



State of the Town Address

February 26, 2020

By Supervisor William W. Moehle

Thank you for joining me tonight to discuss the State of the Town of Brighton for 2020. This is my ninth State of the Town address, and in looking forward to the future, the future of our community of Brighton, I can whole heartedly affirm that the State of the Town of Brighton is strong; strong in our people and neighborhoods, strong in our fiscal position, and strong in our policy initiatives. While our successes have earned us the ranking as the best place to live in New York, we must continue to strive for more, strive to be a model for other communities across the state and across the nation, but most importantly, strive to be a community where we open our arms and our hearts to strangers, a community where sustainability, education and inclusion are not merely words, they are core values that we live by and that we work to enhance. This is a challenging time, and in some ways the challenges we face today are very different than those we have faced in the past. Through it all, we must and we will strive always to keep Brighton a community where we celebrate neighborhoods and small businesses and a community where our quality of life is second to none. This is our community; this is our town, this is Brighton.

I want to acknowledge my elected Town colleagues, Chris Werner, Jason DiPonzio, Robin Wilt, Christine Corrado, Dan Aman, Committees, liaisons, etc. Town Clerk and Receiver of Taxes Dan Aman sometimes seems to be everywhere, particularly now that he holds office hours at senior communities in Brighton and the Brighton Recreation Department's Seniors Program every month, ensuring that Town resources and information are available to all. But come tax collection seasons, Dan and his team are in place doing remarkable work not only collecting taxes, but also providing a broad range of services, from dog licenses to handicapped parking to marriage licenses and passports, all part of an ordinary day's work in the Town Clerk's office...if there is such a thing as an ordinary day's work in the Clerk's office!

We can't do it alone, so I am especially grateful for my colleagues in government and education that are with us tonight and those others that could not be here (NAMES). You have all shown by your commitment and your willingness to work collaboratively with me and with others in government that you make service to our residents your priority.

2019 was another year of accomplishment here in Brighton, and those accomplishments are in no small part due to our people and particularly to the leadership and effort of each of our Town senior staff. During 2019, David Catholdi became Chief of Police, after over 20 years of

service with the Brighton Police Department, and service to our country in the USAF before that. Also during 2019, we welcomed Lisa Pavlovych as Court Clerk, and Judges Morris and Falk worked tirelessly to continue to provide fair justice for all, in what is widely viewed as the best Town Court in the area.

Commissioner of Public Works, Highway Superintendent and Sewer Commissioner Mike Guyon probably wears the most hats among our senior staff, with responsibility for, among other things, all of our sustainability planning and execution, sidewalk and trail construction, leaf pickup, snow and ice removal, land use, property maintenance and so much more. When I talk about the many hats Mike wears, the variety of his hats reflect that his crews are busy during every season, and since it seems as though their hardest work comes during our harshest weather, I can't thank them enough for the work Mike and his people do for the Town.

Jennifer Ries-Taggart, Executive Director of the Brighton Memorial Library serves thousands of people each year with so much more than a traditional library full of books. The wide variety of programming, over 1000 during 2019, and materials are just some of the reasons that the Brighton Memorial Library has been recognized as the best library in the area. Don't miss the Friends of the BML Used Book Sale, starting tomorrow for Friends of the BML and Friday for the general public.

Recreation Director Becky Cotter manages affordable and high quality recreation and other activities, that serve families, toddlers, seniors and everyone in between. In particular, she does all this largely in a facility that was built as a grammar school over 50 years ago. It is important to have a community center to enhance the quality of life for people of all ages in Brighton, and we will begin the process of planning such a center during the coming year.

Matt Beeman, Brighton's Parks Superintendent, has somehow managed to maintain an ever expanding parks and trail system...and by the way, we're not done yet!, with a small but dedicated group of workers, who today keep over 560 acres of parks and nearly 15 miles of trails, safe and enjoyable.

The public doesn't get to work with our Finance Director, Paula Parker, very often but Paula and her team are responsible for working with me to develop strong fiscally responsible budgets, even in the face of scarce resources and a tax cap that has the unintended consequence of denying local governments the resources needed to enhance community quality of life investments. Through it all, Brighton continues to maintain balanced budgets, comply with the tax cap and earn high ratings from Moody's and the NYS Comptroller, among others, for our financial stability and strength.

