object to the extension, others object to the change of routes and some who want no trolley at all. But one might as well try to stem the Falls of Niagara as to prevent the introduction of a trolley in the present century.'"

All of the controversial issues which capture our attention seem to relate in one way or another to the question of how best to protect the quality of life in Rye. Often this means how to balance change with tradition; how to manage new things, with our desire to keep things just the way they are.

During the second grade tours, I take some time to regale the students with stories of Rye history, by using the examples of our great leaders from the past, whose portraits hang on these walls.

Mayor Morehead (his portrait is in the lobby), who generously donated all the funds to construct the great public building we are in; Mayor Grainger, who lead the fight against Governor Rockefeller and Robert Moses and stopped the Oyster Bay Bridge; Mayor Ilse, the first woman to serve as mayor of Rye; and Mayor Otis, who continues to serve us as an elected official in Albany.

Mayor Carey is one of Rye's great citizens, and he has always been generous with me in dispensing sage advice.

Recently, Mayor Carey suggested that I consider establishing an award, presented by the mayor, to someone who embodies civic virtue.

I am doing that tonight, and I am naming the award the Mayor John Carey Merit Award – “Presented annually by the Mayor of the City of Rye to a Rye resident who has made meaningful contributions to public life in the City, both in the past year and over an extended period, in the example of former Rye Mayor John Carey.”

This year's first recipient of the Mayor Carey Merit Award is none other than... Henry King.

Henry is a long-time Rye resident and a tireless volunteer at the Rye Nature Center.

Henry, while always modest and humble, has become an expert in the field of beekeeping, and like a true philosopher, has wisely stated that “just when you think you know everything about bees, they teach you something new.”

Henry has taken a keen interest in, and been a strong advocate for, flooding issues in Rye, particularly with regard to Beaver Swamp Brook, which runs by his back yard.

Henry is a constant and reassuring presence at Rye City Council meetings, always sitting middle and center in the chamber at our bi-weekly Council meetings, acting as a one-man Greek Chorus on the contested issues of the day.

At the conclusion of meetings, Henry graciously provides – to those who are smart enough to ask – his take on what had transpired, shaping opinions by the clarity of his unvarnished assessment.

Henry is a sharp observer, and has applied his strong powers of perception in a number of areas, benefitting those around him with his soft-spoken but trenchant comments, as he explains the mystery of otherwise hard to understand topics, and reveals important and interesting truths about our environment and ourselves.

Well done, Henry!

During the tours, the students always come well prepared and ask excellent questions.

One question I usually get is, “how much time do you spend in your role as mayor?”

If I actually added up all the hours I devoted to the job, I would probably cry. But the students are surprised to learn that I am a volunteer, and that I am employed as an attorney in private practice. As a result, there is a full-time professional City manager and City staff that runs the City on a day-to-day basis.

One of the compliments I get the most comes during the winter when it snows. Residents will approach me and thank me for the great job I did plowing the roads.

The truth is that I have virtually nothing to do with keeping the streets clear. The City Engineer and our great DPW workers take care of that. But since I get blamed all the time for things that are not my fault, I sometimes will say, “you’re welcome, nothing to it!”

But tonight, having made this small confession, on behalf of the entire Council, I would like to acknowledge Marcus Serrano and Eleanor Militana and all the department heads, many of whom are in attendance tonight – thank you for all that you do, and thank you for making the rest of us up here look so good.

Next, the students will inquire, “what is the hardest thing about being mayor?”

Being mayor can certainly be challenging. And it’s not always so glamorous. Constituents can be quite demanding. But this is public service, after all, and it’s my job – our job – to be responsive to constituents.

At the end of the day though, it is also our job to look out for the best interests of all of Rye, and not just to personally advocate for one particular opinion or another. It is important that we resist the temptation to side with one view, no matter how loud or forceful, at the expense of the bigger picture.

For sure, we cannot please everybody in this job. What I have learned is, no matter what the issue, half the people feel one way, and half the people feel the other way. And another half feels a third way. That’s me channeling my inner Yogi Berra.

So what is most important as mayor, in my view, is that I help facilitate a fair process, allowing everybody an opportunity to be heard and to express their points of view. That way, all have a chance to contribute to a compromise outcome.

During the presidential campaign, I speculated that Donald Trump could win the primary and then win the race for the White House. And that has come to pass.

But I opined then, as I do now, that – with all due respect to the President-elect – Mr. Trump could not get elected mayor of Rye, or mayor of any other city for that matter.

Because the qualities and characteristics of a good and effective mayor, are the willingness and ability to listen to all perspectives, to sometimes absorb people's anger and frustration, and to try to build consensus.

Believe me, I'm only human, and there are plenty of times when I'd like to take a page out of the Trump playbook, and tell an unruly or unreasonable speaker or two where they could go, and what they could do.

That may be the new definition of what it means to be presidential. But it wouldn't be mayoral.

And it would certainly not be any way to treat my fellow neighbors and residents.

Please don't forget, I live here too. They don't just break me out of a glass box for these meetings. I stand on the train platform next to you. I run into you at the drycleaners. I coach your kids in CYO basketball and Little League baseball.

So no matter how strongly held your opinions are, no matter how righteous you think you are, it is my prerogative as mayor to demand

that we be nice and treat each other with mutual consideration and respect.

We're all in this together. And that's worth pointing out to students and grown-ups alike.

Naturally, a follow up question is, "do you like being mayor?"

Without a doubt, I am extremely fortunate to have the honor of serving as mayor. And no matter how hard it gets, I truly enjoy every minute of it. Because if you don't love it, you shouldn't be doing it.

Once I was asked, "what is the name of your dog?" Before I could respond, one of the other students shouted out that she knew the answer. I asked her how, and she replied somewhat indignantly, "uh, because I've been to your house, several times!" (A friend of one of my daughters.)

As an amateur politician, it's difficult for me to recall all the names and faces of the people I meet. So if you see me on the street, please don't be shy about stepping right up and saying hello and reminding me how we met!

The highlight of the tour is at the end when I bring the students up in small groups to take their seats on the dais. This is a thrill for them, and frankly part of the message that I try to instill, which is: You should envision yourself sitting up here one day.

I always encourage their continued involvement in public life, and empower them with this thought: In this room today, there are future Council members, there is a future mayor.

By luck of the draw, the student who ends up sitting in the mayor's seat, has the gavel in front of him or her. And that student gets a few special

pointers in mayoral gavel technique. Of course the real trick is, the best way to wield the gavel, is to use it sparingly.

Finally, as the tour comes to an end, I position myself in the rear of Council chambers, at the bottle neck leading out into the foyer. And I have them all give the mayor a firm handshake, and look me in the eye and state their name. Because that is a skill that you need to develop not just in politics, but in life.

Once, after I had just said farewell to the latest crop of second graders, bringing up the rear on this receiving line, was the school nurse. And she gave me an incredulous look and said – “if I were you, I’d go wash my hands right away...”

Good advice for sure, but let the record reflect that being mayor in Rye is a job where you need to get your hands dirty!

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, leaders of the past, present and future: Upon the 75th anniversary of the City of Rye, as we look back on our accomplishments of the year and years gone by, and as we aspire to achieve even greater goals in the years to come; as we re-new our commitment to one another, and as we strive to elevate all of Rye – assessing the state of our City, I can observe with great faith and confidence, that it is unyieldingly strong.

Thank you, God Bless you, and God Bless Rye.