

North Hempstead State of the Town Address

February 1, 2007

Supervisor
Jon Kaiman

Good Afternoon. To begin with, let me thank our host, the League of Woman Voters, for sponsoring this wonderful annual event. Let me also acknowledge our Town elected officials, Councilman Tom Dwyer, Councilman Angelo Ferrara, Councilman Fred Pollack, Councilwoman Lee Seeman, Councilman Robert Troiano, and Councilman Wayne Wink. I would also like to acknowledge Town Clerk Michelle Schimel and Receiver of Taxes Rocco Iannarelli.

I can tell you that I continue to be impressed with the commitment to public service illustrated by this Town's elected officials on both sides of the political aisle. Each has shown creativity, ability, and integrity and I am proud to work with all of them.

Let me also acknowledge at this time those who help manage this town and are doing an extraordinary job. Deputy Town Supervisor Chris Senior, Chief of Staff Jo-Anne Taormina, Town Attorney Richard Finkel, Comptroller Paul Pathe, Commissioner of Finance Helene Beckerman, Commissioner of Information Technology Tom Harty, Commissioner of Community Services Madge Kaplan, Commissioner of Administrative Services Ray Levan, Commissioner of Planning Michael Levine, Commissioner of Public Safety Edward Neidich, Commissioner of Parks and Recreation Jerry Olsen, Highway Superintendent Tom Tiernan, and our newest commissioners, Commissioner of Public Works Michael Martirano and Commissioner of Buildings James O'Connor. Also, we have Director of Solid Waste Management Michael Engelmann, Director of Emergency Management Janet Wohlers, Director of Communications David Chauvin, Director of the Office of Inter-Municipal Coordination Rafael Lieber, Director of Municipal Affairs Deena Lesser, Director of Community Based Planning April Brown Lake, Director of Budget Review and Grants Management Dan Nachbar, Director of Special Projects Kevin Kelly, Director of Code Enforcement John Macedo, and Director of Project Independence Caisy Goldschmidt. Of course I thank and acknowledge all deputy commissioners and management personnel, my office staff, Helen McCann and Christine Michelin and the 311 call center staff as well. Also, I thank and acknowledge the union leadership of the town and the entire workforce of the Town of North Hempstead who do such a wonderful job serving the residents of our community. I would also like to thank Linda Brickman for serving as acting Buildings Commissioner and Jillian Guiney for serving as acting Public Works Commissioner, they both did an outstanding job and came through for us when we needed them.

I would also like to thank those who serve on our advisory boards and commissions such as the Board of Zoning Appeals, the Community Development Agency, the North Hempstead Housing Authority, the Town's Ethics Board, our Waterfront Advisory Commission, Senior Citizens' Commission, Traffic Safety Commission, Ecological Commission, Historic Landmarks Commission, and the Clinton G. Martin advisory board.

I would like to take a moment to thank Barbara Blumberg for her years of service to the Town in many capacities, but most recently as Chairwoman of the North Hempstead Housing Authority. I welcome Matthew Cuomo who is replacing her and I am sure will serve with ability and distinction.

As I begin my fourth year as North Hempstead Town Supervisor, I am proud to be able to tell you that the Town of North Hempstead continues to thrive with solid finances, strong management, new technological support, creative and exciting programming and our continued commitment to being accessible and responsive to our residents.

First and foremost, I am happy to report that the Town is on its strongest financial footing in Town History. The Town, as reported last year, is maintaining its Aa2 rating from Moody's financial services, placing the Town of North Hempstead in the fairly exclusive company of only a handful of over 1500 towns, villages and cities that exist in the State of New York. In essence, the Town of North Hempstead is in the top one percent of all municipalities in the entire state.

In 2006, the Town received yet another upgrade from Standard & Poor's Rating Service to AAA/AA from A+. According to the Credit Report issued in August of 2006, "North Hempstead's management practices are considered to be strong under Standard & Poor's Financial Management Assessment methodology. The FMA is designed to measure the policies and procedures used by the town's management as it oversees day to day operations. The strong assessment indicates that practices are strong, well embedded, and likely sustainable."

