

**2017 State of the Town  
Colonie Town Board Meeting  
January 19, 2017**

Good evening. Before we begin our regular Town Board meeting this evening, I would like to share my 2017 State of the Town message with you. It's very hard for me to believe this is my tenth State of the Town message.

For me, ten years marks a milestone. Time has gone by so fast, but I'm confident that we have used our time wisely, and our many accomplishments demonstrate the progress we have made together. I can truly say that being your Supervisor is a positive and rewarding experience.

I can clearly remember my first State of the Town before the Chamber in January, 2008. I was into my third week as Supervisor and people were wondering, 'What could she possibly have to say?' After all, I was a teacher, what did I know about running a government?

And so the story begins. My students, seventh and eighth graders, cheered me on and told me to just do my best. They assured me things would be great. One of their big questions was, would I be driven to my office each day in a limousine? So after a wonderful career in teaching, I made the transition to Town Hall, and the work began. Getting back to the question of what a teacher would know about running a government, well, you'd be surprised.

I had gained many valuable skills through my many years of teaching. First, when you teach, you manage people every day. You utilize teamwork, collaboration, problem-solving, prioritizing, consensus building, organization, listening skills, compassion, time management, developing goals and plans to meet them, and the list goes on.

The work began, and with the help of a great staff and a trusting community, the many challenges began to turn into opportunities to move the Town forward. And, yes, my teaching skills turned out to be quite valuable.

And now, as I enter my tenth year, 2017 promises to be a milestone year for Colonie as well as we complete the process of updating the Town's Comprehensive Plan. The Plan was adopted in 2005, and we have worked very hard to implement its vision. I'll get back to the Comprehensive Plan in more detail a little later on.

I think all of us who live and work in Colonie know what a great town we live in. But it's always great when others recognize it too. That's why I was so proud when Colonie was once again named "Best Suburban Community" in the 2016 Times Union Reader's Poll. That's the third time in a row Colonie has been voted the best in this category!

Also, in April of 2016, a Siena College Research Institute survey found that an "overwhelming" 97 percent of Colonie residents surveyed rated Colonie as a great place to raise a family, with 73 percent indicating that they believe Colonie is "on the right track."

The survey also underscored the fact that residents have a high degree of satisfaction with life in Colonie – with our low taxes, our recreational facilities and library, our truly excellent schools, and the wide range of goods and services available right here in our community.

Finally, the Siena survey showed that our residents feel safe and secure in their neighborhoods – with 91 percent rating our police and 96 percent rating our firefighters as providing good or excellent service. I'd like to thank all our police officers, EMS staff, and the firefighters from our 12 volunteer fire companies for working so hard to keep us safe.

As you know, public safety has always been one of my very top priorities. That is why I am very excited that we have brought the Colonie Police Department's regular staffing level to 112 officers, the highest number in 25 years. The CPD has worked very hard to realize this goal. Working together we were able to make it happen.

In addition, both the CPD and our EMS Department are now online with a new county-wide public safety radio system that increases efficiency and interoperability. As a shared resource, it also saves us money. Now, we are working with our regional partners to develop a shared computer-aided dispatch system that will serve all of our first responders.

This year, our EMS Department is in line to receive the American Heart Association's Gold Plus Award for excellence in emergency cardiac care. What a huge honor for Colonie! Many factors contribute to this success, including our outstanding paramedics and EMTs. Another is our ability to transmit data directly to hospitals from our ambulances, a result of equipping all of our ambulances with tablet computers.

Also, following years of dedicated leadership by our EMS to provide free CPR training to the community, bystanders last year provided CPR in 84 percent of our cardiac arrest cases. That resulted in a 40 percent return of spontaneous circulation, far outpacing the national average. What a great service EMS has rendered to our community with this training!

As you know, proper training is extremely important for all of our emergency responders. Last November, we made a big leap forward at our Municipal Training Center when we opened a "streetscape" incorporating the physical features encountered by emergency responders in the real world – the only such streetscape in the Capital Region. I want to thank

Albany County Sheriff Craig Apple, District Attorney David Soares, our Albany County Fire Coordinator Jerry Paris, as well as all our relevant Town departments for making it a reality.

