

**2016 State of the Town Message
Town Board Meeting
January 21, 2016**

Good evening. Before we begin our regular Town Board meeting this evening, I'd like to take a few minutes to share my 2016 State of the Town message with you. In some ways, it's hard to believe this is my ninth State of the Town message. However, I do look forward to presenting it each year because it gives me an excellent chance to let everyone know what we achieved over the past year and what we look forward to accomplishing in the year ahead.

First, I am really very honored to have been re-elected as your Supervisor, and I want to thank you for your support and interest in Town government. The involvement of all of you in the workings of our Town is very important to our success.

We all know that Colonie is a truly great community, and I am excited about all we have accomplished together. I was so proud – as I'm sure you were too – when Colonie was once again named the “Best Suburban Community” in the Times Union readers’ poll. It's a huge honor to be recognized as the best community two years in a row, and it says a great deal about our quality of life here in Colonie.

And we do indeed have a great quality of life. We are ranked as one of the safest places in the nation, and we have a nationally recognized EMS department. Our twelve volunteer fire departments provide an excellent response to fires and other serious incidents. The Town operates in the black and provides a full range of excellent resident services. At the same time, we have one of the region's lowest tax rates. And very importantly, we continue to experience remarkable new growth and investment, adding energy and vitality to our community.

We also have outstanding schools and a very supportive and involved community. That means young people can thrive here. I raised my children in Colonie, my grandchildren are being raised here, and I want to be sure that all the generations to come will want to live and raise their families here. I believe the most important part of my job as Supervisor is protecting our quality of life both for today and for the future.

Another part of what makes Colonie a great place to live is the richness of our recreational opportunities, and maintaining public green space is a very important part of the equation.

Earlier this month, Colonie resident Dr. Patricia Fox donated 70 acres of undeveloped land on River Road to the Mohawk-Hudson Land Conservancy. It will be opened as a public preserve, perhaps by 2017. Dr. Fox and I had discussions about possible plans for this land in the past, and now Dr. Fox has made it happen. This was an incredibly generous gift, and I want to take this opportunity to extend a very grateful thanks to Dr. Fox.

As I was preparing for this morning, I thought it might be interesting to look back at my first State of the Town message to you in 2008. I promised to address the Town's serious fiscal challenges, and I did. I also wanted to see what else I'd identified as important. I said then that we would – and I quote – “be aggressive in our efforts to attract and retain jobs.” That is a promise I have taken very seriously, and I am proud that over my eight years in office we have brought thousands of new jobs to Colonie.

I will address our progress with jobs in more detail later on, but first I wanted to note a truly historic passage with the retirement last year of our long-time Colonie Police Chief Steven Heider and the appointment of Jonathan Teale as our new Chief of Police. As a 25-year veteran of the CPD, Chief Teale brings both continuity and new energy to the Department.

We also saw the retirement of our library director, Richard Naylor, after many outstanding years of service, and the appointment of Evelyn Neale as our new library director. Evelyn brings with her many years of experience as a library director and will make a great addition to our truly excellent library.

Finally, speaking of retirements, my good friend and our Town Comptroller Craig Blair retired at the end of 2015. Craig was an integral part of my administration from day one, and his guidance and good humor were essential in helping the Town regain financial stability – and helping me keep my sanity! Chris Kelsey is now our Acting Comptroller.

Looking back at where we were in 2008, I am very proud of what we've accomplished. By following a conservative fiscal path and reducing the cost of Town government, we brought our Town back from the brink of bankruptcy.

And, as of 2014, we had built up a fund balance of almost \$3.5 million. I'd say that's pretty good since we started with zero. I am optimistic that in the near future we will reach the \$4 million dollar fund balance recommended by NYS Comptroller Tom DiNapoi. This will mark a hugely important milestone for us, and I am truly grateful to all those who have worked so hard to help me make it happen.

Our conservative financial practices have also allowed us to keep our budgets low while at the same time providing an excellent level of resident services. I'd like to point out that our 2016 budget of \$87.3 million dollars is LESS than the \$91.8 million dollar budget we inherited in 2008. To do this, we have worked consistently to find new ways to make Town government cost our taxpayers less.

This year, we will once again meet the requirements of the Governor's Tax Levy Cap, which actually limited our 2016 tax levy growth to less than three-fourths of a percent. And while we have successfully achieved many economies, some expenses continue to increase. So living within the tax cap is not without challenges for us. However, I remain committed to meeting it, because I want to do whatever we can to reduce the property taxes. Incidentally, this is the fifth year we will meet the requirements of the tax cap.

