

**2019 State of the Town**  
**Colonie Town Board Meeting**  
**January 17, 2019**

Good evening. Before we begin our Town Board meeting this evening, I'd like to share my 2019 State of the Town message with all of you. It's a good way for me to update everyone on recent happenings here in Colonie, and perhaps to get your feedback. I think we get the best outcomes when we work together.

First, I can truly say that being your Supervisor has been a positive and rewarding experience for me, and I am happy that I have many exciting new developments to report this year.

I'm happy to note that Colonie continues on its strong upward trajectory. People really want to live here and businesses really want to be here. This has generated great positive energy, and puts us in an excellent position for the future. All of you play a huge role in what makes our Town so exceptional. Thank you for bringing so much variety and richness to our life in Colonie.

Financially, we continue to be on firm ground. Our budget is balanced, and our fund balance keeps growing. We're actively investing in our most critical infrastructure, as well as in our parks and recreational facilities. We've strengthened public safety, with staffing levels in our police and EMS departments at new highs. In all these areas, you can see your tax dollars at work. We work very hard to prioritize the needs of the Town to ensure your dollars are being spent wisely. Plus, we've redoubled our efforts to obtain grant money to help us achieve new goals, and we're now working to create a funding stream to help us preserve open space, such as

farmland, environmentally sensitive areas, and waterfront. Interestingly, these areas that we've been actively working on are in line with the preliminary recommendations of the 2005 Comprehensive Plan update. I'm really proud of all we've accomplished.

Speaking of our accomplishments, I want to thank all the Town Board members who have worked in partnership with me to help make these good things happen. I also want to thank our hard-working department heads and all our other Town employees, many of whom are here this evening. Will you please stand as well? Let's give everyone a hand for their hard work and dedication!

I hope you don't mind me repeating myself on this, but Colonie was once again named "Best Suburban Community" in the Times Union Readers' Poll. That's five years in a row! We know our hometown feeling plays a big role in that. Our neighborhoods are safe and welcoming, our schools are excellent, our business climate is thriving, and there is a great spirit of community and citizen involvement at every level. In addition, we have great services and amenities. Achieving this recognition five years in a row is remarkable. It's wonderful to have our work recognized, and it motivates us to continue to raise the bar.

We also continue to be identified as one of the safest towns, with both our police and EMS departments consistently receiving top honors for excellence. I am very proud to report that in 2018, crime was once again down in every category. Violent crime was down 4.7 percent; serious crime was down 1.3 percent; and less serious crime was down 6.5 percent – all this as service calls continued to increase. Public safety has always been one of my most important goals, and these numbers show us the success of having increased staffing levels.

Just recently, our EMS department was named Regional Agency of the Year. And in December, the Town added eight new full-time EMS positions. Now we can cover the majority of shifts with full-time personnel, and staff an additional ambulance during peak hours seven days a week. And, thanks to Assemblyman Phil Steck, the Town will receive \$250,000 towards the purchase of a new ambulance. This is all very exciting!

I'd like to take a moment to thank our Police Chief Jon Teale and his staff, our EMS Chief Peter Berry and his staff, and all the firefighters from our twelve volunteer fire companies.

Our Department of Public Works has been busy working to make the Town's infrastructure the best it can be. We are continuing major initiatives to improve our drinking water and sanitary sewer systems and to bring all our roads back to top condition – which sometimes seems like a never-ending task! Our DPW and Parks staff have also been very busy actively upgrading our many beautiful parks and recreational facilities.

We are now in the tenth year of our paving and stormwater improvement program. We've invested carefully, at upwards of \$2.5 million a year for a total of about \$25 million dollars. Just last summer, we repaved all or part of 50 roads. But paving is very expensive, at about \$184,000 per mile. Just as an example, repaving just one street, Wertman Lane, cost \$145,000. But we are 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.

Last summer we took a big step forward at the Mohawk River Town Park when we installed a beautiful state-of-the-art splash pad. We had been wanting to provide something special for our smaller children, and we were able to complete this project and open the splash

pad this past summer. The response was overwhelming! The splash pad was just the latest improvement to our swimming facilities. We've already outfitted the pools with new soft pool liners, new filtration systems, and ADA-compliant lifts. Next on the radar will be major improvements to the pool house, which was built in the 1970s and could really use some major renovation!

We've also been busy improving the Town's 12 pocket parks, which taken together provide almost 60 acres of open space conveniently located throughout the Town. We're installing new fencing and play equipment, and updating various courts. The first to be completed was Roessleville Park, which was re-dedicated last fall as the Trooper Michael J. Anson Memorial Park. A Colonie native and former Roessleville camp counselor, Trooper Anson sadly passed away last year from an illness he contracted at Ground Zero. We're honored that his family supported our wish to name the park after him.

