

“STATE OF THE COUNTY
JANUARY 3, 2020

“I have served as Budget Officer for the past seven years and this has afforded me insight and knowledge into individual departments, as well as the overall operation of Warren County. This knowledge has and will benefit me as I engage in the duties of being Chairman.

“This year’s budget continues the conservative practices of the past while setting what I hope will be new precedents for investments in the County’s future. Establishing reserves and continued funding of them will allow us to make investments in infrastructure planning, enhance our commitment to SUNY Adirondack, maintain and improve the County’s facilities and pay expenses that will inevitably happen, but we are not sure when.

“The County’s fund balance to begin 2020 is projected to be between \$21 and \$22 million and the goal is to achieve the GFOA (*Government Finance Officers Association*) recommended level of fund balance over a multi-year period that is equal to two months of operating expense which in the County’s case is \$23.6 million. We will finish developing the fund balance policy early on this year.

“Each year we have to adapt to new challenges imposed by the New York State Legislature, at times with new expenses surpassing the allowable 2% tax cap also imposed by the State. Our 2020 Budget absorbs the new expense of mandates of Bail and Discovery Reform, as well as Public Health. A new twist is revenue diversion using diverted County sales tax revenue to make AIM (*Aid and Incentives to Municipalities*) payments to the towns in essence using the County’s revenue in order to cut the State Budget expenses. Well over half of our \$45 million property tax levy goes to fund State mandates.

“To meet these challenges and many others I have asked Supervisor Geraghty to serve as Budget Officer. Supervisor Geraghty has served in this capacity in the past and I am very confident he will do a great job. He will begin working with the County Administrator on the 2021 Budget and beyond very soon.

“I have asked Supervisor Frasier to Chair the Finance Committee and in accordance with Local Law she will also be Vice-Chair of the Board. Supervisor Frasier is solid, dependable, has a great personality and if the need arises, will do an excellent job.

“Warren County continues to be in good financial condition, with our bond rating improving over the past few years to its current rating of AA Stable. Our goal is to achieve a AA+ rating this year when the rating agencies reevaluate us. Our bond and indebtedness is \$40.7 million and is about 25% of our Constitutional debt limit of \$160 million which is down 27% from a year ago.

“In 2019 Warren County sales tax revenue was up about 2.5% and as of this morning is up about 2.2%. Our financial forecasting will continue to be realistic, but conservative when it comes to sales tax and other revenues.

“I have asked Supervisor Simpson to serve as Chair of the Personnel & Administration Committee. I am removing Higher Education from this Committee because in the scope of long-term planning it makes more sense to look at SUNY Adirondack through the lens of workforce development. I am moving SUNY Adirondack to the Economic Development & Growth Committee and am moving Administration to Personnel which will include Clerk of the Board, County Attorney and County Administrator for two reasons, the first of which is their agendas develop in response to the needs of all departments so they will benefit from a later meeting. Also because most Supervisors attend the Personnel and Finance Committee meetings, I feel it is appropriate for more Supervisors to be present for discussion of agenda items for these very important departments.

“In 2019 the accomplishments of the Personnel Committee included development of pay scales for attorneys and management confidential employees, the resolution of two union contracts and the hiring of a new Department Head for Employment & Training Administration. This years work will include hiring at least two new Department Heads, one for the Office of Emergency Services and the other for Weights & Measures, as well as mediation with the CSEA (*Civil Service Employees Association*) and the beginning of negotiations with the PBA (*Police Benevolent Association*).

“I have asked Supervisor Wild to Chair the Economic Growth & Development Committee. One of our main functions besides providing services for our residents is to facilitate the conditions for opportunity which leads to prosperity and will benefit all our residents present and future. We need to do more strategic planning which means taking an educated realistic look at what Warren County has to offer to the outside world, identifying industries that are well suited for here and making the investments in our workforce and infrastructure that are needed to get them here. It is not enough to say we need more jobs, as we need more quality jobs that make people want to move here and stay here. It is also not enough to say you should move your business here because the taxes are low and the views are nice. It is going to take a more serious analysis, as well as investment and this Committee will begin that work. A part of this will involve continuing and enhancing the capital infrastructure planning initiative begun last year by Chairman Conover. Employment & Training Administration will also become part of this Committee because we need to start thinking about this department as a tool to develop our workforce to suit out local economy and plan for the future. This department is also about lifting up our neediest residents to hopefully become part of our economy and improve their own lives, with the department developing new and strong partnerships with DSS and Probation.

