

SUPERVISOR JUDI BOSWORTH'S

2021 NORTH HEMPSTEAD

STATE OF THE

TOWN



MARCH 19, 2021

State of the Town 2021
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Supervisor Judi Bosworth
Town of North Hempstead

Good afternoon and thank you for joining us for our annual North Hempstead State of the Town address.

2020 was a year unlike any we have ever faced. The situation we all have experienced together has been truly unprecedented.

Much like everywhere else, the COVID-19 pandemic dominated 2020 in the Town of North Hempstead. These challenges were obviously not unique to our community. This has been a global crisis. However, we in North Hempstead have been doing everything we possibly can to navigate through this public health emergency.

My first State of the Town occurred seven years ago amidst a series of blizzards. So perhaps it's fitting that this, my final State of the Town, would occur after a month of snow events and during a pandemic. It seems, unfortunately, that we've come full circle!

While in past years, we have all gotten together for a lovely lunch at Harbor Links. I hope that this year, you're enjoying a nice meal at your desk, on your couch, or wherever you may be, as we look back on the year that was and look ahead to the year that will be in the Town of North Hempstead.

Before we begin, I would like to thank the League of Women Voters, once again for their work and dedication, particularly League Co-Presidents Julie Meer and Regina Goutevenier and their team for playing such a significant role in bringing local, state, and national issues to our community's attention. We are all better-informed citizens because of their efforts. We also thank them for their help in coordinating our previous State of the Town luncheons.

A very special thank you to League Vice President Amy Bass for her introduction, her commitment to our community, and for her help in kicking off today's virtual event.

Additionally, I would like to thank the members of our veterans advisory committee for leading us in the pledge.

The Veterans Advisory Committee consists of those who represent our various veteran communities across the Town of North Hempstead. We thank them for the sacrifices they've made and for their service to our Town.

I would be remiss if I failed to mention all of the North Hempstead residents who tragically lost their lives due to the COVID-19 pandemic including Matt Falcone, a treasured member of our Veterans Advisory Committee who assisted us in his own special way at previous State of the Town events. Tragically, Matt passed away a few months ago due to COVID-19. He was a dear friend to so many of us in the Town, and we miss him every day.

At this time, I would also like to recognize our Town of North Hempstead elected officials and my partners in Town government:

- Receiver of Taxes Charles Berman
- Town Clerk Wayne Wink
- Council Member Viviana Russell
- Council Member Peter Zuckerman
- Council Member Angelo Ferrara
- Council Member Veronica Lurvey
- Council Member Lee Seeman
- and Council Member Mariann Dalimonte

Our Town Board is successful because of the spirit of consensus building, bi-partisanship, and respect for one another.

We are also proud of our collaboration with our colleagues at all levels of government which is especially important this year. I would like to thank Senator Chuck Schumer, Senator Kirsten

Gillibrand, Congressman Tom Suozzi, Congresswoman Kathleen Rice, Governor Andrew Cuomo, Comptroller Tom DiNapoli, State Senator Anna Kaplan, Assemblywoman Gina Sillitti, Comptroller Jack Schnirman, our Nassau County Legislators, and of course our County Executive Laura Curran, and all of our other colleagues in government, our local mayors, special district commissioners, school board members and union leaders. I would also like to extend a special thank you to all of our local school superintendents who have been dealing with their own unique challenges, trying to keep our schools open and safe during these unprecedented times.

Also, a special thank you to my North Hempstead government team – my senior staff, finance team, and all of our departments -- our commissioners, deputy commissioners, directors, managers and, of course, our entire workforce. The diligent efforts of my extraordinary team have helped us achieve so much, and I am proud to work with them every day.

This has been a long and challenging year.

It all began late last February, not long after last year's State of the Town. We were hearing about the Coronavirus which seemed to be heading to our shores. It reminds me of the Madeline books – when Miss Clavel sits up in the middle of the night and says "something is not right." Well, something was not right. A pandemic was on the horizon. We immediately formed an internal coronavirus task force to address it. Our team began to meet regularly. We knew the importance of preparing for the worst while hoping for the best.

