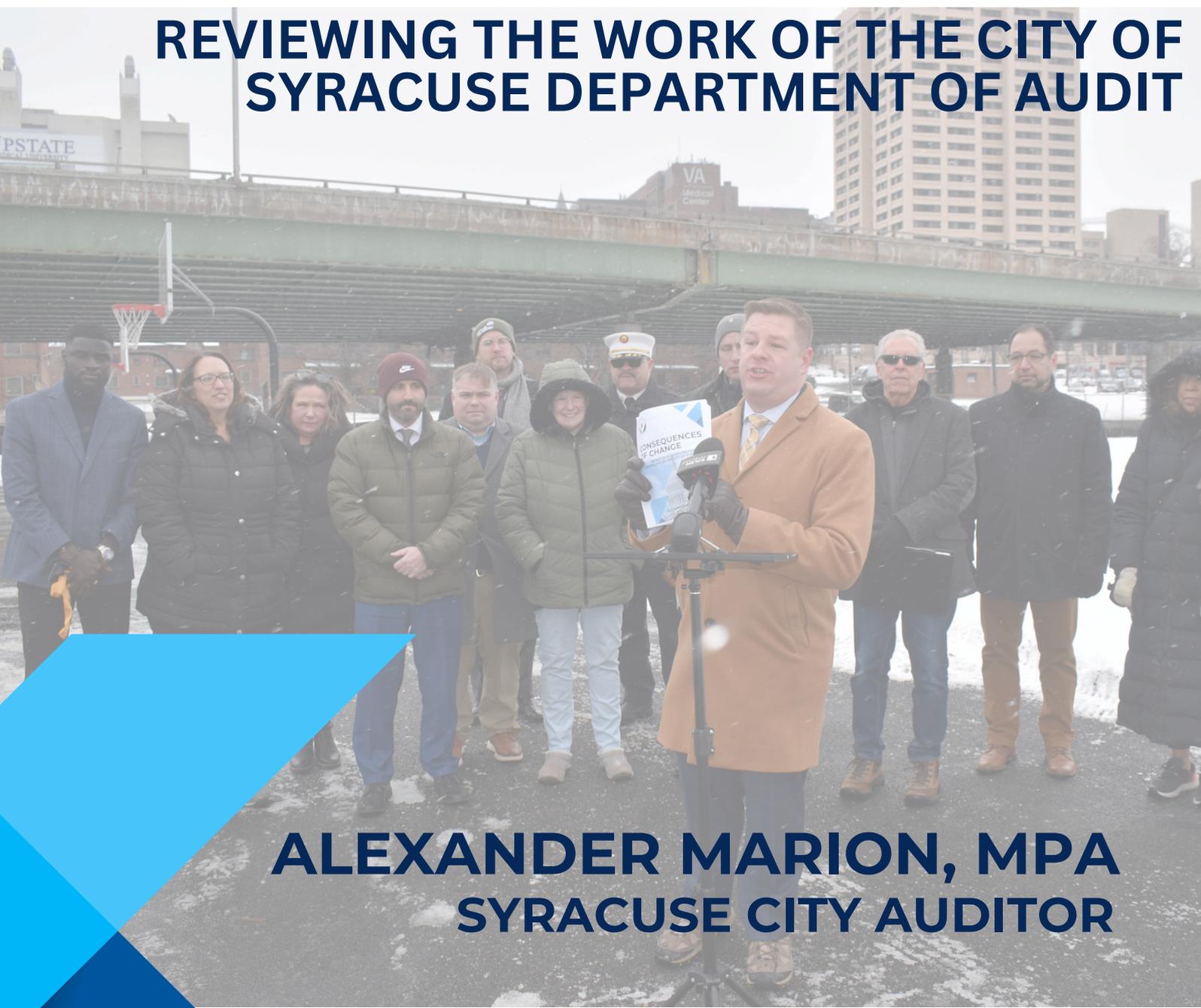




# 2024-25 ANNUAL REPORT

REVIEWING THE WORK OF THE CITY OF SYRACUSE DEPARTMENT OF AUDIT



**ALEXANDER MARION, MPA**  
**SYRACUSE CITY AUDITOR**

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## **Office of the Syracuse City Auditor**

**Hon. Alexander Marion, MPA, City Auditor**  
Kyle W. Madden, Deputy City Auditor  
Michael Guckert, Auditor III  
Deborah Somers, Auditor I  
Christina Whiteside, Secretary to the City Auditor

# Message From The City Auditor

March 28, 2025

Success is measured in different ways. For some, success is purely monetary. For others, success involves having a certain title. And for others, it's recognition or prestige in their field.

