



2010 STATE OF THE TOWN

SUPERVISOR
PAULA A. MAHAN

JANUARY 21, 2010

8 A.M.

Good morning, and thank you for such a warm reception. It's hard to believe this is my third "State of the Town" message. Time has gone by so quickly throughout my first term, and I am so honored to be here with you again this year.

Let me first take a moment to acknowledge my fellow elected officials who have joined us this morning – Albany County Executive Michael Breslin, former Congressman Michael McNulty, and Green Island Village Mayor Ellen McNulty-Ryan. I really appreciate your support in being here.

Last year was an important year for the Town, and I know it was an important year for the Chamber as well in leading many initiatives designed to help all of us realize the opportunities in being part of Tech Valley. And let me just say how lucky we are in Colonie to have such a great champion in Mark Eagan. Mark, thank you for your leadership.

Let me also say how much I appreciate your continuing this forum for the "State of the Town", and thank you to CB Richard Ellis and HMS Agency, Inc., for sponsoring the event.

I also want to acknowledge your new Chair of the Board, J. Kenneth Desmond, Vice President of the Desmond Hotel & Conference Center. I've enjoyed many wonderful events at the Desmond. I would also like to thank the staff of the Century House, for again doing a wonderful job at today's breakfast.

During my first term I had the pleasure of working with the former President of the Chamber, Lyn Taylor, followed by Mark Eagan, who we are very fortunate to have in this important position.

And a special thank you to HMS Agency's Steve Mather for that kind introduction and for all the work you do on behalf of the Chamber – and the Town – as Chair of the Colonie Business Council.

When I gave my first “State of the Town” to you two years ago, I promised I would work hand-in-hand with businesses and residents to foster the kinds of change that could help us resolve the issues the Town was facing. I vowed to keep taxes low while at the same time safeguarding the services that make Colonie such a great place to live.

I also wanted to hear your ideas about the best ways to improve the Town’s business climate and stimulate economic development. I am proud to say that since then, I think we’ve succeeded in bringing many major players to the table for positive and productive conversations that have yielded real results.

I believe it’s important to collaborate with others to find solutions, and my philosophy has always been “identify and work with your strengths” and the weaknesses will improve. It’s important to focus on the positives, and speaking of positives, before I go further, let me just say that I stand before you today as the very proud Supervisor of the Safest Town of our size in the nation.

In 2009, Colonie had the lowest number of serious crimes of any of the 393 largest municipalities in the United States. With only 54 incidents of serious crime, we are literally the number one safest community in the nation. For that, I want to thank Chief Steve Heider and every member of the Colonie Police Department. They put their lives on the line for us every day to ensure we have one of the most basic elements of a good life – the ability to feel secure in our homes and community.

Of course building a strong and safe community is more than a matter of good policing. It takes everyone working together to achieve such high standards. I want to say thank you to our entire Town workforce, Colonie residents, and business owners for helping us achieve this outstanding award.

Having a safe community is also a matter of providing the top-quality support services that people need in order to be able to live in dignity and with the sense that others care about

them. That's why I've worked hard to fund programs that benefit the entire range of our citizens, including, very importantly, those aimed at seniors and youth.

Juvenile crime in Colonie has decreased for each of the past ten years. That is partly a matter of having excellent schools, and we are fortunate to have some of the region's most outstanding schools in our Town. As a former educator, I assure you I will always make it a priority to find ways in which we can work collaboratively with our schools to enhance the good work they do.

Today I stand before you very excited at the prospect of continuing the steady progress we've made in our first two years. Currently, Colonie is a much stronger Town, financially and operationally. As I previously stated, we made it a priority to develop a productive dialogue with both businesses and residents, and we have made several business-friendly improvements to the Town's planning process.

These discussions also helped us develop our strategies for getting the Town's finances in order and resulted in new laws responding to resident concerns – notably, the Town's new Noise Ordinance and the sex offender law, which places restrictions on the number of sex offenders living in Colonie motels.

Financially, we have significantly reduced the \$19.7 million budget deficit we inherited. We accomplished this by generating more revenues and reducing expenditures. We continue to follow and monitor the progress of our ten-year financial management plan.

We reduced Town expenses by several million – by working very hard to cut costs, eliminating wasteful spending, and establishing strict internal controls for cash transactions. We also kept town-wide personnel costs down, partially through attrition and leaving some posts unfilled, and partially by instituting a mandatory employee contribution that reduced employee benefits costs by \$1.9 million.

The effectiveness of our actions was recognized by Moody's Investor Services last March, when they noted favorable operational and budgetary improvements as indications that the Town's finances were headed in the right direction. Most important, as in 2008, we again avoided having the Town's bond rating downgraded after three previous drops, the last occurring in 2007.

