

**2020 State of the Town  
Albany-Colonie Chamber  
January 9, 2020**

Good morning. Well, here we are again! It is hard to believe it has been a year since my last State of the Town. Time really does fly, but I am happy to report that it has been a very productive year for Colonie. We keep moving ahead, and we have made great progress.

First, thank you for being here. I have really appreciated your interest and support over all these years – this past year especially. Now, it is great to have a chance to catch up with everyone and be able to update you on our progress.

I want to thank the Chamber for hosting us once again this year, especially CEO Mark Eagan, Chamber Chair Paul Milton, and Albany-County Chair Robert Schofield, as well as your board and staff members.

CBRE Albany and HMS Agency are again sponsoring today's event, and I thank them for their continuing support. All of you in the Chamber do an excellent job for all of us, and we are lucky to have your leadership and advocacy.

I was so thrilled when I learned that Colonie was once again voted Best Suburb in the 2019 Times Union poll. This is the sixth year in a row we have won the top spot! We all know Colonie is a great community, but it is wonderful to see it recognized as the best year after year.

We have lots of other great news. First, serious crime in Colonie decreased for the second year running, even though there were more calls for service. Chief Teale has worked with us to bring Colonie Police Department staffing levels up to the highest levels ever, and it is wonderful to see the positive results of this effort. Public safety has always been one of my top priorities and will always be at the top of my list.

Of course, our EMS Department and our twelve excellent volunteer fire departments all play a huge role in our outstanding level of public safety, and I thank all of them for their service. Our EMS Department, which has been recognized for excellence so many times, had another great year in 2019. For the third year in a row, they received the American Heart Association's prestigious Lifeline Gold Plus Award! They were also named our region's Emergency Medical Organization of the Year.

Last year was a red-letter year for the EMS Department in many other ways. First, EMS celebrated its thirtieth anniversary with the highest full-time staffing ever. As a result, they can cover the majority of shifts with full-time personnel and staff an additional ambulance during peak hours, seven days a week. Last year, we also bid farewell to outgoing EMS Chief Peter Berry, who provided excellent leadership for us. We also welcomed our new Chief, Chris Kostyun.

Speaking of public safety, I am so grateful to Senator Neil Breslin and Assemblyman Phil Steck. Together, they are providing \$500,000 to enable us to replace our 40-year old mobile command post with a much-needed state-of-the art vehicle. In fact, Senator Breslin joked that I twisted his arm to help fund it by taking him to see our old one! This new mobile command post will help all of our first responders manage complex emergencies more efficiently.

Assemblyman Steck is also providing \$250,000 for a new ambulance and \$500,000 for upgrades to our Municipal Training Center. All of this support means that Colonie, and indeed all of our neighboring communities, will be safer. Let us show both Assemblyman Steck and Senator Breslin our appreciation for their help!

We are making great progress on other fronts as well. Last fall, based on our smart, new energy-saving initiatives, NYSERDA certified us as a Clean Energy Community. As a result,

we won a Clean Energy Community Grant, which will help us retrofit our Public Safety Center with energy-saving LED lighting. After an amortization period of just over a year, savings to the Town will be more than \$41,000 annually. I will tell you more about our other bold, new energy-saving initiatives later on.

Without our dedicated and hard-working employees, department heads, and Town Board members, these accomplishments would not be possible. Will our Town Board members please stand? And will all our department heads and other Town employees please stand as well? I am very proud that by working together as a team we have consistently achieved – and even exceeded – our goals.

As we look ahead to a new decade, I think you would all agree that Colonie is primed for even greater success. Our neighborhoods are safe, our businesses are thriving, and our community is active and involved. People genuinely care about Colonie. They want to live here, work here, and do business here. All of this puts us in a great position for the future. Our financial house is in order, and we are moving steadily ahead on creative new ways to make life in the Town of Colonie even better.

Through the years, it has been critical to follow each step of our Ten-Year Strategic Financial Plan. We achieved every goal, which greatly improved the efficiency and effectiveness of our operations. In addition, we greatly improved our bond rating – from Baa1 with a negative outlook when I took office in 2008, to today’s rating of A+ with a positive outlook. Once we stabilized our finances, the next step was to begin investing in the Town’s most essential infrastructure – our roads, and our drinking water and sewer systems.