“To follow up on that, SUNY Adirondack is all about workforce development and I believe it fits well with the Economic Growth & Development Committee and will be a critical partner as we go forward. The advancements that have been accomplished at SUNY Adirondack over the past few years with the leadership of President Duffy and the SUNY Board of Trustees, which Supervisor Strough is a member of, and I would like thank him for his leadership on that Board, are rather amazing including the improvements in the facilities, the NSTEM

(*Nursing, Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics*) Building, WORC (*Workforce Readiness Center*), moving the Culinary Facility to the City of Glens Falls and having a dormitory which allows students to reside there. They have developed many programs to help our businesses, school children and to create and educate the County's workforce. As a sponsor of SUNY Adirondack I believe the County can and will do better in terms of providing funds for the operation. Currently the County's contribution equals about 11%, but when the Community College was established one third of the funding was provided by the sponsors, one third from New York State and the remaining one third was provided by the students. Although I do not anticipate our contribution will amount to one third, if the sponsors contributed more it would keep tuition down and allow more individuals to obtain higher educations.

"Another educational institution that I would like to mention is BOCES (*Board of Cooperative Educational Services*), with seventeen locations across New York State. I think they are a gem that is not thought of most of the time. They partner with SUNY Adirondack in their career and technical education program, help teach the County's youth, individuals who are seeking to better themselves and those who have lost their jobs. I feel at minimum the Board should make a concerted effort to promote BOCES and also advocate legislatively for additional State funding for the BOCES facilities and programs.

"Next, I would like to talk about broadband and cell service. I read with great interest the article that Supervisor McDevitt distributed from *New Yorker Magazine* about two Counties in Kentucky that have had a phone co-op for many years and also developed a broadband co-op. They had lost a lot of manufacturing jobs, with a few plants shutting down, resulting in the issues that occur when there is no work, but the broadband itself enticed answering services and that type of industry to come to those two communities and while not being the complete answer it certainly made a significant improvement in the quality of life there. I think that broadband and cell service is desperately needed in the Adirondacks, as I believe they could be a lifeline for people making an income and being able to live in the Adirondacks. It is not just about communication and safety, as it is also about education, paying bills, etc. We are making progress on broadband, but people get impatient, similar to the electrification program that occurred in the 1940's, but I believe we will get there at some point.

"Supervisor Conover will Chair the Public Works Committee, with an important priority being the railroad corridor. Whether where going to have freight, tourist passenger service or recreational uses this corridor is a huge asset and its time to get moving on its future. Supervisor Conover has invested a lot of time and energy in this and will continue leading this effort. Personally I am good with whatever direction develops.

"In 2020, same as prior years, we will expand our highway improvement program with additional funding, if possible. We will be contracting all of our paving projects this year and the additional workers made available by not having a paving crew will be necessary for doing repairs to County Roads as a result of the Halloween storm. A large thank you to the Federal Government for

declaring a disaster which enabled us and many of our towns to receive 75% reimbursement from FEMA (*Federal Emergency Management Agency*) for repairs and damages.

“We have two good leaders for the Tourism and Occupancy Tax Coordination Committees in Supervisors Merlino and Dickinson and I am asking them to continue. These Committees will work in tandem and invest the County’s resources in two goals, the first of which is enhancing what we already do and the other is over the long-term pushing Warren County into a year-round tourism destination. One template to observe in this regard in my opinion is the City of Saratoga Springs. We are a couple of assets shy, but continue in the right direction.

“Our greatest economic asset is our environment from our lakes to our mountains. I am asking Supervisor Braymer to continue her excellent leadership in this area. We can be environmentally and fiscally responsible at the same time, as this Committees many accomplishments last year demonstrated.

“I am asking Supervisor Beaty to continue to Chair the County Facilities Committee. He is a good leader for this Committee and works well with our professional staff. Last year was the first of a new ten year FBO (*Fixed Based Operator*) contract that Supervisor Beaty helped to negotiate. We are doing even better than he said we would under the new contract with our T-Hangars at 100% capacity and we have seen significantly more revenue. The goal is to close the Airport operating deficit and we are making great progress towards that. The County is seeking Airport Improvement grant funding through the FAA (*Federal Aviation Administration*) to design and replace our maintenance buildings at the Airport and if you have ever seen them you would be aware this is long overdue.

“Last Year we sold the recycling facility on the former Ciba Geigy property and used the proceeds to finance the construction of a new Office of Emergency Services storage facility which was a major accomplishment. We have been discussing building this storage facility for nearly ten years to house the County’s emergency response equipment and we will see that completed in 2020. I apologize to Mr. LaFlure that he had to retire in order to get this done.

“There are two other County facilities in need of our attention, the first of which is Countryside Adult Home and the other is the County Highway Maintenance Garage in the Town of Johnsburg. Countryside Adult Home has been connected to the Town of Warrensburg sewer system, but the buildings, systems and rooms are in need of upgrading with the goal of making the facility more appealing, comfortable and filling the forty-eight beds the facility has available. The County’s Highway Maintenance Garage needs to be replaced for the benefit of our employees and the proper storage of our equipment. Working with the Town of Johnsburg, I am confident we can reach a positive outcome.

