

**Town Supervisor Paula A. Mahan**  
**2018 State of the Town Address**  
**Capital Region Chamber of Commerce**  
**January 19, 2018**

Good morning! I am honored to stand before you as I begin my sixth term as your Town Supervisor. It's great to be here. All of you have played a big part in the Town's success, and I thank you for your support. Looking ahead, I see more great things for Colonie!

I want to thank the Chamber for hosting today's event – especially my good friends Mark Eagan, your new Capital Region Chair Paula Stopera, and Albany-Colonie Chair Andrea Crisafulli – plus all your other directors and staff. It's always a pleasure to work with you. I also appreciate the support of Tom Nolte and the Colonie Chamber in being here today.

I also want to thank CBRE Albany and the HMS Agency for sponsoring this event once again. I really look forward to having this chance to update all of you on the State of the Town and where we are today.

When I think about where the Town is now, all I can say is, "Look how far we've come!" I'm truly thrilled by how vibrant Colonie is today. When I first became Supervisor ten years ago, it was difficult to see the light at the end on the tunnel. But with a collaborative effort and a tremendous amount of hard work, we got the Town out of a very deep financial hole.

Today we're on solid ground and experiencing unprecedented success. New families, businesses, and jobs come to Colonie every day. The look of the Town has changed. Instead of big-box stores, we're seeing architecture that enhances our streetscapes. Because of our successful focus on redevelopment, countless vacant or underused sites have been reborn, breathing new life into our commercial corridors. And today, Colonie offers a huge variety of goods and services, including an exciting mix of new residential options. Colonie is truly prospering!

The beauty of it all is that we've retained our hometown feeling. That's something we never want to lose. Our neighborhoods are safe and welcoming, our schools are excellent, and our public safety and emergency services are outstanding. Plus, we're seeing an exciting influx of new young families who want to make Colonie their home. Often, these families are buying the houses of seniors looking to downsize. And because of the Town's many new senior housing options, those seniors can now remain here in Colonie.

Once again, I was very proud when Colonie was ranked the “Best Suburban Community” in the 2017 Times Union’s Readers Poll. That’s the fourth year we’ve been named as Best Community. And last year we were named a “Tree City USA” by the National Arbor Day Foundation, a designation that reflects the Town’s ongoing commitment to the environment and urban forestry. Over the past ten years, we’ve increased our Town-owned open space, and we currently are exploring options for a dedicated revenue stream for open-space acquisition.

We are also one of the safest towns in the nation, and our Police, EMS, and DPW Departments have received many honors for excellence. Late last year, our EMS Department earned the American Heart Association’s 2017 Mission Lifeline Gold Award for excellence in emergency cardiac care. We’ve received recognition and awards for our Town Library, our parks, for economic development and our youth and senior programs. What great votes of confidence for life in Colonie!

We also got some very encouraging results in a Siena Research Institute poll conducted as part of our 2005 Comprehensive Plan review process. In the poll, 95 percent of respondents rated Colonie as a good or excellent place to live and showed strong support for Town services. Eighty-six percent said our property taxes were “about right” relative to services. It’s pretty amazing when people think they pay the right amount of taxes!

It takes a lot of people working very hard to achieve such success, and I’d like to take a moment to thank some of the many people who help make it possible. First, several Town Board members are here today. I’m always proud of the way our Board members work together to move the Town forward. Would our Town Board members please stand so we can give you some well-deserved applause? I’d also like to recognize departing member David Rowley and welcome our newest member, Melissa Jeffers Von Dollen. Also, will our Town Department heads and staff please stand? Let’s give everyone a hand for their hard work and dedication.

Finally, I’d also like to give my very special thanks to our police officers, as well as our EMS staff and the firefighters from our 12 volunteer fire companies for their service. Thank you for all you do every day to keep us safe. You make Colonie a great place for all of us.

Speaking of keeping Colonie safe, the Colonie Police Department has some great numbers to report. In 2017, the Town had a three percent drop in serious crime and a ten percent drop in less serious crimes, for an overall total decrease of 6.7 percent! And the CPD was able to achieve these numbers in spite of a three percent increase in calls for service. Thank you, Chief Teale, for your leadership, and your outstanding officers for their service.

We set the bar high, and the results speak for themselves. We built a strong foundation that will take us far into the future. But there's a lot more to do as we enter 2018. Our priorities remain the same – continuing our conservative financial approach, keeping Colonie safe, investing in our infrastructure, and collaborating with our schools to set the stage for the next generation. We will also be working to ensure that future development protects our quality of life through growth that's in line with what makes Colonie a special place to live and do business. In short, we plan to keep Colonie a great place to call home.

When I stop and think about it, the ten years I've spent as Supervisor is a pretty big block of time. Together we have made tremendous accomplishments, and I'm very proud to report that our 2018 operating budget of \$90.8 million is less than the \$91.8 million in expenses incurred in 2007, the year before I took office. How were we able we do this? We did it year by year, reviewing every dollar spent by every department, consolidating operations, sharing resources, and aggressively paying down debt. And, yes, we had to do a whole lot more with a lot less. We all owe a big debt of gratitude to everyone who helped to achieve these outstanding results.