Also largely invisible to the public, but vital nonetheless, are our Information Technology Director, Jeremy Lutz, and our HR Director Tricia VanPutte. In an era where cybersecurity is a regular part of the evening news, Jeremy's work is ever more important, to ensure that our IT infrastructure supports our work as efficiently as possible, but also to ensure that your data and ours, are protected from criminal hackers. Tricia is responsible for navigating the arcane rules of a civil service system, that was designed to prevent nepotism and political patronage, but all too often makes it difficult for municipalities like Brighton that seek to diversify our work force. Thank you for your behind the scenes excellence, Jeremy and Tricia.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, is the very visible and very important work of our Town Assessor, Sue Wentworth. Sue came to us originally as our Information Technology Director, but she also had a background in real estate appraisal. As Town Assessor, Sue has melded those two disciplines, and now leads an office that works daily with residents who have questions about the complicated world of property taxes and assessments, and does so in a way that is so helpful and welcoming to everyone who walks in the door, particularly our seniors.

As former Attorney to the Town myself for over 18 years, I know how important that job is, both serving as a legal advisor but also more broadly as a governmental advisor, particularly in a Town like Brighton where we work proactively and are often the first in the area or even the state to take action in important matters. In appointing Ken Gordon as Attorney after I became Supervisor, his own experience as a former Town Board member was a valuable consideration, and I appreciate the expertise and experience that he brings to the job.

Since 2012, Brighton has received over \$5 million in new grants. Last year, we completed our Envision Brighton 2028 Comprehensive Plan update. The Envision Brighton Plan update has an emphasis on sustainability, and this year, we have relied on the recommendations set forth in the Plan to win additional grants, to build sidewalks that will help ensure that students arrive at school safely; to design a new trail system in West Brighton, the Multiversity Trail, that when completed will connect our region's mini-Research Triangle, the U of R, RIT and MCC, with a trail system that will also support economic development and residential quality of life in West Brighton; and a Climate Action Plan, an important roadmap and scorecard for Brighton's sustainability efforts. Each of these grants has its basis in the Envision Brighton 2028 Plan and each of these grants will help advance the cause of sustainability in Brighton. Envision Brighton 2028 is our core land use planning document and we work with it daily to develop sustainable ideas for Brighton's future.

This past fall, Brighton and Rochester jointly opened the Highland Crossing Trail. The Highland Crossing Trail links the Erie Canal Trail in Brighton with the Genesee Riverway Trail

in Rochester, and it was funded by a federal grant. It runs generally from the Brighton Town Park on Westfall Rd. past SUNY Empire State College, through Highland Park and the Highland Park Neighborhood, to its junction with the Genesee Riverway Trail near the north end of the University of Rochester River Campus. This route is ideal both for recreational use and commuting by cyclists and pedestrians. We now have approximately 15 miles of trails in Brighton that help connect our community with nature and with our neighbors, as well as providing an important sustainable transportation network.

Our public safety agencies work 24/7 for our safety and welfare. During 2019, we congratulated outgoing Police Chief Mark Henderson on his retirement, knowing that he would continue to be a part of the broad effort to keep our community safe in his new role as Director of Community Security for the Jewish Federation, and we welcomed Chief David Catholdi, a 20 year veteran of the Brighton Police Department. In line with our town wide sustainability engagement, the Department now has three hybrid police vehicles, and plans to purchase additional hybrid vehicles in 2020. The number of traffic tickets issued by the Brighton Police rose significantly in 2019, as did DWI arrests, and traffic safety enforcement will continue to be a priority with the Department, as we know it is with the community, in 2020. On a related note, we purchased two sets of temporary speed humps last year, and tested them briefly before the early snow set in last fall. Tests with these temporary humps will be part of the review process for any new speed humps to be installed for traffic calming purposes. While speed humps can, in some cases, help calm traffic, they do come with potential disadvantages. We will review any new requests for speed humps to ensure that they don't simply divert traffic to other streets, and don't cause excessive delays in service for emergency service vehicles. I am particularly appreciative for the many occasions that our BPD works on an interagency basis with the Sheriff, State Police and/or District Attorney to conduct serious investigations. In 2019 we witnessed at least two very high profile cases of that nature, the tragic motor vehicle accident on Edgewood Ave. and the reopening of the murder over 35 years ago, of Cathleen Krauseneck. The hard work, compassion and professionalism of the Brighton Police Department was evident in both of these cases.

