

STATE OF THE COUNTY

2014-15



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MADISON COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
CHAIRMAN

INTRO AND HISTORY

Good afternoon, everyone. This is the eighth time I have addressed you from this position for a State of the County Address. The job has not been easy or taken lightly.

Let me speak for a moment about public service...

Anyone who thinks these jobs are easy or ‘gravy’ positions is sadly mistaken. These are positions where when decisions are made, they are second-guessed constantly. Personal attacks are frequent and vicious, and people view elected officials not in the highest regard.

There is nothing further from the truth.

Electeds who take these jobs here truly care.

Electeds are asked to be referees in neighborhood disputes between unreasonable or unruly residents – most of whom only have half the facts.

Electeds must weigh the impacts on our constituents at budget time when deciding the necessity of preserving County services, protecting taxpayer investment in equipment and buildings and retaining professional and caring employees with adequate compensation vs. raising taxes.

I can guarantee that any supervisor here who cares stays awake at night worrying about decisions that he or she has made – or must make – and how they impact people. We are in the people business: public safety, road maintenance, building maintenance, child welfare, social services and care and benefits for the elderly and less fortunate.

The people business is not easy, and isn't any easier when under personal attack.

Eight years ago, we had a good, healthy fund balance – about \$16 million. I had become chairman and staunchly held the position that we would not raise taxes. And we didn't.

People were hurting. [emphasis added]

In the years 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010, that \$16 million went back to the taxpayers in the form of no – or very minimal – tax increases. We cut jobs and equipment, consolidated departments, moved people from full- to part-time and streamlined as many county services and functions as we could, all while keeping in mind that people were in bad shape and they couldn't take any more.

While these efforts were underway, the price of fuel was skyrocketing, which meant Highway Department expenses escalated, Department of Social Services HEAP applications tripled and the cost of fueling Sheriff's Office patrol cars rose 2-and-one-half percent.

With the hike in energy costs came other impacts. The price of blacktop went from \$27 to \$75 a ton and salt rose from \$25 to \$50 a ton. The price of a basic truck spiked from \$150,000 to \$210,000. Patrol cars increased from the mid-\$20,000s to the mid-\$30,000s.

Taxes have gone up significantly the past two years, but I believe the worst is over and anticipate a less-than-2-percent increase in 2016. To be efficient yet still have the services that are demanded, the county has to be more proactive in its allocation and use of resources.

One example is the flooding in Oneida, DeRuyter, Brookfield, Eaton and other places in Madison County two years ago. We increased the stream maintenance and Soil and Water Conservation budgets this year so that we can mitigate potential future flooding. Keeping debris and trees

from plugging streams, culverts, ditches and other water paths, we can prevent problems later on.

This past year brought us another type of disaster: a tornado that touched down in Smithfield. This is the worst type of disaster; not only was property decimated, lives were lost. Structures can be rebuilt; lives cannot. Our county workforce came together, along with volunteers from all over, to help those affected by this tragedy.

One thing is clear: Undersheriff John Ball is right. He always tells me, ‘It’s not a matter of IF this is going to happen, but WHEN.’

This is why we on the Board of Supervisors have decided to put together the Office of Emergency Management. This move provides us an inventory of the resources at our disposal and prepares us for future disasters by allowing us to harness those resources at a moment’s notice to plan for and address life-threatening problems as they arise. Whether it is flooding, tornadoes, blizzards – like the one recently experienced in the Buffalo area, to which we dispatched aid in the form of two trucks and four crew members – or another railroad disaster, we will be ready.

In addition to the railroad, we have four major state routes and the Thruway running through Madison County, all of which provide pathways for commercial vehicles carrying hazardous materials. Despite these operators taking every safety precaution in the safe handling of these materials, factors outside their control can quickly turn a routine, every-day transport into a disaster.

The major rail line for the northeast running through Madison County has seen a 30-percent increase in energy source shipments with the development of oil shale in the midwest.

We need to be ready. [emphasis added]

We are actively looking for an emergency manager to coordinate all aspects of a disaster when the need arises.

This also ties in with Public Health in handling a pandemic or other problem outbreaks with local hospitals overwhelmed, mass evacuations, mass casualties and the like.

We need to be ready. [emphasis added]

We have increased Highway Department funding to maintain the level of road quality people are used to; however, we need a huge influx of grant money to fix our bridges. The federal government realizes that we have a problem, and Congressman Hannah, along with Senators Schumer and Gillibrand, will be helping us out in bringing home money to take care of the \$9 million bill to fix the 21 deficient bridges in our county.

The big bridge project for 2015 will be the North Court Street bridge in Wampsville.

YEAR IN REVIEW

I want to personally give a big thank you to County Treasurer Cindy Edick and her employees; two years ago, we invested more than a half-million dollars to bring the county's payroll, financial and purchasing systems into the 21st century. We were operating in a DOS-based system that, at any time, if it went down, could have been a disaster in itself. This new system, called MUNIS, will allow the Treasurer's Office to do away with the tedious payroll sheets and streamlines the functionality of the Treasurer's Office, allowing it to be more efficient.