I'm proud that our 2018 budget also meets the NYS Tax Levy Cap requirements – for the seventh year in a row. Incidentally, the 2018 cap limits our tax levy growth to about \$808,000, so you can see the cap presents a big challenge for the Town every year. We have worked very hard over the past seven years to live within the cap. However it does present many challenges for us.

After right-sizing our finances, we were able to begin addressing the Town's long-term infrastructure needs. Our infrastructure was in dire need of rejuvenation. Many critical systems at our water and sewer plants had been in place since the 1970s, and some of the water and sewer mains as early as the 1920s. This is the fifth year of major investment in both our water and sewer infrastructure, and the ninth year of our highway and storm-water improvement program. By the end of 2018, we will have invested \$18 million for our drinking water systems and \$14 million in sewer system improvements. The long-term infrastructure plans we've put in place will call for investment at these levels for the foreseeable future.

We've invested at least \$2.5 million in our roadways every year since 2010. I'm happy to report that today 95 percent of the Town's major feeder roads are in very good or excellent condition, and we are making steady progress with our residential streets. The Town has 320 miles of roads, and it will take some time to get to all of them, but we're making good progress. I hope that within the next few years we will be able to increase our paving plan budget above current levels, but that remains a goal for the future.

Major upcoming projects at the Latham Water District this year include replacing almost two miles of water main in two capital projects. The first includes replacing approximately 2,900 feet of main along Maxwell Road, from Old Niskayuna Road to Hills Road, and 2,600 feet of main along Route 9, from Campus View Drive to Turner Lane, with a new 12” diameter main. The second includes installing about 3,800 feet of new main along Route 9 from the point of Old Loudon Road to Maxwell Road. The projects will cost \$1.7 and \$1.63 million, respectively. Replacing water mains is expensive but necessary so we can continue delivering optimal service to our residents and businesses.

At our Pure Waters Division, we expect a spring 2018 completion of a \$1.2 million project to replace a 1978-era emergency generator and for roof repair at our Mohawk View Water Pollution Control Plant. We also anticipate completion of the \$1.9 million Wolf Road Pumping Station rehab, which is ongoing right now with no interruption to service right here on Wolf Road! Looking ahead to next year, Pure Waters plans further improvements at the Pollution Control Plant, upgrades to the Albany Shaker Road Pump Station, and replacement of \$1 million worth of aging sewer lines.

We’re also focusing on improving our many beautiful parks and recreational facilities. Among our first tasks was making some much-needed updates at the Town Park on Schermerhorn Road. Recently, we installed new filtration systems and new pool liners for the town pools and a beautiful new ADA-compliant playground. Now we’re finalizing our plans for a beautiful new splash pad there, and I really think everyone’s going to love it. Plus, we’re beginning a new effort to improve the 12 pocket parks located throughout the Town. It’s taken us a while to get to the point where we can afford to make these improvements, but we worked hard and found a way to get there.

Even though we are undertaking much-needed capital improvements, we must still continue our conservative fiscal approach. First and foremost, we must ensure that the Town can continue to live within its means for all the years to come. That’s why we’ve kept bonding for our capital projects to about 11 percent or less of our legally authorized debt limit. We’re proceeding very cautiously in order to be certain our finances will remain sound – and our taxes low.

This year, I’m very happy to tell you we’ve been successful in obtaining grant funding from a number of different sources to assist us with important Town projects. These grants will help us continue our progress in important areas such as economic development and also to make additional capital improvements at our library, parks, bike path, municipal training center, and to the Latham Water System infrastructure.

A \$960,000 Drinking Water Infrastructure Improvement grant is helping us move forward with an important infrastructure improvement at the Latham Water District. The grant will help defray the Town's \$1.6 million share of a project to establish connections between the Colonie and the City of Albany water systems. These connections will enable both the Town and the City to provide each other with an emergency back-up water supply. This is an extremely far-sighted project. First, it provides for shared services, a very important goal for all municipalities these days. But most important, it will provide both Albany and Colonie with much more efficient and cost-effective emergency water systems. And in our case, it will mean we will no longer have to support a more expensive back-up system at our Stony Creek Reservoir in Clifton Park.

As you may know, we're now beginning some much-needed updating and beautification of our Town Library. The Town expects to commit \$3 to \$4 million to renovate the library for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which calls for enhanced technology and more flexible space for meetings and educational services. Plus, we are extremely grateful to Colonie Assemblyman Phil Steck for arranging \$1 million in special funding for the library renovation. This funding will be used for renovation of the library's lobby and entryway. The new configuration will be beautiful, and I think everyone will be pleased when it's completed.

Assemblyman Steck also arranged for \$500,000 to fund capital improvements to the Town's Municipal Training Center, a regional training resource where thousands of the region's first responders train every year. This is another example of shared services. In addition, through his efforts, the Town will also receive special funding of \$250,000 for improvements to the bike path and \$125,000 to construct a much-needed new pavilion in the Town Park.