How do we measure success in the City Auditor's office? That's a much harder question. To achieve anything, we rely on working with others – whether that's our colleagues on the Common Council or in the City administration, partners in the state or federal government, stakeholders in the community and private sector, or our neighbors next door. Our strive is bringing people together around data and ideas and collaborating to get things done.



I have now been in office for just over a year and take great pride in the success our team has enjoyed. We have issued audits and reports on topics from licensing to police staffing to state and federal aid. Our work has begun delivering policy changes and I look forward to more in the coming years.

We have also engaged our community in ways that are unprecedented for this office. We don't measure success by the number of pages in a reports, or how many recommendations we issue, but instead on how well we work together to advocate for and implement changes that make the lives of Syracusans better.

In this Annual Report, as required by the City Charter, we look back at our work and accomplishments from the last year, but also to the work which lies ahead – a focus on housing, smarter uses for city land, effective and efficient government, and attention on our infrastructure. These efforts will make a difference in the lives of many.

I also measure success with a less precise metric: are we doing work that makes a difference? And are we able to do that work with good people? I am very proud of the team we have built in the Auditor's office, working tirelessly for the people of Syracuse, on the issues our neighbors are passionate about each and every day. I am honored to have the opportunity to continue this work for the people of our community and I look forward to the year and challenges ahead.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alexander Marion". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

**Alexander Marion, MPA**  
**Syracuse City Auditor**

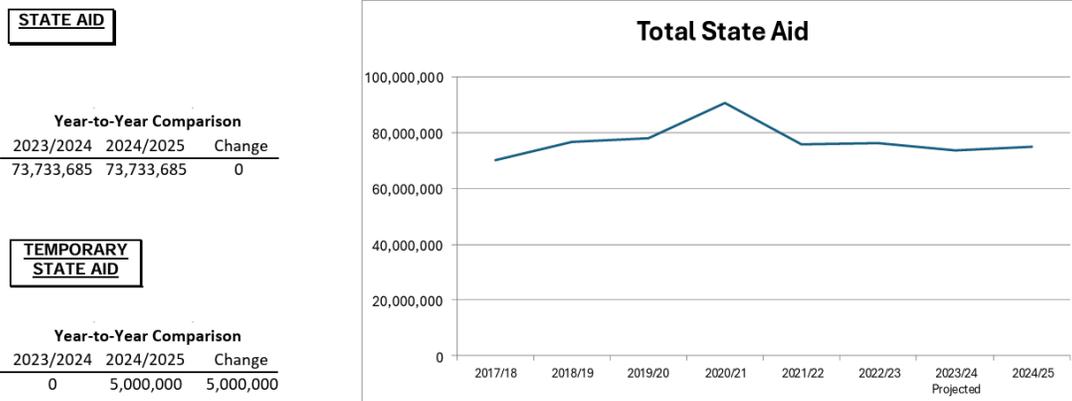
# City Auditor Advocacy Delivering Results

## Fighting For Our Fair Share: Delivering a Decade-Overdue Increase in State Funding

Through City Auditor Alexander Marion’s leadership and vocal advocacy, state lawmakers and Governor Kathy Hochul delivered an historic \$5 million increase in state revenue sharing to the City of Syracuse in the state’s FY25 budget – the first such increase in more than a decade.

Auditor Marion’s first report – *AIM Higher* – revealed the dwindling impact state revenue sharing from the Aid and Incentives for Municipalities (AIM) program had on City operations. Frozen for more than a decade, the \$5 million boost helps fund 1.5% of City operations.

Auditor Marion is proud to announce that the \$5 million temporary increase in the FY25 budget has been included in the Governor’s FY26 state budget request, and in both the State Assembly and Senate’s one-house budget bills for the upcoming fiscal year. The Auditor is optimistic State leaders will continue to grow this critical funding source to support local communities.



2024-25 City Budget Book shows \$5,000,000 increase in State Aid

## Increasing Oversight and Responsibility: New Contractor Accountability Ordinance

In May, 2024 City Auditor Marion released “*Roadwork Ahead*,” an analysis of the City’s road reconstruction plan, where he called for contractors to be held more responsible for their repair work. Mayor Walsh and City lawmakers agreed, unanimously passing a new Contractor Accountability Ordinance this February. The new law increases oversight of city contractors who work within the City’s Right-Of-Way.