These ratings by Moody's and Standard and Poor's mean direct savings to our taxpayers on many levels. Not only do the Town's capital projects cost less, but all districts that bond under the town's authority save money as well.

I would be remiss when speaking of the financial success of the town over the last three years if I didn't give credit to my predecessor who made many of the tough decisions during tough times that put this town on the road to recovery and a solid financial footing. Thank you May Newburger.

And, as did my predecessor, I too have made a commitment to cleaning, preserving and protecting our environment. In the Town of North Hempstead we continue to acquire properties for open space and trails. We are also requiring developers to clean-up brownfields and contaminated properties and to provide for public access to our natural resources. We continue to aggressively pursue grants to fund our environmental goals;

and we continue our efforts to remediate and improve local ponds and waterways. In 2006 the Town reconstructed Ridder's Pond in Manhasset Hills; Received authorization to begin our multimillion dollar restoration (we've received over \$3 million dollars in state, federal, county, and private grants) of Mill Pond in Port Washington; and also received grants to restore Roslyn Pond and Searingtown Pond. We also removed 232 tons of debris from Sheet Creek in Manhasset Bay in the Manorhaven/Port Washington North area and we cleaned over 1000 tons of dirt, sand and debris from our roadways during our annual Clean Sweep program. We've added cars to our hybrid electric car fleet bringing the total number of hybrid cars to 10 and our hybrid electric bus fleet conversion is well under way. Our truck fleet also already meets the new low sulfur emission standards currently being imposed.

In late 2006, New York State awarded the Town of North Hempstead \$2.4 million for seven separate environmental and parks related projects. We received the largest award in the State of New York. These projects include an award of over \$1 million dollars for the Roslyn Pond Park Water Quality Improvements; \$150,000 for the reconstruction of Manorhaven Beach Boat Ramp, and a Planning and Design grant for Bar Beach in partnership with the Resident's for a More Beautiful Port Washington.

In fact, over these last three years the town has been awarded over \$20 million in grants and federal, state, and county allocations. This money goes to projects that we would not or could not fund ourselves. I am extremely proud of the success that we have had obtaining money and support from all levels of government for our North Hempstead community. With this money we are cleaning our ponds and bays, filtering our stormwater before it gets into our waterways, building and improving community centers, building our 311 and emergency management systems, enhancing our parks, paving more roads, planting trees, and the list goes on and on. We are also partnering with groups in many of these endeavors such as with Sustainable Long Island, Vision Long Island, LIPA and Residents for a More Beautiful Port Washington.

When I look at all of the things that we are doing here in North Hempstead, I am reminded of the message brought to us by our US Senator Hillary Clinton when she said that it was time that the federal government recognize that most of America lives in suburbs and the problems facing suburban communities cannot be resolved by each individual town or village. She pledged to put the resources of the federal government into a coordinated effort to help us help ourselves when it comes to cleaning our bays and waterways, rebuilding our infrastructure, growing our economy, revitalizing our downtowns and preserving our quality of life. Senator Clinton's comments underscored the fact that local governments must partner with each other because the issues that confront us cross our boundaries and effect our lives today, tomorrow and for generations to come.

For example, picking up garbage may be as local a function as local governments perform, and yet figuring out how to dispose of that garbage has far reaching implications. The garbage that our local governments pick up or contract for is now sent out of state, in our case ending up in Virginia or Pennsylvania. We put it in trucks that

get only a few miles to the gallon, driving hundreds of miles while belching out smoke and carbon monoxide warming the globe and costing us a fortune. We need local solutions that are environmentally friendly, that do not undermine our local infrastructure and are cost effective. Similarly when it comes to preserving our bays and waterways that are silting up, becoming too shallow for our commercial and recreational boaters, and have been exposed to environmental hazards, we at the local level do not have the ability to dredge, clean and protect these natural resources without help from beyond our borders.