When I assumed office in 2008, we inherited a budget of \$91.8 million. Ten years later, Colonie's 2017 budget is only \$88.9 million. We're spending less today than in 2008! Keeping our budget low has been possible only because everyone in Town government has pulled together to find new ways to hold the line on spending. For that I am very, very grateful to the Town Board, our department heads, and all our dedicated staff members. I am lucky to have a board that is working so well together. We all share a true commitment to public service. That's true of our department heads and staff members as well.

Our 2017 budget also meets the requirements of the NYS Tax Levy Cap – for the sixth year running. That means our taxpayers will again be able to benefit from the NYS Tax Rebate Program. Incidentally, the cap limits our 2017 tax levy growth to about \$570,000, so you can see that living within the cap is a big challenge for us, but each year we try our very best to stay within the cap.

One of my first priorities in 2008 was to develop a ten-year financial plan aimed at achieving financial stability. I also created a very broadly-based Budget Committee, and each year we review literally every dollar spent by every department. By working together and sharing resources across departments, we were able to realize all the goals of our financial plan well before the ten years were up! This is a tremendous accomplishment.

With our finances on firm ground, we began to aggressively address the long-term infrastructure needs of the Town – focusing major efforts on our drinking water, sewer, and

storm water systems – and on our roads. We’ve also been able to begin making much-needed improvements to the Town Park, and are planning for major improvements to our library in the near future.

But you should know that even though we are embarking on significant capital projects, we are continuing to follow a very conservative fiscal approach. We want to be very certain that the Town continues to live well within its means.

For the last few years, we have been making significant capital investments in our drinking water and sewer systems. In this regard, we are well ahead of the curve when compared to many municipalities. And now is the right time to be doing this, because it costs much less to tackle these projects earlier rather than later.

As just one example, in an emergency it costs the Town about \$1,300 to replace a foot of sanitary sewer pipe. Just think of that – one foot! Contrast that with an average replacement cost of \$85 per foot in our recent Metro Park Road Sewer Replacement project. With more than 2 million feet of sanitary sewer in Colonie, you can see that planning ahead goes a long way toward making sure we’re getting the most bang for the buck.

And that’s just the sewer system! The Latham Water Department has another 2.3 million feet of pipe, and this year it will be replacing large sections of water main on Maxwell Road and Route 9, as well as making continued improvements to its pumping, storage and distribution systems.

By the end of this year, we will have invested about \$10 million in long-term infrastructure improvements for our sewers, and \$14 million for our drinking water

systems. Significant investment will continue for the foreseeable future.

I'd like to take a moment now to thank the architects of our long-term, strategic infrastructure initiatives – John Frazer, our Latham Water Superintendent, and Chretien Voerg, our Pure Waters Superintendent.

We're also beginning the eighth year of our paving plan to bring our roads back to top working condition. I am glad to report that 95 percent of the Town's major feeder roads are now at very good or excellent condition -- and we are making progress with our residential streets. I hope that within the next few years we will be able to increase our paving plan budget above current levels; that remains a goal for the future.

As we all know, our central location is one of our greatest strengths. A huge number of people pass through here every day on their way to someplace else. We are studying current traffic patterns and how they can be improved. We are also working with Albany County and the Capital District Transportation Commission on a traffic study for the Albany-Shaker Road corridor.

We are really looking forward to the future revamped Exit 4, which will also help alleviate traffic along Wolf and Albany Shaker Roads. We are lucky to have had the active partnership of the Chamber and the Albany County International Airport in advocating for this much-needed enhancement. The Airport is very important to Colonie. I know it is the fastest growing airport in upstate New York, and we are excited about its most recent plans to further upgrade its beautiful terminal.

We've also been working to bring some much-needed improvements to the Town Park

on Schermerhorn Road. We've installed new liners at the pools and are on track this spring to install new pool filtration systems. And we're now planning for a new splash pad at the pool next year – a really great addition for families with small children. Last year, we also installed a new barrier-free playground at the Town Park. Now, children of every ability will now have new options for recreation.

As I mentioned earlier, the Town is now in the process of reviewing and updating the Comprehensive Plan. Adopted in 2005, the Comprehensive Plan provided a template for growth in Colonie. Our review involves the community in a collaborative process with our Comprehensive Plan Review Committee and outside consultants. This is a very big undertaking. Thank you to all of the Comprehensive Plan Committee members for your commitment.