While we have made great progress in balancing the Town's budget, we still have many financial challenges ahead of us. As business-owners you all know these are hard times, and hard times have repercussions for the Town as well as for every other municipality. Unfortunately, I don't have a magic wand – although I sometimes wish I did. This year we must find ways to deal with the fact that some of our key revenues, such as sales tax, are down, and some of our biggest expenses, such as pension contributions, are up. So going forward this year, we will continue to be as disciplined as we were in our first two years so we are able to hold onto the gains we've made.

Guiding us will be the disciplined and aggressive financial management plan we developed in 2008. We must continue to follow this plan, and we must continue to cut costs. This year, we are looking to restructure Town Departments in ways that will allow us to become more efficient and cost-effective, but we must remain committed to protecting resident services. These services are the key to our great way of life here in Colonie, and safeguarding them is very important to me.

As many of you know, we've made some significant changes to the Town's planning process as a way to encourage economic development and make the process more user-friendly. A key factor for change has been the use of Town-designated Engineers to oversee all aspects of major projects, essentially providing a more efficient process for developers at no cost to Town residents, which can significantly cut the amount of time and cost it takes to bring a project to completion.

In addition, we have implemented a new system for online tracking of both residential and commercial building permits in the Building Department. The next phase of the project will allow inspectors immediate onsite access to the system from wireless devices.

We also made re-development of under-utilized sites a top priority. Last year that goal, coupled with our new planning process, helped us attract The Fresh Market to Latham. This is the first Fresh Market in New York State, providing both 90 new jobs and a unique shopping experience that will only be available locally here in our Town. Perhaps even more important, The Fresh Market will anchor a compete redevelopment of a notoriously under-performing site, injecting new life into a prime Latham location.

We are also thrilled that two new international companies have chosen to make Colonie their home. By March, we anticipate completion of the 54,000 square-foot Anglo Dynamics headquarters here, new development that is anticipated to bring with it 105 jobs in the next two years.

And by the summer, we expect to welcome Precision Value Automation to a 115,000 square foot facility at 1 Mustang Drive, ultimately bringing up to 120 jobs. The facility is located in what was formerly a vacant manufacturing property re-tooled for PVA's needs. Incidentally, PVA plans to use the facility as a training center, which translates into many hotel nights per year.

Several more exciting new projects are in the pipeline, and we are very excited about three re-development projects, at 1207, 1225, and 1839 Central Avenue. The largest of these, at 1839 Central Avenue, will add five new storefronts and a pedestrian walkway to the old Dexter Shoe location. At 1207, Green's appliances purchased the vacant building next door for a 7,800 square-foot retail addition. And at 1225, there will be a new Paesan's Pizzeria.

I want to thank the Town's Planning Board and our own planning staff, headed by our Director, Joe LaCivita, for their hard work in helping us turn our economic development goals into realities.

As we move into the future we will intensify our efforts to encourage developers to re-develop abandoned or under-performing sites. We all know that such sites have a negative effect on surrounding properties and a demoralizing effect on the community. We are now actively pursuing re-development of the Adirondack Steel and Tobin's First Prize locations, looking toward projects that will demolish the existing aging and unsightly structures. We are also actively working to promote re-development of the Latham Circle Mall, a conveniently located property which could still be a beacon to area shoppers.

I mentioned earlier that one of the ways in which I sought to improve the business climate was through dialogue with businessmen and women here in the Town. Last April, we formed the Town's first Small Business Advisory Council to provide feedback on the impact of Town policies on small businesses. We know that small businesses create two out of every three new job and produce 40 percent of the Gross National Product, so providing the right climate for small businesses to grow is essential to our future.

The Small Business Advisory Council is chaired by Diane Conroy-LaCivita, who also chairs the Cohoes Business Council, and who I believe is here today. Diane tells me there has been a very positive response to the Council and many small businesses have taken the opportunity to advocate for small businesses in Town.

Last September, in conjunction with the Colonie IDA, the Council surveyed small businesses regarding the Town's business climate. More than 50 companies responded, offering their views on how the business climate could be improved. So I feel that the stage has been set for a dialogue that will help improve the process for small businesses here in Colonie.

Making progress is always a matter of high expectations, good planning, and follow-through. Last year, we outlined all of the Town's priority infrastructure projects in a document for requests for federal Stimulus funds, which was released in February. One of the two top priorities in that plan was making improvements to the Town Landfill.

I'm happy to report that Phase II of the Landfill's new Area 6 is on track for completing its certification this spring, and we anticipate beginning operations there in late spring or early summer. Completion of Area 6 will give us the capacity for environmentally friendly, long-term solid waste disposal for at least the next ten years – a waste disposal value of around \$80 million. This is definitely good news for the Town going forward.