As we do every day, but especially in this time of crisis, our team in North Hempstead Town government came together. We put the needs of Town residents, as well as the safety of our Town staff and crews, first.

We initiated the first of many notifications to the community on March 4, and one week later, on March 13, the Town of North Hempstead officially declared a state of emergency, which we are still under.

Even though Town facilities were mostly closed to the public, our number one priority was that essential services continued to operate as we maintained the continuity of government. In fact, we often expanded our services, offering extended hours for the Town's 311 Call Center, and developing numerous initiatives in response to emerging needs. As many of our employees worked remotely, we continued to operate seamlessly as a team.

One of the most important responsibilities we had was to communicate information to the public on a consistent basis and in a way that reached as many people as possible. And while we continuously provided updates via our traditional methods, we were cognizant that not everyone would have access to our website, social media, and email updates.

We produced videos, public service announcements, spoke regularly with the media, posted large signs throughout the Town, distributed flyers, and, most importantly, disseminated robocalls on an almost weekly basis that reached tens of thousands of residents. We continue to reach out in this way. We also worked collaboratively with our mayors, especially the mayors of Westbury, Port Washington, and Great Neck to determine the best way to get the message out to their particular communities.

Recognizing the anxiety and hardships our residents were facing, we did everything in our power as a Town government to help. This included waiving fees for all Town parks. In the spring and summer months when it was warm outside and we had limited options for recreation, we provided free access to all of our pools and beaches in an effort to encourage residents to spend time outdoors in a safe manner. We wanted to eliminate the contact that handling cash exposed everyone to as well as making sure that we were being responsive to the emerging economic crisis that so many were facing.

It was also incumbent upon us to advocate on behalf of our residents, and we did. We were in regular contact with Governor Cuomo, County Executive Curran, and various state and federal representatives, advocating on behalf of our residents. As an example, our regular communication with New York State and Nassau County officials helped secure an extension for school tax payments. We were also pleased to announce that the Governor recently granted an

extension for first-half general tax payments.

In light of the effects caused by the pandemic, we recognized how important it was for us to speak up for those in our community who were facing monumental financial challenges. We have also continuously advocating for additional vaccines for our North Hempstead residents.

Local businesses were severely impacted, and continue to be affected, due to the pandemic. With that in mind, we established an internal COVID-19 Business Recovery Response Workgroup to develop some common-sense opportunities as well as some out-of-the-box initiatives. The Workgroup, which includes members of the Town Board, continues to meet and devise new strategies as challenges arise. I am so appreciative of the dedication of this Group and the work they have done both independently and in concert with our local Chambers of Commerce and BIDs on behalf of our local business owners.

One major component of our recovery roadmap focused on ways in which we could help our local restaurants, food service establishments, and retail stores expand their operations outdoors.

Our Lift Up Local initiative was designed to provide a boost for outdoor dining and retail establishments. This program gave businesses the ability to close streets, creating makeshift dining and shopping opportunities. We also provided local Chambers of Commerce with storefront posters for their particular business district and installed signage throughout the Town, encouraging residents to shop local.

And that's a message that we always need to be out there promoting. Shop local, support your local businesses.

To support local business, we also encouraged residents to order takeout meals and bring their food to eat at local parks. We set up tables with benches. Menus from nearby restaurants were posted at these makeshift picnic areas at Town Dock in Port Washington, Mary Jane Davies Green in Manhasset, Blumenfeld Family Park in Port Washington, Martin "Bunky" Reid Park in Westbury, and Clark Botanic Garden in Albertson. This initiative gave a new meaning to dining

out, allowing everyone to continue supporting local businesses while enjoying a fun and safe al fresco experience.

