

City of Auburn, New York Public Statement  
New York State Assembly Committee on Cities  
Public Hearing on City Infrastructure Concerns  
February 4, 2016  
Delivered by Michael D. Quill, Mayor

Good Morning and thank you for the opportunity to present today regarding the City of Auburn's Infrastructure Concerns.

As you well know, New York State's physical infrastructure is critical to our economy and affects the daily life of our residents- from facilitating the movement of travelers and goods and services to providing reliable, safe drinking water. However, as recently illustrated by the "2015 Report Card for New York's Infrastructure" by the American Society of Civil Engineers NYS Council, the State as a whole received an unacceptable grade of "C-". Furthermore the State's Bridges, Roads and Wastewater infrastructure facilities received a grade of "D" or "D-". Much of this has to do with infrastructure facilities operating beyond their useful life expectancy and the lack of capital infrastructure investment funds. How can the City of Auburn and the State of New York compete for business and industrial development when New York State very clearly sends the message that it does NOT prioritize investment in infrastructure? Your attention to this matter today is greatly appreciated. In the upcoming state budget the legislature has the opportunity to set the state on a path toward significant improvement of our infrastructure needs.

#### Introduction & Background

The City of Auburn is located within the CNY Regional Economic Development Council and is the seat of local government for Cayuga County. Similar to all cities across New York State, the City of Auburn faces a host of serious infrastructure challenges. The economic well-being of the City of Auburn is dependent on its physical infrastructure and how it affects the daily lives of our 27,000+ residents. In total, the City of Auburn has:

- 329 streets with 104 centerline miles;
- 21 bridges and culverts;
- 1 high-hazard and 2 moderate-hazard dams;
- a community water filtration facility & wastewater treatment facility;
- 109 miles of water distribution mains;
- 101 miles of sanitary sewer collection lines; and,
- In addition, the City provides professional police and fire protection and judicial services to City and County residents and these services are currently housed in aged buildings that need immediate replacement.

Funding for the City of Auburn's infrastructure comes from a variety of federal, state, local and private sources. As time goes on the gap continues to widen as the costs to maintain and improve infrastructure increase at exponential rates while the City's ability to spend money on capital improvements diminishes with each budget year.

The City of Auburn's upcoming critical infrastructure needs include:

Roads and Bridges: Through the City's annual Road Improvement Program, we currently have a \$13 million funding need to bring City streets in a state of "good" condition. Due to increasing fiscal constraints, unfunded mandates and the Tax Cap, the City is only able to contribute less than \$1.5 million annually to fixing these roads.

Water and Sewer: The City of Auburn's water and wastewater utilities are under increasing pressure to make significant investments to upgrade our aging and deteriorating treatment facilities, pump stations, distribution and collection systems.

The City of Auburn's water and wastewater utilities service over 45,000 users and are under increasing pressure to make significant investments to upgrade our aging and deteriorating treatment facilities, pump stations, distribution and collection systems. A 2013 Water and Sewer Capital Needs Assessment outlined over \$28 million in capital improvement costs to the City's water and wastewater infrastructure. The largest category of need is the installation and maintenance of water transmission and distribution systems and sewer collection systems- accounting for \$15.9 million or about 56% of the capital needs projected through 2023. NYS's mechanism for funding assistance related to water and wastewater infrastructure is the NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation (EFC). While the City has been successful with receiving principal forgiveness and funding assistance from EFC since 2009, it is widely understood that infrastructure projects that consist primarily of water distribution or sewer collection improvements receive low priority for funding assistance through EFC. The City is also too large to receive benefits through the USDA Rural Development Water & Environmental Grant program (population threshold of 10,000). Therefore it is largely left to the system owners and operators, such as the City of Auburn, to fund these infrastructure projects on our own. The City would need to commit \$2 million/ annually on water and sewer line infrastructure to address the aging system. With 16.3% of the City's population on fixed income and 19.1% of the City population living at the poverty level, the City is forced to defer maintenance because of insufficient funds.

