

# **Supervisor Patrick Casilio**

## **State of the Town 2024**

**Town of Clarence, New York**

**Jan. 25, 2024**

Good Afternoon,

We all finally made it. If it wasn't COVID, it was snow trying to prevent me from giving my State of the Town. Maybe I should take the delays as a sign. I am glad the Chamber postponed our event. Half of Erie County was shut down last Thursday. Even if you made it here there was no guarantee Samuels employees or food would.

Thank you everyone for making the second effort to come to our 2024 State of the Town and for supporting every good thing the Chamber does for Clarence. Welcome new Chamber Officers to the Chamber Board. Under her leadership, Amy has done wonderful things for the Chamber and the Business community in Clarence.

Before I go into detail I just wanted to list some of our accomplish this Town Board has achieved without raising taxes.

During my tenure as an elected official representing you, I thought one of my greatest accomplishments was replacing the outdated 1950's cinder block restrooms at our Town Park with a new multi-stall Disney-type restroom. We have major multi-people events in our Town Park and at the time everyone had to wait in line to use just four toilets. After the completion of the New Bathrooms, never would I think that we would then build a new public safety building housing our improved Courthouse, the Erie County Sheriff's and the New York State Police. The State Police have a lease agreement with the Town for the next 30 years. Our Park system is an integral part of the Town of Clarence. After the public safety building, we replaced an older park pavilion at Town Place Park with a much-needed larger 300-person full-service pavilion. With round tables and chairs the pavilion has already been host to wedding venues. Included in the new pavilion are attached bathrooms (which many of us more senior people appreciate) and a service garage for our Parks Department.

The Parks Department stores equipment used to service Town Place Park and the Town Hall complex. With addition of pickleball courts the formerly "dead melancholy park is full of activity starting early in the morning and finishing every day with Pickleballers. With grants and public safety in mind, the Town worked with the State DOT to rebuild and/or improve the Main Street sidewalks. Sheridan Drive will soon have sidewalks from Thompson Road to Sheridan. After the New Larger Pavilion at Town Place was completed, the Town Board and Highway Superintendent Jamie Dusing new it was time for a much-needed New Larger Highway Garage. The Old Highway facility had non-ADA-compliant stairs everywhere and wooden garages that were 100 years old. I will show you today how they used to park plow trucks overnight versus

how they will be parking in the New 65,000 square foot building. It is amazing that no one was run over in the old buildings.

As part of the project Clarence Center is getting a New Pocket Park with a 50-person open pavilion and bathrooms to service the new park and users of the bike trail.

We are not done improving for our residents. With funds from the American Rescue Plan Act the Town is totally refurbishing Fogelsonger Park. Many people live around the park now and there was a need for a new pavilion. The Town has plans for a pavilion similar to our Town Place Pavilion but 30 percent smaller. New Parking Lots, Walking trails and hard surface courts are planned for the park. The Clarence Lions Club would like to fund and build Clarence's first all-inclusive playground, it's location is tentatively planned for this park.

We are not done yet. With a grant from Erie County (Thank you, Legislator Chris Greene) the Town is going to convert one of the Highway Department's old garages into Clarence's first indoor Recreation Center. The rehabbed building should have enough room for two full-size basketball courts.

Besides volleyball the modified hard floor surface will be able to accommodate pickleball as well. Yes.... pickleball 12 months a year in Clarence. Besides the summer months, the new building will allow our Youth and Recreation Departments to have activities for our very young people all year long. The building will be also available for special events. The Town is gather information for an out door skating rink there also.

All the improvements including new LED street lighting we have accomplished without raising taxes. Unlike what social media indicates this Town Board has nothing but the best interest of our Town residents first and foremost. They will always keep your taxes the lowest in Erie County.

## **Highway**

The Highway Department will embark on its most aggressive paving program to date.

Thanks in large part to the Town Board, taxpayers, and the New York State CHIPS program we will put over \$1 million into pavement resurfacing across our town. Some major projects are also planned:

- Completely replace the drainage and pavement at the Clarence Senior Center as part of a two-part project.
- Complete phase two of our Kelkenberg Road Project which will include new shoulders and recycling of the current surface. This road is a low-volume road with only a few houses, but it is important to the local residents and agriculture to rehabilitate the road and make it safer for many years to come. As a side note, we try and rehab at least one road on the north end of the Town every year.