Our “parklet” program was designed to further assist local restaurants and food service establishments. This provided for an extension of sidewalks that allowed participating restaurants to add seating on the street in front of their businesses. This included permitting some parking spaces adjacent to storefronts to be used as outdoor dining areas. Coming at a time when indoor dining was restricted, this was a way to provide additional seating. Coordinating with the Town, some restaurants were able to use the entire sidewalk in front of their establishments while making sure a safe and ADA-compliant, pedestrian pathway was maintained.

This past summer, we worked with the Greater Port Washington Business Improvement District and the Port Washington Chamber of Commerce for their Port Outdoors Dine & Shop events. This took place on Thursdays in the summer and beyond, safely offering traffic-free pedestrian malls in two zones that allowed people to dine outside and shop while maintaining social distance.

We also allowed gyms, fitness centers, barbershops, hair salons, personal care services, and religious institutions the option to expand their operations outdoors during the pandemic due to reduced interior occupancy restrictions.

We have numerous initiatives planned to promote businesses in 2021 as well, including an interactive game we will be running in coordination with local chambers, spotlighting small businesses, and offering social media training opportunities.

Just as we have been concerned with addressing the needs of business owners, we were concerned with addressing the emerging needs of our senior citizens -- the sense of isolation that would most certainly result from being urged to stay safely in their homes.

Project Independence, which was created in 2009 as an aging-in-place program for the Town’s nearly 60,000 residents over 60, serves as a lifeline to so many seniors throughout North

Hempstead during this time. Currently, there are more than 15,000 registered Project Independence members. More than 475 new members signed up to be a part of this program in 2020.

Back in March, when news of the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic became apparent, our indoor Town facilities were closed and our seniors could no longer meet with their clubs and organizations. The Town reached out directly to all Project Independence members to keep them informed. We waived all fees for the taxis that are part of the Project Independence transportation program, including medical visits. We also expanded transportation to include COVID vaccination sites for the Town's seniors, taking residents to NUMC, Nassau Community College, LIU Post, and taking veterans to the VA in Northport. And when grocery stores were adjusting hours and opening earlier for seniors, we expanded our schedule to coordinate with those newly established hours. To give you an idea of how significant this program was, Project Independence actually provided 21,458 rides in 2020.

Additionally, we created our Neighbors Helping Neighbors program. Those Project Independence members who enrolled received calls and reassurance from neighbors during a time where many felt isolated and disconnected.

It was wonderful to see so many of our residents volunteering to help out during such a challenging time. And, by the way, we're still looking for volunteers, so anyone who would like to sign up can do so by calling 311.

One of the silver linings of the pandemic is that some of the innovative ideas, like Neighbors Helping Neighbors, will continue long after the pandemic is over.

We have remained focused on providing many of the activities our Project Independence seniors participate in despite these uncertain times. Early on during the pandemic, we began working with our fitness instructors to put our exercise classes on North Hempstead TV with links to those classes available on demand on our website and social media channels.

Every week since the spring, we have broadcast exercise classes to help keep our residents engaged and active while remaining in the safety of their home. From yoga, to dance, to Tai Chi - there's something for everyone. We have some of the most active and physically fit seniors you will find anywhere, and continuing these programs was so important. We also made it a point to schedule our virtual classes on North Hempstead TV at the same times they would have taken place in person. So, if you had a regularly scheduled aerobics class at 10 a.m. on Monday, you still had that class – you were just now participating from home. These classes are also available online so seniors can participate whenever it is convenient for them. In 2021, we have also launched interactive live classes on Facebook that build upon the successful remote programming we established last year.

We expanded this initiative to include our popular FunDay Monday series. Typically, 1,000 seniors would visit the beach each Monday during the summer, but clearly that was not an option this year. However, we thought, if we could do exercise classes virtually, we could do FunDay Monday in the same way, and we did.