On behalf of all of us in the Town of Colonie, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Assemblyman Phil Steck for his outstanding support. So far he's arranged for almost \$2.7 million dollars for new projects benefiting the Town. Plus, he's provided additional grants for the villages located in our Town – the Village of Colonie and the Village of Menands. Among several grants to the Town are \$500,000 for improvements to the Town's Municipal Training Center and another \$500,000 to repave the bike path, to install a new playground at the south end of the Crossings, and to build a new pavilion at the Town Park.

Also, if any of you entered the Town Library recently through a maze of plastic-lined passageways, you will see another way in which he has helped move the Town forward. While the Town is dedicating between \$3 and \$4 million dollars for major library improvements, Assemblyman Steck secured an additional \$1 million to assist with the current reconfiguration of

the library's lobby and entryway, which will provide a much more spacious and welcoming environment for our library patrons.

We could never do all these projects at once without extra funding. Keep in mind that with Colonie's low property tax rate, which is \$3.90 per thousand, a one percent tax increase yields the General Fund only about \$225,000 dollars in new revenue. So you can see how important this additional funding is to the Town. And, when those funds are added to other grants secured by the Town, recent grant funding comes to more than \$5 million dollars.

One of the Town-generated grants is a \$1 million Restore New York grant for demolition of the old Tobin Packing plant. The Tobin site has been one of our most challenging sites, and this grant provides funding for the essential first step in its redevelopment, through which a private developer is planning an exciting mix of retail and residential uses. Another grant of \$960,000 is helping us partner with the City of Albany to strengthen back-up water supplies. I'll give you a little more detail about that later.

I'm also proud that in the past year we've enhanced the Town's ability to apply for new grants. While grants can provide the Town with much-needed new funds, getting grants and administering them is extremely labor-intensive. Now, we have new capacity in both our planning and DPW departments, and we're already seeing excellent results.

For instance, we are partnering with Albany County Executive Dan McCoy on applying for \$9.5 million dollars in federal Transportation Improvement Program grants, or TIPS grants, to address congestion and pedestrian safety on three major roadways. These applications include \$5.1 million dollars for improvements to 4.1 miles of New Karner Road between Western

Avenue and Watervliet Shaker Road, and \$3.6 million dollars for Watervliet Shaker Road, from New Karner to Sand Creek.

We've also jointly applied for \$826,000 dollars to improve Albany Shaker Road between Wolf and Everett Roads in line with the recommendations of the recently released Albany Shaker Road Corridor Study. Also on Albany Shaker Road, a traffic light will be installed later this year at the Shaker El intersection to increase safety and improve traffic flow during school drop-off and pick-up times. The traffic light is being supported by a \$125,000 grant also arranged by Assemblyman Steck. I also want to thank County Executive Dan McCoy for his partnership and all of his support for these Colonie projects. Improving mobility throughout the Town is another preliminary recommendation included in the 2005 Comprehensive Plan Update.

I think you can see that we are working creatively to find new ways to fund improvements that will enhance our quality of life, both through the Town's own efforts and by partnering with our fellow elected officials, and I am confident that these collaborative efforts will continue to yield great success.

Speaking of collaboration, I know we are all excited that the revamped Northway Exit 4 project is finally going forward. It will help traffic flow along Wolf Road and Albany Shaker Road, and will provide much better access to the Albany International Airport. I want to thank John O'Donnell, CEO of the Albany Airport Authority, as well Chamber CEO Mark Eagan, and County Executive Dan McCoy for working with us to keep this project alive. I would also like to thank the New York State Department of Transportation for supporting the Northway Exit 4 project and many others in Colonie. They have been great to work with!

In addition, when both the revamped Exit 4 and the new connector road from Route 9R to Route 9 are completed, we should see notable improvements during peak travel times. Having said that, we must still remember that more than 200,000 cars pass through Colonie each day, the great majority of them coming from or heading to the north. Unfortunately for us, if traffic gets backed up on the Northway, it's going to spill over onto our roadways. While we are working aggressively and strategically to address traffic issues, it is difficult to be able to totally eliminate the problems sometimes created by the heavy volume of pass-through traffic. However, we will continue to strive for solutions.

Another collaborative project nearing completion is the one I mentioned earlier. It will establish back-up water connections between Colonie and the City of Albany. This interconnect will provide new, more efficient back-up water supplies for both municipalities. And for Colonie, it means we will no longer have to support an aging and much more expensive back-up system at our Stony Creek Reservoir in Clifton Park. The Town's \$1.6 million share of the project was offset by a \$960,000 dollar NYS Water Infrastructure grant.

As you may remember, the Town has been aggressively investing in upgrading its drinking water and sanitary sewer systems since 2014. By the end of this year, we will have invested more than \$33 million dollars.