As I noted last year, during 2019 the Brighton Fire Department conducted a public review of ongoing staffing at Station 3, on Blossom Rd. Thanks to community involvement and a willingness of the BFD to engage in this important dialog, a decision was made to maintain full time staffing at Station 3, and to conduct a test of increased staffing at the Station beginning later this year. Maintaining and enhancing the quality of service in East Brighton and in Brighton as a whole is an important part of our public safety framework and I greatly appreciate the shared commitment of the Brighton Fire Department to that goal. Brighton Volunteer Ambulance continues to see increasing calls for their services, but thanks in part to their expanded facility, BVA also continues to increase the percentage of calls they are able to respond to directly, rather than relying on mutual aid from other agencies. This helps ensure

faster responses and reduced cost to town residents for the high quality EMS and other services provided by BVA.

If you're like me, you are unhappy to see the empty lot at the interchange of 590 and Monroe Ave. Like me, you are probably also concerned with generating adequate funding for Brighton schools, which receive barely 50% of the State Foundation Aid to which they are entitled by formula. And if you are like me, you were impressed at our Town Board meeting two weeks ago, when we listened to a very articulate student who wanted to be able to walk safely to the Harley School and submitted a petition with over 100 signatures in support.

There is a connection between each of these concerns, and that is the continued frivolous litigation that is blocking development of the vacant land at the interchange between 590 and Monroe Ave., consisting of approximately ten acres, primarily zoned for commercial retail use.

This land that is today an eyesore is intended to be the site of the proposed Whole Foods supermarket and plaza, and the gateway to a revitalized Monroe Ave. business corridor for Brighton, with retail options new to Brighton and healthy competition that provides new choices for consumers. When developed, that property will generate as much as \$400,000 in local property taxes, approximately \$200,000 of which will go to the Brighton Central School District. Of course, that is not enough to fill the Foundation Aid gap that the District faces, but that tax revenue, and the new tax revenue that will be generated as we embrace sustainable redevelopment of our Monroe Ave. corridor, will help ensure the long term stability of our schools. Finally, among the over 2 million dollars in amenities that will be provided to the community at no cost to taxpayers by the developers of that project, is the acquisition of the right of way and construction of the Auburn Trail, which will run from Highland Ave. to the Pittsford Town Line, a distance of about 2 miles, connecting with the existing Auburn Trail in Pittsford. When acquired and constructed, the Auburn Trail will allow safe walking and biking to the Harley School, and to businesses and neighborhoods.

Why is that parcel still a vacant eyesore, when Brighton would receive such significant tax revenue and community amenities, including Trail construction and Monroe Ave. safety improvements, and traffic studies show that there will be next to no rush hour traffic impact when the project is completed? A series of what I believe are frivolous lawsuits has so far blocked redevelopment of this property. Who is behind these lawsuits? We don't know, but we do know that the groups that filed some of those lawsuits are fighting tooth and nail to prevent you from finding out any information about who is paying their lawyers to keep this property an eyesore, and they are fighting to keep us from finding out if they even have the right to bring their lawsuits in the first place, what is known as "standing."

The Courts have already ruled that our incentive zoning law is legal and that the Town Board complied with the Open Meetings Law in reviewing the application for development. The Town

Board held five public hearings, at which all perspectives on the project were heard. Those hearings were open to the public and live streamed and broadcast on television. The members of the Town Board listened to those who expressed concerns about traffic and neighborhood impacts and to those who supported economic development and the taxes this project would generate, and in response, we directed that the project be reduced in size and the nearby neighborhoods protected from traffic by eliminating project access to Clover St. and Allens Creek Rd.

With those protections in place, the Town Board voted to proceed with the project, for the good of the entire community. Now, it is time to move forward. It is time for this frivolous litigation to end. It is time that we work together as a community to bring smart growth redevelopment, consistent with our comprehensive plan, to our commercial corridors. As I said last year, change is hard, but change is vital. Without change, without a vision for the future, communities lose their vitality, and can lose what made them special in the first place.

When the Plaza is completed, the southern gateway to Brighton will have new vitality, and traffic management improvements, paid for by the developer, will help improve vehicle and pedestrian safety in the area. As I have noted before, increased traffic speed should not be the goal for commercial corridors like Monroe Ave. Tax base growth, economic development, and safe transportation alternatives to automobile dependency will be more and more important to Brighton's future, and the proposed Whole Foods Plaza project will bring all these benefits to Brighton.

