



State of the City Address January 24, 2023

As I look out on this 24th day of January – still the beginning of a new year – I'm reminded of the beginning of my administration. Back in January 2020, we were excited to get out of the gate fast and tackle exciting projects, blissfully unaware of what was coming to the world just a few months later. Oh, how we would all be tested. I spent my first summer as Mayor contemplating canceling the iconic festival we have celebrated since 1978 – The Popcorn Festival. Which I regretfully felt necessary.

Yet, the City persevered over the panic. We showed up for the community. Police, fire, ambulance, utilities, trash and recycling collections continued without interruption. Our bills were paid. Our meetings continued, moving to screens we all shared.

We overcame fear, we asked some tough questions of our public health leaders, didn't always agree with their response, but we worked hard to balance caution and courage. We supported our local business community and worked to keep doors open. While other communities were turning the lights out, we were shopping local. Today we have a lot to be proud of.

I'd like to acknowledge that our kids and seniors were some of the most affected by the global pandemic. We're working to support both of these audiences and recognize the compromises they were forced to make. In speaking of youth, I want to share a community highlight – the formation of the **Mayor's Youth Council**, now in its second year. We created the council to give young people a look at their local government, a chance to build leadership skills and engage with the community. Today we're pleased to welcome members of the Mayor's Youth Council. Please stand. Thank you to each of you for sharing your time this year. We know we will see you in leadership spots throughout your future and we enjoy the spark you've brought to City Hall. You represent our future.

Our youth and seniors truly inspired us through the pandemic and motivated us forward. While the world paused and other communities went dark, the City of Valparaiso used the time to plan and lay the groundwork for progress we're seeing today. I'd like to share some of those highlights today.

First, let's look downtown. This year will see us break ground on projects that will greatly enhance the east side of our downtown to complement the positive we see surrounding Central Park Plaza. **The Linc** will be a \$30-million-dollar development, combining residential with commercial use. It will add more than 120 living units, from lofts to multi-bedrooms, complete with the amenities today's residents are seeking. The ground floors will offer opportunities for business, serving The Linc residents and others.

Across the Street - The **Lincoln Highway Garage** will support The Linc, and many existing downtown businesses by providing more than 350 parking spaces. The \$15-million-dollar project will make our downtown an even more desirable place to live, work and shop.

Look for both of these projects to break ground in the next few months.

In other exciting news, we look to see the gradual opening of **Journeyman Distillery** later this year, transforming an abandoned factory into a regional destination. This \$30 million-dollar redevelopment project is something we've been working on collectively since 2017. Journeyman will be the centerpiece of a transit-oriented district we're calling the Barrel District, connected to downtown by a walking trail that also connects to the Creekside area. We look forward to gatherings at this new destination and celebrating the collaboration that makes projects like Journeyman possible.

A complementary redevelopment project will also begin this year – the **Grand Gardner Hotel**. This \$32-million-dollar project will transform the former Gardner School on Chicago Street. The Romanesque building was constructed in 1899 and recently served as the Boys & Girls Club. The new landmark will be a 58-bed boutique hotel, with a conference/meeting space including a 1920's themed speakeasy lounge in the rafters on the top floor - drawing visitors to our community, adding vitality, while preserving history.

The Brooks residential development is nearing completion and the first homes are under construction. What is of great importance to me is the positive impact the public infrastructure work will have on public safety and stormwater management for decades to come. With the completion of Vale Park Road, our police and fire department now have direct access to all the residential subdivisions on the City's west side. With the completion of the stormwater ponds, erosion along Beauty Creek and other waterways within the City will be significantly reduced.

The Uptown Apartments renovations were completed in late 2022, and new residents have already begun occupying the former student housing complex. Although the City was not financially involved, I fully supported the focus on workforce housing close to the downtown. It's likely that many of the residents will work in our downtown or other parts of our community. People who work in Valparaiso should have an opportunity to live in Valparaiso.

Another gratifying accomplishment was working with the City Council to distribute **ARPA** funds in support of city **nonprofits**. Valparaiso is so fortunate to have such quality organizations engaged in our community. **Dressed for School** helps outfit Valpo school children with clothing they get to choose themselves. **Hilltop** provides affordable daycare and preschool options in a neighborhood setting. **Mitch Peters** and **Respite House** provide transitional housing for men seeking treatment for drug and alcohol dependency. Further, the City looks forward to partnering with Respite House to develop a men's shelter and warming facility to assist residents at risk.

