

Town of Orangetown

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State of Town 2017

Andy Stewart, Supervisor

Annual Town Reorganization Meeting, 1/3/17

Welcome and Acknowledgements

Good evening, welcome to Orangetown Town Hall, and Happy New Year! Thank you all for joining us tonight. It is my pleasure to speak to you and deliver the State of the Town address.

Before going any further, I want to recognize a few important people here tonight. First, and most importantly, I thank my wife Rachel. Thank you also to Pastor Hoover and Rabbi Pernick for offering your spiritual blessings. Thanks to the students of the Nyack High School Advanced Chorus for your beautiful music. Thanks to my executive assistant Vicki Caramante and my secretary Kim Allen for helping to coordinate this event, and our dedicated IT staff for making this meeting accessible via TV. Thank you to my colleagues on the Town Board, my Finance Director Jeff Bencik, and my Deputy Supervisor Allan Ryff. It is a pleasure to serve with you, with a special congratulation to Jerry Bottari for completing his first year on the Town Board. I note also that Jeff, Allan, and Vicki will continue in their positions in 2017. And finally, thanks to all of our Department Heads. Let me also express my gratitude, and I am sure the whole town council feels the same way, to all our town workers and to the volunteers serving on numerous town committees. Tonight we re-dedicate ourselves to our mission of public service and it is truly an honor to serve with all of you!

State of the Town 2017

It's my pleasure to talk a bit about projects and priorities this year, with a special emphasis on teamwork and partnership as essential to success. I believe that our ability to cooperate, to disagree respectfully, and to trust in our process -- that is, to be good and effective "teams" -- is a more powerful force than the

negativity we see all around us in the world these days. Much of what is good about local government depends on cooperation, partnerships or contracts with third parties, whether they are grassroots activists, town vendors, nonprofit groups or myriad other government agencies. Often, town government itself must grow or change to serve new needs in the community. Teamwork is a powerful force -- here are some examples:

Grassroots activist teams come and go in Orangetown based on need, but sometimes form real partnerships with government with lasting results. I'll give just one example, Clean Air for Orangetown. Clean Air has pressed for an end to Aluf Plastic's excessive odors in and around Blauvelt - rallying the community to report the odors, raise awareness in the media, and advocate for solutions. As a result of this activism, the town - via its Zoning Board and court system - and the state, are forcing Aluf to fix its leaky odor control system. We've also beefed up our capacity to monitor industrial emissions by funding a new public health engineer position and an air quality monitoring project. I think the collaboration between activists and the town is really paying off. The work is not finished -- but this is what democratic, participatory government looks like in practice. That's teamwork!

Do Not Knock legislation is another example of partnership: We heard complaints about over-zealous door-to-door sales efforts by cable companies and realtors so we amended town law to enable residents to opt out of this solicitation by registering their property on the town's new Do Not Knock list-- and we beefed up penalties for failure to comply by solicitors. The community really helped out by spreading the word, and now over two thousand residents have signed up at the Clerk's office. Other towns are copying this idea and the County is considering a countywide version.

Business development is a very different kind of teamwork and also requires close partnership with the town to succeed. These teams create jobs, pay taxes and offer services people need. I'm thinking of IRG's efforts to attract new tenants to the former Pfizer campus, the construction of the chic new Time Hotel in Nyack, the completion of the senior rental housing overlooking Lake Tappan in Pearl River, the construction of a professional soccer training facility on former RPC lands, as just a few examples. Speaking of RPC, please keep your fingers crossed that the data center developers we are currently working with actually make an offer soon to buy, cleanup and redevelop our land. Lastly, the re-opening of the Tallman State Park pool as a private concession by local investors and caterers was a particularly impressive bit of teamwork by the private and public sector in 2016.

Let's continue to pursue business development that fits with our town character. Let's always remember that such investment is directly impacted by how quickly and expertly the town reviews and permits

construction activity in compliance with zoning, planning and safety standards. On that note, I am happy that our 2017 budget includes an additional building inspector to help move projects smoothly through the permitting process.

Public access to government meetings is fundamental to any kind of partnership with the community. This year we expanded TV coverage and YouTube posting of town meetings to include meetings of the Planning Board and we moved the Planning Board to town hall where there is better parking and handicap facilities. This is an important step in meeting our community's demand for government accountability and transparency, the basic building blocks of good government. Also, our terrific IT guys, Anthony Bevelacqua and Matt Lenihan, collaborated with Nyack resident and village trustee Doug Foster and my assistant Vicki to create a new Orangetown website that is accessible via mobile phone, easier to edit, and even costs less than our old one. That's teamwork!

In 2015, the sudden demolition of the historic Lent House on a weekend morning put an abrupt end to efforts by preservationists to plan for the disassembly and removal of the building to a different site. The public outcry was intense. Now, an ad hoc committee of town residents working with our Deputy Supervisor Allan Ryff has developed a sensible proposal to change town code to make demolition permits subject to public notice, just like other construction activity. This way, conversations can begin early with nearby property owners about how to safeguard community character. I hope to see this proposal reviewed by the town board and the public early in 2017 and credit the teamwork of those involved, including the Historical Societies, members of our Historic Areas Board of Review, and town legal and building staff.