We began our paving and stormwater improvement program in 2010, funding it at \$2.5 million per year. The Town has 320 miles of road, and it has been a huge – and expensive – job

getting them back to good repair. We have invested carefully, repaving 101 miles of road, repairing many more miles, and bringing all of our major feeder roads back to top condition. You may remember that when I was here last year, I said I hoped that at some point we would be able to increase the budget for paving and storm water improvement. In 2019, we were able to add an additional \$250,000. And this year, I am proud that we are able to add \$500,000 to our paving and stormwater budget!

In 2014, we began ambitious programs to renovate our drinking water and sanitary sewer systems. Both our Latham Water Treatment Plant and our Mohawk View Water Pollution Control Treatment Plant needed major upgrades. Now, we have significantly renovated both plants. In addition, we have modernized and upgraded many of the pump stations essential to these systems. By the end of 2020, we will have invested just under \$40 million dollars.

Last year, we also established a brand new back-up emergency water connection with the City of Albany. A second connection is coming online this spring. These inter-connections will provide both municipalities with much more efficient and cost-effective emergency water supplies. In fact, the City needed to use the system last December, and everything worked smoothly. A \$960,000 dollar NYS Water Infrastructure grant offset the Town's \$1.6 million share of the project.

Since 2016, we have invested three million dollars in the Town Park on Schermerhorn Road. We made major improvements to the pool complex, and in 2018 we installed a beautiful new splash pad for kids. Last year, we renovated the Latham Lassies concession stand there. We also improved all the Town's twelve pocket parks with new fencing, playground equipment, and other upgrades. This year – by popular demand – we expect to install pickle ball courts at the Kiwanis pocket park!

Also upcoming this year are significant bike path improvements, a new pavilion at the Town Park, a new playground and parking lot at the south end of The Crossings, and major improvements at the West Albany Pocket Park, including new bathrooms and seating at the football complex – all with \$1.2 million of support arranged by Assemblyman Steck, incidentally.

As you may know, in 2018 we began an ambitious renovation of the Town Library. It turned out great. Today, the library has a spacious new entrance, new bathrooms, new teen and children's rooms, and many new meeting spaces. If you've been there recently, you may also have seen the new adult reading area and a dedicated quiet study area. Still coming are a new roof and HVAC system.

Finally, in 2019 we began a major exterior renovation of the Pruyn House, a \$900,000 project.

We were able to achieve these capital improvements only through sound financial management and good planning. Currently we bond to only about 11 percent of our constitutional debt limit. We plan to keep the debt limit low. It is essential that the Town continue to live within its means. Keep in mind that with our low property tax rate, which is \$3.99 per thousand, a one percent tax increase yields our General Fund only about \$240,000 dollars in new revenue. You know, that is really not a lot!

Grants are playing an increasing part in helping us do that. In the case of the library, the Town was able to commit between \$3 and \$4 million for improvements. We were fortunate that Assemblyman Steck provided an additional \$1 million to expand the entrance area, and Senator Breslin provided another \$100,000. Their grants, plus other grants and gifts obtained by the

library totaling \$365,000, allowed us to expand the project well beyond what would have been possible with only Town funds.

I am proud that beginning last year we were able to enhance the Town's ability to apply for new grants in both our DPW and Planning Departments. In the past couple of years we have obtained about \$6 million dollars in grants. In addition, applications are in progress for more than \$1.2 million in new grants, including one to fund a tree inventory and community forest management plan, and another to develop new bicycle connections throughout the Town.

Another way to live within limited means is to find new and innovative ways to cut costs. That is why I was especially proud last year to move forward with two new energy-related projects. Both reduce the Town's energy costs, while at the same time increasing our profile as a good environmental citizen. One involves the purchase of eco-friendly hydropower. The second involves converting our streetlights to energy-saving LED lighting.

In the first project, the Town last year signed a twenty-year agreement to purchase hydropower from the Schuylerville Hydroelectric Facility located 37 miles from Colonie. No, there's not an extension cord to Town Hall! However, we receive credit for the power generated there, which in turn offsets our electric bill. This is one of the most far-sighted and far-reaching initiatives we have been able to undertake – and the savings to the Town is huge. We expect savings of upwards of \$400,000 in the first year alone.

We also expect a significant savings by purchasing the more than 4,000 streetlights we now lease from National Grid, then converting them to energy-saving LED lighting. When the project is complete, we expect to save more than \$570,000 annually in combined energy costs and facilities charges. The New York Power Authority estimates our twenty-five year savings at \$12.2 million! Plus, we reduce our CO2 emissions by about 1,107 tons a year every year going

forward. We will amortize project costs over a period of time that will maximize the Town's positive cash flow during the payback period. Installation should be complete by late spring or early summer.

