



STATE OF THE TOWN

May 25, 2022

Thank you for joining us tonight to discuss the State of the Town of Brighton for 2022. I first acknowledge that while we meet remotely, the Town of Brighton is situated on the ancestral and traditional lands of the Onödowá'ga tribe of the Haudenosaunee confederacy--whom we recognize and respect as the traditional custodians of this land throughout the generations. We pay our respect to Onödowá'ga elders both past and present. The history, culture and traditions of the Onödowá'ga are worthy of our understanding and study and we praise those who keep those traditions alive. We recognize that that study is of ongoing importance if we are to truly understand the history of our community and our nation. We support efforts to ensure that we and future generations continue that study and that respect in a way that is honest and truthful so that in the words of Sagoyewatha, (Sakojewatha), the great Haudenosaunee chief and orator, also known as Red Jacket, we may always work together to brighten the chain of friendship.

I want to tell you honestly, it is very difficult to speak to you tonight about the State of the Town, because I must speak in the context of a world where we see uncontrolled violence that seems to be running rampant. A father buying a birthday cake for his son, a long time community activist, a retired and beloved police officer who became a security guard, and seven others gunned down in Buffalo by an 18 year old man consumed by hate. I will say their names. Roberta Drury, Margus Morrison, Andre Mackniel, Aaron Salter, Geraldine Talley, Celestine Chaney, Heyward Patterson, Katherine Masset, Pearl Young, Ruth Whitfield. These are not simply victims of a shooting, that is far too

sanitized; they are parents, grandparents, family, friends, people taken from this world brutally by a hateful killer with an illegally modified semi-automatic weapon. Yesterday, 19 school children in Texas, and two teachers, who were within days of finishing their school year, were gunned down, again by a semi-automatic weapon, wielded by a teen aged man. I know that parents in Brighton and across our nation had difficult conversations with their children and with each other this morning. All of us must now have difficult conversations of one kind or another, until we can solve a crisis of gun violence that is cresting across our nation. While I do not pretend for one moment that thoughts and prayers are a sufficient solution, out of respect to those killed at Tops Supermarket in Buffalo, and out of respect to the victims of the shooting yesterday at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde Texas, let us please observe a moment of silence. (SILENCE)

I urge us all to search our hearts and work in a constructive but active way, to make sure that shootings like these do not scar our communities ever again. To that end, I want to acknowledge Councilmember Chris Werner, who researched and advocated and saw to it that the Brighton Town Board unanimously passed a safe gun storage law, to make it less likely for guns to fall, even inadvertently, into the wrong hands.

Last year I addressed the state of the Town of Brighton after a year in which COVID had impacted peoples' lives and peoples' ability to live their lives in so many ways. At the same time, I spoke of a time when we could look forward. Tonight, we do look forward, and we look forward with optimism. While I strongly encourage Brighton residents to get their booster shot or second booster, and I encourage everyone to continue to use whatever level of COVID precaution you are comfortable with, our Brighton businesses and restaurants are busier than they have been in two years, and we are seeing new businesses open and thrive in Brighton. Just last night, I was speaking with the owners of a Monroe Avenue business at an event sponsored by the Brighton Chamber of Commerce. Their business is just one of many that is thriving and successfully finding new ways to connect with their customers. I am so pleased to see the renovation and reopening very soon of Malek's Bakery as one more

example of this, thanks to the commitment of Hillel School to supporting this Brighton institution right on Monroe Avenue. Support Brighton businesses. Buy in Brighton and you are supporting your neighbors and your neighborhoods, and you are helping to build a better Brighton.

Brighton is one of the very few communities in Monroe County where the number of home purchases has risen so far in 2022. People want to live in Brighton; now more than ever. It is important that we make sure that Brighton is a community that has housing opportunities for all income levels. While I can't go into a lot of details at this point, we are currently in discussions for new affordable housing proposals that will ensure that living in Brighton is not an impossible dream. People want to live in a community where they can walk, ride the bus, or ride their bikes to necessities like schools, groceries, places of worship and other important destinations. People want to live in a community where people of all faiths, races, gender identities, and backgrounds are welcomed, celebrated and safe, and where their local government acts with intent to ensure that is the case. People want to live in a community where the schools are outstanding, and give all students the opportunity to succeed and thrive. People want to live in a community that celebrates our seniors and provides a wide variety of services and housing options, including aging in place. People want to live in a community with parks, trails, open space and recreational facilities for people of all ages and abilities. Brighton is that community. Tonight, in this State of the Town address, I will highlight our successes and our plans for future success.

