

## **STATE OF THE TOWN**

**Maria Lull**

**Town Supervisor**

**January 18, 2018**

Thank you for the opportunity to present the 2018 State of the Town address for the Town of Chatham, New York. After 24 months in office, I am pleased to announce that our town is in a sound state; it is energized and vibrant, and it adheres to good governance practices. Through the efforts of the Town Board, the department heads and staff, and the counsel provided by the Citizens Finance & Planning Committee, we adopted a strategic and tactical approach to making and implementing decisions.

What do I mean by good governance? Good Governance means accountability, transparency, rule of law, responsiveness, equity & inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency, and participation. The benefits of a good governance policy are that it promotes confidence in elected officials and in the community, supports ethical decision-making, and leads to better decisions. Town Board members are elected to make decisions on behalf of their communities. As such, they have a responsibility to represent the interests not only of their constituents, but also those of the entire community.

Our decisions and accomplishments in 2016 and 2017 are a reflection on the ability to deliver on what we have promised, which was to create and promote good governance, and to manage the town's assets through solid short-term and long-term planning. While the town still has financial challenges, the town is in a significantly better financial condition than it was in 2015 and 2016, due in large measure to a great deal of hard work by many staff and volunteers. It is important for the Town Board to continue to strengthen Chatham's finances over the course of the next few years to ensure stability for Chatham's financial future. I fully understand the responsibility of crafting and managing the town budget and how deeply it affects the town and our hard-working taxpayers.

In 2017, the Town Board continued to accomplish a great deal, including the following achievements:

- The Town was awarded a \$7,500 Greenway grant awarded for town planning and implementation of the Comprehensive Plan.
- The Town Board authorized the installation of an Electric Vehicle Charging (EVC) station to be installed this year in the jointly owned village parking lot and we decided to permit EVCs in all zoning districts.
- The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, Office of Climate Smart provided a \$13,000 grant for this EVC station.
- We received the NYSERDA grant award for \$2500 for Electric Vehicle Charging Station in the jointly owned parking lot in the Village of Chatham.
- Through Trout Unlimited, the town received approval of \$29,953 in grant funding for the Green Brook Road Stream Crossing Survey Evaluation and Prioritization Project from New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission on behalf of the Hudson River Estuary Program.
- Thanks to the highway department, a new parking lot was installed in front of the skateboard-park area at Crellin Park. The new parking lot fits about 6 vehicles and is deep enough for vehicles to turn around before exiting back onto the entrance road. Large stones were installed around the perimeter of the parking area to keep vehicles from exiting onto the grass. The job was very well done. The highway department also removed old unusable metal soccer goal frames from the field behind Sonoco's parking lot, delivered mulch for our playground areas, and dug out sod for the park's future beach volleyball court.
  - The Chatham Reds baseball team began practicing and playing home games at Crellin Park last year. The pavilion and ball field are very active for the players and families during the season.
  - The approximately ½ acre plot of land leased to Cait Denny's Children's Garden was fenced and planted, and programs started this year. The highway department installed a water line connected to the existing well near the back pavilion and have piped the water under the access road to the inside of the Children's Garden.
  - "The Farmer's Daughter Gravel Grinder" took place on Sunday, May 21st, beginning and ending at Crellin Park's back pavilion. The event hosted 400 cyclists starting at 9:00 am and reaching the finishing line throughout Sunday

evening. The ride is a non-competitive joy ride traveling 60 miles through much of Chatham & Columbia County; using its conservation areas and dirt roads.

- The Chatham School District reserved our pavilion and facilities at Crellin Park in early June for its annual senior class picnic.
- The Basketball Court at Crellin has been resurfaced by the Highway Superintendent; baskets have been replaced, the court sealed, and lines painted.
- Through the Columbia County Sheriff's Office Innate assistance program, the picnic tables and swing sets were painted.
- For the first time, the Chatham High School Annual Arbor Day tree planting was held at Crellin Park.
- On August 12th, 2017, the Recreation Commission sponsored the first annual Crellin Park Community Day with over 350 participants and raised \$2100 for Crellin Park. The Morris Foundation Soccer team raised \$600.
- To reduce liability and risk for the Town, all organizations using town facilities will be required to sign agreements, provide insurance and sign hold harmless statements to protect the town.
- The Town has continued the practice of signing a shared service agreement with the county which will enable the town to share additional services with the county and save money. This agreement includes Internet Technology services.
- The Town Board set policy under Chatham Local Law 138 for escrow deposits to be collected from permit applicants for estimated actual, reasonable and necessary legal, engineering, or other consultation review fees incurred by the Planning Board or Zoning Board of Appeals in the course of reviewing applications. This measure is saving the Town a considerable amount of money each year.
- We installed a new Muncicity software program in the Building Department to effectuate efficiencies and reporting to the Assessor and County Department of Real Property.

