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**Councilperson Celeste Friend**  
SOUTH UTICA - THIRD WARD



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## South Utica Newsletter #23 from Councilperson Celeste Friend

Here it is, the first Newsletter of my second term on the Common Council. I will continue to tell you about important things going on in South Utica and the City, and to let you know how I voted on the Council. I am excited about this new term and optimistic that the Council will be working hard to deliver good things to the people of Utica.

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## Keep Up With Katie Aiello

The First Ward has a new Council member - Katie Aiello. Katie is a really great communicator, and had earned a reputation as an astute observer of the Common Council even before she joined us. So I really recommend keeping up with her and listening to her perspective on the issues before the Council and the City. Visit her website and sign up for her newsletter.



[Visit Katie Aiello's Website & Sign up for her Newsletter](#)

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## Utica City School District - Meetings and Teacher Survey

The School Board meets on the fourth Tuesday of the month. The (regularly scheduled) special meeting begins at 6pm, followed by public comment at 6:30, then the regular meeting at 7pm. After meeting for several months at the new administrative offices at Kernan Elementary School on York Street, they had begun meeting in the Proctor High School. (The new board room is simply too small to accommodate the number of people showing up for these meetings.) As of January 25th, the Board voted to return their meetings to their too-small Kernan Board Room. I encourage everyone to attend these meetings, regardless of where the Board chooses to meet, and to use public comment to talk about what is important to you. The City of Utica can only be successful,

after all, when our school system is successful.

Meanwhile, if you are interested in reading the anonymous comments from the survey conducted by the teachers' union, I acquired a copy and have put it on my website. Just click the link below.



[Results from Teacher Survey](#)

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## Sidewalks Are Important

Sidewalks are really important to making and keeping our communities livable for everyone. Utica's size makes us an eminently walkable city. Many of us walk simply because it is pleasurable and healthful. But for others, walking is their main form of transportation. For all these reasons (and more!), it is important that we keep our sidewalks in good shape. Please shovel them when it snows, and continue to keep them clear of snow and ice at all times. Also, please do not park your cars across sidewalks!

Of course, we all realize that there are members of our community who cannot shovel their own sidewalks because they are elderly or disabled. The Parkway Recreation Center has a program to help make sure that these people can get their sidewalks shoveled as well, and they are always happy to have more volunteers. The Parkway Recreation Center works with the Office for the Aging to match their clients with a Shoveling Program volunteer. The minimum age to

volunteer is 18 years (unless a family wants to volunteer together and there is a parent present).

Getting involved is easy:

Simply email or call Kate Frymoyer at the Parkway Center:

315-235-2029

kregner@theparkwaycenter.org

As Spring approaches, it is never too early to think about having your sidewalk redone. The City does put money aside to help homeowners with their sidewalks, and not nearly enough people take advantage of this program. There are rules to how this works, so call the Department of Engineering and ask how the program works: 315-792-0152.



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## Flooding Mitigation Update

I have plenty to report on flooding. So much, in fact, that I am planning on a separate newsletter in my "How Utica Works" series. The City has spent a lot of resources in the last two years making sure that storm drains in South Utica function to their full capacity. The County has gotten a grant from NYS to design and engineer some of the recommendations for the Sauquoit management plan. And the Mayor has convened a regular monthly meeting of people from the Department of Engineering, along with Joe Betrus of North Utica and

myself. We are kept up to date on ongoing efforts to mitigate against flooding.

So, keep an eye on that upcoming Newsletter.



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## My Votes on the Council in January 2022

Here are all my votes in January. I am going to organize them a little differently from here on. I hope that this will make them easier to follow and understand, and slightly more concise.

