

"STATE OF THE COUNTY
JANUARY 4, 2018

"I will begin this message by thanking Kevin Geraghty for serving as our County Administrator. I have asked Kevin to stay on as our acting County Administrator until a replacement is found and he has agreed to continue in this role (for at least a while longer). Kevin, I just want you to know how extremely thankful we are for your continued service.

"In 2017 we passed another on time budget staying under the State imposed tax cap. Much of the credit goes to Frank Thomas our Budget Officer, our budget team and our Department Heads for their good work. Frank continues to do an exceptional job with the County Budget and we are most appreciative of his continued and excellent service. I have asked Supervisor Frank Thomas to continue as Warren County Budget Officer for 2018.

"Also, I have asked Supervisor Matt Sokol to continue to Chair the Warren County Finance Committee and to continue in his responsibilities as Deputy Chairman of the Warren County Board of Supervisors.

"Today in Warren County we find ourselves with a stable if not slightly improving financial condition. Our bond rating continues to hold at AA+ Stable. We are in the enviable position of having an adequate unassigned fund balance of almost 17.3 million dollars. A reasonably healthy fund balance makes it possible to avoid short term borrowing for cash flow purposes and just as important annual appropriations from this fund balance helps us stay below the State imposed property tax cap.

"As our Treasurer Mike Swan correctly reminds us the fund balance is not inexhaustible, nor was it created overnight. It is the result of the fine work of our employees, department heads, one-time revenue and an overall conservative approach to expenditures and revenue projections by this Board.

"This year we will complete a \$16 million court expansion project. I am happy to report that the project is 3 months ahead of schedule and slightly under budget. The move of family court to their new facilities is scheduled to take place in early March of this year. My compliments to former Supervisor and Facilities Chair Dan Girard as well as Supervisor Ron Montesi, the Facilities Committee and our DPW staff for their very good efforts on this important project.

"Much thanks also to Mike Swan, Warren County Treasurer, for his efforts in timing and securing excellent financing for these projects thereby lowering the budget impact for The Court and the NSTEM Project.

“The NSTEM Project at SUNY Adirondack is another major project that was completed ahead of schedule and under budget which opened in 2017. I would also like to congratulate President Duffy and her project team for the successful delivery of this important project at SUNY Adirondack. It is a wonderful new addition to our college.

“In 2017 the Warren County Sales tax revenue was up approximately 2%. As you might expect, this year over year increase had a positive impact on both last year and this year’s County Budget.

“If the economy continues to improve in 2018 and we see additional growth in sales tax revenue we can expect our five-year projections to also improve. That said, I do not believe our present expense to revenue picture is sustainable and the five-year projections while showing some improvement continue to bear this out. As we did in 2017 we will need to find additional efficiencies and savings in 2018 if we are to continue to stay below the tax cap.

“As you all know, we have authorized advertising for a request for qualifications and proposals for contracting services and work at the County Airport. Our goal has been to explore whether continued privatization of FBO functions and even expansion of services is the best way to proceed.

“While we have achieved savings at Floyd Bennett Airport by centralizing some Airport and DPW operations, there is much more to be done. To me the question is simple, those operations we can do more efficiently by contracting with the private sector we will certainly consider. Those functions we can do at less cost with our own staff must also be considered.

“To help lead us to the best place possible I have asked Supervisor Jack Diamond to Chair our Facilities Committee. Jack comes to us with a wealth of experience and knowhow and I am confident he will provide the strong leadership we need to Chair of Facilities. I continue to believe that by working together we can build upon the success we have had at the airport while achieving increased efficiencies and savings.

“In 2017 we settled with Siemens and secured outstanding state Medicaid reimbursements owed to Warren County for reimbursement for the cogen facility. Most of the Medicaid funds are part revenue to a reserve fund established by the Board to pay legacy costs associated with Westmount and as such securing these funds was important to our operating budget.

“In 2018 I am hopeful that we will settle the remaining universal settlement associated with this facility. This settlement will provide the remaining revenue

owed to Warren County by the State of New York and are also a part of this reserve fund.

“In 2017 we completed an employee evaluation program. Overall, I think it was a useful process both for us and our employees and I expect this program will continue and even improve in 2018. In 2018 we have important appointments to make not the least of which includes a County Administrator and Social Services Commissioner. I have asked Supervisor Geraghty to Chair the Personnel and SUNY ACC Committee. Having been budget officer for many years along with his intimate understanding of our union contracts and county personnel Kevin is well suited to Chair this important committee.

“Last year we negotiated and settled with three union contracts. For 2018 we will be negotiating two more. No small or simple matter. I would like to thank Kevin Geraghty and our negotiation team for their excellent work in 2017 and I have every confidence the same will be in 2018.

