

"STATE OF THE COUNTY
JANUARY 4, 2019

"I will begin by thanking everyone for their vote on confidence serving as Chairman of the Warren County Board of Supervisors these past two years, as it had been a distinct honor. I am humbled by your support and grateful for the opportunity to serve the taxpayers of this County for another year.

"In 2018 we passed another on-time 2019 Budget staying under the State-imposed tax cap. Much of the credit goes to Frank Thomas our Budget Officer, our Budget Team including Ryan Moore and his colleagues in the Administrator's office, and of course our Department Heads. Frank continues to do an exceptional job with the County Budget and we are most appreciative of his continued and excellent service on behalf of the taxpayers. I have asked Supervisor Frank Thomas to continue as Warren County Budget Officer for 2019, and he has accepted.

"In 2018 we caught a few revenue breaks. Reduced retiree health insurance costs and increased sales tax revenue were enormously helpful in preparing the 2019 Budget. While retiree premium cost growth will be capped for 2020, we should not take for granted that sales tax will be as robust in 2019; therefore we will continue to carefully forecast and analyze the County's short and long-term finances. This year more than in any previous year since its development, our five-year budget forecast aided us in our budget analysis and decision-making. It provided us multiple financial scenarios based on possible actions. In short it has taken us to a new level in our budget analysis and our decision-making.

"For 2019 I have asked Supervisor Matt Sokol to continue to Chair the Warren County Finance Committee. As Chair of this Committee, Matt will also continue in his responsibilities as Vice Chairman of the Warren County Board of Supervisors. Matt is someone with the knowledge, experience and temperament to step in on a moment's notice to perform the duties of the Chair should he be called upon to do so.

"Today Warren County finds itself in a good financial condition. Our bond rating continues to hold at AA Stable. We have no need for short-term borrowing for cash flow purposes and our bonded indebtedness of \$44 million is but a fraction of our constitutional debt limit of \$158 million. We are in the enviable position of having an adequate unassigned fund balance of about \$19.5 million, which is forecasted to grow when the 2018 books are closed.

"A healthy fund balance makes it possible to avoid short-term borrowing and helps us stay below the State imposed property tax cap, which we've done every

year since it began. Our County tax rate is the tenth lowest in the state, and our local sales tax rate of 3% is the lowest in the state.

“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, an overall conservative approach to expenditures and revenue projections by this Board, and frankly, a few lucky breaks such as last year’s sales tax. Going forward we must be extremely careful about using these savings for recurring annual operating costs.

“Last year we largely completed a \$16 million court expansion project. This major project was on budget and many months ahead of schedule. My compliments to all involved in the project and the smooth planning that has taken place during the transition into this new space. In 2019 phases 3-5 will begin including rehab to the Supreme Court Facility. I have every expectation and confidence that under the excellent leadership of Kevin Hajos and Frank Morehouse, these phases of the project will be completed on time and within budget.

“Much thanks also to Warren County Treasurer Mike Swan for his efforts in timing and securing excellent financing for this project and the NSTEM Project at SUNY Adirondack Community College. If you have not seen the new building or Adirondack Hall, I recommend you do so. It is an important new addition to the college and our community, as is the new Culinary Arts Institute in downtown Glens Falls. Once again, I would also like to congratulate President Duffy and her project team for the successful delivery of these important projects to our college and our community.

“In 2018 the Warren County Sales tax revenue was up approximately 5.5%. As you might expect, this year-over-year increase had a positive impact on the 2019 County Budget. That being said, we all need to keep a watchful eye on these revenues as we move into 2019. If necessary we should be prepared to make operating adjustments should sales tax revenues begin to wain.

“In 2018 we completed Fixed Base Operations bidding and related contracts for the County Airport. It should result in a greater share of Airport revenue to the County. It is a credit to our Department Heads that participated in the development of the RFP and to our County Facilities Committee, our Highway Superintendent, Airport Manager and our negotiating team of Supervisors Beaty, McDevitt and Sokol. For 2019 the net cost of the Airport is estimated at approximately \$356,000. That’s down significantly from last year’s budgeted amount of \$546,000. Over the next ten years we’re conservatively projecting a 3.5% per year growth in Airport revenue. If that happens, it will represent almost \$2.4 million dollars in cumulative savings over the next ten years.

“In 2019 we will begin to consider a significant modification to the runway expansion project. Much thanks to our Airport Manager, Don DeGraw, and Highway Superintendent, Kevin Hajos, for advancing an alternative option that is less costly and less environmentally intrusive. I look forward to hearing from the FAA relative to this option as we move into 2019.

“In 2018 we made important appointments including the County Administrator, Social Services Commissioner, Airport Manager, Health Department Director and DPW Superintendent. I think most of you would agree that these appointments are paying big dividends to Warren County. Much of the credit for getting this done belongs to our Personnel Committee under the excellent Chairmanship of Kevin Geraghty. Today, we are in a much better place in so many ways and I would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank Kevin for making sure that these appointments got done in 2018. I have asked Kevin to continue to serve as Personnel Chair in 2019 and he has accepted.