The environment was another winner this past year. The City has a successful history of environmental stewardship and energy efficiency. Currently 873 **solar panels** are being installed at five locations throughout the City, including City Hall. The project will save taxpayers an estimated \$4.6 million dollars in electrical costs over the life of the panels, not including any additional savings based on surplus energy produced.

Further, the City continues to improve the quality of life and sustainability for Valparaiso residents. Utilities will be embarking on major capital improvements for both water and wastewater utilities. This forward-thinking will include the renewal and replacement of aging infrastructure. It also includes assessing the long-term water supply needs for our community by considering **Lake Michigan water** as an additional water source.

As you drove to the Expo Center today, a portion of your trip may have been along Route 30. For the last several years, the City has been diligently working with INDOT on a \$22.5-million-dollar project for road enhancements and overall beautification. The project highlights Valparaiso as a destination rather than a drive through. The old Quality Inn hotel was demolished in anticipation of a redesigned configuration of Silhavy Road, which will, of course, include a roundabout. In addition, you will soon see new signs along Route 30 welcoming visitors to stop in Valparaiso.

Perhaps no bright spot is more exciting than the Parks initiative we launched last year. **Valpo for All Generations** sends a clear message that we do indeed see our youth and our seniors. This initiative embraces all ages – for this generation and those who come after us, advancing our long-time commitment to parks and to an extraordinary quality of life. It embraces a trend we’re seeing nationwide that **the future is outdoors**. We embrace this concept in Valparaiso and continue to support golf, mountain biking, pathways and all outdoor sports.

In 2023, we’re excited to see two major advances of this initiative, as we break ground on the **Next Generation Skate Park** and the **Valpo Sports & Recreation Campus**. The skate park has been designed by world-renown skatepark designer and former VHS graduate, Dug Ketterman. The park will be both highly visible and highly accessible, serving the next generation of skateboarders, scooters, BMX bikers and in-line skaters.

And the city’s newest and largest park, the **Valpo Sports & Recreation Campus** will begin taking shape this year. Designed by the community for the community, this 248-acre park is possible only because of the planning and legwork accomplished during the pandemic.

The park will be a tremendous mix of active play space including multi-use fields and pickle ball courts, plus passive natural spaces to hike and enjoy nature and spaces to gather. We’re so excited by these shared spaces and the positive economic impact this project represents.

These are just some of the highlights for projects we’re working on. Valparaiso is fortunate to have so many excellent and excited partners willing to invest their confidence and their dollars in our city – many in this room today. We’re excited to foster these projects and relationships, moving the city forward while preserving its integrity and character. 2023 promises to be another monumental and positive year for the City.

I’d also like to shine a light on some of the positive progress we saw in 2022, strengthening the foundations of Valparaiso.

- Like the shiny new surface on our original water tower at Tower Park. We were pleased to feature a new brand for the city to serve our community.
- In 2022, the City retained its “AA/Stable” bond rating, based on the city’s strong financial oversight, resources, and overall performance. This rating by *Standard & Poor’s Global Ratings* places Valparaiso among the top communities in the state with only 19 Indiana municipalities receiving a rating of AA or better. Though we don’t frequently borrow funds, it’s gratifying to know that our financial position is strong, qualifying us for the very best interest rates, maximizing funds for our taxpayers.
- The City’s Rainy-Day fund continues to increase, growing to more than \$4.7 million dollars, a sign of our stability and ability to spend within our means.
- Last year we invested \$2.7 million dollars in street rehabilitation, with the help of a \$1 million-dollar Community Crossing grant from INDOT. In addition, we invested more than \$1.4 million dollars in sidewalks, replacing and installing nearly 3 miles of sidewalk and pathway.
- We made roadway and pedestrian safety a priority, installing a new traffic signal at the Froberg Road and State Road 130 intersection. We installed radar feedback speed signs, curb bulb outs, raised crosswalks and speed tables. We look to add even more to these roadway safety measures as safety continues to be a priority in our growing community.
- We continued to support our neighborhoods. This year saw more than \$275,000 dollars in neighborhood improvements, with the help of 20 Neighborhood Improvement grants. This successful program has funded 79 projects since 2018, creating more than \$1 million in positive impact citywide, putting neighborhoods in control of improvements that improve their quality of life.