**URA Properties Sold:** All properties sold by the URA must be approved by the Council. They are approved of in three separate stages: first, we pass a Recall for a Public Hearing, then we place into Committee the legislation to authorize the sale, and finally, once that Public Hearing has been held, we vote on the Ordinance selling the property. So, here are the sales we authorized in January:

- 126 Eagle Street to Jose Raimer De La Cruz Hernandez for \$5,000
- 1007 Stark Street to Priscila Alvarez Armijos for \$25,000
- 1319 Steuben St & 1100 Schuyler St to Ramon Collado for \$500
- 701-703 Jay St to Congrega Di Santa Rosalia for \$12,000
- 1110 Blandina Street to Rayhanah Myint for \$20,000

**Marriage Officers:** The Common Council, by way of Resolution, can appoint any person to be a marriage officer in the City of Utica. The following people are now marriage officers in the City of Utica:

Melissa Sciortino, David Butler, Michael Galime, Katie Aiello, Robert Burmaster, Celeste Friend, Frank Meola, Delvin Moody, Joseph Betrus, Mark Williamson, Samantha Colosimo Testa, and Frank DiBrango, Nedim Mujic

**Commissioners of Deeds:** The Common Council can Resolve that eligible voters who reside in Utica should be allowed to be Commissioners of Deeds. This allows those people to collect ballot petition signatures from anyone in the City, regardless of party affiliation. After the Council passes them, these Resolutions are then sent to the County to be finalized. We Resolved that the following people be appointed as Commissioners of Deeds:  
Nedim Mujic

**Sale of City-Property:** the sale or disposal of any City property must be authorized by the Common Council. In January we authorized the sale of four used vehicles.

**Transfers of Funds:** The Council is required to authorize, through Ordinance, any transfers between budget lines. In January we authorized the following transfers:

\$30,000 from "Infrastructure Wages" to "Other - Telephone"

\$25,000 from three Police budget lines to "Police Administrative - Uniforms"

**Flood Mitigation Reserve Fund:** Reserve Funds put aside monies that can only be used for the very specific purposes named in the Reserve Fund. In January, we voted to establish a Reserve Fund for Flooding Mitigation and then voted to place \$250,000 into that fund.

**Flood Mitigation Taskforce:** We discussed a proposal to establish a Flooding Mitigation Taskforce. It was a good discussion, but there were enough unanswered questions that we decided to keep it in Committee.

**Ordinance Establishing a Civilian Public Safety Board and Auditor.** This is one important result of our recent Police Reform efforts. This Ordinance describes its purpose as follows: "The City of Utica shall establish public safety oversight that couples an audit function with citizen oversight in an effort to improve accountability and transparency. The purpose of this model is to ensure that complaint resolution, citizen interactions and adherence to policies are monitored continuously, not just when a problem arises. It will allow the identification of patterns, cultures and practices that may be modified to improve relations between public safety departments and the residents of Utica. Further, this model will assist the City in tracking the progress and efficacy of recently implemented reforms and to look beyond just citizen complaints, into any area that can impact overall safety and wellness. This oversight mechanism shall

give community input when making or revising department policies and discuss current police practices and strategies with the ability to make suggestions for improvement. The Board shall work in conjunction with and not adversarial to the City of Utica Police and Fire Departments."

**Amending the Composition of the Bureau of Fire:** This is legislation to originally add 12 firefighters/EMTs to the UFD. (It was later amended down to only 8 additional firefighters/EMTs.) On January 5th we placed this into Committee. We then discussed it in Committee. We discussed the efforts of the City to obtain a SAFER grant from FEMA, which would pay for the salary of these new personnel for three years on condition that the City commit to paying the salary for at least two more years. We had lively debate about the budgetary implications of this legislation as well as whether there was actual need for more Firefighters/EMTs. We discussed its legality, and many of us expressed our skepticism about the way in which it was worded. On January 19th, we did all vote for it, despite the reservations that many of us had, myself included.

