

State of the Town 2023

Good afternoon,

Hard to believe it has been almost three years since my last State of the Town. A lot has happened since then. Who would imagine shortly after my last State of the Town that we would still be dealing with the aftereffects of the COVID pandemic with over 1.1 million American Deaths? Sadly, some of our loved ones are no longer with us due to COVID pandemic and our prayers are with them.

I have often mention that our Town is lucky to have dedicated hardworking employees. Last Christmas they were put to the test and passed with shining colors. Both Highway and Parks had employees working around the clock keeping our residents safe from the Blizzard. We even had retired employees come back and volunteer their time during the snow event. Our Fire Companies were also working long hours answering fire and first aid calls. Most trips to the Hospital which would take on a normal day minutes was measured in hours. Thank you, Town Employees and Fire Companies, for your dedication serving our residents when duty calls even during the Christmas Holiday.

Clarence continues to be a place where people want to live. There are many reasons but some of the most obvious are our great schools and our open spaces we have preserved through our planning of 50 percent open space on new development and our Green Print program. During my tenure as your

supervisor, I have worked to keep our tax rate one of the lowest in Erie County without sacrificing any of the services we offer to our residents. This year our tax rate was lowered again by almost 10 cents to 74 cents a thousand. The Town still maintains its double AA rating and all my budgets have been below the State mandated tax cap.

In 2006 a Town referendum to form a Town wide Garbage Collection District was defeat 2,112 to 1,783. The vote was defeated by only 329 votes. During the single day vote it appeared many seniors were voting more than at a normal election. Some of the most contentious Public Hearing meetings were held on the subject with hundreds showing up. Some were pleading to the Town Board in tears how they loved their present refuse hauler and didn't want to change. Others said they don't want the district because they take their garbage to work. We know many party up with their neighbors to have their garbage removed. The party people now can't fit four households in a 96 cubic foot tote. The haulers had waged a media campaign against the forming of the district placing I believe fear into our residents that Government can't do a good job of managing waste removal. The Town of Clarence is one of only two Town's in Erie County that doesn't have a refuse district. For comparison purposes the Town's District was going to have "unlimited" weekly pick ups at an annual cost of \$150 full year and as low as \$45 for seniors and snowbirds. We were returning over a million dollars in savings to our residents.

Fast forward to today where both haulers for the Town have gone to single totes with no free bulk pickup at some rates as high as \$880 annually. I mention the past for the record and to let you know the Town is actively collecting information on existing Town Districts. Though the rate for a District today in the Town would probably be half of what our residents are paying now. All calls to the Town Hall concerning garbage service are forwarded to the vendors which usually gets a fast response to their customer. I mentioned earlier about people wanting to live in Clarence. Without a doubt our strong School system and all they have to offer to their students makes Clarence a destination for young families. Matt Frahm and his School Board always try to have the best for their students at a tax rate that is dollars below similar School Districts. Thank you Dr. Frahm and the Clarence School system for all you do.

In 2007 the Town of Clarence as part of its new master plan and to control the impact on growth went to an Open Space Concept where any new residential project must leave at least 50 percent of the development green undeveloped space. Many Towns are still in the 1980's building new neighborhoods that are wall to wall houses. The open space design has been well received by people living in the new neighborhoods. Even with the associated higher cost of property in an Open Space Development the lots are sold out as fast as the streets are dedicated.

Due to the limited Sewer capacity and our present zoning laws, there are no new traditional large housing developments planned for now or in the immediate future. Future housing for Clarence is planned at the Eastern Hills living Center which I will be talking about shortly.

With that said, the governor wants local communities to stop hindering housing growth through restrictive zoning and the approval processes. The governor wants local communities to stop hindering housing growth through restrictive zoning and the approval processes. The governor wants local communities to stop hindering housing growth through restrictive zoning and the approval processes. She said, "Community opposition should not control growth. I would like 800,000 new homes and have proposed taking away home rule to get it done." As mentioned by Deputy Supervisor DiCostanzo, believe it or not our Town and Planning Boards are here to protect our resident's by controlling growth that is brought to us. As a Board we do not go out looking for private projects to come Clarence. Ask any developer that works in Town if they get an easy pass. It takes years to vet any major project brought us. If the State takes over "Home Rule" you could possibly see 5 story buildings in the middle of a residential neighborhood.

In 2002 the Town passed a 12.5-million-dollar ten-year bond resolution to buy especially vacant land and farms that could be developed for homes. The Bond act preserves the character of Clarence that we all know and love.