- The Comprehensive Plan Implementation Group submitted the first phase of the Comprehensive Plan to the Town Board and has begun working on the final phase of the implementation process.
- The Town was able to secure a Bond for \$358,000 at 2.378 % interest rate amortized over 10 years for highway equipment replacement instead of reducing fund balance reserves as was the practice in the past.
- To streamline municipal spending, the Zoning Board of Appeals was changed from 7 to 5 members.
- The Chatham Town Budget, combined general fund and highway fund for 2018 is \$2, 896,695 which will come under the state mandated tax cap of 1.84% with a minimal tax increase of 1.017%.
- The 2018 Budget is \$38,000 less than 2017. This was accomplished by a reduction in expenditures and estimated additional revenue.
- Village Taxes decreased significantly for village residents in the 2018 budget.
- We received NYS Department of Transportation approval of plans for the Route 295 & Albany Turnpike Intersection and for traffic lights on the bridge. The town is anticipating completion of this project this year.
- We secured a better interest rate from The Bank of Greene County. The new rate will increase interest revenue for 2018.
- A Town Road Study Report was completed by the Road Committee to prioritize roads for the Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee and enable long-term planning for capital improvements.
  - The Highway Department under the direction of our Highway Superintendent completed the following work in 2017:
    - 1. Rebuilt (3) bridges on Seven Bridges Road.
    - 2. Paved 1.94-miles of road.
    - 3. Fiber Mat & Seal 3.36-miles of road.
    - 4. Graveled 17.5-miles of road.
    - 5. Installed (14) culverts on town roads.

- The Town Clerk and Deputy Clerks responded splendidly to the Governor's directive to allow citizens to make early payment of 2018 property tax bills by the end of the year to take advantage of the deductibility of the taxes against their federal tax for 2017.

The Town Clerk reports that between December 29, 2017 and January 2, 2018, 378 transactions were posted, totaling \$1,155,077.22, nearly \$122,000 of which was paid online. To date, the Town Clerk posted 652 transactions (only 30%) totaling almost \$1.8 million dollars. It has been a record two weeks! We anticipate a few wrinkles in the weeks to come as mortgage companies try to pay tax bills for escrowed customers who have "prepaid" their 2018 tax bills. It has been a very busy early January as opposed to Januarys past when the bulk of the traffic was seen towards the end of the month.

- The Chamber of Commerce & Register Star Newspaper sponsored voting throughout Columbia County and awarded Chatham, "the Best of Columbia County, Best Managed Town".

On the immediate horizon, we have several items planned:

- The Town Board expects to approve the new zoning code early this year.
- All department heads and town board members will receive a secured, designated town email account for conducting town business.
- A new town website will be designed.
- A new fund balance policy is being developed to help prevent future fund balance depletions.
- Continuing to move forward in planning with the county to realize broadband throughout the town.
- The promotion of planning initiatives in Crellin Park to complete the pavilion & continue to improve facilities.
- Promotion of a great season of sports and children's programs at Crellin Park.

- We will provide support for another successful season for the Community Garden by installing a waterline to the community garden area in Crellin Park.
- We will continue to prioritize culvert infrastructure throughout the town and work towards its replacement.

Through the use of multiple committees, we bring together diverse opinions to implement positive and interactive relationships with the Town's residents and we are committed to help all our residents gain a greater understanding of their municipal government. I wish to thank the volunteers on all the town committees for their dedication to the Town and the community.

I want to recognize and commend the Town Board, Budget Officer, Finance Clerk, Town Clerk and deputies, Recreation Director and staff, Assessor and clerk, Building Department and clerk, Planning and Zoning Boards, Highway Superintendent and staff, and Town Justices and clerks for their hard work and commitment. Your support and engagement, will ensure that the Town will continue on a course of stability, success, and prosperity.

Thank You All, and God Bless Chatham!