Senator Clinton understands that the problems that local governments face are larger and more complicated than can be handled and resolved by individual local governments. Yet, in order for her program of suburban community restoration to succeed, it is incumbent upon suburban communities to lay the groundwork for success. Senator Clinton makes it clear that her plan is not to throw money at our problems, but rather to find real, in-depth, long-term solutions to complicated issues that are adversely affecting us. These are the problems that we put off for another day because we have no practical ability to address or resolve them today.

What is clear, however, that in order for us to benefit from the support that Senator Clinton is talking about, we have to lay the groundwork here at home. We have to build the inter-municipal infrastructure, the relationships and processes, that would allow us to work together, cross municipal boundaries, share the responsibility and maintain the transparency necessary to gain the confidence of our constituents and also achieve real results.

There has been much discussion during the last couple of years about this type of interaction among different governing bodies. The focus, locally, has been on the plethora of special districts and governments that exist throughout our region.

The Town of North Hempstead is one of three towns in Nassau County. Combined we account for over 1.3 million people. And while the Town of North Hempstead is the smallest of the three with only 230,000 residents we have something no other town in New York has. We have over 100 municipal governments within our borders. The Town of North Hempstead has 31 villages, 14 school districts, and approximately 60 special districts, associations, and authorities located within our township. We are, in fact, the poster child of specialized government. In some ways we benefit from it, in some ways we are hurt by it, and always we pay for it.

Governor Spitzer announced in his State of the State address earlier this year that there are over 4200 taxing jurisdictions in the State of New York and, he said, that reform is necessary. The question is, what form is reform going to take. We have grown our awareness of the multiplicity of governments on Long Island and their impact on our pocket books, in large measure due to a series of articles on fire districts on the one hand and the efforts of our County Comptroller Howard Weitzman and his office on the other. We in Long Island understand the need for specialized services in regard to water, fire protection, garbage removal, parks maintenance and education. However, we are not

sure that we need so many layers, so many versions, so many administrators, so many consultants, so many governments – although, we generally like the ones that serve us directly. We are concerned that even those with the best intentions might not be up to the challenges that we face in modern municipal government. Decisions involving millions of dollars are made regularly and we know all too well that one corrupt or incompetent manager or employee can wreak havoc before a problem is discovered.

So what do we do?

I believe we need to grow the dialogue between municipal entities. We need to find efficiencies; share services; share information; and learn from one another. We need to work with one another as if we were one government. We need to be transparent in our budgeting and decision making so that people can have confidence in the way we spend money and make decisions. We need to be accessible and responsive and document what we do and when we do it. And we need to put in place a mechanism and process to achieve these things.

I would like to announce that the Town of North Hempstead is now prepared to take the concept of our Office of Intermunicipal Coordination (OIC) to the next level. The Town will establish this month an intermunicipal task force that will be comprised of 15 to 20 representatives from various villages, special districts and school districts. We will ask the county and the state and the federal government to participate to the extent that they can. We will meet regularly to address the issues that we are facing, large and small, so that we can understand how to connect with each other and grow the dialogue that is becoming essential in order for us to fulfill our mission as public servants. The Town will assign an attorney and an accountant to this office along with the administrative personnel that are currently assigned. The first assignment will be to review a study that the town has commissioned regarding the establishment of an intermunicipal insurance reciprocal as announced at a recent press conference with County Comptroller Howard Weitzman and Oyster Bay Supervisor John Venditto. The second is to oversee the implementation of a \$180,000 grant recently awarded to the Town of North Hempstead with the support of the Village of Great Neck Plaza Mayor Jean Celender to study the possible merging or reorganizing of ambulance services within the town. Third will be the implementation of an \$80,000 grant to consolidate GIS services with the six villages on the Port Washington peninsula. They will work with our partners in Port Washington North on the Bay Walk Project and the Village of New Hyde Park on the pocket park project that is going so well. They will have their hands full with emergency management partnerships and service agreements and problem resolution issues.

