

Reflecting on State of the Town

I would like to thank the Clarence Chamber of Commerce for hosting the State of the Town a few weeks ago. It was great to be back after the COVID hiatus. It was an honor to swear in the 2023 Chamber Board of Directors.

Although we do our best to communicate all the happenings in the town throughout the year, it's nice to summarize it all within a single presentation.

One of the more important aspects was the overview of development in our town. When I first ran for Councilman several years ago, I promised to "preserve our past and protect our future." We have to keep our town's farmland, green space, historic character, while also methodically growing both residentially and commercially in order to keep our tax rate low and quality of life high.

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 projects must leave at least 50 percent of the development green, undeveloped space. Many neighboring towns are still building new neighborhoods that are wall to wall houses. 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.

Governor Kathy Hochul wants local communities to stop hindering housing growth through restrictive zoning and the approval process. 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 a board, we do not go looking for private projects to come to Clarence. Ask any developer in town if they get an easy pass. It takes years to vet any major project brought to us. If the State takes over "home rule" you could possibly see 5-story buildings in the middle of a residential neighborhood. We continue to make it our priority to protect the character of the Town, and as much green space as possible.

Clarence has always prided itself on our parks. There are over 961 acres of park land, and we have one of the biggest town park systems in all of Erie County. We recently purchased and removed a zombie home adjacent to the Fogelsonger Park. The one-acre property adds Greiner Road frontage to the park, with plans to include a new pavilion at this park, especially since it's dramatic increase in usage over the years.

Commercial development happens in our commercial zones. Any time a new business comes to Clarence, there are new taxes that come with it that help support our municipalities. Many of these businesses bring more ways for our residents to enjoy our town, without having to travel far for shopping and dining.

It's easy to see a sign for new homes or new businesses and panic. It's also easy to miss the growing parks, added greenspace, increase in walking trails, lowered taxes, funds for improvement projects, removal of zombie homes. It continues to be the mission of keeping Clarence beautiful, with low taxes, and great schools. The Master Plan has protected this town from overgrowth and development through my lifetime and beyond.

Town Clerk Karen Hawes will be accepting Pavilion Reservations starting March 1st at 8:00 am. As before, I will be coming in earlier to open Town Hall for residents that are waiting in line very early in the morning. Reservations numbers will be handed out to those entering the building before 8:00 am. Last year there were over 50 residents that came in before 8:00 am to reserve a pavilion.