Update: On January 26th, the Mayor vetoed the Ordinance we had voted for, which would increase the number of Firefighters/EMTs in our Fire Department. We had a special meeting on January 28th in order to respond to that veto. At that meeting, we heard his message on why he had vetoed it, and we heard from Corporation Counsel as to why that office believes that the Ordinance we had passed, and which the Mayor had vetoed, was legally problematic. It takes 6 votes of the Common Council to override a veto. We voted five to four against such an override. In other words, the override fell two votes short of the necessary six votes. I voted against such an override. We then considered a new Resolution and new Ordinance on the subject. The Resolution expresses support for the Administration's efforts to obtain the SAFER grant and to increase the complement of the Bureau of Fire if the grant is awarded. It passed unanimously. The Ordinance actually increased the complement, conditional upon actually being awarded the SAFER grant. The Council placed that legislation into Committee, by a vote of six to three, including me. It will need five votes to pull it from Committee and bring it to the floor for a vote.

**Resolution to Use ARPA Funds to Provide Premium Pay to Fire/EMS & Police:** We voted for a Resolution advising the Mayor to use American Rescue Plan funds to award premium pay for fire and police personnel. I voted for this despite having reservations. Many essential workers risked their own health and the health of their families by continuing to do necessary work during the pandemic. Many of those workers are paid far, far less than our police and fire personnel. I do not believe that this is a good use of ARPA funds, which should benefit everyone in our community. It is only a recommendation to the Mayor,

and one which I hope he will not follow. (Also, for the record, Councilmember Colosiomo-Testa asked to be recused from this vote, since she is married to a firefighter, and this premium pay would directly benefit her. Only the Council can grant permission for a member to recuse her or himself from a vote. We did grant Colosiomo-Testa permission to recuse herself.)

**Amending the Composition of the Bureau of Police:** We voted to keep this in Committee, because the Mayor currently has plans to use some of the ARPA funds that are specifically intended for combatting gun violence to hire more police officers. The Police Department has a specific plan for the use of these funds in relation to combatting gun violence.

**Resolution to Add More Members to the Parks Department:** We placed this legislation into Committee.

**Resolution Waiving the Application Filing Requirements for the Granting of Real Property Tax Exemptions for the Disabled or the Aged:** Older residents, as well as disabled residents, may be eligible for reductions to their property taxes. This exemption must usually be applied for on an annual basis, but Governor Hochul made an Executive Order allowing municipalities to waive the requirement to re-apply for this reduction in taxes. This Resolution authorizes the Assessor to automatically grant such annual exemptions. In relation to this, we also passed **Ordinance Amending Section 2-25-2:** This Ordinance institutes graduated income eligibility levels for the disabled and aged, matching those already in place in Oneida County. (This will ensure that COLA increases to income will not create an undue burden on disabled property owners or low-income seniors.)

**Local Law "Registration and Posting of Owner and Manager Information and Designation of Agent":** We placed this legislation into Committee. It is a local law intended to hold absentee landlords more accountable.

**Intersections Where Stop Required:** This is one section of the Code which we amend every time we decide to authorize a new stop sign.  
O'Brien Ave and York Street, northeast corner, to control westbound traffic  
East Park Road and South Park Drive, northeast corner of East Park Drive  
Parkview Drive and East Park Road, northeast corner of Parkview Drive  
Lin Road and Pond Lane, southwest corner of Lin Road

**Rules of Order:** On January 5th we passed ten Resolutions which established our new Committee of the Whole, and the rules under which we will use it. And on January 19th we passed one more.



**Urging the City to Create Inclusive Playgrounds:** Once we learned that the Administration may already be planning on this, we decided to keep this Resolution in Committee.

**Discharged Legislation:** On January 5th, we voted to discharge from Committee a number of old pieces of legislation from the previous Council term.

## Report from E&A

The Board of Estimate and Apportionment is a five person Board, on which I now serve, that oversees the day-to-day budget operations of the City. All transfers of monies from one area of the budget to another must be approved by E&A, as well as all expenditures of supplemental monies that come into the City. (Fascinated? Just wait for a special edition of "How Utica Works" on this important City Board.)