Finally, I'd like to highlight **Public Safety** – the priority that makes our other accomplishments possible. Recently the **Valparaiso Fire Department** confirmed its superiority with a Class 2 rating by the Insurance Service Office – one of just 12 departments in the state to achieve this standard or better. The ranking demonstrates superior and reliable fire safety by the fire department AND city utilities, and it translates into more affordable insurance rates for Valparaiso property owners.

The fire department continues to upgrade equipment, replacing frontline apparatus and heart monitors this year, improving safety for the community and our firefighting team.

Our extraordinary **Valparaiso Police Department** is one of just 15 Indiana agencies and 800 nationwide to be accredited by CALEA, the gold standard in accreditation, demonstrating that they hold themselves to a higher standard. Their success is based on sound leadership, quality training, the best equipment money can buy, and hiring the very best. Because of the quality of the department, it's not unusual for a job posting to attract more than 200 applicants – meaning Valparaiso is a desirable place to serve in law enforcement and affords our community the ability to hire the best of the best.

All of these glowing accomplishments are the result of hard work, looking forward and leadership – translating a collective vision into reality. And Valparaiso is full of great leaders. I'd like to recognize a few as we wrap up today.

A leader of young Valparaiso men – **Bill Marshall** came to our city in 2001, where he attended Valparaiso University and shortly after graduating began his teaching career at Flint Lake Elementary. He joined the coaching staff at VHS and became head coach in 2018. Not only does Bill lead his team to win a lot of football games, but he helps make them winners *off the field* by instilling in them a sense of community and volunteerism. His teams donate their time sprucing up our parks helping out at a local food pantry. And this past November, we watched as he led his Vikings to Indianapolis' Lucas Oil Stadium again. But this time to win, in nail biting, heart-pounding fashion - the 2022 5A State Championship game. For the North! A victory this City has been waiting for since 1975! It was - as the opposing coach called it a "game for the ages." And in true Bill Marshall fashion, when he returned home the next day with his team to a huge rally at Central Park Plaza, he presented the game ball not to one player or one coach – he presented the game ball to our community. By the way, it's at City Hall in my office, come visit. I will bring the ball out in my white gloves and no you can't hold it. Friends, please join me in recognizing an incredible leader of our kids. I am so glad that he's inside Valparaiso High School every day, leading and interacting with our kids, **Valparaiso Teacher and Head Football Coach, Bill Marshall.**

Another big win happened in November as well, and that was the victorious campaign that Jeff Balon waged to become the next Sheriff of Porter County. While Jeff was celebrating, I turned my focus to selecting his replacement, a vital position in our City. One of the marks of a great leader is who they promote and surround themselves with and Jeff did that with top notch leaders. So, I was able to select someone from inside the Department. Last month I was pleased to introduce a new police chief. I'd like **Chief Andrew McIntyre** to stand. Let's all congratulate Chief McIntyre – a leader who has served in every sworn division of the VPD and committed himself to building the department since he joined their ranks in 2009. Chief McIntyre was chosen after a comprehensive evaluation of candidates, including interviews with dozens of members of the VPD. We're so pleased to have him leading our police department and look forward to his service. Likewise, I'd like to recognize **Assistant Chief Mike DeHaven** – please stand – for his unwavering professionalism and commitment to leading as he has served as assistant chief since 2017. We're grateful for his continued service.

We are so fortunate to have such dedicated leaders in our community. I'd like to thank my entire **leadership team**. I'd ask them each to stand. I'd like to recognize each member of the team for their ongoing commitment to the long-term success of the City of Valparaiso.

And finally, I want to thank you all for your support of my role as mayor. When I attended the 2019 State of the City at Harre Union I listened as Mayor Costas addressed us all and he had a couple of requests for the next Mayor. One, to run a positive campaign. And he also asked that the next Mayor not be a “caretaker.” Well during the campaign I took the high road, the only road - and I’m so glad that I did, because it has helped me be an effective leader of a diverse political community. As to not being a caretaker, I have taken that to heart by starting some significant projects like the Valpo Sports and Recreation campus and bulldozing large swaths of the downtown historic district. Just kidding! But, to be fair to my critics, we ARE **being bold in our downtown** and I know it’s a little scary, but we are going to do it right – The Linc and the Lincoln Highway Garage will complement the historic character of downtown Valparaiso – the heart and soul of our City. And the truth is that City of Valparaiso has not forced anyone out. We support our local businesses. When ‘Round the Clock chose to sell their property (and not the City), we worked with them diligently to try to find them another location in Valpo.