To meet the 2016 tax cap requirements, we also had to have in place an approved efficiency plan. Our ongoing efforts to streamline Town government helped us in meeting this mandate. Going forward, we will continue to work to achieve new operational efficiencies. We will also continue to work with County Executive Dan McCoy and other municipal leaders to explore the potential for shared services. All of these efforts will be necessary to meet the tax cap's ongoing efficiency and shared services requirements in the years to come.

By successfully meeting all the tax cap requirements, we've made it possible for our residents to benefit from the NYS Tax Rebate Program both for 2015 and 2016. The 2015 rebate checks are now in the mail, and many of you may have already received them. When you get your check, please remember that without a collective willingness to rethink the way the Town does business, we may not have had the rebate opportunity.

And I do want to acknowledge the hard work of our Town Board in helping me achieve this success. We've also asked a lot of our Town employees at every level, all of whom have been asked to work in new ways as we rethought how to deliver Town services.

Speaking of shared services, Colonie is now working with Albany County and the Town of Bethlehem to implement a new police and emergency communications system that will allow for uniform data collection and enhance the ability of participants to communicate with each other. It also has the potential for significant cost-savings.

Our EMS Department also enhanced communications last year. By installing laptops in every ambulance, EMS crews now have immediate access to dispatch call information, providing them with greater information about patient conditions before their arrival on the scene. The new system also enables EMS to transmit medical information electronically from an ambulance to the hospital, decreasing delays that can occur after the patient's arrival. We are always looking for new methods to improve our services and protect lives.

As you may know, I remain very committed to funding supportive programs for both our youth and seniors, and I am proud that the Town has maintained these programs even as other municipalities have cut such services. We must never forget that the strength of our community is dependent in part on programs that can help everyone realize their full potential.

I am also very committed to enhancing our recreational facilities. We were able to make several improvements to Town facilities last year and more improvements are planned for 2016.

Last spring, we installed soft, new vinyl liners for the pools at the Town Park, and next fall we will install a new pool filtration system and pool covers. And in 2016, we are planning more improvements at the Town Park and also to the Town's portion of the Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Path.

This spring we are planning to construct a new pavilion at the Town Golf course, which will enhance our ability to host golf outings there and thus boost our bottom line. Incidentally, we are offering ice skating and other winter sports at the golf course this year – weather

permitting – and last fall we opened our second dog park on Town land directly adjacent to the golf course.

In last year's State of the Town, I outlined several major long-term initiatives designed to preserve and strengthen our aging drinking water and sanitary sewer systems, which represent a huge and necessary reinvestment in these essential systems.

To review very quickly, since 2014 the Latham Water District has invested \$7.5 million dollars in several major infrastructure projects. This year, it will spend \$3 million to complete its renovation of the River Road High Lift Pump Station, to rehab the Osborne Road water tank, and to replace an aging water main along Route 9.

At Pure Waters, \$10 million has been allocated so far as part of a long-term strategic infrastructure improvement plan. The biggest expenditure is for the \$5.2 million rehabilitation of the Lisha Kill Pump Station, expected to be completed this year.

Last year we also began our second, \$10 million five-year paving and drainage improvement program. When we began our first paving program in 2010, more than 46 percent of the Town's roads were in need of repair or nearing the end of their useful life. So far, we have repaved 64 road miles on more than 200 roads and completed 144 major storm sewer repairs. This is great progress, but with 320 miles of Town roads, you can see that there's still more work to be done.

Speaking of roads, we all know that Colonie's location is one of its most outstanding features. It's easy to travel almost anywhere from here, which is a very important factor when new businesses decide to locate in Colonie. Our accessibility was enhanced even further this year by the addition of JetBlue to Albany International Airport's airline lineup. I want to thank CEO John O'Donnell and the Albany Airport Authority for a job well done in positioning the region for further positive growth.

Growth has been very important to the Town's success throughout my tenure. Our major goal has been and will continue to be to make sure that good development is able to move forward smoothly, while at the same time maintaining an excellent quality of life for our residents.

One area we will be looking at is traffic patterns and how they can be improved. As growth to the north of us continues, we have many people passing through on a daily basis to and from their workplace. We are also situated between four major metropolitan areas – Albany, Troy, Schenectady, and Saratoga – and 200,000 people pass through Colonie every day. We will continue to advocate for ways to mitigate traffic congestion, including the revamped Exit 4.