When I first came to office in 2008, we focused our attention on the redevelopment of four major sites that had been either idle or underutilized for many years. I am proud that we have made great progress on all four. First, Fresh Market Commons and the Latham Circle Mall became productive, new properties.

This year, we were excited as the redevelopment of the third, the old Starlite Theatre site, took shape with the construction of the new Ayco headquarters there. It's a gorgeous building that will provide a template for upgrades all along the Route 9R corridor. In addition, the construction of solar tee canopies over the parking area will get the project to net zero energy consumption.

And, we are finally making progress on the old Tobin site, easily the most difficult of these four properties to redevelop. As you know, a developer has put forth ambitious plans for a beautiful new mixed use development there. As the site is located partly in Town and partly in the City of Albany, the Town has created a special overlay district that will include a joint Town and City Planning Board to oversee the project. Additionally, the Town has secured a \$1 million grant for demolition of the old Tobin Packing Plant – the essential first step in realizing the site's potential.

This year, we realized another long-term goal with construction of the new Northway Exit 3. It provides direct connections to the Albany International Airport and helps to alleviate traffic congestion along Wolf and Albany Shaker Roads. I think it turned out great. I want to thank Governor Cuomo and all our friends at the Department of Transportation for making this

project happen. I also want to thank former Albany Airport CEO John O'Donnell and County Executive Dan McCoy for their ongoing advocacy for this project. By the way, I wish my friend John O'Donnell health and happiness in retirement and send best wishes to the airport's new CEO, Phil Calderone.

With the construction of the connector road linking Route 9R and Route 9 as part of the Ayco project, traffic is flowing much more smoothly along that corridor as well. The new connector road, named Coliseum Drive, is beautiful. The Town has wanted this connector road for many, many years, and I want to thank everyone at the Galesi Group for helping making it a reality for the Town.

In addition, following a recent traffic study, we are planning for changes that will help move traffic more smoothly along the Albany Shaker Road corridor. Already, we have a new traffic light at the Shaker Elementary School intersection. It is operational during school hours, when it provides greater safety and convenience for those coming and going from the school. I would again like to like to thank County Executive Dan McCoy for working closely with us. Did I mention that Assemblyman Steck arranged the funding for the traffic light? So I thank him again as well.

You may remember that we were awarded a Brownfield Opportunity grant to study redevelopment of the former Adirondack Steel site. We have completed the study and sent it to the Department of State for review and approval. We developed the recommendations with community input. Among the recommendations are using the site for green energy initiatives and creating an access road to take truck traffic off Lincoln Avenue. It would be wonderful for everyone if this site can be returned to productive uses that also enhance the neighboring community.



Last year we completed an update of the Town's 2005 Comprehensive Plan. Many of the recommendations reflect goals we have been actively working on throughout my tenure. Some lay out new directions for the future, such as increasing open space and better protecting neighborhoods that border commercial zones. I will keep you updated on our progress as we move forward. The review process was very thorough, and I want to thank Joe LaCivita, our Director of Planning and Economic Development, for his leadership on it. I also want to take a moment to congratulate Joe on his new position. Joe has been with us since the beginning, and we will miss him greatly.

In addition, some special events in 2019 provided us with lots of fun and excitement. One of these was the 50th anniversary of the Town Golf Course. In honor of the occasion, the golf course rolled back greens fees to 1969 rates for four days over the Columbus Day weekend. It was a great success! Now if we could only roll back our health insurance premiums to 1969 rates, it would be like getting a hole in one!

Another exciting event added a totally new dimension to life in Town Hall last year. This was the Hometown Hero Celebration for Shaker High School's Madison Vandenburg, who had made it into the final rounds of the American Idol competition. One day I got a call from Hollywood and the American Idol producers, all very secret, that we might need to create this big event in about a week's time! It was a real sprint, but with the help of North Colonie Superintendent Joe Corr, Deputy Superintendent Kathy Skeals, and everyone at Shaker High, we were able to pull everything together for a great celebration. There were hundreds of well-wishers at The Crossings cheering Madison on. It was a proud moment for all of us to have one of our Shaker High students achieve such success, and as a former Shaker Junior High School teacher, this felt very special to me. I know we all wish Madison continued success!

Speaking of success, I would like to close simply by saying that the Town has had a successful year in every way. In 2020, we will continue to move forward with the goal of keeping Colonie the best place ever. I truly believe it is by all of us working together that we will continue to keep Colonie the best suburban community! I thank you for your support of our great Town and wish all of you the very best in the new decade!