Among the changes, the new law clarifies permitting issues and allows the City to hold a retainage fee until the contractor completes work to City specifications, a measure called for by Auditor Marion in his report.

20. Amend – General Ord. #18 (08/22/2016), "The Revised General Ordinances of the City of Syracuse; Chapter 24, Article 8, entitled "Excavations and Street Openings". Amend Section 24-32 and Section 24-33 to add a Right-of-Way Violations Fine fee Schedule "A", and to update miscellaneous language in the legislation to reflect present-day technical terms and requirements for working in the right-of-way. Gen. #5

City lawmakers unanimously passed a new Contractor Accountability Ordinance in March

## Advancing Equality and Sound Fiscal Policy: A Better Bike Share Program

The City Auditor is pleased to see a new and improved contract with VEO, the City's scooter and bike-sharing program, signed this past winter which addresses several of the concerns he raised in his November report, "Incomplete Streets." In that report, Auditor Marion called for changes to the program including ensuring the City earns a fee in exchange for VEO's right to operate in Syracuse, along with seeking a new approach to VEO's equity program which needed to do more to promote the service's reduced-price rides.

City lawmakers agreed and demanded a better deal from VEO to continue operating in Syracuse. Through their support and Auditor Marion's report, rentable VEO scooters and e-bikes are back in 2025.

The new agreement now includes revenue sharing, which will now see the City earn 15 cents from most rides, which should generate more than \$50,000 in new revenue for the City. Additionally, VEO has modified their equity program to no longer require users provide proof of income constraints to receive reduced-price rides; under the new contract, rides which begin or end in certain areas will now automatically receive a discounted rate.



Auditor Marion with bicycling advocates at the release of his report "Incomplete Streets" which investigated the City Bicycle Plan and bike infrastructure.

## Bridging the Digital Divide: Surge Link Bringing Internet Service to More Syracusans

Even more income-constrained residents in some of Syracuse's most impoverished neighborhoods will now have home internet thanks to City Auditor Alexander Marion's advocacy to expand the SurgeLink Broadband Internet program. Auditor Marion worked with leaders from across government and across the aisle, including former Representative Brandon Williams (R) and Mayor Ben Walsh (I), to match city priorities with federal support, working to secure an earmark to keep this critical infrastructure program alive when its initial federal funding stream lapsed.



Auditor Marion with former Congressman Brandon Williams (R), Mayor Ben Walsh (I) and other leaders announcing funding for Surge Link program

## Streamlining Government: DPW To Repair Roads Following Water Repairs

Beginning this Spring, when a roadway gets dug up because of a water repair, that repair work will be completed by the Department of Public Works Division of Street Repair. This division houses the City's experts on repairing and maintaining our roads, yet, until this year, when a needed repair to City streets was caused by a water main break, the Department of Water was fixing the roadway, not DPW.

In "*Roadwork Ahead*," City Auditor Alexander Marion's analysis of road reconstruction, he called for reassigning this responsibility from Water to DPW in an effort to streamline city government and gain efficiencies. The Water Department is plenty busy repairing and managing the City's complex water system; they should stick to water, and street restorations should be left to DPW.

## Improving Customer Service: New Signage Coming to City Offices at One Park Place

Visits to City government changed in August 2023 with the closure of City Hall Commons and the relocation of staff to new offices at One Park Place. Among the offices which moved was the Central Permit Office – the public facing office for doing business with the City. Now, eighteen months later and following City Auditor Alexander Marion’s call for increased signage in his audit *“A License May Be Required,”* One Park Place now has additional signage and wayfinding to help residents and business owners get the help they need.



An audit of City licensing found it was too hard to locate the Central Permit Office. New signage has been added making visits to City government easier.

## Forging Relationships: Permitting Driving Collaboration Between City, County, State

City Auditor Alexander Marion’s first audit, *“A License May Be Required,”* identified opportunities for more collaboration between the City’s Central Permit Office and their permit and license-issuing peers in County and State government.

In response to this call for better partnership, Central Permit Office staff is now working more closely with the Onondaga County Clerk, receiving “DBA” (Doing Business As) applications each week, helping identify businesses in need of licensure. They have also found trainings and other resources from the NYS Gaming Commission helpful in managing compliance with State law.