Tonight, I acknowledge gratefully the people who serve our community, as first responders, as volunteers on our community boards and organizations, as leaders in church, synagogue or mosque, and as coaches and leaders in youth sports and other youth activities. I also acknowledge and thank every employee of the Town of Brighton. There are too many to name individually but you make Brighton work, you help keep us safe, you help us face the ultimate challenge of climate change and the moral imperative of social justice and equity. You make Brighton a place that people are proud to call home. Like all of our employees, our senior staff people come into work each day, focused on serving the

community. They have different backgrounds, different skill sets, but each one is a professional and each one works day in and day out for the people of Brighton.

Local government, including town government, is the government closest to the people, and in many ways it is the level of government that can most directly impact people's lives on a day to day basis. In a diverse community like Brighton, that means that local government has an obligation to understand and to respond to the needs of Town residents; all of our residents, no matter their race, faith tradition, disability status, gender identification, age or other characteristic. To do that more effectively, the Town established the position of Chief Diversity Officer, responsible for diversity, equity and inclusion, DEI. Last month, we hired Miriam Moore-Burt, an experienced DEI professional, to fill the position. Brighton is the first Town in Monroe County to hire a Chief Diversity Officer, and in her position as CDO, Miriam reports directly to me as Supervisor. If there is one thing that I can tell you, this position will not operate in a silo. Miriam will be working holistically as an integral part of everything we do and I am certain that the decision to hire Miriam as our Chief Diversity Officer will enhance all parts of Town government, and the community as a whole. Thank you Miriam for hitting the ground running, for building relationships and for the perspective and experience that you bring to Brighton as our Chief Diversity Officer.

I want to thank the members of our volunteer members of the Town's Inclusion, Diversity and Equity Advisory Board, the IDEA Board. They accepted the challenge of developing our Inclusion, Diversity and Equity Action Plan, the IDEA Plan. The draft IDEA Plan has six key focus areas, including Infrastructure, Housing and Transportation, Engagement and Partnerships, Inclusion and Representation, Policies and Practices, Economics, Communication, Education and Celebration, and Public Safety. These six key areas cut across all aspects of town government and the community. Each of these key areas includes specific goals and suggested strategies for meeting those goals.

The Draft Plan is available online at www.Brightonidea.org. I urge you to read the Draft Plan and then I urge you to share your comments about the Plan at that site. The Draft IDEA Plan will be revised to reflect community input, and then presented to the Town Board for its final review and expected approval by the end of the summer. During the spring and summer we will recognize and celebrate Memorial Day, Juneteenth, Pride and the 4th of July, and we will encourage the entire community to be a part of these and other celebrations and events. With the Plan in place, we will ensure that Town policies reflect best practices when it comes to inclusion. We will ensure that Town infrastructure is accessible to all, beyond the bare minimums required by the ADA.

Last week the Town of Brighton cosponsored a highly successful job fair in collaboration with RochesterWorks and SUNY Empire State College. We will repeat events like these and we will engage with community members and organizations, economic development groups and partners in government across the greater Rochester area to ensure that we can hire a strong diverse workforce, that new minority business owners can open and thrive in Brighton, and that Brighton sends the strongest possible signal that we welcome, include, and celebrate all of our residents.

Mike Guyon, who is not only the Commissioner of Public Works, but also the Highway Superintendent and Sewer Commissioner, wears many hats, and handles a broad range of responsibilities. Mike is responsible for so much of our infrastructure and is so often the person who engages with residents, or with other county or state personnel to keep things operating smoothly. Just yesterday morning, Mike met with a group of neighbors at 7:30 am, not because it worked best for his schedule, but because that time worked for the residents who met with him. Thank you Mike, the residents of Brighton are lucky you are working for us and for them.

Town Clerk Dan Aman often acts as the ombudsman for the residents of Brighton, in addition to his official record keeping and related roles as Town Clerk. Day in and day out, when people aren't sure who to turn to for help, they

walk into Dan's office, and Dan and his team make every effort to get them answers, and results. Dan is also responsible for responding to Freedom of Information Law request, which have risen in number, as well as issuing a variety of licenses and permits. The Town Clerk truly serves the people of Brighton, face to face on issues large and small, on a daily basis.

