

SUPERVISOR JENNIFER DeSENA'S

2023 NORTH HEMPSTEAD

STATE OF THE

TOWN



JANUARY 27, 2023

## **State of the Town 2023**

**January 27, 2023**

**Supervisor Jennifer DeSena**

**Town of North Hempstead**

Good afternoon everyone and thank you for joining us for the annual North Hempstead State of the Town address. This is the **36<sup>th</sup> annual State of the Town address** and I am so excited to be here today for my second go at this!

First, I would like to thank the **League of Women Voters** for all their hard work and dedication to make sure that today's event went off without a hitch.

Planning an event like this is no easy task, so thank you to President of the League **Regina Goutevenier**, Luncheon Chair **Amy Bass**, and her talented team: **Michele Lamberti, Francine Furtado, and Marie Bellon**. Let's have a round of applause for them and the amazing job they did today!

The League of Women Voters has long played a **significant** role in uniting our communities and advocating for the informed participation in our democracy of all citizens, regardless of **gender, sex, race, ability, or party**.

Delivering this address is a privilege that I do not take lightly, and without the important work of the League throughout history, I surely would not be here in this position today.

A special thank you to our Commissioner of Community Services and the Department of Services for the Aging Kimberly Corcoran-Galante for all she and her talented staff do to make today's event a reality. Finally, a special shout-out to the Harbor Links staff, under the direction of new manager, **Laura Duhig**, for all they do to coordinate today's event.

Thank you also to all the Town of North Hempstead elected officials here today, including:

- **Receiver of Taxes Charles Berman**
- **Town Clerk, Ragini Srivastava**

- **Councilmember Robert Troiano, Jr.**
- **Councilmember Peter Zuckerman**
- **Councilmember Dennis Walsh**
- **Councilmember Veronica Lurvey**
- **Councilmember David Adhami**
- **Councilmember Mariann Dalimonte**

There are numerous other elected and public officials here today and I am so thankful for your support and would like to take a moment and recognize those in attendance: **[READ LIST]**

Last year, I stood here and delivered a simple message to the Town Board, **“together, we can accomplish many great things.”** I believe that we have done just that as have continued to collaborate and hard work for our residents over the past year. I am proud of all the great work we have done and while some of our Board meetings have been undeniably a bit painful at points, **we’re in this together**, and we’re all committed to doing the people’s work!

It's also important to recognize and highlight our collaboration with colleagues in other levels of government, as well as all our many local mayors, special district commissioners, school superintendents, school board members, and union leaders, all of whom contribute in different ways to help make the Town of North Hempstead such a **special place**.

Also, I would like to recognize all of our first responders and health care heroes, especially those who are in the room today. Living under a pandemic for 2+ years gave all of us a newfound respect and appreciation for their **hard work, dedication, and selflessness**, and we are forever **indebted** to them. Thank you.

Also, a thank you to the entire workforce of the Town of North Hempstead, led by **CSEA Local 7555 President Tom McDonough** and his dedicated slate of officers. Thank you for all you do to support and advocate for the best interest of our workforce.

I'd also like to extend a special welcome to **President of CSEA Long Island Region 1, Jerry Laricchiuta**. Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to be here with us today.

Finally, I would like to thank our department commissioners. Without all of you and your dedicated staffs, the many great services, events, and programs here in our Town would simply not be possible. **I thank you, and our residents thank you.**

Having now been in office and on the job for over a year, I can honestly say that time has flown by. Over the last year, I have had the opportunity to oversee the **tremendous** amount of work that goes into delivering Town government and services to the people.

But, until you're sitting in the Supervisor's seat, and actually serving your role as the head of all departments, it's hard to appreciate the **non-stop activity** that takes place throughout the year in Town government. From winter months filled with historic snowstorms, thankfully which we've had

none of so far this year, to the arrival of spring and the rejuvenation of our parks and recreation programs, to the adventure and beauty of the summer season, and finally, to the tough decision during a hectic budget season in the fall – I can honestly say there is no way to appreciate the **enormity** of this job until you're actually the one doing it!