Now when I stood before you three years ago, I was confident that on this day, I would be an incumbent mayor seeking a second term. We couldn’t have predicted the world events or the path ahead. While I’m grateful for the new challenge ahead at Urschel Laboratories, I will miss serving as mayor alongside an extraordinary group of men and women who made this ride so fun and enjoyable. On this day, I pledge to you that I will lead with high energy and commitment throughout 2023 and until I pass the gavel to the next mayor in 2024.

With that said, I would not be here today without the leadership of Jon Costas, whose role as mayor so inspired me to get involved. I wanted to be a part of the direction of this great city. Further, I stand before you today confident in our city’s future knowing that Jon Costas is willing to re-engage and return to leadership.

Today, I thank you for your continued confidence in me and my team. I want to leave you with a couple of ideas on how I feel Valparaiso’s success is measured:

- By the safety of our community and its residents.
- By the continued maintenance and upkeep of our roads and utility infrastructure.
- By the programs and opportunities offered by our Parks department.
- By the prudent fiscal decisions taken by our City Council and Clerk-Treasurer.
- And by the sustained and managed growth as a community.

On all of these measures, the City of Valparaiso is an outstanding and successful city. It is a tremendous honor to serve, and I thank you all for the support in the ongoing success of Valparaiso. Thank you.

The following is the introduction written and presented by Lee Lane of Genetos Lane & Buitendorp LLP. Lee Lane is Board Chair for the Valpo Chamber, which hosted the annual meeting.

Intro for Mayor Matt Murphy

Lee Lane

Today is a significant day because this will be Mayor Matt Murphy's fourth and final State of the City address. On November 23rd, Matt "surprised" us when he announced that he would not be running for another term. I know he has some really great opportunities ahead of him, but I wanted to take a quick look back over the last 3 years and reflect on just how outstanding his performance as Mayor has been.

Mayor Murphy led the City through one of the most difficult three-year periods in the City's history. On January 28, 2020, Matt Murphy gave his first State of the City address and about 6 weeks later, the world effectively came to a stop: countries shut down their borders, professional sports teams canceled their seasons, schools closed, and businesses sent their employees home. To say that Matt Murphy had a lot on his plate, would certainly be an understatement. There are so many things that he did to respond to the needs of his constituents, but I want to focus on three things that he did for the business community.

First and foremost, Matt Murphy took great efforts to communicate with the business community through a weekly conference call. It was through this weekly phone call that he briefed businesses on major news concerning City services and relayed to us the direction that he was getting from the Governor and other State Officials. He made the calls from our Chamber offices and worked closely with the Chamber staff in keeping the lines of communication open. In an unprecedented time, when there was no blueprint on how to move forward, Mayor Murphy did an outstanding job in keeping the business community informed.

Secondly, the Mayor developed a small business grant program in which the City applied for and received from State government, a grant for approximately \$300,000; and the city made these funds available to small businesses that were in need of assistance. Businesses applied, an independent third-party evaluated the proposals, and the grants were awarded quickly in a way that allowed them to do the most good. This was another way in which the Mayor provided leadership to help our small businesses.

Thirdly, in spite of all the pressing immediate needs, Matt Murphy did not allow himself or the City to become short-sighted. He continued to look beyond the "crisis" and kept a strong focus on economic development. Over the last three years, he has continued to work the economic development puzzle like a rubics cube – strategically addressing all the pieces - schools, residential development, commercial and industrial development, and quality of life – just to name a few. These are all pieces that are needed for a vibrant business community to thrive. And because of that, today the City has 12 significant projects currently in the works.

During the pandemic, Matt Murphy promised "We'll come back stronger." It wasn't just talk. He strategized, he collaborated, he ensured that he had the right leadership team in place and then he and his leadership team worked side-by-side and hand-in-hand with this community to make that vision a reality. In last year's State of the City address, Matt called 2022 a "New Season"... and it was. Matt has been a strong and dynamic leader when this community needed leadership most and his bold, yet measured, full-steam ahead approach has helped our business community to grow. So, Matt may have surprised us when he decided not to run for a second term, but he's made it very clear that he's not done. I believe his words were "We're not going to take our foot off the gas during my final year in office." Because of leadership like that, this City is in really great hands. Ladies and Gentlemen, I give you Mayor Matt Murphy.