I know we were all very pleased with last year's completion of the Northway Bridges over Albany Shaker Road, and I want to thank the NYS Department of Transportation for doing a really beautiful job with that project. This project, the impressive redesign of Exit 6, and the recently renovated Latham traffic circle have improved the safety of our infrastructure and greatly enhanced the beauty of our Town.

As you all know, we are experiencing exciting growth all over Colonie. After some delays, new tenants have been announced for the Shoppes at Latham Circle, including the Burlington Coat Factory and Bob's Furniture. With the existing Lowe's and the new Walmart Super Center, I think we can finally look forward to this site finally returning to full viability. It's a great improvement!

At Latham Farms, Dick's Sporting Goods will be taking over the former Walmart location and adding a Dick's Field and Stream store. The combination of a sporting goods store with a field and stream store is a new business model for Dick's, and Colonie was lucky to be chosen for one of the first sites in the region. On nearby Sparrowbush Road, Upstate Veterinary opened its beautiful new facility, greatly expanding options for specialized pet care here in Colonie.

We are also seeing exciting activity all along the eastern end of the Route 2, both in new construction and redeveloped sites. Included in new construction is the ambulatory eye surgery facility at 207 Troy-Schenectady Road, the Salvation Army store at 190 Troy-Schenectady Road, and a new Cumberland Farms store at 211 Troy-Schenectady Road.

Among several redevelopment projects, the former Lennon's site at 264 Troy Schenectady Road has been redeveloped for mixed and retail use, providing new life for a site long in need of a makeover.

I want to stress our continuing emphasis on redevelopment projects, where existing properties are being successfully renovated or rebuilt. Redevelopment has been a major and ongoing focus of my administration, and I am proud of the many sites that have been repurposed and reborn, both beautifying our Town and ensuring continued vibrant activity in our commercial corridors.

All of this activity adds jobs, and there's no doubt that we have created lots and lots of new jobs in eight years. The jobs created by new businesses, by expansions of existing businesses, and by construction have yielded more than 1,000 jobs a year every year since 2010.

I think everyone understands that all the new offices, hotels, grocery stores, restaurants, and retail operations have generated lots of new jobs. But what of the high-tech and manufacturing sectors?

We have actively worked to bring such jobs to Colonie, and we've had some notable successes. Let me take a moment to review some of the high-tech and manufacturing jobs that we helped bring to Colonie since I began this journey, starting with the decision of Anglo-Dynamics in 2010 to locate its corporate headquarters here, bringing with it more than 100 high-tech sector jobs.

Also in 2010, Precision Valve Automation relocated into a vacant manufacturing property on Mustang Avenue. The result: 175 good manufacturing jobs here in Colonie.

In 2013 M&G Dura Vent, a gas ventilation company, relocated its Albany manufacturing facility to a vacant warehouse at 120 Jupiter Lane, bringing 78 manufacturing jobs with plans to create 100 more. And in 2014, ThermoAura, an RPI start-up company, moved to a state-of-the-art manufacturing facility on Railroad Avenue, projecting a five-year growth to 25 employees.

In addition, last October, PrimaLoft opened its new headquarters and testing lab here, bringing 25 jobs. The same month G&G LED, which makes LED lighting for wet environments, expanded its headquarters and manufacturing operation in Colonie, announcing plans to add new jobs in 2016. Integra Optics, begun here in 2007, renovated its offices, added 20 new employees, and created a second start-up at its Albany Airport location, all in 2015. And BestPass, which provides services to commercial trucking fleets, moved its growing workforce to larger Colonie offices.

Finally, according to the Business Review's 2014 Book of Lists, Colonie is home to six of the region's top 25 manufacturers, including Latham International and Protective Industrial Products. And eight of the region's top 25 technology companies are based in Colonie, including Angio Dynamics and Plug Power. These are some pretty impressive employers!

It's important to recognize that although we all know new jobs are coming to Colonie every day, the number of high tech and manufacturing jobs is increasing as well. We all know that these jobs provide a more stable population and a better business climate.

I think you will agree with me that 2015 was a very good year for Colonie. I expect 2016 to be even better, and I'll be prepared to give you a full report next year! Thank you all for taking the time to be here this morning, and I wish you all the best in 2016.