Our Town government is faced with **many challenges**, and I have sought to face these challenges head-on, the only way I know how. Before I was elected Town Supervisor, I prided myself on my ability to build coalitions to accomplish goals, and that is what I continue to seek to do each and every day in this role.

My goals for my administration have not changed since my inauguration. I believe that we should **streamline Town government wherever possible, work through the governmental logjam and increase accountability to our taxpayers, operate in a fiscally responsible manner, and lead our Town in an open, honest, and transparent way.**

**Transparency** is the key not only to a responsive government, but it also helps greater inform our residents on what is **truly** going on in their Town government. It's been said that "an educated citizenry is a vital requisite for our survival as a free people," and this is something that I wholeheartedly believe.

Last year at my State of the Town address, I announced that North Hempstead TV, our award-winning government access tv channel, would begin rebroadcasting our Town Board meetings, something that had **never** been done in the more than 15-year history of the tv studio.

As a result of this plan, which was put into action last April, I am happy to report that our Town Board meetings have been rebroadcast every single day on North Hempstead TV! These rebroadcasts, which occur at varying times throughout the week to give our residents as much of an opportunity to tune in as possible, have undoubtedly led to a more informed public than **ever before**.



Although there is no ability to quantify this in “ratings” per se, I can tell you anecdotally that not a day goes by where I don’t meet a resident at a community event who mentions that they tuned in for some of the most recent board meeting, and how much this change has helped **better educate** them about how their Town government works.

Beyond all this, North Hempstead TV is a fantastic resource that does a great job providing our residents with enriching programming. Our residents know that they can always find something interesting to watch on NHTV, and in the new year, they can expect to not only continue seeing the programming they love, but they can also expect to see a renewed emphasis on highlighting all the fantastic projects taking place across our great Town.

Town government is **continuously** working for its residents, often times in many ways that go unseen or unnoticed as projects continue to advance over the years. This year, the Town will be bringing a number of projects to fruition that residents have been looking forward to for **years**, including

work commencing at Michael Tully Park in New Hyde Park and Charles J. Fuschillo Park in Carle Place.

As work intensifies throughout the year for these projects and more, residents should expect to see them documented in **new** programming on our TV channel.

At my last State of the Town address, I spoke about the need to **educate and empower** parents to protect their families from the risks of alcohol and other drugs. Through my work as Executive Director of the Manhasset Coalition Against Substance Abuse, I witnessed firsthand the **destructive effect** alcohol, tobacco, prescription, and other drugs have had on our youth, and let's be frank: this is a problem that has not only not gone away, but it's become an evolving issue that is threatening to hit dangerous new heights.

While we would all like to believe that these are some far off issues that will never touch our idyllic Town of North Hempstead, those of us who have been touched by tragedy know that it is already **here** and pretending otherwise would just be **burying our heads in the sand**. The truth is, tragedy like this caused by the opioid epidemic can happen in **any** of our communities.

Just this past week, Newsday highlighted an “unusual increase” in fatal and non-fatal overdoses, which Nassau County officials attributed to illegal counterfeit prescription pills mixed with deadly fentanyl and urged those using non-prescribed drugs to use extreme caution. Warnings like these are becoming all too commonplace, as six out of every 10 counterfeit pills analyzed by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration in 2022 contained a lethal dose of fentanyl. This is an alarming increase over the past year.

I believe that as public officials, we must do **everything** in our power to save lives through prevention, treatment, and recovery. Last year I established the **Town of North Hempstead Substance Misuse Advisory Council** and have worked diligently to meet the issue head on through a number of ways, including free Narcan training seminars in conjunction with Northwell Health.

This Advisory Council includes a number of important voices in the fight against the drug overdose epidemic that has swept across our country and our area, including **Steve Chassman**, Executive Director of the Long Island Council Against Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, **Dr. Nellie Taylor-Waltrust**, Director of Outreach Services at the North Shore Child & Family Guidance Center, and **Dr. Sandeep Kapoor**, Director of Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment at Northwell Health.