**CENTRAL PERMIT OFFICE**  
CITY OF SYRACUSE



**ONONDAGA COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE**

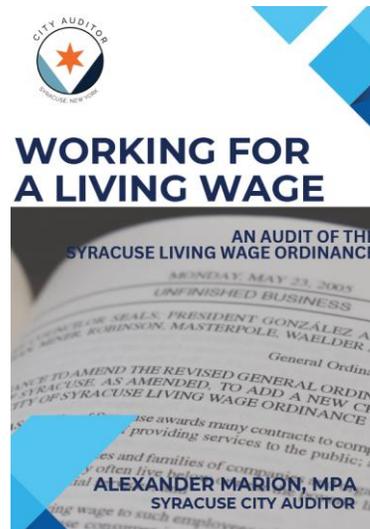
The City’s Central Permit Office is now working more closely with the Onondaga County Clerk to ensure businesses have proper licenses

# Audits Conducted Over The Past Year

The Department of Audit completed two full audits in the last year which covered the City's business licensing operations and compliance with the Syracuse Living Wage Ordinance.



A License May Be Required, August 2024



Working For A Living Wage, March 2025

In "***A License May Be Required***," the City Auditor found the City of Syracuse has ordinances regulating 75 different licenses but layers of legislation over the years have created scattered, confusing, complicated, and sometimes overlapping rules which make it hard for even City officials to interpret and follow. The licensing process has struggled to gain efficiencies, create predictability, and provide consistently high-quality deliverables for residents and businesses looking to operate in the City.

The audit recommends creating a new Department of Permits, Licenses, and Inspections to be located at City Hall. The new department should conduct a comprehensive review of all licenses, permits, and certificates and streamline them into one business license ordinance.

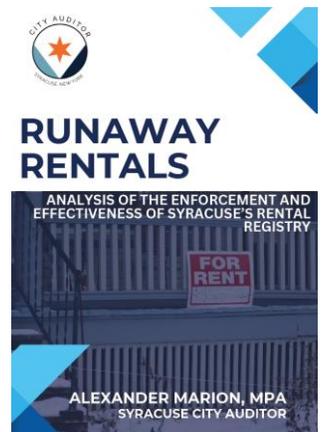
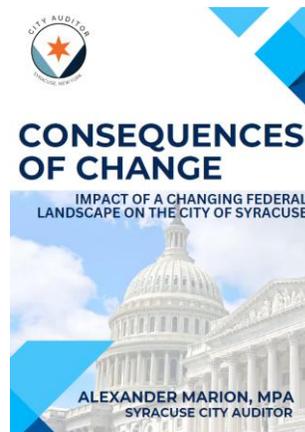
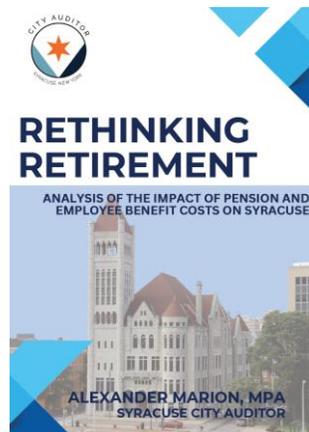
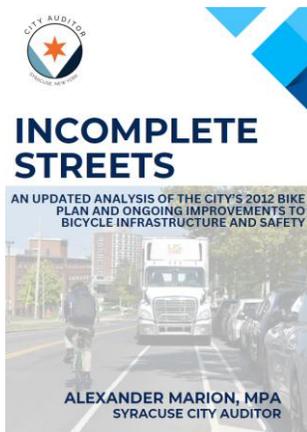
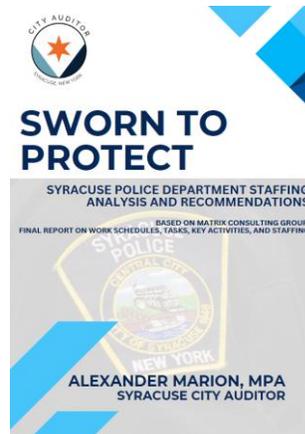
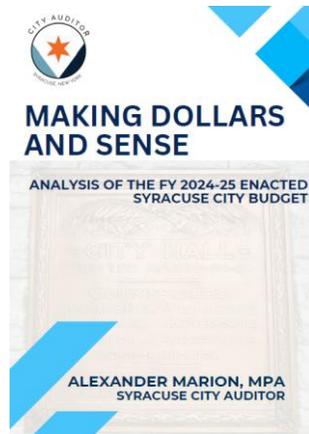
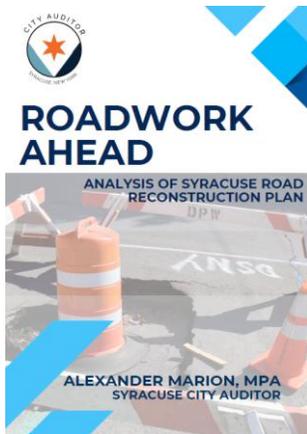
In "***Working For A Living Wage***," the City Auditor found that the Syracuse Living Wage Ordinance contains exemptions, exclusions, and carveouts which have made it so that no contractors are required to follow the Ordinance; reviews of payroll records showed this allowed several contractors to pay lower wages without consequence. The audit also found the City has failed to meet their own compliance requirements; no rules, regulations, or procedures were ever established to investigate complaints or track compliance, and no department was designated to issue an annual compliance report.