In fact, North Hempstead has already authorized dozens of intermunicipal agreements with villages and districts within the town. We've offered our 311 and reverse 311 services to our intermunicipal partners and will be looking to advance the 311 concept to all municipalities within the town. North Hempstead has already hosted two intermunicipal conferences at our clubhouse at Harbor Links. The most recent conference focused on emergency management in conjunction with the Nassau County Health Department where we had presentations on PODs (Points of Distribution) for medicine

distribution and emergency services; on NIMS (National Integrated Management Systems) which requires that all municipalities develop the same emergency response structure so that we can act in a coordinated way during an emergency; and on reverse 311 where we can communicate with the entire town or any portion thereof before, during, or after an emergency. This latter conference is now being developed into an annual intermunicipal emergency management meeting that will ensure that we continue the dialogue necessary to protect and serve our constituencies.

The Town is also in the process of inviting all of the special districts throughout this town to meet with town personnel one at a time over the next few months to go over budgets, review practices, and address mutual problems or concerns that may exist between us.

This, I believe, is a beginning. The Town of North Hempstead is prepared to lay the groundwork so that we not only chip away at the larger issues that confront us, but enhance our ability to partner with federal, state and county leaders to achieve long term solutions to problems that simply won't go away by themselves. We share Senator Clinton's vision of suburban restoration, and Senator Schumer's focus on middle class American families struggling to make sense of the world and our dependency on forces outside our own control. We in local government must, at least, tackle the issues that we can control, but we need partners and partners there will be.

In line with our efforts to achieve a closer, more responsive relationship with our constituents, the Town of North Hempstead has taken the lead in suburban America in developing 311/TownStat as a suburban tool to connect with our residents and oversee our management operations and in developing Project Independence as a suburban model for sustaining our older populations in a manner that would allow them to age in place, in their home, in their community, with their dignity, family and friends around them.

Last year I spoke of the initiation of our 311/ TownStat system. I spoke of the creative way that Baltimore Mayor Martin O'Malley merged the 311 hotline concept with New York City's 1980's policing strategy called ComStat and how he applied it to municipal services. Mayor, now Governor, O'Malley's was a bold initiative that was followed by a number of cities throughout the country. The question for me was could it be done in the suburbs. Could it be done in a Long Island community with its multiple layers of government and its disparate decision making processes? With support from Senators Chuck Schumer and Hillary Clinton and our Representatives Gary Ackerman and Carolyn McCarthy we received \$500,000 from the federal government and through the offices of then State Senator Michael Balboni we received \$75,000 as well. Our 311 plan was launched. We are now the first among suburban communities in our country to deploy this model of constituent response and management. We are now taking almost 5000 calls per month through our 311 system and it is not yet implemented in all Town departments. This month Code Enforcement went live and in March our Buildings Department will be brought into the modern technological and modern management era when it too goes live with 311/TownStat. Accountability, efficiency, and transparency will be the rule.

With the 311 system firmly in place, I now reaffirm that the Town of North Hempstead will fill any pothole within two days of a 311 request, we will replace any streetlight within four days, and all code complaints will receive a response within three business days. Our general switchboard, Parks Department and Highway units are currently live and we've even partnered with the North Hempstead Housing Authority with our first intermunicipal 311 agreement.

With 311 we memorialize each call that comes in, document the response and report the result to the appropriate managers. We are building a data base, monitoring our progress, and redeploying our resources based on need and efficiencies and we intend to be as effective as a government can be in responding to the calls that we receive – every time. One Call to Town Hall has been our motto throughout the year and we are building to a new level of individual constituent response that focuses on consistency, convenience and results.

This coming year will not only be the year of 311, but also of Project Independence. Our Community Services Department has taken the lead in this new suburban initiative. We've partnered with North Shore LIJ and FEGS and a portion of our local community in New Hyde Park where we are developing a pilot program that enables our senior population to receive support services so that they can remain in their community and their home longer than they otherwise might be able to. What some refer to as NORC, Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities, we refer to as Project Independence. We are developing a program that will help our seniors age in place, with support services facilitated by the town, but provided by a number of important public, and private partners including neighbors and friends.

Upon request we will send a social worker to talk about depression, or provide a ride to a doctor's office. We also have visiting doctors and we are preparing to include in this effort a visiting handyman program. Little things like fixing a leaky faucet, repairing a railing or a broken window can give comfort and prevent little problems from becoming bigger ones. We've recently authorized a snow shoveling program and we continue to look for ways to grow Project Independence in ways that make our seniors' lives more comfortable and less stressful.