2012 the Town Board extended the allotment time to acquire property. Most of the Bond money has been spent and the focus now is to make the property more accessible for the Town residents to enjoy. Even though the Bond money has been spent this Town Board is still interested in acquiring property for Open Green Space and Parks.

During my tenure as your supervisor myself and this Town Board have been on a mission updating many of the Town amenities by bringing them into this Century without raising taxes. It started with updating of our 1950's two stall cinder block bathroom at the Town Park. We use to rent temporary toilets for big events. Now we have a large Disney type building that can handle large events in the thousands. The State Police were looking for New Barracks to replace their existing smaller one from the 70's. The Sheriffs were in a moldy basement at the Highway Garage. The Clarence Courts was still in the Town Hall without any safety precautions for the staff or public. We built a new Public Safety Building which houses the State Police Zone Headquarters. They have a thirty year lease. The Sheriffs who have a new large above ground barracks. Our Courts have a new Court House which before had almost 60 violations of operation from the New York State Office of Court Administration all of which have been corrected. People being held for Court Appearances use to wait in a running police car in the parking lot. Now a defendant can be walked from either barracks or held in a detention area in the Courthouse before their appearance in front of a judge.

Town View Park on Goodrich for many years operated almost like an abandon park. There were not many amenities to support the public when there. Two years ago, with help by a New York State Bond from Assemblymen Mike Norris, again a fifties pavilion and bathroom were removed and rebuilt with a full kitchen and connecting bathrooms. With maturing trees in the arboretum next store and the dedicated pickle balls courts, Town View Park is now one of our busiest parks. I have watched events through the years where our Seniors struggling to sit at our conventual picnic tables. The new pavilion with round table and chairs is the first choice for many of our residents.

This was a long lead-in to our most recent project. the New Highway Department Facility was started which includes a pocket park, public parking, public restrooms along the bike path and a expanded indoor recreation space for our ball teams. The Department will be under one roof in an environment that is safe and efficient for our 36 Highway Employees.

Many of the existing buildings at the Highway garage were built in 1923. The older wood buildings will be removed, and the new building will be away from Goodrich Road preserving the character of Clarence Center. You can see by this photo even the 1980's building is not a safe way to park trucks in during the winter. Imagine you are one the first trucks to leave at 4:00 am and your truck is the furthest from the exit door. The trucks in the old garage now dangerously back in and out. The new building will have dedicated parking.

The plow trucks will come in one door and leave through another. The trucks can leave anytime without being obstructed by another truck.

The Clarence Rotary Club wanted to make sure our Veterans were never forgotten. Especially the 57 Clarence residents that have gave the ultimate sacrifice for their country. Captain Andrew Beyers an Army Ranger being the most recent. Since my last State of the Town the Rotary Club along with the Town of Clarence built a permanent memorial for our veterans at our Main Street Town Park. The five granite stones in the memorial represent the five branches of service. They have the names of veterans who served our country. The marble fountain in the center of the five stones honor those from Clarence who lost their life serving our County. Five flag poles for the branches of service and a new large American Flagpole also adorn the memorial. The memorial is lighted so visitors can pay their respects to those who have served day or night. The memorial formal dedication was two memorial days ago. Hundreds attended including many who's loved ones are on the memorial. There were two other events during Veterans Day when other veteran's names were added to the wall. Thank you, Clarence Rotary and Town Engineer Tim Lavocat, for making a home permeant for our veterans to be remembered.

Taxes, Assessments and Housing

The Town total assessment approaching \$5,091,000.00. That's an increase of almost 42 million dollars. We have building permits for 91 new residents adding a value of \$59,000,000 to the Town in assessed value. Last year's taxable parcels are up 52 to 13,267. The average home in Clarence last year was assessed for about \$300,000. The average now is \$356,000. Most new homes are at a starting price of \$655,000 with an average size 3,500 sq ft. Many new homes are in the millions. This is all healthy news. When home and property values drop, taxes usually go up.

Clarence like other communities have had homes appreciate by almost 30 percent the past few years. Even with the past Town reassessment most homes are selling for well over assessed value. The home market has slowed down but still is demanding top dollar for both new and used.

I am proud to say again that Clarence has one of the lowest takes rates in Erie County. For my tenure I am committed to staying under the New York State tax cap which is 2 percent. For my 7th budget as Supervisor again I am below the cap. The tax rate was lowered from last year by almost 10 cents to one of the lowest rates in our modern times. 74 cents a thousand. Other Town's rate is measured in dollars not cents. Our Town financial rating for barrowing is still Aa1. You would have to go down the thruway to Victor NY for a Town with a higher rating than Clarence.