The audit recommends an overhaul to the Ordinance which would require *all* City contractors to pay a fair, living wage and designate the Office of Management and Budget with the responsibility and power to oversee compliance, investigate complaints, and provide annual compliance reports. The Auditor also calls for a new wage formula, based on the "ALICE" method, to determine the annual rates and believe all City employees should be paid a fair, living wage, regardless of their job title, duties, or employment status.

# Reports Completed Over The Past Year

In addition to completing two comprehensive audits last year, City Auditor Alexander Marion also released eight reports on other major issues impacting City government and its residents, plus a 2024 Year In Review. Covering a wide range of topics including housing policy, roadwork, police staffing, and retirement costs, these reports generated more than 75 recommendations. If enacted and implemented, these recommendations would:

- Save the City taxpayer money
- Generate new and/or increased revenues
- Improve delivery of City services
- Create more government efficiency
- Increase public reporting and transparency
- Modernize City operations
- Develop closer relationships with partner governments
- Ensure better-trained employees
- Improve compliance with existing laws
- Ensure consistently high levels of customer service



City Auditor Alexander Marion released eight reports since March 2024, in addition to compiling a 2024 Year In Review.

# An Active Presence In Our Community

Since taking office, being an active and present part of the Syracuse community has been a top priority for City Auditor Alexander Marion. The Auditor's Office has prided itself on engaging with neighbors and taking advantage of every opportunity to celebrate the very best our community has to offer.

## Giving Dignity to All

In January, City Auditor Alexander Marion and Deputy City Auditor Kyle Madden took part in the Point In Time Count, hosted by the Housing and Homeless Coalition of CNY. This annual count is a census of the unhoused population in our community, which helps determine the need for shelter and emergency services. Overseen by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the count is held each January across the county. Auditor Marion's group confronted frigid temperatures but connected with multiple residents, helping to secure an overnight shelter stay for a man who had been prepared to sleep under a bridge along West Street.

## Housing Town Hall & Resource Fair



In November, Auditor Marion joined Common Councilor Corey Williams and County Legislator Maurice Brown along with representatives from the Greater Syracuse Labor Council, CNY Fair Housing, Syracuse Tenants Union, and the New York Civil Liberties Union to discuss housing issues and Good Cause Eviction at a town hall meeting and information session at Southwest Community Center. The event also included local housing organizations, service providers, and community partners who provided valuable information for attendees.

## Honoring Our Community's Heroes

It has been a source of pride for Auditor Marion to support our veteran neighbors. We thank our hard-working servicemen and women for their commitment to our country. They deserve a community that proudly welcomes them home and supports them for a lifetime. The Auditor has supported City initiatives, including the new Purple Heart City designation and the Hometown Heroes program to promote banners honoring the service of veterans along local streets.



## Standing With Our Immigrant Communities

Syracuse's diverse immigrant communities are what make us a great, good, and thriving City. City Auditor Alexander Marion has been firm in his commitment to support our immigrant neighbors, whether joining them for cultural celebrations, connecting New Americans with public sector job opportunities, or standing up for their rights when threatened by the federal administration.



Ukrainian Independence Day, August 2024



Pakistani Community celebration and flag raising, August 2024.

## Supporting Arts in the City

This year marked the first competitive season for the Syracuse City School District's combined high school marching band, the Spirit of the City of Syracuse. The band's uniforms evoke the City's skyline and new City flag and they performed music which tells the story of our community. City Auditor Alexander Marion welcomed the band to City Hall for a performance and to recognize their achievements.