Those efforts will continue in 2019, with Latham Water anticipating another \$3.1 million dollars in infrastructure improvements. Last summer, Latham Water replaced a mile of water mains along Route 9 and Maxwell Road, replacing 1930s-era mains that had become increasingly prone to breaks. This year, we will replace an additional 3,800 feet of water main along Route 9 from Maxwell Road to Old Loudon Road. New mains are expensive, but not as expensive as emergency repairs. The cost for this year's water main replacement project is

estimated at \$1.6 million dollars. Another \$1.74 million dollars has been budgeted for improvements to pumps, motors, and screening equipment at the Mohawk View Low Lift Pump station.

In 2018, our Pure Waters Division, which oversees our sanitary sewer system, completed \$3.1 million in major upgrades at the Mohawk View Water Pollution Control Plant and the Wolf Road Pumping Station. Next up, we expect to begin the \$1.9 million dollar Albany-Shaker Road Pumping Station Rehabilitation and the \$4 million dollar Mohawk View Pollution Control Plant Clarifier projects. By the way, since 2012 Pure Waters has delivered its capital projects at an average of 35 percent under budget by employing aggressive cost and change control measures!

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

We have been very aggressive with our investment, because the need to update our aging infrastructure is a major priority. Much of it was built in the 1970s or long before that. Now, we are well ahead of the curve when compared to many municipalities. However, even as we make these major investments, we continue to follow a very conservative financial approach. Currently, we are bonded to only about 11 percent of our constitutional debt limit – and we plan to keep that percentage low, between 10 and 12 percent per year. That's because we want to be very certain the Town can live within its means going forward. It's like using your credit card. At some point you have to pay it off! It's very important to prepare for the future of the Town as we address our current needs.

Speaking of living within our means, I am very excited to tell you about a new project now nearing final approval. This project will allow us to save on our utility bills while promoting sustainable energy in our region. Through this project, the Town is investing in hydroelectric power, which allows us to earn green energy credits. These credits will offset a significant portion of our energy usage and stabilize our energy costs over the next twenty years. We are also weighing our options for converting the Town's 3,982 streetlights to LED lighting, which would also yield substantial cost and energy savings.

You may remember that last year we signed the NYS Climate Smart Communities Pledge, underscoring our commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, we are working to become a certified Clean Energy Community. As part of that certification, we are now finalizing the process of adding unified permits for solar installations. Through all these actions, Colonie is building on its earlier efforts to be a good environmental citizen by adopting new sustainable energy practices. This is another area highlighted in the Comprehensive Plan preliminary recommendations.

As I have indicated, the Town has recently been in the process of reviewing its 2005 Comprehensive Plan. The 2007 Land Use Law changed many zoning provisions to support the Plan. Both were in place when I first took office. Some things worked, and some not as well. Now, through the review process, we have an opportunity to determine if there are areas that should be updated and to modify the land use law as necessary. Many of the preliminary recommendations reflect goals we have been actively working on throughout my tenure. The next step is to present the draft recommendations and implementation processes at a Town Board public hearing in February. I appreciate the efforts of the Comprehensive Plan Review Committee members in conducting a very thorough review.

The Siena Research Institute survey conducted as part of the Comprehensive Plan Review process indicated that more than half of our residents support conservation of open or environmentally sensitive land, and we are now looking at new ways to fund open space preservation through the development process. Just as a reminder, the Town currently has 1,155 acres of Town-owned land dedicated to recreation and open space. We've added more than 185 acres of open space total during my tenure. Also, we recently dedicated 157 acres of Town land to the Pine Bush Preserve. Finally, we will continue our ongoing efforts to enhance connectivity, mobility, and pedestrian accessibility throughout the Town, as we have in the past by securing four convenient new connections to the bike-hike path.

Through all my years in office, we've emphasized a well-balanced environment that supports a diverse economic base. We've focused our development efforts on redevelopment of existing properties, and have been successful with some of our most difficult sites, including the Latham Mall and Starlite sites. Now we are in the beginning stages of redevelopment of the Tobin packing plant site. We also welcome the recent news that the Department of Environmental Conservation will invest \$16.6 million to clean up the former Altech Steel site.

Regarding the Starlite site, you may remember that Ayco chose Colonie for its new headquarters after an exhaustive search. That it chose Colonie speaks volumes about our desirability. Ayco's decision means that not only will more than 600 well-paying jobs stay right here in Colonie, but it also brings with it a potential to add 160 more. I'm happy to report that the project, which is proceeding according to plan, is actually somewhat ahead of schedule, and the connector road between Route 9R and Route 9 being built in connection with the project is likely to be finished this fall.

I'm proud of the many sites that have been redeveloped and repurposed, both beautifying the Town and ensuring its continued vibrant activity. We continually receive many compliments regarding the redevelopment of commercial sites throughout the Town. Going forward, I will continue to focus on creating a Town that welcomes new projects while at the same time preserving all the its best aspects – welcoming neighborhoods, great recreational facilities, abundant open space, and beautiful vistas.

In closing, I'd like to all of you for being here and for your commitment to Colonie. It's all of us working together that makes Colonie the successful community it is today. I think we've exceeded all expectations!