Last year, over **110,000** people died due to drug overdoses, which is a stunning and sad new record. This is a shocking increase over the previous years record by 10,000, and this has been driven largely by the spread of illicit fentanyl. As public officials, we **must** do more to combat this.

One public figure who has done a tremendous amount to raise awareness and combat this scourge is **Drew Scott**, former longtime News 12 anchor and reporter, and current reporter for Newsday TV. Drew was personally touched by the deadly opioid epidemic, as his granddaughter Hallie tragically passed in 2017 to an overdose of heroin which was laced with deadly fentanyl.

Since then, Drew Scott has dedicated his life to **fighting** addiction in Hallie's memory and raising awareness about this issue. Drew has been **instrumental** in not only educating the public, but he has also set up a foundation in Hallie's memory and has helped to establish Opioid Addiction Task Forces in the Towns of Southhampton and Islip.

I am proud to announce today that Drew Scott has graciously accepted an invitation to join my Substance Misuse Advisory Council, and with his help and expertise, I know we will do **extraordinary** things to educate the public. The year ahead will be an important one, as we continue to work to address the opioid crisis and navigate the **uncharted landscape of legalized recreational marijuana** in the state of New York.

Last year, I called for a **recommitment** by the Town to investing in critical infrastructure, such as our roads and our sewers. As I said at the time, for too long, these have taken a back seat to other competing interests in the Town and been neglected to the point of **nearly** falling into a state of disrepair.

So, I am proud to announce today that over the course of the last year, the Town has taken major steps forward to completing a number of **long-stalled** projects that will **significantly** improve the quality of life of our residents.

The first project I'd like to highlight is Westbury Avenue in Carle Place, and in particular, its **dreadful** sidewalks. For too long, the sidewalks on Westbury Avenue have been **neglected**. Although Westbury Avenue is a Nassau County owned and maintained road, the repair and rehabilitation of the sidewalks falls under the jurisdiction of the Town of North Hempstead.

Westbury Avenue was constructed over 100 years ago and has been in serious need of repair and repaving for a long while. This could not be done though without a **commitment** from the Town to repair and rehabilitate the sidewalks in conjunction with this project, and this was something the County struggled to secure from the Town under multiple prior administrations.

Now, utilizing a portion of the Town's remaining American Rescue Plan Act funds, I am **proud** to report that the Town will be making a **\$2 million dollar** investment in the **future** of Carle Place's downtown and begin the replacement of these sidewalks this year, in conjunction with Nassau County reconstructing this long-neglected roadway.

Thank you to **County Legislator Laura Schaefer** for all of your hard work on behalf of your residents, **County Executive Bruce Blakeman** for helping the project move forward, and **Councilman Robert Troiano** for supporting the project as well.

This is an investment of **significant** resources in the Carle Place community, and along with the ongoing construction and improvements taking place at Fuschillo Park just a few blocks away, I am proud that the Town will be delivering these quality-of-life improvements to a corner of our Town that many residents feel has been **overlooked** by Town government for far too long.

Beyond this, another long-stalled project is now taking steps forward after the first year of my administration. The Manhasset sewer connection project has been something that residents have been asking for for **many** years.



For over **50 years** now, the residents and businesses along Plandome Road have had to rely on septic tanks, and over time, this has led to numerous issues, like the potential impact excess nitrogen flows are having on Manhasset Bay, and the significant financial burden these septic tanks have placed on our businesses.

I'm sure you'll be as shocked as I was when I tell you that an individual business on Plandome Road **spends upwards of \$70,000 dollars a year on septic services**. This astronomical cost is making it extremely difficult for anyone who is looking to open a business here, and it **must** change.

Throughout the course of 2022, I held meetings with the various stakeholders in the project, including the **Great Neck Water Pollution Control District and the Manhasset Chamber of Commerce**, where it was discussed how my administration can best move this project forward, after it has languished for years.

While details are still being finalized, this project remains a high priority and I have long believed that now was the perfect time to address it, especially in light of the **\$5 million dollar grant** secured by **Assemblywoman Gina Sillitti** in furtherance of this project. Thank you Assemblywoman Sillitti for your hard work on this project.