### **In January, E&A approved the following:**

- \* We moved \$250,000 into a new reserve fund established by the Council for flood mitigation.
- \* We moved \$1,653 from "Youth-Social Security" to "Celebrations - Contractual Services". (This paid for unexpected costs associated with the 2021 Fireworks).
- \* We moved \$11,500 from "Fire Training-Food" to "Fire EMT-Gas & Oil" (This adjusted for increased gas prices.)
- \* We moved \$500 from "Infrastructure-Misc" to "Infrastructure-Gas & Oil" (Again, this adjusts for unexpected increases in gas prices.)
- \* We went into Executive Session to discuss a settlement.
- \* We approved the new CSEA contract, for the period of April 1, 2020 to March 31, 2025. This gave CSEA-represented employees a 3% wage increase each year for the five years of the new contract.
- \* In May 2021, the Common Council approved over 11 million dollars in bonding for a variety of capital projects. E&A then moved just over 6 million of those bond proceeds into the following Budget lines: Traffic Signals, Utica Place Parking Garage, Box Culvert on Bleeker Street, City Hall Roof, Police Building Reconstructions, Fire Building Reconstruction, Electric Subway at Bleeker St, and DPW Building Reconstruction.

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## Important Dance Opportunity for All Children in Utica

The mission of the Leatherstocking Ballet School of Dance is to provide a dance experience to all children, but especially to those of limited means, regardless of financial, transportation, or social limitations including language barriers. With the increase in violence, especially in the inner-city, it is evident that creating alternate after-school activities would provide parents and children an alternative to possibly negative behaviors. Offering an expanded dance program to the inner-city community helps to demonstrate that there is an alternative to activities that damage the fabric of our communities.

The Leatherstocking Ballet School of Dance operates a dance program at the Midtown Utica Community Center for 5-10 year olds. The program runs on Mondays from 4:30-6:00 and students study Acro-Jazz, Ballet, and Tap with a focus on providing a good foundation for future study. Currently, the program serves inner-city dancers at the MUCC as well as including dancers from local dance studios that will perform side-by-side in an annual production.

The School of Dance invites children to sign up for classes and offers scholarship for those of demonstrated need. A registration fee of \$10 is due upon signing up for lessons with \$50.00 monthly tuition for the 90 minute class for dancers not on full or partial scholarship.

Please spread the word about this important opportunity for children in our community! (Just forward this email, or send people the link provided below.)

The Leatherstocking Ballet, Inc. is a non-profit and all donations are tax deductible. To sponsor a dancer or the School of Dance or volunteer with the Leatherstocking Ballet, or as a dancer to apply for scholarship, please email the School of Dance at [jmsnydance@aol.com](mailto:jmsnydance@aol.com) or phone (315) 737-0703.

Please join the Leatherstocking Ballet for their performance of "Alice in Wonderland 2022" in June 2022 at the Stanley Theater in Utica. This performance is sponsored in part by the Matthew Carton Fund granted through the Community Foundation of Herkimer and Oneida Counties.

For more information on the Leatherstocking Ballet and the School of Dance, please visit our website at [www.leatherstockingballet.org](http://www.leatherstockingballet.org).



[Check Out the School of Dance](#)

## Free Films at Utica College

Jeff Miller, Associate Professor of Communications at Utica College, curates and presents a film series at Utica College every semester. These free films, which you will not be able to see anywhere else, are shown on Thursday nights. Just click on the link below to see the full schedule.



[See Film@UC Schedule](#)

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## SUNA Continues to Meet Regularly

The South Utica Neighborhood Association continues to meet on the second Monday of every month at 6pm in the Ski Chalet at the Parkway Recreation Center. We are having great conversations about what we want for our neighborhoods and City. I will be there a little early every month.

SUNA is conducting a survey so that they can better address the concerns of those in South Utica. It only takes a few minutes. Just click on the link below.

You can keep informed of their meetings and agendas by following SUNA on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/UticaSouth>. They are working on a website as well, so stay tuned for that information.



[Take the SUNA Survey](#)

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# Newsletter Archive Now Online

If you have found my Newsletters interesting and informative, I have good news. They are now all archived on my website. I am very grateful to Zac and Heather Wasielewski for building me a beautiful new site!

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