

ORCHARD PARK, NEW YORK

STATE OF THE TOWN

Supervisor

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SERVING  
OUR COMMUNITY

Councilmember

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# 2016 STATE OF THE TOWN ADDRESS

## WELCOME

(Pat)

**Thank you** Mayor Litwin and trustees of the Village Board. It's been yet another eventful and strong year for village residents under your leadership. Not only is the village at the geographical center of Orchard Park; it is at the center of our lives as a community. It is, once again, a real honor for the members of the Town Board to be able to deliver our third joint Address to the community we serve.

And **thank all of you** (audience) for your presence here this evening. We greatly value your presence and, even more, your concern for our community. Once again we will not presume upon your time and patience by selecting some items for approval while lightly passing over others, as is typical of so many "State Of" addresses. Long ago the Greek philosopher Socrates declared politics to be the toughest of all trades. Well, it has been a tough year, and next year promises more of the same. Tough decisions had to be faced, and success has remained elusive for at least one of last year's goals.

## RETROSPECTIVE

(Pat)

But successes there have been. Although often taken for granted but immensely beneficial to our quality of life, as a community our greatest success, in terms of volume and quality, remains that of the work faithfully accomplished by our many volunteer committees, boards and task forces, as well as our employees. They are the backbone of our distinctive way of life. It is only the newness or perhaps uniqueness of the following successes that warrants their being singled out for mention in this Address, not any superior value. By its nature and Address is an update, not a comprehensive report.

Although it may not have seemed like it at the time, perhaps the most noteworthy accomplishment of the first half of last year was the removal of all the brush resulting from one of the most severe winters on record – one which lasted into April. There was so much of it, in fact, that the Buffalo News wrote an article that included a

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picture of what seemed like mountains of brush which had been removed by our highway department.

What has also proved a success during the first half of 2015 was the decision to hire the Drescher & Malecki accounting firm to fill a vacancy in our finance department. It was a decision arrived at in part thanks to the work of one of our Government Efficiency Task Force teams. At no increased cost to the town, the process improvements of this hire are still coming.

During the second half of the year two other Government Efficiencies Task Force teams provided the board with reports. A team working with the police department recommended the appointment of additional supervisory personnel in an effort to bring our department in line with the standard practice of peer communities. We will return to this matter later on. A third Government Efficiencies Task Force team working with our technologies department identified the need for additional technologies and personnel if the town is to maximize its efficiency and effectiveness in addressing the various legal, departmental and community needs. The board has, accordingly, approved the hiring of additional personnel, as well as some necessary software.

Our Senior Services Task Force provided its third report to the board this past fall. After months in the making, they presented the board with copies of a comprehensive resource guide outlining the supports and assistance available to our residents. It is a guide that will prove immensely valuable. Also approved last fall and implemented a few short weeks ago is a new waste collection contract. Although representing a significant cost increase over the previous five-year contract, it was the least costly of the available options and bids, and has the additional benefit of increasing the community's "green" fingerprint through the use of larger recycling carts.

(Gene)

Recently approved and now into the implementation phase is the purchasing of back up cameras for town highway trucks as well as GPS and salt dispenser units. The former will increase safety, and the latter will increase efficiency and savings during the winter months. Speaking of safety, the police department will soon have a full-time school resource officer in the Baker Road BOCES school at no additional cost to the town.

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Other items and projects have continued to move forward over the course of this past year. Assessment of the community's long-term infrastructural needs, necessary for the development of a master plan as well as budgeting, is ongoing. The Bussendorfer Road area drainage project is entering the bid phase. Designing of the Green Lake dredging and dam reconstruction has been completed, and the required NYSDEC permit is about to be issued. We will then be able to move forward with bids in anticipation of a June completion of work.

Contract negotiations with our White and Blue collar unions is ongoing, and both police union contracts expired at the end of 2015. Although negotiations can be difficult and protracted, it is evident that all parties are committed to our community and the principle of fairness. Orchard Park and this board remain thankful for the quality of services they continue to provide us.

A final mention relates to that of potential shared services with neighboring communities. Currently two possibilities are being floated while a third – the sharing of an electrical inspector with the town of West Seneca – was just implemented. These discussions can take a lot of time as the representatives from each community drill down to make sure that any eventual agreement will not result in diminished services to our respective communities.

But as stated a few moments ago, for one goal success remains elusive, meaning not fully unachievable, at least thus far. We are referring to police reaccreditation and the development and implementation of its first ever five year strategic plan. The principle, and perhaps sole reason for insufficient progress in both regards is owing to a lack of resources – human and financial. Accreditation and the enactment of a strategic plan are administrative functions. The reality is that the burgeoning legal and civil responsibilities and liabilities incumbent to all law enforcement agencies has not been matched in Orchard Park by an increase in the department's administrative capacity. The police department's command and administrative structures have remained largely stagnant.