“It is my belief that as many Supervisors as possible should Chair a Committee if the Committees are available and there is a desire to be Chair. To that end I am dividing the Criminal Justice & Public Safety Committee into two separate

Committees. I am asking Supervisor Leggett to remain as Chair of the Public Safety Committee which will consist of Fire Prevention & Building Code Enforcement, Office of Emergency Services and Sheriff and Communications. I am asking Supervisor Seeber to Chair the Criminal Justice Committee which will include the District Attorney's Office, Public Defender, Assigned Counsel, Probation and the Courts. Her previous experience as Supervisor and more importantly her experience working as a Crime Victim's Advocate in contact and working with many of these departments lends itself well to serving in this capacity.

"A major priority in the criminal justice/public safety area is Bail and Discovery Reform. I believe there will be unintended consequences that will come to light as a result of this legislation. Warren County has led from the front on this issue and has done so in a bipartisan manner. We know there are major problems with the new law and we are committed to pushing the State Legislature to fix the problem before innocent people are needlessly victimized. The Legislative & Rules Committee will continue to play an important role with this issue and other legislative issues and I am asking Supervisor Strough to remain as the Chair of this Committee.

"Another Committee that I would like to separate this year is Health and Human Services. I am asking Supervisor McDevitt to Chair the Health Services Committee and Supervisor Driscoll to Chair the Human Services Committee. Supervisor McDevitt has been a strong advocate for those in need of medical care, with medical health issues and our seniors. We have all seen his passion and concern when discussing these issues and he will do a great job in this position with the oversight of Public Health, Mental Health and the Office for the Aging. One priority for the Health Services Committee this year is the transition of behavioral health services from the Glens Falls Hospital to outside providers.

"I cannot think of anyone more qualified on the Board to serve as the Chair of the Human Services Committee than Supervisor Driscoll. He has devoted his professional life to those in need and will be compassionate and informed and will lead us through the challenges, including getting the Veterans' Peer to Peer Program operational again.

"Supervisor Hogan has asked to remain as the Chair of Extension Service and I am pleased to reappoint her to that position. Again I think that Cornell Cooperative Extension is another gem that does not get enough attention. I believe if more people took advantage of the programs and were promoted by the County it could result in improving many people's lives and I look forward to Supervisor Hogan doing that.

"I would also like Supervisor Merlino to continue as the Chair of the Park Operations & Management Committee and Supervisor Beatty to remain as the Chair of the Shared Services Committee. I am asking Supervisor Magowan to Chair the Support Services Committee which contains many of the critical departments that keep the County's operations running and interact more directly with the public. This Committee oversees the Auditor, Board of Elections, County Clerk/Department of Motor Vehicles, Information Technology,

Purchasing and Self-Insurance Administration. Supervisor Magowan is a “nuts and bolts” guy who presents a good face to the public himself and I think he has the perfect disposition for the job.

“I will also be appointing a special Committee for 2020 for the purpose of getting the long contemplated EMS (*Emergency Medical Services*) shared services plan completed. The EMS Task Force has done the yeoman’s work on this and I want to thank Supervisor Leggett for his leadership. This special Committee will be Chaired by Supervisor Geraghty, whose unique perspective as both a Supervisor, a first responder for nearly fifty years and a former County Administrator will give this the push it needs to get a plan to fruition.

“I believe the Chairs I am appointing are inclusive of all Board Members. People were chosen for their experience and how their strengths matched up to the priorities at hand in the substance of the Committee. I have chosen these chairs because I have confidence in their ability to lead each Committee forward. Having said that I am requesting that each Chair choose their own Vice-Chair and second Vice-Chair for their Committee and inform the Clerk of the Board in the near future so your selections can be applied to the Standing Committee list. I have also reduced the Committee sizes from eleven members to nine and from nine members to seven. I hope that having fewer Committee appointments will allow each Supervisor to spend more time and focus more deeply on the Committees to which they are assigned. All nineteen of you are busy and you should not be expected to be an expert on everything all at once.

“I want to extend a thank you to all of the employees of Warren County that work each day providing services to our residents. I am looking forward to working with each Board Member in 2020 to create opportunities, have positive outcomes and maintain quality services for the businesses and residents of Warren County. My door will always be open and I will always listen to your concerns, ideas and perspectives. Thank you again for affording me the privilege to serve as Chairman of the Warren County Board of Supervisors.

Respectfully submitted,
Frank E. Thomas, Chairman
Warren County Board of Supervisors”