Finally, we are really excited about a future \$125,000 grant, also arranged by Assemblyman Steck, to construct a new playground at the south end of The Crossings. This will greatly expand recreational options for our residents and help us realize the potential of the park's south end. The Town will also construct a new parking lot there.

On behalf of the whole Town, I want to thank Assemblyman Steck for working so hard to deliver this support for Colonie. Assemblyman Steck could not be here today, or I would ask him to stand for a very well-deserved round of applause.

Last year, we received a \$175,000 grant from the NYS Attorney General's Office to help the Town deal with the issue of vacant and abandoned – or zombie – properties. This new initiative builds upon our earlier efforts to confront this problem through creation of a vacant property registry. I want to thank the Town Attorney's Office for their leadership in getting this grant and helping the Town tackle the issue of zombie properties more aggressively.

Finally, as you know we've had great success redeveloping some of the Town's most challenging sites. Now, the Town has begun the first steps in a process to determine the best ways for 340 acres of the Lincoln Avenue Corridor to be redeveloped. This effort is being supported by a \$269,000 Brownfield Opportunity Grant obtained by our Planning and Economic Development Department. Community outreach and involvement will be part of the process. I think we can all agree that the Lincoln Avenue Corridor is a case unto itself. If we can help bring this corridor back to productive life, we will have accomplished a huge public service for everyone.

The Town is also working on a project through the Municipal Electric and Gas Alliance (MEGA) and Gravity Renewables to use Hydro Electric Generation to earn green energy credits that will offset a significant portion of our electricity usage and help stabilize the Town's energy costs over the next twenty years. We finalized the agreement with Gravity late last year and their engineering team has been preparing information for the interconnection to the utility. The Town's formal submittals to the utility will be made shortly. I expect more information about this exciting project to be announced in the next few months.

As many of you may know, the Town has been reviewing its 2005 Comprehensive Plan since last summer. The review process has involved a broad-based review committee, community meetings, the Siena survey I mentioned earlier, and regular meetings open to the public. This spring, we will also be looking to engage the business community through a breakfast roundtable because a business perspective is very important to the process. We are now looking at a late spring or early summer completion of the review.

The goal of the review is not to replace the 2005 plan, but to supplement it based on the review process. We have been following the 2005 Plan in such areas as redevelopment, quality of life, open space, and recreational activities. The plan also directed the Town to create a business-friendly environment that would support a diverse economic base, and I'm proud of our success in doing that.

Many zoning provisions were changed to support the 2005 Comprehensive Plan goals through adoption of the 2007 Land Use Law, and we now have an opportunity through the review process to determine if there are areas that should be updated or modified. Many things worked, and some things didn't. This update of the 2005 Plan gives us the opportunity to modify the areas of the plans that may need improvement.

When we look at Ayco's recent decision to locate its new headquarters here, I think we can all point to our success in creating an environment supportive to Colonie's economic development and expansion. That Ayco chose Colonie after an exhaustive search speaks volumes about our desirability. In addition to many very good jobs, the Ayco project would also make possible a connector road between Route 9 and Route 9R. This connector road was

recommended to the Town during the Boght Road GEIS update, which was prepared in conjunction with Creighton-Manning, the Capital District Transportation Committee, and Clough-Harbor. We think the connector road will help reduce traffic congestion in the corridor.

The results of several other studies are also being considered as part of the review process to ensure a more holistic approach to the plan's next phase. Among these are the Town's Central Avenue and Fuller Road studies, the recent Wolf Road corridor sanitary sewer analysis, and the Albany Airport GEIS now being developed, as well as the Albany Shaker Road Corridor Study. All of these studies suggest land use and implementation processes that can guide us as we move into the future.

We have made good progress on the Albany Shaker Road Corridor Study, which we are conducting with Albany County and the Capital Region Transportation Council. We had two community meetings to present information and gather feedback about the possible scope of corridor improvements, such as turning lanes, intersection improvements, and enhanced pedestrian accommodations. Now we are working to incorporate those ideas into a long-term plan agreeable to the community that can help improve traffic flow.

Speaking of traffic flow, we are really looking forward to the future revamped Exit 4, which will also help alleviate traffic flow along the Albany Shaker Road and Wolf Road. Based on traffic counts provided by the NYS Department of Transportation, over 200,000 vehicles a day pass through Colonie from Central Avenue and the Northway alone. If we were to include other roadways the number would be much higher. We are very lucky to have had the active participation of the Chamber and the Albany International Airport in advocating for this improvement.

In closing, I would like to thank all of you for your commitment to Colonie. It's all of us working together that makes Colonie such a vibrant successful community. I'm happy that 2017 proved to be a really great year for the Town. Many more exciting projects are in the works, and we're really looking forward to continuing our progress in 2018 and keeping the Town of Colonie the best place to call home.

*Note: Supervisor Mahan also delivered the State of the Town Address at the Colonie Town Board Meeting in Town Hall on January 18, 2018.*