Auditor Marion has now twice been a presenter at the Syracuse Area Music (SAMMY) Awards, recognizing the best of our community's local talent. These awards are presented annually to local recording artists and performers at a ceremony held at the Palace Theater on James Street in Eastwood.



# Working With Partners Across Government

## Recruiting Lifeguards to Keep Our Pools Open

Syracuse always faces a challenge in the competitive market for summer lifeguards. Auditor Marion teamed up with Mayor Ben Walsh and the Parks Department to work collaboratively on recruiting more lifeguards for summer 2024. Thanks to these shared efforts across government, the City secured full staffing and was able to keep pools open and swim lessons scheduled.



Auditor Marion with Mayor Ben Walsh (l) and Parks Department leadership at Lifeguard Recruitment Press Conference

## Supporting Critical Public Health Initiatives

With recent changes in the federal government, it's more important than ever to work with partners to secure funding for local healthcare. Auditor Marion has worked with Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer to fight for our Community Health Centers to make sure the doors stay open and everyone in Syracuse can access the care they need.



Auditor Marion with Senator Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and staff from the Syracuse Community Health Center.

## Working Together to Help Our Neighbors

When Meadowbrook neighbors woke up on December 22, many found themselves without water service due to a massive water main break. Several neighbors even faced flooded backyards and streets due to the volume of water that was produced. Auditor Marion worked joined with County Legislator Maurice Brown to receive updates from Water Department workers and meet with concerned neighbors.



Auditor Marion with County Legislator Maurice Brown following a water main break in the Meadowbrook neighborhood

## Building Partners Across New York State

Auditor Marion will work with anyone who has the best interests of the City of Syracuse in mind. He regularly works with State Comptroller Tom DiNapoli, Attorney General Letitia James, and Senators Rachel May and Chris Ryan on a variety of issues impacting Syracusans, including aid to local governments, protecting taxpayers, building new housing, and supporting local union workers. When leaders on different levels of government work together and share ideas, we're able to use more resources to solve the challenges our communities face every day.



Auditor Marion with State Senators Rachel May and Chris Ryan at a United Way of CNY coat drive



Auditor Marion joined NYS Comptroller Tom DiNapoli at his annual State Fair Breakfast in August.



Auditor Marion with NYS Attorney General Letitia James at the Great New York State Fair in August.



Auditor Marion with Assemblyman William Magnarelli, County Legislator Palmer Harvey, and Common Councilor Rita Paniagua at 2025 St. Patrick's Parade.

# Looking Ahead To 2025-2026

City Auditor Alexander Marion is using the Office of the City Auditor to create the most value for our limited resources: our tax dollars, our human capital, our public space, and our infrastructure. Every initiative undertaken and every report issued is in furtherance of that goal. He takes seriously the responsibility to provide oversight of the decisions the City is making today and provide insight into the decisions City government will make tomorrow.

Here are a few of the issues the office will be addressing in the year ahead:

## **A Focus on Housing**

The Auditor's Office will be laser focused on tackling the housing challenges facing our City. Building off our work advocating for Good Cause Eviction and overhauling the Rental Registry, the Auditor's Office will continue making housing a top priority. Auditor Marion is committed to finding new ways to improve Code Enforcement, hold bad property owners accountable, and prevent vacant structures from becoming dangerous, blighted, and a threat to our neighborhoods and firefighters.

## **Smarter Uses for Public Land**

In the year ahead, the Auditor's Office will investigate land use and examine how our City utilizes our finite supply of land. We will discover the tools available to the City to control these sites and discuss steps taken to advance public policy and promote smarter growth. From zoning rules to tax seizures, Auditor Marion is seeking innovative ways to put more land into productive use, generating tax revenue and creating new opportunities for more of the housing units we urgently need.

## **Making a More Efficient Government**

The number one goal of the Auditor's Office is to make our government more efficient and effective. Whether it's improvements the administration can make alone, or legislation for the Common Council, our recommendations will streamline government, increase efficiency, and solve tough problems. Auditor Marion is always listening to the concerns of our community and looking for creative strategies to make our City a better place to live, work, and play.

## **An Attention on Infrastructure**

The Auditor's Office will ensure the people of Syracuse are being well-served by public infrastructure across our City. From roadways to water mains, public parks to municipal broadband, Auditor Marion will work to ensure our public infrastructure and utilities are delivered safely, reliably, and equitably. Our office will seek ways to extend the useful life of our assets, and support necessary outlays in new, to make the investments necessary to develop a thriving City of choice.



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