So each week during the summer, we hosted our FunDay Monday program virtually and on North Hempstead TV. In addition to all the people who tuned in on our TV channel, the first episode was viewed more than a thousand times online – confirming that we were definitely on to something. With tours of the waterfront of the Gold Coast, tours of the Nassau County Museum and cooking classes - our FunDay Monday brought culture and recreation into the homes of our residents.

We also started incorporating Zoom for many of our senior groups including our Project Independence advisory committees, book clubs, and more. The aim is for everyone to feel connected while being at home. We even taught technology classes, with a focus on how to communicate via Zoom and other platforms, to help our seniors keep in touch with their families and friends.

These programs have been successful, and we have recognized the need to help move these initiatives forward by incorporating technology whenever possible even after the pandemic has ended.

It wasn't only seniors who were feeling isolated. Every day feels like blursday, where one day of the week feels not much different than the one before, for so many of us. So along with Project Independence virtual programming, we also created our NHTV At Home Series. This brought great virtual programming through our television station and internet platforms to everyone in our Town, including our youngest residents!

These classes included:

- Cooking Classes
- Sign language classes
- Japanese language classes
- Bubble workshops
- Art classes
- Basketball and football skills classes
- Kids dance parties
- Workshops from the National Circus project
- And a Reptile show featuring Erik the Reptile Guy

Adhering to social distancing guidelines – we also created a series of free outdoor events for our residents: drive-in movies, drive-in concerts, and our Concerts by Candlelight series.

Our drive-in movie series was a tremendous success. We were the first municipality in New York State to host drive-in movie events. We projected films onto large outdoor screens so residents could enjoy a night out while staying safe in their cars. Every weekend, in the summer, we had classic blockbuster movies such as Star Wars, Back to the Future, and Jurassic Park - just to name a few.

We continued this with a Halloween feature film and holiday movies in December, and there are plans already in place to offer more movies in the months ahead. In fact, we are planning on having a “float-in” movie this summer where families will be able to gather together on boats and watch a film on the water.

The Town's "Concerts by Candlelight" and Drive-In Concert series for Town residents, featured a variety of musical acts, ranging from doo wop & Motown to country or rock. We designated seating circles which were all six feet apart to help allow for some fun and safe musical entertainment.

While admission was free to all of these events, because of the increasing food insecurity that people were experiencing, we encouraged those attending to contribute to our food drive as a way of giving back to the community. We wanted to do our part to help our food pantries throughout the town.

In October, we held a week-long celebration featuring socially distant Halloween events for children of all ages. It was important that our residents were able to enjoy Halloween, while staying safe and somehow maintaining a sense of normalcy.

The events included: the Not-So-Spooky Walk at Clark Garden, an outdoor pumpkin painting event at Clark Botanic Garden, a special Trick or Treat event where children still got to dress up in costumes, a drive-in movie screening of Hotel Transylvania, and the week culminated with North Hempstead's first ever drone light show at North Hempstead Beach Park on Halloween – which was truly a dazzling display of Halloween-themed images unlike anything we had ever seen before. The show was the first of its kind in Nassau County, and it was a huge success.

Even if we couldn't celebrate together, we wanted to capture the fun and specialness of the different holiday seasons. This year's holiday celebrations starting with Thanksgiving certainly looked different as well.

The Town hosted special editions of NHTV at Home featuring Thanksgiving, Chanukah, Christmas, and Kwanzaa themed videos. On the programs, the Town Board and I read stories, talked about some of our favorite traditions, memories, and the importance of giving back.

Additionally, the Town, in a partnership with muddworks of Great Neck, hosted special craft

workshops centered around various holidays, for our children, which was done virtually. In fact, our most recent craft initiative had a Valentine's Day theme. These craft kits were distributed, at no cost, to children, ages 4 to 10, residing in North Hempstead. This was so popular that we hope to do it again next year. We felt this was the perfect way for families to get into the holiday spirit, working together on these fun arts and crafts projects in a socially distant manner. We hosted Zoom Calls with Santa Claus, installed large holiday-themed backdrops at Town parks for photo opportunities, and produced many fun virtual programs like how to build a gingerbread house. And then in January, we held a fabulous, free drive-in fireworks show to ring in the New Year, where everyone was able to remain in their cars and enjoy a much-needed, fun and safe night out. It was an opportunity to celebrate the end of 2020 and welcome 2021 together as a community.