“This year we will conclude interest arbitration with the PBA, continue negotiations with the Police Supervisors Union, and begin negotiating with the CSEA; no small or simple matter. I have every confidence in our team that we will end in a good place that is fair to both taxpayers and our dedicated employees.

“In 2017 we moved to self-insurance for our health coverage. This decision resulted in the avoidance of a large double digit increase in health costs in 2018 and 2019. As our health insurance costs are above \$11 million, this cost avoidance was a significant benefit to our 2019 Budget and I might add to our employees and retirees, who share in these costs. Our move to Humana for 2019 for our retirees resulted in a \$900,000 expense reduction to our 2019 Budget. Our expectation is that our experience with self-insurance will continue to be positive in 2019 and beyond and that we will be able to keep the future growth in health insurance at a more manageable level.

“In 2018 we began the process of addressing the provision of EMS services in our more rural areas. The existing response systems continue to be stressed and our EMS experts have advised us that the situation was only going to 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 continue to work toward adequate, sustainable emergency response systems for our residents and visitors. The legislation introduced by Senator Little failed to make it out of the Assembly last year; this year we will once again lobby Albany for legislation to help us set up a part county tax district. Other counties will be joining us in delivering this message including the New York State Association of Counties. In the interim we must continue to develop our plan of action. I

have once again asked Supervisor Leggett to lead this undertaking and he has accepted. There is not a more important task going forward than putting our EMS response on a sound, professional financial footing.

“In 2019 we will implement our Shared Services plan. I am especially excited to work with my fellow town supervisors, Mayor Hall and Mayor Blais on LED conversions for our streetlights with the assistance of the New York Power Authority.

“In 2019 our plan is to expand on our highway improvement program. These improvements are needed, and I would hope that the allocation of additional funding proposed in the Budget Officers message will be approved early in 2019. Also, in 2019 we will be soliciting an RFP for the Railroad Corridor. I would like to thank DPW Chairman Matt Simpson and the DPW Committee for spearheading this initiative in 2018 and into 2019. I have no doubt that, like the Airport RFP, if we invest time and resources in the process we will get to the best place possible. I have asked Matt to continue to lead the Public Works Committee. As far as I am concerned relative to the Corridor, everything is on the table until such time as this Board says otherwise.

“In 2019 we will be expanding our partnership with the private sector through the Regional Chamber Of Commerce 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. The numbers don't lie, occupancy tax revenues last year were up more than 4%, which demonstrates that our collective efforts are working. I know Supervisor Merlino and Supervisor Dickinson 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 2019.

“Working with our municipal partners, we are making excellent progress in addressing the amount of salt that we use on our roads. New salt products, special equipment, brining techniques, temperature sensors, cameras, computers and accurate calibrations are examples that are moving us to a better understanding of salt use which will hopefully result in much less salt finding its way into the environment and into our waters.

“So too with the issue of harmful algae blooms as we did with aquatic invasive species we are leading the way with reducing the introduction of nitrates into our waters. The Town of Queensbury has already adopted a septic compliance ordinance with other Lake George communities soon to follow. Other initiatives in Queensbury and Lake George to help property owners upgrade their septic

systems are underway and set an excellent example of what can be done when we work in concert toward important goals.

“As many of you know I continue to believe that Warren County needs to play a greater role in assisting with the modernization of infrastructure throughout our County. The first step to meeting this challenge was to develop a County-wide capital plan. Our Shared Services Plan begins the process with engineering assistance from Warren County to its municipalities. The new sewer treatment plant in Lake George, Storm Water separation work in the City of Glens Falls and other communities, water and sewer work in numerous towns are a few examples that need to be addressed. Let us now take the next step to develop a full capital plan for our County. To aid us in developing such a County-wide Capital Plan, I will be asking our County Administrator, working with our Planning Office and Ed Bartholomew and our economic development partners, to begin the process of developing a comprehensive capital infrastructure plan for our County and our municipalities. From this comprehensive plan we will be better able to direct our needs to available funding sources. We will be better able to prioritize them and position our projects for funding. Eventually, I believe Warren County should create a major capital funding program to assist with the myriad of costs including up-front engineering, local share on capital projects and even project costs. Let us spend 2019 putting into place the talent, program and resources to get this done. I have asked Supervisor Simpson to spearhead this initiative through the Public Works Committee.

“We are fortunate to have great employees who day in and day out do an excellent job providing services to the people of this county, many of them do so under difficult, harsh and even dangerous conditions. They are an exceptional group of dedicated individuals and we are most appreciative of all they do. They are the unsung heroes who 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 privilege these past nine years of being Bolton’s representative to the Warren County Board of Supervisors, four as Vice Chairman and for the past two years 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”