

**Inaugural Address
Mayor Sal Panto, Jr.
January 2, 2024**

On this inauguration of my fifth and final term, I want to thank the citizens of Easton for this incredible opportunity to serve. It's a humbling and exciting to oversee the renaissance taking place in our city and turn the tide of people who wanted to write us off. We have not experienced this type of growth since the early 20th century.

I want to thank our father/Son judges for swearing in our office holders. For the Honorable Jack Panella. To his son Brian, congratulations on becoming the newest member of our Court of Common Ple

I want to thank and acknowledge my wife Pam, who served on City Council for 6 years. She is my guiding light and soundboard and the individual who helps me through challenging issues. Also our children. They are always there for us and have given us seven wonderful grandchildren that I love spending time.

I want to thank my parents - Sal and Mary Panto, dad who gave me my work ethic and great upbringing and worked extra jobs so that I was able to go to college and my mom who always supported me. Even though mom is not here today, she is with me in spirit.

My brothers and sister -- Joe Paul and Nancy -- have been big supporters and workers on my political campaigns and my extended family as well - nieces, nephews, cousins, aunts and uncles. Thank you for being with me every step of the way for the last 16 years. I am glad to have you by my side on this journey.

And Pam's parents -- my mother and father-in-law – Mary and Jack Wallaesa -- for their love and support and her sister Sue who now resides in Florida. My mom and in-law parents look down on me and hopefully they can smile at our accomplishments.

To our newest members of the Easton City Council, Frank Pintabone and Crystal Rose -- welcome, and congratulations. I look forward to working with both of you on Easton's future.

I want to especially thank my City Administrator Mr. Luis Campos who has been the leader of a great group that makes up our senior management team. I have a great staff and city employees.

I also want to recognize the members of our Administration and the city employees. We owe them all big thanks.

I also want to give a shout out and a huge thank you to Randy Galiotto my campaign chairman who really did a great job and has headed my campaigns for the last 20 years.

Since the last time we were here in 2020, a lot has happened. Three months into our term our lives were upended by a pandemic that isolated us from our family and friends, shut down our schools, and created new levels of uncertainty that we've never experienced before – about our health, our lives, and our future. But today, the pandemic is in the rear-view mirror and Easton didn't just survive, we thrived. And thanks to our lobbying efforts we were able to get our fair share of the American Rescue money. Our allocation was originally \$2.3 million and with the help of Congresswoman Wild and Senator Casey and with the White House we received \$20.6 million.

The progress we've made is tangible. We can see it and we can feel it. And yet, our success in some areas has only sharpened the contrast between the work we've done and the work we still have left to do. Even amidst a strong economy many people struggle to find stable careers and can't afford decent housing. And, all the while, the pressures of climate change, of poverty, and of polarized politics heighten tensions while increasing the urgency of action. We've built partnerships and our success must also go to Governors Rendell, Wolf and Shapiro as well as Representative Freeman and Senator Boscola and our representatives at the federal level including Congresswoman Wild, and Senators Casey.

Make no mistake, if it weren't for the Biden Administration's American Rescue Plan, and our decision to refinance our debt at historic low interest rates our city and cities across America would be in a much different situation after the pandemic.

As remarkable as the last 16 years have been, a great city does not rest on its laurels. And as we gather here today to begin a new chapter for Easton, there is much work yet to be done.

We must tackle the problems that have come with our success - particularly in the areas of livability and quality of life. From traffic to tourism, from recreation to redevelopment, from public safety to public engagement and transparency, to safe intersections for pedestrians and of course the dreaded P-word --- parking.

I will be working directly with our staff, City Council and citizens to address our climate action plan, to improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists, to achieve sustainable and resilient growth while respecting our environment, to improve the delivery of basic city services, to grow and support our small businesses, to help empower our brothers and sisters in need including our homeless, to build upon our rich cultural heritage and the arts and music, to add parks and beautify the public realm, and so much more.

The second challenge that we must address is that of ensuring real, meaningful opportunity for all of our citizens, regardless of race or creed or circumstance. We must, and will, work to address affordable housing and seek social and economic justice for all. I am proud of our residents and the way we get along. We are a city that would rather draw circles of inclusion rather than lines of division.

In assuming this office, we don't just inherit a shared past – we also inherit responsibility for the future. Every decision we make we must think not just about our residents today, but also the residents of tomorrow. We will work to preserve and better the assets of our community for generations to come.

To the people of Easton: the women and men, children, and seniors; the workers in every industry; the small business owners in every neighborhood; the artists and the activists; the clergy and the social workers; the teachers and the students; and the veterans who protect us and make us proud: I pledge my commitment to you and we will work to make our city the best it can be.

From the pandemic, to protests, to an insurrection, we've stood together. And now I have more optimism and hope for the future of Easton than ever before.

First, and let me be very clear, nothing is more important to me than creating a safe city for all of us. It's happening, families are moving into our neighborhoods again.