As such, late last year I announced that the Town would set aside a portion of the remaining ARPA funds to leverage these commitments to the Manhasset sewer connection project, and **finally** push it over the finish line towards completion.

ARPA funds were specifically designed to be utilized for investments in things like water and sewer infrastructure, so this is the perfect avenue to commit funds that will finally make this dream a reality.

I'm sure everyone would agree that improving the quality of life of our residents and protecting our environment are **not** partisan issues. But unfortunately, when this allocation came up for a vote at our monthly Board meeting earlier this week, it was blocked and then ultimately postponed until the Town Board's March meeting.

This was a disappointing result, as there is clear desire for this project in the community, and my fellow Town Board members professed their support of the project. I am confident that their lingering questions and concerns will be resolved by our March meeting because a project that promotes economic development, improves quality of life, and protects Manhasset Bay for generations to come should result in a unanimous vote in favor.

Over the last year, the Town has secured millions of dollars in grant funding to make a number of projects and programs a reality all across the Town.

Most recently, the Town was the recipient of a \$1.265 million dollar grant under the Restore New York Communities Initiative to support the redevelopment of three **vacant** and **abandoned** properties in New Cassel by our North Hempstead Community Development Agency.

The CDA, led by the tireless Rosemary Olsen, redevelops vacant and underutilized properties into **brand-new affordable workforce housing**, and these homes are then sold to eligible first-time homebuyers selected through a lottery. 19 such homes have been built so far under this program over the last 10 years, which is truly incredible.

The successful redevelopment of blighted properties under this program helps **improve the community, stimulates the economy, and aids in the revitalization of New Cassel**. I am very proud of this program, and I want to thank Councilman Robert Troiano again for all he has done to make it a success, especially as a vital member of the CDA during its early days.

I want to thank **Senator Schumer and former Congresswoman Kathleen Rice** for their hard work in securing the Town a \$900,000 dollar grant for upgrades at **Bunky Reid Park in New Cassel**. Bunky Reid Park is a vital part of the community that plays an important role in providing a much-needed outdoor recreation and wellness space, and this funding will go a long way towards renewing and improving this community park in the not-so-distant future with a **new skate park, community gardens and pollinator areas, and improvements to the deteriorating swimming pool**.

The Town continues to work with New York State to compensate eligible residents under the Emergency Rental Assistance program. Under this program, nearly **\$10 million dollars** in rental assistance was paid out to persons who qualified under the terms of the pandemic era program, with more than **\$6 million dollars** of that coming in the last year. I am proud that the Town's Grants Office was able to dole out nearly **90%** of the Town's allocation under this program, a number which many neighboring municipalities greatly lagged behind.

Thank you to our **Grants Coordinator Tom Devaney** for all you do to make sure the Town maximizes our grant funding, something which we will continue to put a particular emphasis on in the coming year.

I am happy to report that the Town will be sending out a request for proposals soon for a planner to update our **Town's nearly 35-year-old Master Plan**. At my last State of the Town, I spoke about the importance of a Master Plan, as it's a document that identifies and addresses the diverse needs of our communities when it comes to decisions affecting **quality of life, sustainability, and delivery of services for our residents**.

Over the course of the last year, I have spoken to residents from all walks of life and all corners of the Town, and I have heard a lot of great feedback on this topic. Now, I believe the time is ripe to bring in a professional planner to formally help shape the process.

Make no mistake, there will be a **difficult** balancing act ahead as we look to preserve the North Hempstead we all love while considering the possibility of some changes to reflect our times more accurately. But I am committed to advancing the process, and I look forward to and urge our residents to participate as we go forward.

Updating the Town's Master Plan is an **especially** important process as our State continues to look for ways to impose its will on our local control of zoning. Just a few weeks ago, Governor Hochul outlined her newest housing plan which would **effectively allow the state to override the Town's ability to control local zoning decisions.**

Under this plan, New York State would be gifted a new power that would allow Albany bureaucrats to **unilaterally rezone all suburban neighborhoods**, with a special emphasis on the immediate vicinity of Long Island Railroad stations.