In last year's State of the Town Address we noted that progress had been less than hoped for in the pursuit of police reaccreditation, suggesting that "the Town will

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need to find the resources, human and financial, that will enable a more concerted effort in 2015.” After receiving last year’s Government Efficiencies Task Force report – alluded to a few moments ago – which recommended the hiring of two additional lieutenants, the board decided to do so for the twofold intention of increasing both patrol supervision and administrative capacity. While determination of supervisory scheduling within the department was being worked on, end of year financial data as well as cost projections for 2016 necessitated the paring down of materiel and personnel for almost all department budgets.

As a result the 2016 budget provides for the appointment of only one additional lieutenant. We will reassess later this year to measure the impact this addition will have made and what the need remains, especially in relation to patrol supervision. Accreditation and strategic planning are best practices which would benefit our police department by rendering it more efficient and effective. We will, accordingly, keep it on our radar. But they are neither required nor necessary. This board and police management, as is the case with all our service-providing departments, must prioritize the allocation of limited financial resources, most of which is encumbered as fixed costs.

### FINANCES

(Mike)

And so we arrive at what was undoubtedly the most time consuming and consequential issue of 2015 – the town budget and the decision to exceed, for the first time, the tax cap. Thanks to a mutual respect and a shared concern for the community, through the medium of our two local papers taxpayers were kept informed, at an unprecedented depth, as to the issues and complexities facing the board and our community in this matter. We will not, therefore, subject all of you to a repetition of those complexities that resulted in our decision, although we remain ready and willing to explain them privately or in other venues.

Suffice it to say, we made a decision that was consistent with our promise from last February’s State of the Town Address and which we believe, although painful, was necessary for the continued fiscal well-being of Orchard Park as a local community. As we stated in that Address – after having first exposed the underbelly of Albany’s fiscal Trojan Horse – “One thing this Board can promise as we approach this choice of evils: we will not knowingly, inattentively or recklessly allow our community to be driven

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into fiscal distress and/or the loss of its right to choose, within reason, the kinds and levels of services we want.”

As anticipated, based on the Town’s preliminary close for the year ended December 31, 2015 it appears our expenditures will have exceeded revenues for a third consecutive year. That usage amounts to about \$500,000. Although this was a planned use of our fund balance or savings, the Board recognizes it cannot maintain this policy over the long term.

Allow us to give you an idea of what our community, like others, is up against. Two needed and fixed costs that we contract out for are garbage pickup and insurance coverage. Even after a thorough canvassing of potential providers and selecting the lowest responsible bidder the 2016 town-wide garbage contract increased by almost 25% or over \$300,000 from 2015, and contracted insurance is up in the 2016 budget by over \$200,000. These two items alone put us at over 3 times the tax cap.

Bringing this example home, as a result of the tax increase the average home in the Town will see an increase of about \$6.20/month due to town taxes. Of this, \$3.50/month is related to the increased cost of garbage pickup alone. The reality is that in the absence of increased revenues and/or significantly reduced costs, compliance with the current iteration of the tax cap is simply not sustainable if our community is to maintain the kinds and levels of service we currently enjoy.

Because of Albany’s utter failure to fulfill its promise of increased aid and/or actual mandate relief, our tax increase was the necessary choice of evils we referenced in last year’s Address. It was chosen, on the one hand, to avoid a measureable drop in our current levels of service. And on the other hand, it was chosen to avoid a draw down on the town’s savings to a level below the Government Finance Officers Association’s recommended minimum of two months expenditures on hand, an amount that equates to a combined general, public safety, and highway fund balance of \$3,253,464 for the town of Orchard Park. Other than through a significant cut in services, staying under the tax cap in 2016 would not only have risked dropping us below that level, but within a few years totally depleting our reserve funds, something that has already happened to other communities.

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In general, most Albany politicians continue to rely upon catchy phrases, grandiose claims, and taxpayers that are intentionally kept, or at least allowed to remain in the dark about the taxes they pay. This town board has, to the contrary, spared no effort to inform the taxpayer, and we will continue to do so. In December we launched what we refer to as the New Tax Cap Initiative. It represents a request in relation to the current iteration of the State's tax cap, not a protest against it as some have mistakenly understood or represented it. There are a number of problems the tax cap has created. So consistent with best organizational practices we composed a letter to the Governor asking him to revisit, that is, to assess all of the impacts of the tax cap and to improve it where possible. In that it relates directly to the well-being of local communities and taxpayer dollars, it seems extraordinary that local communities from all across New York State should have to even ask, and bordering on unconscionable that the pleas of so many local communities should be met with indifference and even the dismissiveness of the Goliath that is Albany.

### PROSPECTIVE

(Pat)

So where do we go from here in 2016. As we have done in our first two State of the Town Addresses, we have identified three goals.

Goal 1 (Pat). **To present a fully developed Community Activities Center plan to the community for a determination of its practicality and scope.** Phased-based infrastructural and operational aspects have been developed, in accord with one of the goals laid out in last year's Address. Work is currently underway in relation to its financing aspect.