This program sends the message to our seniors that we are your community, we are your town, and we will be there for you when you need us.

The Town of North Hempstead has so many exciting projects and programs, some that we've developed over these last couple of years. We established North Hempstead Day where we celebrate the Town's secession from the Town of Hempstead and the British Crown, the first community to do so of the 13 colonies back in September of 1773; we initiated our new annual EcoFest in the spring where during the two day festival we learn of energy alternatives, the evils of pesticide use, and how to protect our wildlife in this region. Our Family Beach Festival at Bar Beach Park in the fall is becoming one of our most popular events, along with our Memorial Day Fireworks display. At Beach Fest we enjoy concerts, kite flying, and kayaking and more. Of course, we continue to expand the

wonderful Earth Day programming; and we've also augmented Spooky Walk making it Spooky Week with our ever popular, Not So Spooky Walk for the younger children. We also include Winter Wonderland in our repertoire of events and our Business and Tourism Development Corporation actively participates in and promotes so many other wonderful community, charitable and fun events throughout the year.

I can also commit to the residents of our town that our parks and roads remain a priority and we will continue to invest resources into continually improving our parks, waterways and ball fields while also enhancing our ability to pave, plow and sweep our roads. This year will see a complete overhaul of Donald Street Park in Roslyn and Mill Pond Park in Port Washington.

There are so many more accomplishments and activities of which I can speak. There is our new e-waste program initiated by Town Clerk Michelle Schimel and new efficiencies initiated by our Receiver of Taxes Rocco Iannarelli. We have expanded senior programs and our multicultural events. Our North Hempstead TV station is adding more programming and providing more information than ever before. We've laid the foundation for a new crew house in Bar Beach Park and installed kayak floats at the Town Dock; we've made improvements to more parks and more fields; we, along with some other communities in Nassau County, received an Empire Zone designation in part of the town and our BTDC is actively building its economic development portfolio; we opened our new Harbor Links clubhouse; added lights to our soccer fields in Port Washington and our turf football field in New Hyde Park; acquired a new community center in Port Washington; and are planning on building a new center in the New Cassel/Westbury area; we've partnered with the Great Neck Arts Center in a number of programs, some for disenfranchised kids; funded pocket parks in a partnership with the Village of New Hyde Park; helped fund ambulance services in Mineola; supported our veteran's organizations in East Williston and Albertson; repaired baseball fields in Herricks and Williston Park; continued our anti-gang program in Port Washington; planned improvements to Plandome Road in Manhasset and Westbury Avenue in Carle Place; are implementing the vision plan in New Cassel, New Hyde Park and in Port Washington; are preparing to begin a visioning in Great Neck; and the list goes on and on and on.

I can tell you that the elected officials, our managers and our workforce here in the Town of North Hempstead have our hands full. There is so much more going on than I can cover in one speech and there is, of course, more to do. We are blessed to have such strong and competent officials in our area including our Assemblyman Tom DiNapoli and our former State Senator, Michael Balboni who have both done so much for us, both extraordinary public servants. Our newer assembly members Chuck Lavine and Tom McKeivitt are also doing a great job. County Executive Tom Suozzi is a great friend to our community and has shown his support time and again as have our County Comptroller Howard Weitzman, District Attorney Kathleen Rice, and our county legislators, village mayors and trustees, and district commissioners. I've discussed our federal representatives, but let me repeat that they, Senator's Schumer and Clinton and Representatives McCarthy and Ackerman along with Congressman Peter King as well

are doing such a wonderful job for us that we cannot thank them enough. I'd like to thank the Pataki administration for the support that they've given us over the years and I welcome our new Governor Elliot Spitzer who will make his mark in so many positive ways.

I am proud to tell you that the Town of North Hempstead is alive and well. The state of the town is great as we continue to work hard to make this town the best that it can be. This is a vibrant, demanding place and I am proud to serve this community. I thank you all for coming and I wish you a wonderful, happy and successful year.