2020 was surely one for the record books for many reasons. Let us not forget that at an incredibly tumultuous time, in the midst of the pandemic, our Town was ravaged by a tropical storm. Many of us lost power for days. The unfortunate timing of the storm during the pandemic added to the anxiety we were all experiencing, and it complicated our instinctive response to gather with friends and neighbors during a power outage.

It was so upsetting that thousands of our residents were without power. There was a total communications breakdown between PSEG and residents. Town officials, myself included, were relaying outage information and complaints on behalf of our residents because they, themselves, could not get through to PSEG.

We fully recognized the task of restoring power to tens of thousands of homes was arduous. However, the aftermath of Tropical Storm Isaias brought to light significant shortcomings. Thus, we demanded the implementation of substantive changes so PSEG would be better prepared to respond when the next storm arrives. And, unfortunately, we know there will be a next storm. We joined with other levels of government to ensure accountability from PSEG. We spoke regularly with County Executive Curran, Congressman Suozzi, and various officials on the State level, urging that actions be taken to prevent these issues from arising again.

Making matters worse, these power outages occurred in the middle of an oppressive heatwave. In an effort to assist residents, the Town opened up cooling centers at Clinton G. Martin Park and the Port Washington Adult Activities Center. Project Independence also offered free transportation to and from our cooling centers for our seniors during that difficult time.

The damage to our community was actually comparable to what we sustained in 2012 during Superstorm Sandy. Isaias was a fast-moving, powerful storm with wind shears that toppled hundreds of trees, damaging many homes. The cleanup efforts were monumental. Our Town employees continued to go above and beyond, working around the clock, to remove trees and debris. I would like to thank them as well as Governor Cuomo for the assistance he provided us in the wake of the storm, making sure additional crews aided in our recovery effort.

Additionally, 2020 saw racial unrest around the country. We at the Town stood in solidarity with everyone throughout our Long Island community, across the country, and around the world -- united in the call for peace, justice, and equality.

In North Hempstead, several years ago, we established a program called "Not in our Town." This underscored that our Town is a place where everyone can feel safe regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation. This is something we strive for every day.

Another area we focused on in 2020 was continued progress in terms of resiliency and sustainability. We were proud to be designated a Clean Energy Community by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), recognizing our leadership in reducing energy use, cutting costs, and driving clean energy locally.

In July, we were again recognized as a "Tree City USA" by the Arbor Day Foundation – the nation's leading community forestry program that provides a foundation for effective and well-organized community tree care. This was the ninth year that the Town received this prestigious designation which is given out to towns and cities that have a viable tree management plan and program. We are currently in the process of updating the Town's tree code.

In 2021, we will be establishing a climate task force with the goal of improving our standing as a

Climate Smart Community. This is part of a New York State program that helps local governments take action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to a changing climate. The program offers free technical assistance, grants, and rebates for electric vehicles. As a matter of fact, we are in the process of engaging with an outside vendor to establish and maintain electric vehicle charging stations around North Hempstead.

The Town is committed to continuing its work on green initiatives and finding ways to reduce our carbon footprint as we work to create a better environment for future generations.

2020 was also a productive and proactive year at the Town's Solid Waste Management Authority. The Authority recently initiated a contract with Covanta. With this new agreement, North Hempstead's trash will be burned in an incinerator plant in Westbury, located in the Town of Hempstead, instead of being sent to an upstate landfill hundreds of miles away, for at least the next five years.