Public Safety Facilities: The City of Auburn provides professional police and fire protection services that currently operate out of an 85-year old building. We are currently beginning the process of working with our Cayuga County related programs and City court system to establish a regional public safety facility. The facilities for our police and fire are in need of immediate attention. While the headquarter building has served the City well, it is antiquated in meeting the needs of modern 21<sup>st</sup> century police and fire services. The facility is not fully accessible to the public, does not accommodate space for a modern Emergency Operations Center and is located in the Owasco River inundation zone. Of most concern is the cracking of the concrete floor in the fire department apparatus bay.

After a 14 month long investigation that consisted of a needs assessments and exploration of modernization of government services, the City of Auburn in cooperation with several Cayuga County Departments has spearheaded the first municipal public-private partnership project for a regional public safety facility in New York State. This collaborative, multi-jurisdictional public-safety infrastructure project will not be feasible without New York

State leading the charge and providing funding assistance to municipalities to aid in modernizing infrastructure in our Cities and downtowns.

Recommendations:

It has never been more critical for New York State to construct and rebuild infrastructure to be resilient and sustainable. I offer the following recommendations to the committee for you to implement in the 2016 State Budget:

1. The City of Auburn takes seriously the concept of the State Property Tax Cap and recommends that a true 2% cap be used. The cap that is tied to the rate of inflation, which this year is .12%, is unreasonable and will only allow the City of Auburn to raise an additional \$15,000.00 through property taxes. Our City's long term financial plan forecasts 2.5% annual growth in expenditures. We urge the state legislature to make the property tax cap a true 2% cap, not one that can fall with inflation. If the true 2% cap is not to be established then we support the proposal of the New York Conference of Mayors (NYCOM) to establish the creation of an additional program that would allocate new unrestricted aid to local governments known as Tax Cap Equalization Aid.
2. Increase unrestricted aid (formerly State Revenue Sharing). In 2011 the City of Auburn's Aid & Incentive to Municipalities (AIM) funding was cut and has been held flat ever since. This is the most direct way the state can assist localities with addressing local infrastructure needs. AIM funding should be restored to pre-2011 levels.
3. This year local governments received an additional \$50 million for "Extreme Winter Recovery" to help municipalities pay for the damage to local roads brought on by snow, ice and cold temperatures last winter. While our current winter has been mild we are still recovering from the extreme winters of 2014 & 2015. We encourage the restoration of Extreme Winter Recovery funds or take the \$50 million and increase the Consolidated Local Street and Highway Improvement Program (CHIPS).
4. We support the Executive's Budget proposal for a \$21 billion DOT five-year capital plan to upgrade critical roads, bridges and other vital transportation infrastructure throughout the State, especially upstate. We urge support of The BRIDGE NY (\$1 billion), PAVE NY (\$1 billion) and the Extreme Weather Infrastructure Hardening Program (\$500 million). We further encourage that these funds be distributed proportionately throughout the State so that each locality will receive their necessary share.
5. We support the Executive's Budget proposal for a \$100 million Downtown Revitalization Program, however, REDC districts should be able to allocate the funds to multiple City downtown projects not just those in 1 City's downtown;
6. We support the Executive's Budget proposal for the Expand Tourism Investment Proposal. The City of Auburn is the future home of the Harriet Tubman National Historical Park, the agreement with the National Park Service is expected to become official by spring of 2016 and

the establishment of the Tubman park will be one more highlight of New York's many tourism offerings.

7. We support the Executive's Budget proposal for the Protect Critical Infrastructure program. This is critical to enhancing public safety for localities.

8. The final recommendation we offer today is that New York needs to reform and streamline the approval process for infrastructure projects and consider adopting Public-Private Partnership (aka 'P3') legislation so that 'P3' is the standard for all Cities in NY State. The State has opened the door with the Tappan Zee Bridge Replacement Project and the Goethals Bridge Replacement project that utilized 'P3' to design, build, finance and maintain the infrastructure project. NYS is behind 33 other States of the Union that have already adopted 'P3' legislation. As Cities become more likely to bump up against their constitutional debt limit, it makes a great deal of sense to transfer the risk and financial responsibilities to the private sector. We urge you to consider this public-private partnership model for addressing aging infrastructure in our NY Cities.

Thank you again for the opportunity to make this statement today regarding concerns on City Infrastructure. Mr. Chairperson, this concludes my prepared statement. I would be pleased to respond to any questions that you or other members of the committee might have.