As there are many parts of the 2005 Comprehensive Plan that have worked out well for the Town, this current review provides the opportunity to make the necessary modifications to parts of the plan that may need to be adjusted.

Of seventeen goals outlined at the beginning of the Comprehensive Plan, several focus on development within the Town, and I believe that realizing these goals have been among our most important and successful accomplishments.

For example, the Plan recommends providing a business-friendly environment that supports a diverse economic base. From day one, we worked to create just such an environment and also to focus our development efforts on the redevelopment of existing properties, another a key Plan goal. Also from day one, we have worked to create a more user-friendly project approval process that is “clear, predictable, and fair,” again as specified in the 2005 Plan.

When we think of all the activity we've seen along Wolf Road, Route 9, and Route 7, the lion's share has been in the redevelopment of existing commercial properties. All of these corridors are defined in the Plan as suitable for "mixed node" development including a range of "service, employment, and residential options." The result is that each of these major commercial corridors has been reborn, providing an exciting new range of services as a result.

We have long worked towards redevelopment of the old Tobin site. We were excited by the announcement last December of very exciting plans for a mixed-use redevelopment there incorporating the principles of "new urbanism." This has been our most challenging site, and these plans follow many years of work and effort on our part. Now, we will work cooperatively with the City of Albany to create the partnership necessary to make this dream a reality for all of us. Stay tuned. Updates to follow!

We have also made significant progress in meeting the Plan's goal of protecting our natural environment, both through preservation of open space and development of potential recreational trail corridors.

I am really proud that we have increased open space significantly in recent years. In 2013 we created the Mohawk Riverside Landing Park at the site of the former Latham Water Treatment Plant on River Road. The Park provides another connection to the bike path, one of four new bike path connections under my administration. Again, establishing such inter-connectivity with the bike path is a high-value objective in the Comprehensive Plan.

Last fall, the Town took ownership of an additional 23-acres of open parkland at the Schuyler Flatts Cultural Park after it was deeded to us by the Open Space Institute, and in 2013

we took ownership of 127 acres of open space along Sand Creek Road. We received another 23 acres north of Route 9 as a result of the Northern Pass development.

Taken all together, we now have 1,155 acres of Town-owned land dedicated to recreational and open space. Plus, we are now in the process of dedicating 144 acres to the Pine Bush, to assure continued protection of this ecosystem so unique to our Town.

In addition, the Town requires conservation easements for development projects. They are simply parcels deeded to the Town that exist as undisturbed open space. We are now approaching 100 acres in such conservation easements.

The Comprehensive Plan directs the Town to encourage “a mix of housing types for seniors in appropriate areas of the community,” and we have made the availability of new senior housing options at every income level a priority. We are especially excited about the affordable senior apartments being constructed through the Elks Lane project. The former Little Sisters of the Poor is being redeveloped into low-income senior housing meeting federal guidelines, and its Chapel is being converted into the new home of the Curtain Call Theater, increasing both the theater’s seating capacity and walkable cultural options for residents.

In addition, the 2005 Comprehensive Plan recommended developing building mixed-node communities that create “a pedestrian-friendly village center.” An example is the Village at New Loudon, at a location recommended in the Comprehensive Plan as a preferred site for such development. Similarly, the new Crisafulli apartments on Aviation Drive are congruent with Plan goals of making Wolf Road into a more walkable “mixed use node or town center.”

The Comprehensive Plan also called for nodes allowing for greater density, and approval

for a number of the larger Planned Development District projects we see being developed today actually pre-date my administration. At the time the plan was enacted, these increased densities met Comprehensive Plan goals. However, I think it might be time to take a new look at the issue of density as we work through our review process.

Finally, one of the Comprehensive Plan's goals directs the Town to "Maintain the Town's high level of public safety services; community services for youth, seniors, and the public at large; and public utility infrastructure and services." To all of these I will simply say, "Done. Done. And Done." And I want to say once again for the record that I remain totally committed to funding supportive programs for both our youth and seniors going forward.

In closing, I would like to thank all of you for being here and for your commitment to Colonie. It's all of us working together that helps make Colonie the vibrant, successful community it is today. I think we've exceeded all expectations – certainly more than what I thought when I first walked into Town Hall in January 2008 after leaving my teaching position. I assure you that one thing has not changed, and that is my commitment to the people of the great Town of Colonie. Thank you so much. Have a great day!