Waste-to-energy plants are cleaner and more sophisticated than facilities of the past, and emissions from the plant are well below federal regulations. Covanta's plant burns 1 million tons of trash a year, generating 80 megawatts of electricity — enough to power 55,400 homes for a year.

The contract controls our costs and provides for greater operational efficiency. More importantly, however, local disposal eliminates the need for our refuse to be transported over long distances to be placed in a landfill, ultimately reducing the amount of greenhouse gases and other pollutants entering our environment.

We were also proud to announce a new recycling program designed to properly dispose of Number 5 plastics. Beginning this year, residents are encouraged to bring Number 5 plastic items to the Town's Residential Drop Off in Port Washington. These items are made of material that cannot be combined with other household plastic recyclables, and this new program is a wonderful way for the Town and its residents to help preserve our local environment.

Though the COVID-19 pandemic forced us to make adjustments to the schedule of our Stop Throwing Out Pollutants events, we were still able to host three S.T.O.P. events in the summer and fall, serving thousands of residents. We certainly look forward to hosting additional S.T.O.P. events in 2021, along with several E-Waste Drop Off events for our residents.

Moving forward, we are placing a significant emphasis on economic development with a renewed focus on promoting the multitude of amazing things to do in North Hempstead. To this end, we are in the process of hiring a Commerce and Culture Coordinator to oversee the implementation of the Town's Cultural Master Plan. The document is one of the first adopted plans of its kind in New York State, and we believe that it is one that will help us continue to foster diversity, equity, and inclusivity, while supporting strong and vibrant local economies. The Cultural Master Plan is the culmination of twenty months of focus groups, surveys, public meetings, and discussions with civic associations, chambers of commerce, Business Improvement Districts, arts & culture organizations, and historical societies.

The arts play a vital role in not just enhancing the quality of life for our residents but as a significant component of an economic development strategy.

The document includes a detailed implementation strategy containing studies, examples, and instructions relevant to North Hempstead. We are looking to develop an integrated marketing strategy that includes a more dynamic online presence for branding, promoting and incentivizing the arts, culture, tourism, dining, and retail to help thread together and cross-pollinate activities and events Townwide.

Though the plan was initially created prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the hope is to adapt it to address both local business and arts & culture organizational challenges in the contexts of economic rebuilding, operational challenges, and public health recovery and safety.

I am also proud of the improvements we made in regards to programming and community development at the "Yes We Can" Community Center this past year.

We were able to host a socially distanced summer camp that served more than 40 campers each

week, featuring unique programming components including STEM, dance, art, healthy cooking, money management, and fitness. We recently developed a “Yes We Can” Teen Fitness program that complements our instructional youth sports programs which include basketball, soccer, and volleyball. Another fun new addition to the programming at “Yes We Can” is our socially distanced Friday Teen Center Nights for our adolescent members. And, to top it all off, we recently introduced a new adult pickleball program, which I know is truly a fan favorite here in the Town of North Hempstead.

This year, we plan to implement the “Yes We Can” Community Center Advisory Board, Program Development Committee, and Safety Committee to ensure that we are working at our fullest potential for the “Yes We Can” membership and the community.

We are also expecting to further develop programming including Family Enrichment Programs (mommy and me, family night out, and family fitness programs), "New Americans" initiatives (ESL, Immigration, and Citizen Services), as well as new youth sports and fitness programs. “Yes We Can” is abuzz with activity for all members of our community.

Separate from all these initiatives, the Center was recently designated by New York State and Nassau County as a POD (point of distribution) for the COVID vaccine. So many are feeling the frustration of not being able to make appointments as they become eligible for the shot. However, we are aggressively advocating for additional sites to open in North Hempstead. The Town has also begun migrating many of its departments to a new software system called CitizenServe. It is modern, intuitive, and easy to use. It provides complete customer care to help our municipality provide online services to our residents. We are the first municipality in New York State to use CitizenServe.