Our crime rate is down every year for the past 16 years. We are currently at the 1980's levels. In today's society we may not erase drugs, violent crimes and gun violence I thank our police for their great job.

We added 11 police officers, built a new police headquarters moving them out of their inefficient substation, and have the most up to date motor fleet in the last 50 years. They no longer have metal traffic signs covering up holes in the floor. They keep our residents safe and to keep them safe we provided them with more training, high-tech equipment, and this year we will take delivery of a Bearcat to protect the officers, and residents in dangerous incidents when someone is shooting at them. I make no excuses for being tough on crime and wanting to give our officers the protection they need.

Today we have a police force which is rapidly becoming one of the most professional police departments in the region. The department enjoys public respect and public confidence. And the lawsuits that cost taxpayers money hundreds of thousands every year have ceased.

In the next four years we will be turning our attention to the other public safety department – the fire department. We already ordered a new pumper and a new ladder truck totaling \$3 million of new equipment. We have contracted for a review of the facilities as we prepare to upgrade or build new fire facilities.

Our biggest area of improvement is in city finances. In 2008, we inherited a city on the verge of bankruptcy and deeply in debt. When I leave office in four years, we will leave the city with millions of dollars in reserve. Our reserves in 16 years is over \$6 million.

In two years our Nation will celebrate our 250th anniversary and as a city that had a leading role in our independence it will be a time to celebrate not only our nation's 250th Anniversary but also that it was 200 years ago when Easton residents met at White's Hotel on December 27, 1824 in Centre Square and founded Lafayette College, one of the premier institutions of higher learning in America. It opened to its first student 2 years later on Canal Street. Lafayette college is still one of the principal US memorials to the French statesman and military leader who helped us win our independence and friend of George Washington

My grandparents came here as immigrants from Sicily with next to nothing. My grandfathers worked on the Lehigh Valley Railroad and at Bethlehem Steel. They were able to make a home and raise their kids to dream even bigger dreams. That's the kind of progress a strong middle class provides, not just security for those who are already comfortable, but opportunity for all who need it.

My greatest concern for our nation's future is that we could lose this engine of upward mobility. We've faced upheavals before, like Depression and war, and we've come out stronger. Today, instead of coming together to defend our common welfare, we are divided, and our middle class is under attack.

Our goals for the next four years include but are not limited to:

- We will do everything in our control to keep Easton "clean and safe."
- We will always look for revenues to the city that doesn't include raising property taxes on our most vulnerable – seniors on a fixed income.
- The water plant and its distribution infrastructure have a value of approximately \$200 million. It was our ancestors that sacrificed and built our water system. We must evaluate the best way to monetize it for our residents. If anyone is going to benefit from this investment it should be the city residents.
- We must get our youth off the streets and give them the positive alternatives like we had growing up in Easton. Tonight, I pledge that in the next 90 days I will create a Capitol Campaign Committee to raise a portion of the money needed to build a new community center in the West Ward for our youth and seniors. The remaining funds will come from the Open Space and Recreation fund I began in 2009 from development throughout the city. It will also house a senior center to replace the two that were closed in the city.
- I know some of you don't believe it but we are in a climate emergency on this planet and that means for all of us. There is no Planet B. The Amazon is "teetering on the edge of functional destruction, and with it, so are we." Combined with recent news about the thawing Arctic permafrost and the accelerating melting of Greenland's ice sheet, the scientists urged that "the tipping point is here, it is now. I would rather prepare for the worst and hope for the best. Fifty years from now our great grandchildren deserve a healthy environment. So, in 2024 we will implement the city's Climate Action Plan.
- Within the first 45 days I will send the staff's parking recommendations to a committee made up of downtown residents,

businesses, and representatives from the Greater Easton Development Partnership for their review and for them to make their final recommendations to City Council.

- Also, with the first 60 days I will convene a committee to review the Special Events we have in our city and how we can address the success they have had. We cannot close the circle and Larry Holmes Drive like we did during the Winter Village and Farmers Market.
- Working with Lafayette College and the Pennsylvania 250 committee we will create a local committee that will plan for the 250th anniversary of our nation and the 200h Anniversary of the college.
- We will put into action the recommendations of the Mayor's Task Force on Affordable Housing and also launch the Housing Development Corporation devoted solely to affordable housing.
- We will work with our local utility companies and the PUC to proactively schedule repairs and infrastructure replacement so that all streets are 100% complete so that we don't experience another project like Washington Street.
- To maintain our property tax rate and hopefully reduce it for our residents.
- To work with our Economic Development department to lobby the Northampton County, State and Federal government for more grants.

So today we take another step forward: mindful of our history as a city of purpose and progress; optimistic about our future; and determined to fulfill a vision that grows with each generation.

Together we have built a city of neighborhoods that are improving, a city of not afraid to take chances, a city of learning and healing, a city of courage and creativity, a city that makes things happen, a city that other cities are trying to emulate.

Thank you. God Bless you and the City of Easton.