

State of the Town Message

Supervisor, James M. Shaw

Leaders of any large institution must separate that which is mundane from that which is fundamentally important. Finding time amidst the day to day grind to focus upon the big picture is a persistent challenge. Therefore, outlining this State of the Town Address afforded me the opportunity to dwell upon the overview of where we are and where we need to be.

Over the past two years our overall Town tax rate stabilized to increases averaging only 1% per year. Containing costs by tightening our belts and reducing Government's footprint are essential to the health of our Community.

Surrendering Woodlawn Beach to its rightful owner, reduced our footprint resulting in redirected efforts to upgrade Hamburg's neighborhood playgrounds and Town wide recreational facilities. 38 neighborhood playgrounds will be reduced in number, redesigned, modernized and made safer. Enhancing the quality of life for families while maintaining a stable tax rate, makes Hamburg a prime Western New York destination.

Four to five playgrounds will be reimagined and refitted each year over the next five or six years to enhance our neighborhoods and our recreational options. Our Town beach will undergo a makeover. The Town's golf course will be in the best shape it has ever been in, and we hope to make the Nike Recreational Center on Lakeview Road a mecca for families as we add to the recreational options that the facility presents.

2019 saw the reconstitution of the Town's Shoreline Revitalization Committee which is comprised of citizens representing different areas of the Town's lakeshore. During the past year the Committee assisted the Town of Hamburg Engineering and Planning Departments while participating in the development of a Local Waterfront Revitalization Grant to remediate shoreline erosion and develop the 18 Mile Creek as an inland waterway to enable greater public access and enhanced recreational opportunities.

The Committee grappled with the Halloween storm and two minor storms that occurred in November of 2019 which devastated the Hoover Beach Community and caused severe damage to Lakefront properties throughout the Mt. Vernon and Wanakah sections of our Township. The Committee has developed a sub-group to prepare an application to FEMA for future mitigation

of shoreline damage by permitting the installation of a break wall or revetments parallel to the shoreline from the beginning of Hoover Beach to the end of Mid Shore Drive. Going forward the Committee will deal with the perplexing difficulties that render assistance from the Federal and State governments fundamentally important to preserving the value of all lakefront properties.

At the dawn of this new decade I have renewed communications with the Woodmont Corp., duly appointed by the New York State Supreme Court to manage the McKinley Mall. The Receiver's obligations include the collection of rents and the payment of various expenses. Maintenance and upkeep of the Mall and the development of new rental opportunities are essential pieces of the overall duty that the Receiver has to the Community of Hamburg. I will push aggressive as opposed to passive marketing strategies to breathe short term life into this regional asset.

I cannot help but believe that inevitably the Mall must be re-born after a third party sale. There are creative options that other communities have used to resurrect huge shopping complexes that have been victimized by online sales and changing demographics. The Mall as a mixed use development, the Mall as a recreation and entertainment complex with shops and restaurants, the Mall reconstituted with housing options, a medical center, and retail outlets are all within the scope of our imaginations.

I hope to exert all the pressure that the Town can bring to bear to reverse the state of atrophy and lay the groundwork for the Mall's reimagining and rebirth through the infusion of new capital and new ownership.

Much publicity attended the formation of an Ad Hoc Committee to constructively respond to the retail vacancy rates in various strip plazas and commercially zoned areas throughout the Township. Older shopping plazas have sustained the most significant migration of retail options. Changing shopping patterns, online sales, along with changing lifestyles compel Town action to first understand the complex dynamics behind empty retail space and to devise plans to enhance re-use and redevelopment.

The Ad Hoc Committee has conducted a community-wide survey, has reached out to plaza owners and managers, along with community and business leaders to formulate a comprehensive program that can arrest the tide of vacancies and give impetus to the slow and steady return of shopping centers that are vital to the character of our community.

Securing grants for façade improvements, suspending increased assessments for property owners who undertake capital repairs or improvements and facilitating connectivity between the Village of Hamburg and the Township at large are all on the agenda for a final report to the Community in June of 2020.

One of the key components to a modernized retail concept would be the rezoning of approximately 6 acres on Camp Road at the borderline of the Town and Village which has been commonly known as the Riefler Concrete property. In the long run a mixed use development enhanced by securing Brownfield designations to enable developers to secure favorable tax treatment in the massive cleanup work that will be necessary is a long term goal worth reaching. That acreage characterized by office space, retail sales, along with apartments and/or townhomes would turn an eye sore into a Town center that would be a source of pride for generations to come.

At the same time you must know that under no circumstances can the Town consent to the installation and maintenance of an asphalt production facility on that property. From my point of view it is a nonstarter.

We must re-engage with the owner and potential developer of the South Shore Country Club to determine what can be done to enhance development of that valued acreage so that its future use can be made compatible with the commercial and residential mix that will characterize growth in our Community for the balance of this century.

On a grand scale, the Town is at work preparing a new and comprehensive master plan for land use preservation and development. A specially formed Committee in 2019 will work through the calendar year 2021 to develop with citizen input a master plan to chart future growth and to preserve green space that too often over the past years has been allowed to gradually diminish.

No great suburban community can attract and maintain businesses and still be a welcoming series of connected neighborhoods without a strong police force and a network of volunteer fire companies that together provide security to all who live here. We are blessed with a professional and nonpartisan police force. Our Volunteer Firefighters are the heart and soul of our Community.

In 1973, almost 47 years ago, the Town broke ground on the construction of an ice rink and hockey arena that has served generations of families in and around Hamburg with countless hours of recreational outlet and enjoyment. It is time to enlarge and refurbish the ice arena, and to add an indoor turf facility for lacrosse and soccer that will make the Nike Center a magnet for family sports and entertainment for people throughout Western New York.

In 2020 the Town will consider capital expenditures that must be made to infrastructure and to major Town facilities. Town drainage issues in the Mt. Vernon section of our Community, in Lake View and in the eastern corridor of the Township along Abbott Road have all been primary concerns that must be addressed sooner as opposed to later. Continued procrastination regarding fundamental infrastructure needs impairs our quality of life, devalues properties, and makes day to day living less safe. Town street repaving and storm sewer updates are fundamental to our wellbeing. Therefore, the Town will enter the municipal bond market this year to fund these essential capital projects, and build new ones.

Our Bond issue for 2020 must also finally bring Town government into compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act which Congress adopted in 1990. That fundamental duty must be considered in conjunction with a comprehensive plan to implement the Town wide energy audit that was completed in 2019. With the assistance we have received from the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) we hope to initiate a comprehensive LED lighting program that will result in energy efficiency, greater safety and significant savings as we refit street lighting throughout every neighborhood in our Community.

At long last, the Town will draft a solar energy local law so that we may consider how best to plan for solar energy farms and to lay the groundwork for the Town's gradual reliance upon solar energy in an effort to reduce our carbon footprint and costs associated with maintaining Town facilities.

Permit me to wrap up by suggesting to you that being the Supervisor of our Township requires a degree of patience and perseverance. The solutions to problems are not always readily ascertainable. In the long run leading by example offers encouragement to our workforce and lays the groundwork for a cooperative can-do spirit. I shall do my best to be tough when the circumstances call for it, to be appreciative of the cares and concerns of others and to be unflinchingly fair in the administration of the Town's day to day affairs without regard to political associations or party affiliation.

I've often said that no one can ever go too far wrong when he or she endeavors to do the right thing. Standing firm in the face of pressure, holding the line against a tide of criticism, and maintaining one's balance will carry the day. We are on the way to making Hamburg better than ever. I am a lucky fellow to be associated with such wonderful people in a community where caring for the needs of others has become our primary characteristic and concern.