The system automates, consolidates, and streamlines Buildings Department processes, like permitting and licensing. Our Buildings Department faced so many unique challenges during the pandemic, but the implementation of CitizenServe truly helped us move forward. The online portal also allows applicants to view their information about permits, licenses, and status of permits and licenses on the web at MyTONH.com.

Since CitizenServe is accessed through a web browser, residents can login from anywhere to access their account. With that in mind, we are installing intake kiosks to simplify the process for residents who visit the Department. The Kiosks will allow residents to submit applications and records requests. Building Department Staff will also be able to help assist residents in completing their applications and to ensure that all necessary documents have been submitted.

The ultimate goal is to create a more simplified process that harnesses technology to make things easier for our residents and business owners. For instance, in the coming year, we are planning to digitize records for the Buildings Department and the Office of the Town Clerk. The digitization of the records will allow for quicker access to documents. It will also enable Town employees to review and respond to requests in a much shorter period of time.

Additionally, the Town passed its capital improvement plan which includes the major projects we will be pursuing over the next five years. The plan also shows the proposed funding schedule for each project – whether through bonding, existing cash on-hand, funding from contractual agreements, grants, or FEMA obligated projects. The Town’s road infrastructure is critically important as reflected by the increased funding for road, both asphalt and concrete, and drainage improvements over the last several years based on input from each council person.

During the pandemic, we were hard at work implementing many improvements including: Construction of an overflow parking lot adjacent to the “Yes We Can” Community Center, the Beacon Hill Bluff Stabilization, reconstruction of the Leeds Pond Culvert, sidewalk replacement along Plandome Road, above LIRR bridge, and the Manorhaven Boat Ramp and Gerry Pond Park dredging which were funded by FEMA.

The 2021 plan dedicates \$4,300,000 million a year for residential and industrial roadway resurfacing, \$1,000,000 million for concrete road improvements and \$1,000,000 for sidewalk improvements townwide.

We continue to strive to improve the quality of parks for our constituents. Our parks are where

we come together as a community for concerts, programs for both seniors and families, summer recreation opportunities and to enjoy the various pools.

Our much-anticipated North Hempstead Beach Park improvement project is currently in the engineering and design stage for phase 1. This comes after a two-year process of “visioning” by the Town during which time the public gave feedback as to what they wanted to see at the park. This is a very exciting step as we begin the transformation of North Hempstead Beach Park starting very soon. We have held several internal and external meetings with the engineering/design consultant to move this project forward with all departments involved, including early discussions on specific design elements relating to the restaurant.

Looking ahead, we have a number of exciting initiatives in the works, including the rehabilitation of Clark Botanic Garden's original house, the design of a nature educational center, engineering services focused on the rehabilitation of the tennis courts and multiple purpose field/track at Michael J. Tully Park, renovation of the pools at Manorhaven Beach Park & Martin “Bunky” Reid Park, replacement of the playground at Caemmerer Park, major amenity and site improvements at Fuschillo Park, and LED street light upgrades.

Other major improvements on the horizon like the Bayview Avenue shoreline stabilization, the Tully parking lot renovation, and the fishing pier rehabilitation will be largely covered by FEMA funding, saving taxpayers millions of dollars.

And with all of the challenges we faced, it was so important to us that we passed a responsible budget that stayed within the tax cap as we continue to govern in a fiscally conservative way. Together with our financial advisors, we were able to identify great opportunities to save significant dollars.

Just recently, we converted outstanding tax-exempt bonds into taxable bonds and refinanced existing tax-exempt bonds at a lower interest rate, resulting in a savings of close to \$1.5 million over the course of the next 12 years. This was after already refinancing additional bonds outstanding at a lower interest rate, resulting in a savings of more than \$400,000.

This administration is the first in the Town's history to earn the prestigious Aaa bond rating from Moody's Investors Service. Our Aaa rating, the highest a municipality can obtain, was reaffirmed this month for the 10th consecutive time. We were truly proud to once again be recognized by Moody's for our strong fiscal management.