We believe this upgrade will pay big dividends in the future.

There has been a lot of sacrifice, worry and extra time spent by all of the employees of the Treasurer's Office trying to get this online, and it has not gone unnoticed.

Hats off to you, Cindy, and your team for again exemplifying the county workforce by working together to get the job done; we know it hasn't been easy.

In 2014, County Buildings coordinated the overhaul of our elevator, although it is not much faster, it will allow for a more readily available parts stream to cut down on critical downtime. More dedicated employees whose efforts do not go unnoticed in Buildings and Grounds. We also finalized the purchase of the Wampsville Fire Park building in 2014 – a move that will relocate our Sheriff's road patrol to free-up critical space at the jail.

Some other highlights for 2014 include:

PUBLIC HEALTH – The county, through the effort of the Health Department, was instrumental in establishing the Rural Health Council of

Madison County, a non-profit rural health network that will play an integral role in assisting local providers and residents to navigate the significant health care system challenges occurring in New York State. Contributing to this public-private partnership, the county Health Department secured a federal HRSA grant on behalf of the Rural Health Council that will assist local providers in transitioning to an electronic health records system.

Public Health also did a health study for the towns of Georgetown and DeRuyter, as promised to the citizens of those areas, for the proposed compressor station in Georgetown. When Georgetown Supervisor Pete Walrod asked me what I thought about the county doing that study, I didn't see any downside. After all, a study like that could potentially help the whole county. Many benefit from efforts like this.

That is the good thing about having a Board of Supervisors – direct input and team efforts at both the town and county levels.

MENTAL HEALTH AND PROBATION – the Mental Health and Probation departments are under new leadership and running well.

ELECTIONS – saw the retirement of longtime employee Lynne Jones and Roxanne Jackson, leaving us two spots to fill. Kelley Hood replaces Lynne and we also welcome Mary Egger, who takes Roxanne’s position.

PERSONNEL – has five open contracts going into 2015, a task that won’t be easy, but the dedication of the department’s staff will make them ready for the challenge.

911 CENTER – updated its radio consoles and collaborated with the NYS Police to move the county’s backup center to Troop D Headquarters.

DSS – implemented a task-based system to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the financial aid programs. The task-based system allows work to be assigned to staff based on availability and expertise. It also allows more control of supervisory and management oversight.

DSS continued to engage work-eligible participants in completing projects that benefit the community.

It was also the first full year of the state Department of Health “taking over” Medicaid administration. The state designated website experienced early problems, but, overall, the program roll-out has been widely hailed as

a success; however, workload relief for the local counties is an elusive desire with some work remaining at DSS and some of it returning. Full implementation is several years away.

DSS experienced staff turnover at unprecedented rates, none more troubling than in our child welfare unit. In spite of this, foster care placements remained stable throughout the year; however, for those children in foster care, many needed higher levels of care than could be provided in foster boarding homes. This drove costs skyward with the costs of placements exceeding \$4 million for the first time in many years and required an additional \$1.7 million for the 2015 county budget.

THE HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT – cleaned up severe storm damage in the southern portion of the county July 5 and assisted with the cleanup from the tornado damage in Smithfield, all while still completing 22 miles of recycled and paved roadways, 44.6 miles of preservation treatments, replacing two large-sized culverts, painting seven bridges and washing all bridges.

The department is successfully working on six bridge projects all in one year, including North Court Street, South Court Street, Creek Road, Hunt Road, Middle Road and Eaton Road, and still completing the 19.34 miles of roadway recycling and paving projects, two large culvert replacements, and 49.72 miles of preservation treatments.

COUNTY CLERK’S OFFICE – in Albany in October 2014, New York State Archives honored the Madison County Clerk, the Madison County Historian, and Madison-Oneida BOCES by awarding them The Annual Archives Award for Excellence in the Educational Use of Local Government Records by a Local Government. This partnership culminated in Madison County’s historical documents inclusion in lesson plans posted on the Internet for use by teachers, researchers, and librarians.

Again, we strive to serve our DMV customers most effectively and inform constituents that local DMV transactions help keep our taxes down.

YOUTH BUREAU – in addition to providing Office of Children & Family Services funding to seven community-based organizations that provided programs and services to more than 700 Madison County children and

youth in 2014, the Youth Bureau also expanded its own direct service programming. As a result, 37 high school students participated in job shadowing opportunities in Madison County departments; 27 students participated in the Youth Bureau's Civic Engagement/Leadership Development program and 16 students participated in the Local Government Internship program on the County campus that the Youth Bureau facilitates in cooperation with Cornell Cooperative Extension.

THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE – had a full plate in 2014 with the tornado in Smithfield – handled flawlessly with the coordination of several agencies – another example of our employees making a difference.

The Sheriff also ramped up staff in the jail to state standards.

The Board has understood in the past that the staff of the Sheriff's Office needs the tools to do their jobs; that is why we continued to fund the next phase of the road patrol's overhaul of its fleet of cars. This should result in every car being replaced when it is three years old.