This latest proposal would create high density housing zones in all existing neighborhoods and downtowns **without** care for what the people who actually live there think. Beyond silencing the voice of concerned residents, this proposal threatens to severely impact the quality of life of our communities, as critical resources will be stretched to their breaking point, our classrooms will be overcrowded, traffic will increase, our water and sewers will be strained, and our environment will be threatened.

While I certainly agree that affordable housing is a necessary priority for all levels of government, jeopardizing the quality of life in existing neighborhoods through a “one-size-fits-all” proposal is a poor way to accomplish that goal, and the Town sent a letter to Governor Hochul last week stating just that. I **hope** that Governor Hochul opens the lines of communications with local municipalities, hears our concerns, and adjusts her plans accordingly.



Local control of zoning has allowed local governments to determine what type of development is consistent with the character of our communities for generations, and it should remain this way. Nobody knows our residents and their wishes better than we do.

The Town's 311 Call Center is the envy of every other Town on Long Island, and it's an **outstanding** resource for both our residents and our departments. A well-run department filled with employees who go above and beyond to make sure our residents' questions are answered, it's an invaluable avenue for our residents to report their concerns, and have them recorded, logged, tracked, and responded to.

In 2021, 311 answered **153,512** calls, which averages out to just about **3,000** calls answered a week. The amount of work our 311 Call takers do is absolutely staggering and I can't thank them enough for their helpful and courteous service to our residents.

17 years after its inception, the 311 Call Center also answered their **2 and a half millionth call** in April 2022. Wow. Thank you to Commissioner of 311 Vinny Malizia and his fantastic staff for all you do.

Our Town continues to support and strengthen our senior community in a variety of ways. In-person programming has returned over the past year, and I can tell you that after attending pretty much every event and program our Town has hosted over the last year, the **excitement** and **gratitude** for being able to gather in person again is palpable. Many thanks to **Commissioner of the Department of Services for the Aging Kimberly Corcoran-Galante** for all she and her staff have done to make the seamless transition back to in-person programming.

**Project Independence** currently has **16,296** registered members, and over the last year, over **500** seniors have newly enrolled in the program.

Additionally, the Project Independence Advisory Committee has begun meeting in person again, and I was so grateful to be able to attend and be in the room with passionate nurses and social workers who provide invaluable

communication and assistance to our North Hempstead seniors so they can comfortably age in place and stay in their homes.

Project Independence is a **nationally** renowned and celebrated program for a reason, and it's for the **unparalleled** service provided for our seniors under its banner, all at no or minimal cost to them. Thank you again to all involved who help make our North Hempstead seniors the priority they deserve to be.

The Town of North Hempstead has a well-earned reputation as a community who really cares about our residents, especially our most vulnerable populations such as **our seniors, our veterans, and our disabled**. Over the last year, I have worked for the betterment of these groups with a simple philosophy in mind, which was imparted on me last year by a good friend Stella Spanakos, co-founder of The Nicholas Center in Port Washington: "diversity and inclusion should be viewed as leverage, not simply compliance."

What this boils down to is we should be doing everything we can to work together to make our communities more diverse, inclusive, and equitable, because it's something that will make our communities stronger, not simply because we **have to**.

People move to the Town of North Hempstead because in many ways we represent the suburban dream. A great example of this is an amazing couple I met just the other day, who moved to Port Washington from Bayside, Queens only a few months ago with their 4-year-old daughter Stella, who has been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. Although we as elected officials work to do all we can to protect and support our most vulnerable communities, unfortunately, there are **still** people out there who do not share these same values.

Stevie and Angelo Bovis found this out the hard way as their neighbors rose up in opposition to a fence installed in their front yard so their daughter Stella **could safely play outdoors**.

After a **long and expensive** legal battle, a variance was granted very recently by the Board of Zoning Appeals to allow the fence, noting that under the Americans with Disabilities Act the fence was allowed as it is a reasonable accommodation for Stella's needs. Despite this happy ending, I still would like to extend my deepest sympathies that their family was put through this ordeal, and hope that this will raise awareness going forward of what is considered a reasonable accommodation.