Goal 2 (Gene). **To adopt a five-year rolling strategic plan by and specifically for the town council.** As you will see in a moment, most phases of such a plan have been completed – again, in accord with one of the goals laid out in last year's Address.

Goal 3 (Mike). **To implement outcomes-based government services.** Both operations and budgets will be managed in accord with desired results. This requires that *outcomes* be established, achievement *strategies* defined, expenditures and needed *resources* identified, *key indicators* of success

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determined, *progress* measured and monitored, *performance* assessed, and *results* reported.

### STRATEGIC PLAN

(Pat)

We want to conclude our third State of the Town Address by giving you some highlights from the strategic plan that has been being developed. It is not a plan for the town, nor for any or all of the services that the town provides. It is, rather, a plan for, that is, directed to the town council itself. It is intended, in other words, to guide the council in the execution of its governing responsibilities in behalf of our community.

We have chosen to have a plan developed that tells us, the council, what is good for us to do instead of our telling others what is good for them to do. This is not an abnegation of our responsibility to provide for the services our community needs and wants, but rather, we hope, an affirmation of what and how the community wants us to go about our responsibility to oversee the services provided.

The MISSION of the town council is twofold: firstly, to exercise such powers and discharge those duties required of it by law; and, secondly, to demonstrate and provide the kind of leadership that promotes the responsive, effective and efficient delivery of outstanding services, programs, infrastructure and support to our citizens and community.

(Gene)

The VISION that should inspire members of the town council is that of providing the desired and superior quality of life services and support our residents want at a price they are willing to pay, thereby helping to distinguish Orchard Park as a community of choice for living, learning, working and playing.

The STRATEGIC PATHWAYS for achieving this vision will include:

1. Developing and infusing results-based management into town government and culture.
2. Pursuing lean services that do not compromise the kinds and quality of services our residents need and want.



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3. Supporting growth management strategies that promote residential and business development which are consistent with the character and services of our community, and which protect our open spaces and the integrity of our neighborhoods and districts.
4. Dynamically engaging our community.

(Mike)

Overarching GOALS will consist of:

1. Implementing performance – and outcomes-based management across all departments. This will include objectives such as planning, continuous improvement practices, outcomes budgeting, and performance strategies.
2. Securing long-term financial stability. This will include objectives such as maintaining appropriate reserve funds, conservative multi-year budget forecasting, and building operational efficiencies.
3. Providing for and/or supporting superior public safety (inclusive of police, fire, EMS, emergency preparedness and building and property enforcement).
4. Promoting vibrant community life in areas related to recreation, leisure, social events and culture.
5. Improving our capital infrastructure through the development of master plans, asset inventories related to buildings, roadways, technologies, parks, and water and sewer.
6. Supporting robust economic development which is needs-based and attentive to community, neighborhood and commercial character.
7. Environmental sustainability in regards to green spaces, neighborhoods and districts, and our practices and technologies.
8. Intentional and meaningful communication and dialog with all constituents – residents, homeowners, businesses, community centers, committee/advisory groups, employees, and schools.

The Plan is not yet finished. Additional objectives and their specific initiatives whereby they will be achieved will be added as we move forward. It is, after all, intended to be a rolling strategic plan, meaning it will be subject to change continuously as needed or desired. In addition to being able to pick up a draft copy now, the draft Plan will be posted on line. Our hope is that residents will continue to offer up their thoughts and suggestions in relation to it, from grammatical corrections to goals, objectives and initiatives. We have tentatively scheduled April 06 for its formal adoption.

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### CLOSING (Pat)

Following upon the previous two State of the Town Address themes of *Protecting Our Community* and *Strengthening Our Community*, this year's overarching theme has been that of *Serving Our Community*. In it we have set forth two key approaches by which we intend to oversee the services town government provides for the next several years, namely, through a strategic plan for the town council and the infusion of management principles and practices that are focused upon the identification and achieving of desired outcomes.

We close this Address with a story about three stonecutters:

A man asked three stonecutters what they were doing. The first replied, "I am cutting stones to earn a living." The second kept on hammering while he said, "I am doing the best job of stonecutting in the entire country." The third looked up with a visionary gleam in his eye and said, "I am building a cathedral."

This Board is not content with simply doing the ordinary work of political bodies, like the first stonecutter. Nor are we, as seems to be endemic to politics, interested in competing and over-inflating our own accomplishments, as was the second stonecutter. Instead we are trying to be like the third stonecutter who recognized that he was part of the fabric and work of a much larger community and purpose that will take time to fully achieve. It is as a community that Orchard Park has been and will continue to be built up. And we remain honored to be a part of it.

In behalf of both the Village and Town Boards, thank you for coming...

We will now recess for about 10 minutes after which we will begin our normal public meeting of the Town Board.