For 2015, we look forward to the shifting of personnel to the new road patrol building and seeing positive, productive results from the

department's drug efforts and cooperative work with the new director of emergency management.

IT – the IT Department has continued to make great strides in providing customer service to the county departments and security to the network. In 2015, the department will implement an out-of-county disaster recovery data center to provide redundancy in the event of a critical failure on campus. The department is also working to implement the new state-of-the-art voice over Internet phone system next month. Any municipality in the county can utilize this new system, which, in turn, will provide cost savings and efficiencies for those who participate.

PURCHASING – the county transitioned to a centralized purchasing model in 2014, streamlining county processes and saving taxpayer dollars under the leadership of Nicole Farino. In 2015, Nicole will look to greatly expand cooperative bidding with municipalities throughout the county to save money for all jurisdictions.

PLANNING – in 2014, Madison County undertook negotiations to minimize its carbon footprint and save costs by participating in a 2 MW

solar Power Purchase Agreement. The system will consist of more than 6,800 high efficiency solar panels and will take up about 8 to 10 acres of vacant land at the County's Solid Waste Facility in Lincoln. There is no cost to the county for the solar system. The county only pays for the power produced by the system at a rate significantly less than the current utility rate.

Through Remote Net Metering, Madison County is able to produce up to 63 percent of its electrical energy needs offsite, to be used to power its facilities in Wampsville. It is anticipated that this project will save the county nearly \$200,000 per year while significantly lowering its carbon footprint; the county looks forward to the system coming online in late 2015.

Also for 2014, the Planning Department saw continued work on the rail trail, as well as other projects throughout the county. Again, a dedicated staff and leader makes Madison County a frontrunner in many innovative areas.

Our landfill – whose leadership by Jim Zecca has been recognized time and time again for being innovative – was officially recognized as Recycler of the Year for 2014. The landfill continues to be a bright spot in the county, with the gas-to-energy projects and solar blanket initiative. We saw the groundbreaking for Johnson Brothers Lumber drying kilns in the Agriculture and Renewable Energy Park, which will utilize excess heat from the landfill gas project. These public-private partnerships exemplify the team effort with public government, private business and a forward-thinking county IDA.

We look forward to the construction of the sewer line that will reduce our costs in trucking waste to other wastewater treatment plants. We will be moving ahead on supplying water for the landfill, with Madison County and OCWA partnering for long-term future projects not only for the landfill, but also for many homeowners in the area.

The one elusive business that is a priority to get into the ARE Park is the plastics-to-oil business; we will be doubling down to get that effort to fruition.

Also at the Landfill is the ReUse Store which has everything from toys, radios, tools, and furniture. Check out their website to see when it is open. There is something for everyone there.

The Oneida Indian Nation settlement is fully in place for 2014.

Although we have some things for our county and the state to work out, the Nation has been a big help on things such as the floods in Oneida with equipment and manpower, manpower at the tornado and we have included them in our selection process for the director of emergency management search.

We recognize that the Nation is here to stay and has a stake in the communities in which their employees live.

For New York State, we need to hammer out some of the details that were left off when we directly negotiated with the Governor. I have asked for a meeting again with him personally a month ago, and I hope his staff sees the critical nature of our meeting.

Our New York State legislators need to understand that unfunded state mandates kill the locals and do nothing to help our local economies. With

fewer state mandates and regulations, we would not need programs like STARTUP NY or pilot programs. The Assembly and Senate need to ask themselves why people are leaving and why businesses are not coming here: it's not the local taxes; it's the state mandates.

We give too much away.

ON BOARD FOR 2015

There will be some changes in 2015. Elections will be moving downstairs for easier access to the public and to provide more room for training and machines. This will allow Real Property to move upstairs out of the basement to be next to the Treasurer's Office, which will oversee that department.

Again, dedicated employees in Maintenance and the leadership of a dedicated department head allows for a seamless transition for these departments and offices.

Also in 2015, the county Employment and Training offices will be moving over to the downstairs of the DSS building. This move will save the county about \$100,000 a year.

The one major project that will take place over the next four to five years will be an evaluation and possible complete overhaul/ rebuild of our county court house. This project will be massive not only in time, money and manpower, but also should result in a completely ADA-compliant court house with state-of-the-art security and state-of-the-art functionality. We no longer can afford to put Band-Aids on the 100-year-old building.

In closing, I hope I have emphasized that, eight years ago, we set out to restructure the county, through good times and bad, the fruits of this restructuring are finally taking shape. Our county should be poised for the next 30 to 40 years to be efficient and grow without any problems and to once again see a slow, even growth in the tax levy, to what we could reasonably expect, and that our most important and valuable assets are our employees.

People. Whether you are on this side of the aisle or that, or on this side of the counter or the other, it's all about people.

So, as I started out before someone goes after a public official, think about whether you'd want to walk a mile in their shoes.

To our employees, whether you are salaried, hourly, full-time or part-time, thank you. Your work is important, and we are proud of our workforce, who every day bring it on and take it all with a smile, just to make our home – Madison County – a better place.

Thank you.