The stable outlook provided by Moody's also reflects the Town's conservative fiscal management practices, which will support healthy operating performance and maintenance of a strong financial position.

Additionally, the Town's fiscal stress score is 1.7 which is one of the lowest of any Town on Long Island, according to data released by the Office of the New York State Comptroller. Comparatively there are Towns on Long Island with fiscal stress scores as high as 70 and above, further demonstrating North Hempstead's commitment to sound financial management.

Although the Town itself is stable, we recognize the struggles so many of our residents are facing. To that end, the Town was fortunate enough to obtain a grant for \$6 million as part of the emergency rental assistance program. In the coming months, we will be working with a consultant to help us ensure that the funds are routed to residents who need it the most. We are also looking to establish a local preference law for veteran owned businesses as we want to do everything we can for those who have already done so much for us.

Every fall, we are proud to celebrate the veterans who live in the Town. This year, adapting to COVID restrictions, we distributed more than 700 commemorative lawn signs to veterans across the community. The signs also acknowledge the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II. We viewed this initiative as just one way to express our deep gratitude for the sacrifices our local vets have made, and to show our appreciation for their bravery, heroism, and selflessness in serving our country and protecting the values we hold dear.

During the holiday season, we held another successful Veterans Donation Drive. This marked the 7th year that the Town has been hosting this drive. This year, due to COVID, the emphasis

was placed on gift cards. However, along with gift cards for supermarkets and pharmacies, donations included cases of brand-new toiletries from the Red Cross of Mineola and custom crocheted and knitted blankets from our very special “blankets of love” senior group.

These programs were initiated in conjunction with our Veterans Advisory Committee. Our veterans play an integral role in determining the initiatives the Committee works on. They have truly devoted their lives in service to our country and our community.

The Town’s Disability Advisory Committee is hard at work advocating for individuals with disabilities and their families. This year, the Committee has plans to continue its work with representatives from Nassau County and New York State to find affordable ways that individuals with disabilities can continue to live and thrive in their home communities. The overall goal of the committee is to improve the quality of community life and promote individuality, and they and we are determined and committed to meeting that goal.

Looking ahead, the Town is planning to unveil a very special monument at Manhasset Valley Park in dedication of the lives lost on September 11, 2001. The focal point of the display will be a 19-foot-long steel beam, once a part of the World Trade Center South Tower that was given to the Town by the Port Authority. We will be hosting a special ceremony this year to commemorate the 20th anniversary of 9/11.

This past year was of course impacted drastically by this unprecedented pandemic. I want to again say how absolutely critical it is that we continue heeding the advice of medical professionals. Please continue to avoid crowds, wash your hands, practice social distancing, and most importantly, wear that mask.

As we have said repeatedly, nothing is more important than the safety and well-being of you and your loved ones. We care about you and will continue taking all necessary precautionary measures to protect the health and welfare of everyone in our Town.

We are a family in North Hempstead, and that has never been more apparent than now. We look

out for each other.

We protect each other. We care for one another. We are grateful for our friends, family, and neighbors. We are grateful for the medical professionals, the first responders, and all our essential workers. They have gone above and beyond to help maintain the health, safety, and sense of community we hold so dear. As a tribute to their service, we will be unveiling a special monument to them in front of Town Hall.

Here in our Town, while this was a tough year on so many levels, and extraordinarily challenging, we never stopped working together on behalf of the residents of North Hempstead, and we are truly optimistic about brighter days ahead. The best is yet to come.

Noam Chomsky once said “Optimism is a strategy for making a better future. Because unless you believe that the future can be better, you are unlikely to step up and take responsibility for making it so.”

So, let's make it so together.

Thank you so much for joining us today. I hope we can all get together again very soon, and I am looking forward to that. Virtual hugs only go so far.

Until then – as always, please be smart and stay safe.