The 2020 Town Budget complied with the New York State tax cap and revenues from sources other than property taxes continue strong. We will continue to budget in a prudent and public manner, relying where possible on state and federal grants and using incentive zoning to support quality of life projects, as recommended in the Envision Brighton 2028 Comprehensive Plan. The Town carries a Moody's AA2 bond rating and the NYS Comptroller has again reviewed fiscal conditions in each community in New York State and found that Brighton has among the lowest levels of fiscal stress in the state.

In 2020, we will begin work on the second phase of the new Winter Farmers Market in Buckland Park. We will hold a public information meeting on the project, to review the current plans, on March 19 from 4pm to 7pm at Town Hall. We also expect to implement Community Choice Aggregation in 2020 under a joint Memorandum of Understanding among the Towns of Brighton, Irondequoit and Pittsford and the Village of Pittsford, which will allow us to procure 100% renewable source electricity for our residents and small businesses. Under this agreement, Monroe Community Power will procure power from qualifying suppliers of 100% renewable source electricity and cause it to be delivered to residential customers, making

Brighton a much more sustainable community.

Diversity and inclusion are central to who we are as a community. It was especially powerful for me to be able to recognize African American History Month and specifically to honor Peter Tolliver tonight for his many achievements, but also painful to recognize that the Tolliver family's arrival in Brighton some 60 years ago was controversial to many. It is also a reminder of the many restrictive covenants that were formerly included in property deeds for Brighton homes, preventing Jews and African Americans from buying homes in some Brighton neighborhoods. Thanks to court decisions decades ago, it is clear that those restrictive covenants are not legal and may not be enforced to keep anyone out of our community. However, I fully understand how painful the mere existence of those covenants is today, particularly for families who own homes subjected to such covenants. Although it is probably impossible to remove those deeds from the public records, because they are included in deeds that must be retained in the chain of legal record for title insurance purposes, I am working with Attorney to the Town Ken Gordon, County Clerk Jamie Romeo and property title experts to identify a way to rescind the taint of restrictive covenants in Brighton as effectively as possible.

Also of importance to the community, our IDEA Board, the Inclusion, Diversity and Equity Advisory Board, is hard at work developing a Diversity and Inclusion Plan for Brighton. When complete, we will be the only Town in New York State with such a Diversity Plan. The first opportunities for public input to that process will be on Tuesday April 16 at 6pm, and Saturday April 25 at 10:30am, both at the Buckland Park Lodge. I want to personally invite members of the community to participate in these two important gatherings where our IDEA Board consultant, Gwen Webber-McLeod and our IDEA Board members will work with attendees, in small groups, to receive input on the Diversity Plan. I thank Felicia Garcia-Hartstein, Chair of the IDEA Board, former Town Councilmember Sheila Gaddis, Special Advisor to the Supervisor for Diversity and Inclusion, and Councilmember Robin Wilt, Town Board liaison to the IDEA Board, for your work with me in advancing the core values of Diversity, Inclusion and Equity in our community.

As we do each spring, I also invite you to participate in the Brighton Clean Sweep at 9am on May 9, here at Town Hall, and our Semi-annual document shredding and electronics recycling event will be on May 16, from 9am to noon at the Brighton Highway Department, 1941 Elmwood Ave.

Finally, I strongly encourage everyone in the community to be counted in the 2020 Census. I have stressed the recurring theme of scarce resources for our community again in my State of the Town Message tonight; one of the ways we can address that issue is by making sure that everyone is counted. Assistant to the Supervisor, Bridget Monroe, is

directing our Complete Count project, working with various community leaders and organizations. Within a few weeks, we will all receive letters from the US Census, and I encourage everyone watching tonight first to respond to the Census themselves, but then to make sure the communities you work with, particularly here in Brighton, know about the Census and know how important a complete count is to ensure community funding for Brighton. This year, we must all stand up and be counted.

I have only scratched the surface of my optimism for Brighton. We cannot insulate ourselves from the challenges that we face today in our nation and the world, but we can work proactively, building on our strong base, to continue to make Brighton a model that other communities aspire towards. It is a privilege and an honor to serve as your Town Supervisor. I thank each of you for being here tonight, or for watching our livestream or cable broadcast, and for the things you do, large and small, to make us all proud to call Brighton our hometown.