- Kenfield Road bridge replacement. This \$1.4-million project will be completed after receiving a Bridge New York grant which is a 95 - 5% grant from the state.

This is a grant that we actively pursued for several years due to its cost. This bridge will replace an old deteriorating bridge that has served us well. The New bridge will be much bigger to accommodate larger trucks and agricultural vehicles but most importantly it will convey more water through its opening which will help us out when Black Creek is up and flooding exists on the east side of the town.

The Highway Department is replacing and adding new equipment to its fleet to better serve you. Under the leadership of Highway Superintendent Jamie Dussing No town during the most recent or past has been better served keeping road open with around the clock snow removal.

This demonstrates that the Town Highway Department will continue to offer excellent service to our residents while working towards a goal of being accessible, dependable, and accountable at all times. Thank you Jamie Dussing. We are looking forward to 2024 as the Clarence Highway Department enters a new era when crews move into a completely new, state-of-the-art facility with a new “fuel farm” to service fire companies and the Town’s fleet of cars and trucks. This was built as a 50-year building, meaning it should adequately accommodate our needs for the next half-century. It was desperately needed to provide our employees with a safe, clean place to work so they can quickly perform their jobs 24/7 as storms and emergencies happen.

### **Engineering (Trails and Sidewalks)**

The Building Department will continue to actively enforce Property Maintenance Codes to ensure properties in Town do not continue to fall into disrepair and/or neglect and will actively enforce full compliance for zombie properties and pursue demolition under the Unsafe Structures code when necessary.

Once the new Highway Department building is in operation, demolition of the existing Highway Department buildings will make way for a new pocket park, pavilion, recreation building and public parking, all to be constructed and completed by the fall. Situated perfectly on the bike path, this park will offer restrooms and a covered area for people to escape the elements. The Park will also offer additional and much-needed parking for Clarence Center.

While sidewalks may not be as picturesque as some of our recreational trails, they serve an equally important purpose; giving pedestrians a safe and dedicated place to walk. We may not love the maintenance associated with sidewalks, but we love their purpose. It is important to remember that a public right-of-way is for more than a street for cars, it is an area designated for people getting from point A to B, whether driving, walking or even biking.

As mentioned earlier, The Town was awarded \$3.5 million for the construction of sidewalks on Sheridan Drive, which will add over five miles of five-foot-wide sidewalks along Sheridan Drive. While it will take several years to progress through the contracting and design phase, these sidewalks will link Transit Road to Main Street, and allow safe pedestrian access throughout. Construction of sidewalks on Greiner Road from Eastbrooke Place to Anfield Lane to provide pedestrian access to Fogelsonger Park from adjacent neighborhoods and ultimately from Transit Road.

Just last week we applied for \$5 million in funding for an \$11 million sidewalk project in Clarence Center. This involves the construction of new sidewalks in areas without them, and improving the existing sidewalk network as needed. Great care would be taken to work around important community features such as street trees.

If you have ever walked or biked along one of our recreational trails, you know how popular they can be. We will continue to connect neighborhoods, schools, parks, and community facilities to our trail system. We are just putting the finishing touches on two trail extensions; the Northwoods Trail (Roll Rd. to Greiner Rd.) and the Wehrle Drive West Shore Line Trail Extension (West Shore Line on Wehrle Dr. to Sunset Park on Harris Hill Rd). Both of these trail extensions represent years of tedious work to get them constructed and operational.

From funding to design and construction, each step is critical to making projects such as these feasible. Every additional mile means more connectivity, better access, and safer options for a healthy and active lifestyle. Upcoming trail extensions include the Spaulding Green Trail extension and a future trail loop at the Eastern Hills Mall site. Additionally, The Town has partnered with outside stakeholders to see our trails continued beyond our borders. Thank you Tim Lavocat for all your hard work on these projects.

## **Emergency Services**

After serving nearly 25 years as Deputy Emergency Services Coordinator, David Baumler is our new Town Emergency Services Manager, succeeding David Bissonnette who has retired after more than three decades. Our thanks to David for his dedicated service to the residents and businesses of the Town.