Two other priority projects, much smaller but still crucial, will be carried out this spring thanks to the support of Congressman Paul Tonko. Congressman Tonko helped us receive more than \$660,000 of federal Stimulus funds that, when combined with Town funds, will translate into an immediate \$1 million infusion into Colonie's energy infrastructure. The grant enables us to get started right away on two critical projects outlined in our new energy savings plan – replacing the rooftop heating and cooling units at the Town Library and the boiler at the Town's Community Center on Central Avenue.

Speaking of the library, I just want to say how fortunate we all are to have a library which consistently exceeds itself in the provision of services. I think that we all know that in tough economic times, library services are more critical than ever. Last year alone, circulation was up by 4.8 percent overall. Since 2000, book circulation increased by an astonishing 210 percent – giving us the highest book circulation of the region's other major libraries. Video circulation increased by almost equally astonishing 109 percent. And we were named the "Region's Best Children's Library" in the Times Union's annual poll for the eighth year running.

The chance to upgrade the Library's physical plant using federal funds – for an estimated energy savings of \$447,000 over 15 years – means that Town funds can be freed up to strengthen library services in other ways. This is important because the library has a real need for more computers, more space, and more staff. We all owe a debt of gratitude to Congressman Tonko for making that possible.

A special thank you goes out to our Library Director, Richard Naylor, and his staff. By the way Richard is here today, taping the “State of the Town” for airing next week on the Town’s TV channel, which Richard also oversees, and which, incidentally, in 2009 added 157 new programs for its viewers.

We also have other good news. At a time when many municipal golf courses are losing golfers , ours is gaining them! More than 70,000 rounds of golf were played there last year. That’s the highest number of rounds since 1998.

Ever since I assumed office I’ve worked hard to build strong relationships with my fellow elected officials in the region, with the view that we can all benefit by pulling together in mutually supportive ways. Congressman Tonko’s advocacy on our behalf is but one example of how working together is getting positive things done for our Town.

In 2009, County Executive Mike Breslin also partnered with the Town on several highway projects in which the County has taken the lead, securing Stimulus funding for projects such as the Maxwell Road extension and roundabout. In addition, the County and the State partnered with us for the new roundabout at the intersection of Route 155 with Old Niskayuna and Old Wolf Roads. And the State was a partner in the major reconfiguration of Northway Exit 6, a major project. We will benefit enormously from these projects, all carried out with minimal investment by the Town, and they will greatly improve traffic flow and the safety of our roadways.

Finally, last fall Assemblyman Bob Riley and Assemblyman Jack McEneny secured \$125,000 in State funding to help expand training opportunities at our Municipal Training Center, recognizing the importance of the Town’s leadership in training emergency personnel throughout the Capital Region. In addition, District Attorney David Soares later directed another \$50,000 to the project. I would like to thank Peter Lattanzio, our Chief of Fire Services, for his leadership of this project. So here again, collaborative efforts are helping build the Town’s infrastructure by providing alternative funding for the Town’s priority projects.

In addition to improving the landfill, the Town's other top infrastructure priority was identified last year as getting caught up on our paving and roadway repairs. As of today, the Town is six years behind in the standard 15-year repaving cycle adopted by most other municipalities. If we continue at this rate, taxpayers will have their streets re-paved only every 40 years! We really cannot afford to let our roadways continue to deteriorate.

To correct this situation, I'm happy to announce we have proposed and passed a paving plan, bonding about \$2 million each year for re-paving as well as repairs to our stormwater management system. This paving plan will take place over the next five years. This aggressive paving plan will help us to achieve our goal of bringing our roads up to standards and strengthening our ability to maintain a good roadway system as we move into the future.

Thinking about things with a business perspective, the Town's residents and business owners are the equivalent of our shareholders, and we continue to collaborate with community members to discuss the progress of the Town's financial plan. We want to continue the dialogue we have already begun and hear the thoughts of our residents and business owners about the best way to continue moving forward. We will also provide the community with more detail about the Five-Year Paving Plan and its necessity as we move into the future.

Summing up, with the help of a very dedicated and committed workforce, we have made great progress in realizing our goals for the Town, as evidenced by all the good news I was able to bring to you today. But we will continue to face financial challenges in the years ahead. You have my pledge that I will work as hard as ever to handle them in the same responsible way as I did in my first two years in office.

Business guru Peter F. Drucker famously said that management is doing things right and leadership is doing the right things. As a good manager, I will continue to make decisions that are fiscally prudent. As a good leader, I will strive to make decisions that will at the same time allow for the Town's continued growth and expansion.

Above all, I will continue to be accountable and to make all our actions transparent to the community that has entrusted us with the responsibility of running the Town. These challenges are exciting to me, and I look forward to 2010.

Thank you so much for taking the time out of your busy schedules to be here today. It is an honor to be able to meet with all of you in such a congenial forum. I thank you for your support, and I look forward to working with all of you in the future as we continue our goal of keeping Colonie the best community ever.