Many thanks to our Financial Director Kim Ignatowski, my assistant Carolyn Delgato, Karen Jurek and Town attorney Larry Meckler for assisting me with the budget making sure we are putting the best budget possible for our taxpayers.

2020 was a census year. The Town population is closer to 33,000 now three years past the census.

New Elected Town Clerk Karen Hawes manages a very busy office. The office booked over 529 bookings in Town buildings. 249 death certificates were filed last year. There were 140 wedding licenses. 4,567 dogs got their licenses renewed. Over 500 Notary Services. 546 Hunting/Fishing Licenses. Last year her office collected almost \$61,000,000.00 in school tax and \$38,000,000.00 million in county, town and other taxes. This year \$1,046,789.51 million dollars in building permits and licensing fees. A large number of taxpayers this year paid in person, so the week of tax collection thousands of our residents walk in to the Town Clerk's Office to pay their taxes. Karen a former Bank manger makes sure that her and her staff are balanced every day before going home.

Youth and Recreation

During the COVID shut down many Youth Departments and Recreation programs were cancelled including the closing of public pools. In a shrinking market of available employees Youth and Rec Department Heads Dawn Kinney, Clifford Trapper and Chris Durr aggressively recruited summer help to be one of the few Towns to open their pools and reestablish Recreation Programs for our youth. The pool which Pandemic closing was the most missed attendance is back up to pre-pandemic levels. Youth Court is back up and running with 20 cases referred to them from the Clarence School, New York State Police and Erie County Sheriff. This year 16 Youth Court members trained to assume the roles of Judges, Defense advocates and bailiffs.

Town wide events were able to resume in 2022 and continuing in 2023 starting with Winterfest which will be next month February 11th from 11:00 to 3:00. It is an inside and outside event. The Easter Egg Hunt in partnership with the Clarence Rotary Club is planned for this spring. New this year Summerfest in July. Halloween in the Park and in December, Breakfast with Santa in partnership with the Clarence Lion's Club is planned also.

Major Town Public Projects

Along with the Highway the engineer department lead by Tim Lavocat again has been very busy. The final phase of the Hollow Sewer District 9 was completed this summer. A consent order has been in place for over 20 years until the District was completed. 11.4 miles of Main Street sidewalks was completed a few years ago. The Town Highway Department now operates two sidewalk snow clearing machines to make sure our residents can safely use the walks all year even in the winter. A new Bike Path South Shore extension will be starting this Spring which will be along Wehrle Drive to the Sun Set Park. When completed the residents of Harris Hill will be able to access the Bike Trail system without going on major public roads. Like Main Street, Sheridan has been reconfigured to safer single lanes with a center turning lane and bike lane on both sides. Since the reconfiguration accidents especially at intersections have been drastically reduced. The Town was also awarded a \$3.4 million grant from the New York State DOT for 5.3 miles sidewalks along Sheridan Drive.

The utility project for memorial park have been completed bringing water and electric to the North end of the park. The leagues have built new vending stations, restrooms and maintenance storage now that the utilities have been installed.

The Town has switched to LED cobra style head street lights. Besides putting more light on the ground and not in the trees when paid for the Town will approximately save \$100,000 a year in lighting our streets. Jonathan Bluer is our head of grants for the Town. Many of the projects I have listed received grants which he championed.

A grant was awarded for the Northwoods bike trail. The Town is continuing to connect the dots with trails between the peanut line and the Wehrle termination. The Northwoods trail will take bike riders from the Roll to Greiner Road.

New Heating from a County grant was installed in the Senior Center and the Carpet was replaced in the library. The Library project was monumental when you are trying to move 30,000 books.

Highway

Jamie Dussing and his Deputies Paul Englert, Jeff Loudenslagerjd and Joe Daigler are in early every morning to plan out work assignments for 34 employees.

Even during COVID our Highway Department was rebuilding roads and cleaning drainage ditches. Sesh and Delaware the past two years with Ledge Lane and a lot of roads in Meadow lakes this year. Most of the Towns repaving work is done with our own Highway forces which keeps the cost down.

The Culvert and Drainage projects are always on going with many in the North Country minimizing the effects of any future flooding. The Highway Department clears blockages in our creeks all year long. Many built by beavers. This is not an easy task because most of the 80 a year are usually in someone's back yard.

Clarence is one of very few Towns that have an unlimited brush pick up every month during warm weather. Some Towns have no brush pick up while others require brush to be in 4-foot bundles which are picked up twice a year. All our brush and leaves are sold to a third party vender to be recycled into mulch or topsoil.