Emergency Services will continue and strive to be one of the best in Erie County. The continuation and growth of our pledge to serve and protect our community is our mission priority. We will continue to work closely with our Local area Emergency Managers, especially our bordering towns of Newstead, Amherst, and Lancaster. We not only have a close working relationship, but we also have a mutual aid-type plan to assist each other whenever needed. We will continue to work together with our Emergency Services and Homeland Security partners in Erie County Government and collaborate with all six fire departments in the Town to assist the incident commanders in their duties at any emergency scene. Emergency Services is an important asset and resource to all of their mutual aid plans.

We are also regarded highly by our Law Enforcement partners (NYS Police and EC Sheriffs) and have been called on many times to assist them at various incidents. We will continue to be a valued resource in their time of need. We are proud to lead an amazing staff of volunteers at the Clarence Senior Center who work so hard whenever they are called upon to set up a warming shelter during any type of emergency event!

The work that they do, just to help the residents of our town, is unparalleled! We will continue to be a valuable asset to the Clarence Central School District and its Safety Committee. We have participated in several drills related to active intruder response and the overall health, safety, and security of our kids, and are dedicated to continuing to assist with the School Districts unwavering commitment to the overall well-being of our children.

This year, the Town of Clarence Department of Emergency Services will provide its 5-year update to the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan and stands ready to serve the residents and businesses whenever needed in the event of an emergency. We accomplish this by working hand in hand with our departments of Highway, Parks, Engineering, and Building/Fire Inspector offices. Together, the Town of Clarence can rest assured that its governmental services are there to protect the lifestyle we have become accustomed to as Clarence residents.

## **Youth Bureau**

In 2024 Youth and Rec would like to expand summer track, pickleball and tennis programs. Our summer rec programs are sold out in hours every year. We have added a comic book camp and an introduction to drawing program also.

This year's Youth Activities will focus is on increasing opportunities for youth to participate in positive, skill-building, community engagement programs, and activities. Town-wide events including Winterfest, a week from this Saturday, the Easter Egg Hunt, Summerfest, and Halloween in the Park along with year-round programming engage Town residents of all ages. Young people between the ages of 12 and 20 are providing service to local organizations including library events, children's programs, and service club events. This is a great way to develop leadership skills and good citizenry in the next generation.

We also offer Special Olympics Developmental Sports Programs for youth ages 6 to 12, an inclusive development program for children with and without intellectual disabilities. This program prepares youth who are interested in pursuing competitive Special Olympics sporting events. Youth Court offers a restorative program designed to assist first-time offenders with moving forward on a more positive, productive path. High school students assume the roles of judge, bailiff, and defendant advocate.

## **Zoning Code Update**

The way we experience Clarence is often determined by and through the built environment. Few things shape the built environment more than the Zoning Code.

The Zoning Code dictates, what, where, and how properties are built upon and used. The last comprehensive update to our Zoning Code occurred in 2005. Since then, we have made incremental updates to our code to better control things such as cannabis, multi-family housing, cell towers, solar panels, wind turbines, and short-term residential rentals, to name a few. With the adoption and successful implementation of Clarence 2030, the Town's Comprehensive Plan, we have begun a complete Zoning Code update to ensure that our vision, goals, and strategies are aligned with our written code.

Working together with our professional consultant and town stakeholders, we will spend the coming year in a discovery phase, determining our challenges and opportunities. Upon the conclusion of that discovery phase, we will hold public meetings to gather input from all those interested and begin crafting the new code.

At the conclusion of this effort, we believe that an updated Zoning code will facilitate larger residential setbacks, higher quality commercial buildings, a more robust enforcement mechanism, and greater focus placed on community features and amenities for our residents and visitors alike.

## **Vision Sheridan**

One of the ways to keep taxes low for our residents is to ensure that our commercial areas remain viable and successful. Partnering with the Clarence Industrial Development Agency, which is a separate entity from the Town, we created Vision Main Street. Partially a document, and partially an initiative, it has led to our Main Street seeing more positive activity and energy than we have seen in quite some time. Our sidewalks are well-loved, storefronts are filling, and some old buildings are even being refreshed. Following the successful Vision Main Street model, we have turned our attention to Sheridan Drive and our newest initiative, Vision Sheridan.