My next few examples of teamwork involve finding ways to save money, since as we all know, Rockland residents suffer an enormous tax burden and it is the primordial duty of all elected officials to control taxes and stay under the NYS Tax Cap, as we have for the past five years.

Hiring a private management company to run the day to day operations of Broadacres and, in 2016, Blue Hill Golf Course, is saving the town millions of dollars and enabling us to pay down the golf debt, which was a black mark on our annual independent audit, and preserve these beautiful open spaces. This success was born of a productive community debate about the golf deficit, and made real by teamwork among our staff setting up the golf contracts with Applied Golf and monitoring them, which also includes volunteers on the golf committee keeping an eye on the facilities. Everybody wins when we work together.

The streetlight deal is another such contract -- instead of paying O&R's exorbitant rates for streetlights, after much research and cost benefit analysis undertaken together with Clarkstown and several consultants, we are planning to purchase the lights from O&R and then contract with an electrical business to replace the old bulbs with energy efficient and low maintenance LED bulbs. In 2016, the town board authorized the purchase of the lights and the issuing of a request for proposals from electrical firms to do the installation, and in 2017, we will select the best business to partner with and reap the economic and environmental rewards going forward.

Another great way to save on taxes is to get other people to pay for things we need--that is, get grants. I thank the town board and our department heads for supporting my active grant writing program -- we may not always win, but we often do. For example, the state is paying for our massive sidewalk projects in Pearl River and Sparkill, and the Tappan Zee Bridge project, bless them, is paying for two police cars, two portable electronic message boards, a bicycle traffic study, and a brand new showmobile in 2017.

The state is also paying, thanks to a grant we won, for the biggest green infrastructure, drainage and water pollution prevention project in town history. This is our million dollar re-engineering of an asphalt covered derelict site in Tappan into a state-of-the-art artificial wetland that will reduce flooding on the Sparkill Creek, beautify the land adjacent to the Homes for Heroes veterans housing project and create a new walking path for town residents. The cooperation of former Legislator John Murphy and his veterans group and the federal government has been essential, and the teamwork of our town highway, engineering, legal and finance teams moving this project forward is so impressive.

All of us here on the town board and in our town departments are passionate advocates for Orangetown, and this includes our town staff. The work they do, day in day out, to plow snow, police streets, administer justice, care for parks, keep the sewers running, do safety inspections, and all the administrative, legal and clerical duties that make this possible, is so, so important.

We all celebrate the value of our public workers, but we need to appreciate, too, the sacrifices our local taxpaying families and businesses are making to pay for these valuable services. Personnel costs, which are over 70% of our budget and growing higher every year, are far and away the driving force behind high taxes in Orangetown. Orangetown is not alone--throughout our region, property taxes are almost unsustainable for the average family or business in this day and age. Essential services are priceless, as is the well-being of our town employees and their families, but there is no avoiding the fact that high taxes drive people and businesses elsewhere, increasing the burden on those who remain. How we balance these issues in our union contract negotiations will be a test of our leadership in 2017.

Orangetown's employees are represented by one of two unions--the PBA for members of our police department, and the CSEA for everyone else. Both of these union contracts are up for renewal this year. The outcome of the negotiation of these contracts will go a long way towards determining whether Orangetown can stay within the tax cap in coming years. That's why it is so important for you, the residents of our town, to be informed about these contracts, how they impact the town budget, and how they could impact your tax bill. The existing contracts are public documents and are available from my office and shortly as downloads from our beautiful new town website. Union contract negotiations are not open to the public, but I urge members of the public to let all of us on the Town Board know your thoughts about this process. I also recommend reading the Rockland Business Association's recently commissioned report on Rockland's taxes: "A Crushing Burden: Why is Rockland County So Heavily Taxed?" The town board will have a presentation on this report at our January 24th town meeting.

Balancing the budget in the face of escalating labor costs unfortunately often results in delayed spending on capital needs, such as roads, bridges, and buildings, until such time as costly emergency repairs force the issue. In 2016 we took the first step in what could be the most important municipal project of this century in Orangetown - we issued a request for proposals and interviewed architectural firms about how best to replace the decrepit old side of town hall, which was built before some of us on the Town Board were born. Its leaky roof, cracked facade, and failing climate control systems demand a long term plan. Early in 2017, the town board will choose a company to prepare a report on our space needs and construction options and costs. Later this year we, and our staff and community, will review the report and its recommendations and decide on next steps. A new building, while costly, can have many benefits and efficiencies, especially by moving the town departments currently housed at Greenbush Rd into a unified town hall.

The journey to a new town hall began in 2016 and will pass a planning milestone in 2017. While I hope to see it built in the coming years, a different town supervisor will have to report annually on its progress since I already announced several months ago I am not running for re-election to a fourth term as town supervisor. As I hope this speech has shown, we have a jam-packed year of work ahead in 2017, and I'm personally excited and honored to close out my six years of service as supervisor working enthusiastically with our great team right here in the old town hall. I am so thankful and grateful to the voters of Orangetown for giving me the opportunity to serve --it has been one of the highlights of my life, and I know our work together has made the town an even better place for all of us to call home. Thank you so much; have a wonderful night!