Our Highway Department is always the first to clear our roads of snow in Erie County. The crew I mentioned earlier is out every night checking snows falls for the next day's removals. The Highway Department clears 360 miles of roads and 11.5 miles of sidewalks every snow event. New this year is a second shift that allows Highway to get a head start on the next day's activities.

As mentioned in my Bee columns we had two major storms this winter season and Clarence by days was the first Town effected by the storms to have it Roads open. After our roads were open much of the equipment that Jamie and his crew used to clean our roads went to the Town of Amherst that had many roads not open three days after the event.

We talked about having the best employees, ours were sleeping on the floor Christmas Eve because both Highway and Parks employees were serving the people of our Town.

Thank you, James Dussing and your group, for all the hard work you do for our citizens. No matter what the problem or holiday or even if it is not Highway related you are always there to help.

Parks Department

Clarence has always prided itself on our parks. Superintendent Jim Burkard Park Department is responsible for over 961 acres of Park Land. Of Towns we probably have the biggest Town Park system by acres in Erie County. The parks department also manages all our pavilion and building rentals, having them cleaned and ready for each group. This is in addition to maintaining all of the parks, recreation facilities and other Town building and grounds.

The Town of Clarence purchased and removed a Zombie Home adjacent to the Fogelsonger Park. The one acre property adds Greiner Road frontage to the park enhancing the layout of park. This Park along with Town View Park is used a lot more than in the past due to the residential development around them. The Town is working on plans for a new pavilion at Fogelsonger Park which will be similar the new one at Town View but 30 percent smaller. The Parks Department added 10 new pickleball courts to Town View Park making our Town the County leader in grouped pickleball Courts. Every morning there is at least 30 to 40 residents playing pickleball there.

Major Town Private Project

Over the past two years the town has approved many projects which many have been completed. on the

Based on Building Permit Data, here is the 2022 Activity:

COMMERCIAL (permit value added \$25,000,000+)

New Construction

- Tractor Supply Company
- Dollar General
- GMA Concrete
- Wilcox Landscaping

Addition/Alteration

- Life Storage
- BFLO Store
- Snappy Cleaners
- R.E. McNamara
- Transit Meadow Medical & Professional Office Park
 - Ten Eleven Group
 - DASNY
 - Refresh Dental
- West Herr Hyundai
- Seal & Design

RESIDENTIAL (permit value added \$76,500,000+)

93 new homes

- average \$823,000
- average 3,956 sqft

Subdivisions of Growth

- Northwoods
- Spaulding Green
- Waterford Essex Greens

MULTI-FAMILY (permit value added \$10,000,000+)

- Samuel's Grande Manor (12 units)
- Transit Station (14 units + commercial)
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2022 Project Review Activity:

COMMERCIAL / MIXED USE

- Clarence Motor and Sport
- Eastern Hills Mall Redevelopment
- Mattina Retail Plaza
- Harris Hill Commons Mixed Use
- Royal Car Wash
- Genesis Automotive
- Bevilacqua Mixed Use
- Bliss Mixed Use
- Dean Architects
- Research Parkway Industrial Park
- Chick-fil-A
- The Farm Salvatore Mixed Use
- Rockledge Professional Office Park Phase 3
- Rane Mixed Use

RESIDENTIAL

- Harris Hill Commons Phase 4
- Woodland Hills
- Clarence Center Open Space Subdivision

Closing

I would like to start by thanking Amy Engler and the Clarence Chamber for hosting this year's State of the Town and thank everyone for attending today. I would also like to acknowledge and thank the Town officials and employees that are here today.

I often forget to thank my wife Susan for being supportive on my journey as Supervisor but not this time. Daughter Carolyn for doing such great job taking my place at Casilio Companies. My publicist Daughter Chrissy. Thank you, Larry Meckler, Tim Lavocat, Jonathan Bleuer, Kim Ignatowski and Cindi Rosel, for your extra help. Without a doubt I could do this job without my Assistant Carolyn Delgato with special help from Karen Jurek.

As mentioned in my very long Bee Column last week our Fire Companies went through hell and back protecting us during the Christmas Storm. Thank you, Clarence Fireman, for everything you do.

I hear the horror stories other Towns have with their Town Boards and Employees. Some with Police protection during Town Board meetings. We don't have those problems in Clarence. I would like to thank the Town Board, Department Heads and Town Employees for working together and pulling in the right direction keeping Clarence one of the best places to live in Western New York.