Sheridan was long known for its past construction; planned for high volume, high speed, pass-by traffic. Today we want Sheridan to be known as a place and destination, not just a road. By making the area safer and more convenient; with a center turn lane, upcoming sidewalks, and current and future neighborhood businesses, we believe this is the successful roadmap for Vision Sheridan. Thank you Jonathan Bluer for all your hard work with new codes and grant writing.

## **Eastern Hills Mall**

As one of the most identifiable locations of Clarence, the original Eastern Hills Mall, opened on November 8, 1971, to great fanfare. Many years later and here today, it is only fitting that its future has generated the same level of interest and inquiry. What I can tell you today is that the future of the Eastern Hills Mall is bright, perhaps not as a traditional mall, but as a Town Center mixed-use community.

We have proactively rezoned all 106 acres to ensure that it remains a viable option for investment and improvements that will give our current and future residents and visitors a place to be proud of. I continue to advocate for multi-story buildings along Transit Road, and low-density townhomes within parklike open space adjoining our existing residential neighborhoods.

Involved stakeholders are currently analyzing sewer infrastructure for both capacity and construction. Once this task is accomplished, the remaining review process should proceed smoothly, allowing for phase one of the Town Center community to be initiated. Phase 1 will begin to turn the mall inside out, improving the site aesthetics, green space, and connectivity. It is only a matter of time before we have people living at the Eastern Hills Mall site, which will create a 24-hour heartbeat, where our businesses and community events will grow and thrive.

### **Street Trees**

We are heading into our third year of planting street trees. Currently, we are planting each spring and fall planting season. Thus far we have planted over 100 street trees in Clarence Center, Harris Hill, and the Hollow. We have applied for grant funds to plant even more because the desire is high from our residents. While the Town is currently planting trees in the public right-of-way, we ask that adjacent property owners water the tree for the first year, which makes your support and assistance important in this worthy effort.

Together with non-profit groups, we have also planted 500 sapling trees at the Clarence Nature Center, with another 500 to be planted this year. Someday these trees may be relocated to become a street or park tree.

### **Parks (Parks Master Planning)**

In Clarence have always taken great pride in our parks. With more than 961 acres of parkland, ours is one of the largest town park systems in Erie County. In 2024 we are looking to expand existing playgrounds. All of them have been at capacity for the past two years.

The Town recently purchased the Jerry Edbauer Building located on the bike path/entrance road to the Main Park, off Shisler Road. We will be repairing and cleaning the building, adding lighting and a security system. The Town-owned house on Thompson Road was recently removed and Parks will be repairing and seeding the grounds to complement the project. Parks would also like to paint the parks' play toys in 2024 Residents were able to enjoy 71 days at the

Town Pool, which is a hidden gem. We are looking into the possibility of upgrading the locker rooms there.

Clarence is known for its beautiful and well-loved parks. Money spent on our parks seems to always be money well spent. Since the new pavilion at Town Place Park is so popular, we are in the design stage for a new pavilion with modern restroom facilities at Fogelsonger Park on Greiner Road. In addition, Fogelsonger Park is being master planned for the possibility of additional parking, walking paths, playground and sports area, and landscaping. We are also exploring the feasibility of a walkway from the adjacent church and neighborhood to the east and a sidewalk on Greiner Road from Eastbooke Place.

Efforts are underway to make Main Place Park even better on Main Street. Funds were received to rebuild an open-air patio behind the clubhouse, just as it existed historically. An expansion of our Veteran's Memorial is also in the works, with funds earmarked to assist those efforts. Most recently we began the research to purchase and install a portable winter ice rink system with a chiller system. If successful, we wouldn't need continuous freezing days to make and keep ice skateable during the winter months.

### **Closing**

Thank you, Amy Engler and the Clarence Chamber, for hosting this year's State of the Town.

And Thank you everyone for attending. Thank you, Town Officials and employees, for attending today. It is a team effort with everyone pulling in the same direction that makes this job easy and us servicing you better. I would like to thank Town Board, Department Heads and Town Employees for working together and everyday doing what's best for the Town. A special thanks to Kevin Keenan and Andrew Schaefer for helping put this presentation together.