“In 2017 we moved to self-insurance for our health coverage. This decision resulted in the avoidance of a large double digit increase possibly as much as 13%. As our health insurance costs are well above 10 million dollars this cost avoidance was a significant benefit to our budget and I might add our employees who share in this cost.

“Our hope is that this experience with self-insurance will continue in 2018 going into 2019 and that we can keep future rate growth in health insurance costs at a more manageable level.

“Beginning in 2018 we must address the provision of EMS services especially in our more rural areas. The existing response systems are being stressed and our EMS experts have advised us that the situation will only get worse. We know based on our meetings and conversations that this is also the case in other neighboring counties as well. It is vitally important that we act this year to insure adequate, sustainable emergency response systems for our residents and visitors. I have asked Supervisors Simpson, Leggett, Geraghty, Dickinson, Hogan, Wild and Sheriff York along with Brian LaFlure to spearhead this vitally important initiative. Legislation presently being advanced by Senator Little that would authorize County’s to establish EMS Districts on a County or Part County basis is a great step in the right direction. I would hope that in the coming months this Board will endorse this proposed legislation and actively lobby for its adoption. I have requested that Brian Laflure assemble the relevant material for your review and eventual consideration. At the same time, we will explore how the State’ Shared Services initiative can aid us in helping to pay for this initiative. I do not believe

there is a more important decision in 2018 than establishing a County or Part County platform for the long-term delivery of these essential services.

“This past year we privately bid some of our highway work which allowed us to do more roads. As we did in 2017, we will continue to solicit private paving bids for our County Roads in 2018. This year we hope to improve on our bid process by getting off to an earlier start. I would like to personally thank DPW Chairman Matt Simpson and the DPW Committee for shepherding this initiative in 2017 and I have no doubt it will be equally successful in 2018 and help us deliver more road improvement projects.

“I think it is fair to say that there is growing sentiment that the railroad corridor could provide larger economic benefit to the region as a recreational corridor than as exclusively a rail line. Continuing and growing concerns regarding rail storage facilities in the Adirondacks adds to this overall concern and further underscores the need for a plan of action. As you all know the State of New York has joined with Warren and Essex Counties in opposition to rail storage facilities in the Adirondacks and I think the prudent thing at this stage is to begin to investigate whether a recreational trail should be created, by whom, at what costs, for which users and how to pay for its creation and maintenance. I am therefore requesting Matt Simpson and our DPW committee begin discussions with our corridor partners including the State of New York as to the best path forward. Initially I would like to see a grant application be submitted to the State of New York the purpose of which will be to help fund a comprehensive review and to begin answering these and other questions and issues regarding the best long-term plan of uses for this major public asset. We need to do this in the best way possible so that we arrive at the best place possible.

“In 2018 we will need to develop a shared services plan for submittal to New York State. Our efforts thus far under our existing plan has resulted in significant savings. The 2018 plan will look to build upon this success and I believe that if we all continue to work together we can do even more to expand on these savings.

“In 2018 we will be expanding our partnership with the private sector through the Regional Chamber Convention and Visitor Bureau to improve our Overall Tourism Program. We have an exceptional Tourism Program and I am excited by the opportunity to develop more events and to work closely with our business community to better package our region.

“While occupancy tax revenues were up in 2017 we must continue to keep a very watchful eye on occupancy tax spending. I know Supervisors Dickinson and Merlino are very watchful of this program and I would like to publicly thank them for their

good work as Chairs of the Tourism and Occupancy Tax Committees. I have asked that they continue to Chair these important committees in 2018.

“We are fortunate to have great employees that day in and out do an exceptional job many times under difficult, even harsh conditions. Our employees have been very supportive of our acting County Administrator and our Committee Chairs and I have every confidence that this cooperation, support and dedicated service will continue. They are an exceptional group of dedicated individuals and we are most appreciative of their work on behalf of the residents of Warren County. They are the unsung heroes that make it all work. They are the people that keep us safe, respond to emergencies, assist the less fortunate, help our neighbors stay in their homes, plow and maintain our roads and bridges, maintain our municipal buildings and grounds and serve our residents in so many more vital and important ways. On behalf of the Warren County Board of Supervisors I would like to take this opportunity to thank our county employees for their service and to wish all our employees a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year.

“I have had the great privilege these past eight years of being Bolton’s representative to the Warren County Board of Supervisors, four as Deputy Chairman and for the past year as Chairman of the Board.

“As Chairman, it is my job to help set the agenda, steward the process, ensure that it is open and fair and that those wishing to speak are heard. This is the essence of our democratic system of government and you can be assured that I will continue to perform these duties to the very best of my ability, so help me God.

Respectfully submitted,
Ronald F. Conover, Chairman
Warren County Board of Supervisors”