Stevie, Angelo, and Stella Bovis are all here today and I would like to acknowledge these amazing parents and their beautiful little girl as they fight with **passion** for the betterment of their daughter's life. I also am proud to announce today I have directed our Highway Department to install "**Autism Child Area**" signs along their street, to further protect the health and wellbeing of Stella. I urge residents who would like a similar sign brought to their neighborhood to reach out to either my office or their local Councilmember, and we will **gladly** work to get this done.

The Town's **Veterans Advisory Committee** did great work throughout our Town this year, especially this past holiday season. Just this past month, the Town, in conjunction with the Veterans Advisory Committee, collected nearly **\$10,000** from generous individuals across our Town as part of the Veterans Donation Drive to benefit those living at the Northport VA Hospital. This includes thousands of dollars collected and donated by a number of high school students across the Town. I am very proud of the example of these kids have set and thank you to all of the school administrators in the room for helping to instill these values in our children. This may even be the biggest veteran's donation drive ever in the Town. I thank the Committee so much for their hard work.

The rehabilitation of Charles J. Fuschillo Park is underway, as our Department of Public Works recently held a project kickoff meeting with the project contractors. Shovels will be in the ground soon, and this **multi-million-dollar reimagining** of this beloved community park in Carle Place, which is primarily being funded by 3TC as part of the MTA's Third Track Project, is projected to be completed sometime next year, providing residents with an all-new park experience.

In another example of our recommitment to critical infrastructure, during the budget process this year, the Town Board and I voted to **unanimously** pass a budget that committed an **extra \$2 million dollars to road repaving and resurfacing throughout the Town**. This was made possible by utilizing a portion of the Town's highway reserve fund which had ballooned in recent years far above necessary levels.

This \$2 million dollar increase will allow the Town to repave and resurface **more miles of Town roadways than in recent years**, and I am proud that we unanimously passed a budget that shifted our priorities in favor of that.

Speaking of budget, I am excited that in my first year in office, a **5% tax cut was delivered to our residents** in our unanimously passed 2023 Town Budget. To my knowledge, this is the first Town tax cut our residents have experienced in **at least** a decade.

While I am very proud that we are delivering **millions** of dollars of property tax relief to our residents with this year's budget, I am disappointed that my proposal to deliver an **even greater double-digit tax cut** to our residents was not advanced. But our residents already pay some of the highest taxes in the nation, so any tax cut is a great start and I look forward to **building** on it come budget time this year.

Having now gone through my first budget season, I am very proud of what we were able to deliver for the residents, especially given the difficult circumstances that the Town has been under, having lost both our Town Comptroller and Chief Deputy Comptroller in January 2022.

In fact, the Town is still with a vacancy in these two positions more than a year later. It's shocking to realize that a Town with a nearly \$170 million dollar budget has been operating without a formally appointed Comptroller for more than a year. To be frank, these positions have gone unfilled for **far too long**.



Having no formally appointed Comptroller is something that could both put our Town at risk financially and could potentially jeopardize our Triple-A bond rating. Beyond this, it has also put undue strain on my Director of Finance Paul Wood, who had agreed to serve as Acting Comptroller temporarily as a stop-gap measure to keep the department **functional** throughout audit and budget season, but he is still in this role more than 6 months later.

This is a situation that needs to be rectified **immediately**.

At last year's State of the Town, I spoke about the need to install the members of our Board of Ethics into defined, staggered terms and cease the practice of allowing them to serve in "holdover status" from previous administrations. I made it a priority to rectify this after discovering our ethics board members terms had expired, to ensure we had a Board of Ethics independent and autonomous of any potential outside influence.

I am happy to report that over the course of the last year, **4 members** have been installed into new, defined terms. These individuals have been a great asset to our Town, and we thank them for their service. I will **continue** to push for a fully appointed independent Board of Ethics, in staggered and defined terms.

I also reaffirm my belief that all Town employees and elected officials should be subject to ethics training. Further educating our workforce on the ethical standards expected of them would be yet another way to establish an 'ethical firewall' to protect our residents from potential conflicts of interest.

This is something I had hoped to accomplish by now, but my proposed hiring of Steve Leventhal as independent counsel to the Board of Ethics was blocked. This is unfortunate, as Mr. Leventhal is considered **the foremost expert** of ethics on Long Island, and he has developed numerous ethics trainings over the years.

I remain committed in my belief that ethics training is a good idea for all Town employees and elected officials, and I am exploring other options to implement this proposal.

It comes as no shock to anyone, that the Town has faced and **continues** to face significant challenges in our Building Department. It's taken many **years** to create these problems, and it will take some time and effort to undo them as well.

Last March, I announced my first in a series of reforms aimed at transforming our Building Department and turning it into the efficient department I **know** it can be. Under that measure, I proposed to strike a portion of our Town's Code that had bogged down departmental operations, created needless interference, shifted accountability away from our trained professionals in the Building Department, and allowed the Town Supervisor or an individual Councilmember the ability to **overrule** the Commissioner's decision regarding an expedited permit application.

At the time, this was something that was **overwhelmingly** supported at a public hearing by our residents and our very own Building Department Commissioner, who firmly believed that final say on any such matter should rest with him and his department.

Despite this vote of confidence from our commissioner, who we trust to know best the validity of Building Department matters, this proposal was voted down at first, but was **ultimately passed in a modified version** a number of months later after much back and forth.

While I am proud to have gotten that code provision off the books in its former state, that was just the **tip** of the iceberg of the Building Department's problems, and at the rate of time it took to make even that small change, I was faced with the reality that this is a Town, and a department, that has become resistant to change.

So, I took the **extraordinary** measure of requesting that our Nassau County Comptroller's Office perform a full field audit of the Town's Building Department. This is something that was long overdue, and something that no administration had had the courage to do in the past. But I am **confident** that this **impartial** assessment by an outside agency will identify and address any mismanagement of departmental operations and any potential misconduct or irregularities that may exist.

Since my first day in office, I have made rehabilitating the Building Department a **top priority** and this independent and impartial assessment will undoubtedly cut to the core of the problems that have been plaguing the Building Department for years.

When this process is complete, which we expect sometime later this year, I'm hopeful that the results of the independent audit **will further identify the department's deficiencies**, so I can **continue** to hold our workforce accountable and deliver for the people of North Hempstead.

This is not to say that I have given up on rehabilitating the department though and plan to sit on my hands until the Comptroller's report is released. I will conclude today's address with one final, recently launched initiative in our 311 Call Center, aimed at helping our residents as they deal with the Building Department.

As I spoke about earlier, the 311 Call Center is integral to the success of our Town department's and is on the frontlines interfacing with our residents **daily**. Because of this, many residents reach out with questions regarding permits, plans, and other Building Department matters.

To help both our call takers in their role helping our residents and our residents in their quest to get their questions answered, at my direction, a **select** group of call takers have been trained over the last few months regarding the ins and outs of the Building Department and their CitizenServe software, and going forward, these call takers will be solely dedicated to answering calls from residents that come in to 311 regarding the Building Department.

I affectionately refer to this as our “**Building Department Pod,**” and although the project is still finalizing its testing period, first impressions from residents have been positive, as they welcome conversations with our **dedicated and knowledgeable staff** that ultimately lead them to the information they’re looking for. Thank you again to 311 Commissioner Vinny Malizia for helping to make this new service for our residents a reality.

The first year of my term in office has been both wonderful and challenging, and I look forward to **continuing** to move North Hempstead forward in the best interest of our residents.

The Town of North Hempstead is a great place to live, work, and raise a family, and I am **certain** that as we continue to work together, the best times are ahead of us.

I’m honored to have been given the opportunity to deliver this speech today, and I thank you all once again for the privilege.

**May God bless you, your families, the Town of North Hempstead, and the  
United States of America.**

Now, I think we have some time for questions from our residents...