Becky Cotter, Recreation Director, and Matt Beeman, Parks Superintendent, work closely together, providing recreation activities of all kinds to our community. As Recreation Director, Becky manages recreation programming for ages; toddlers to seniors. Most recently she has also been an integral part of our planning for a new community center to serve Brighton, as well as working to ensure that even as Brookside School is being sold to the Talmudical Institute of Upstate NY for future use as a religious school, the Brighton Recreation Department will continue to operate from Brookside even after the sale, as we plan our longer term facilities needs, all the while still providing affordable and high quality programs and special events for people of all ages. Matt Beeman manages our parks system, which has seen a dramatic increase in usage during the past two years. Our parks and shelters are used in an organized way by youth and adult sports leagues, and for casual use by people interested in the wildlife of the Frankel Nature Park and Brickyard Trail, the scenic beauty of Corbetts Glen, or a birthday party by the pond in the Town Park lodge. We have continued to expand our parkland and trail system, and the challenge of maintaining that system becomes greater by the year, but Matt and his staff always keep our facilities ready for use, even if it means Matt has to go out into the field himself.

Brighton Memorial Library is a prized community asset, used daily by Brightonians and by people from throughout the area. Its resources can be accessed in a variety of ways, in person or using a range of technologies. Recently, I attended a celebration by the Friends of BML, celebrating 50 years of service to the Library as volunteers. Like so much of what we do, volunteers are an integral part of the success of the Library, and I am grateful for the many ways they serve. BML has been recognized as the best library in Monroe County and under the leadership of Library Executive Director Jennifer Ries-

Taggert, the Brighton Memorial Library provides activities, knowledge and training to hundreds of people every day.

Last year in the State of the Town address, I spoke of the Police Reform Plan, mandated by the State of New York, which was presented by Police Chief David Catholdi that very night, after consultation with a number of community organizations. One year later, we already see the benefits of the Plan, particularly the new civilian hiring panel, made up of a diverse group of community volunteers, who interview every person hired by the Brighton Police Department as part of the formal hiring process. The Brighton Police Department is also in the forefront of mental health training, including 100% of all patrol officers who have received mental health Crisis Intervention Training, which addresses a wide variety of mental health and related issues. During the past year, the Department also initiated the use of the CueHit program, which allows individuals to provide immediate feedback on any interaction with police. This year also marks 30 years that the Brighton Police Department has been accredited by the NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services.

Tonight, you will hear Chief Catholdi update the community on community policing here in Brighton, as he presents the BPD Annual Report. Under Chief Catholdi's leadership, the Department remains at the forefront of professionalism. The Brighton Police Department also works in collaboration with the three other public safety agencies that serve Brighton, the Brighton Fire Department, the Henrietta Fire Department, which serves West Brighton and all areas south of the Canal, and Brighton Volunteer Ambulance. Together these agencies play a vital and professional public safety mission for all of Brighton.

Yesterday, the fourth Tuesday in May, was Grievance Day in New York State, the deadline for property owners to challenge their assessment for property tax purposes. This year, our new assessor, Pamela Post, conducted her first Grievance Day in Brighton, although she had served many years in the Town of Canandaigua. Given the rapid rise in real estate values during the past year, the grievance process this year was probably more challenging than ever, but

as always, our Assessor, and our volunteer Board of Assessment Review, provided hands on guidance to people seeking to challenge their valuations. We currently have the smallest backlog of commercial property tax challenges in many years, further indication of the skillful but fair way the Town Assessor conducts valuations.

The Finance Department is largely unseen to residents, but under the leadership of Director Paula Parker and Deputy Finance Director Suzanne Zaso, the Finance Department develops the Town's Capital Improvement Plan and Town Budget each year, manages day to day financial operations, like accounts payable and receivable, payroll and employee benefits, then works with our auditors to ensure the financial integrity of our financial statements. Brighton maintains a strong AA2 Bond rating from Moody's, and continues a long tradition of responsible and transparent financial management.

Our Personnel Director, Tricia VanPutte works in parallel with the Finance Department in employee benefits, and ensures that the Town complies with all of its policies and legal requirements related to town employment. In particular, Tricia continues to work to ensure that Brighton reaches as many places as possible when we make new hires, and in particular stays in contact with a diverse range of agencies that help identify diverse job candidates.

The Brighton Town Court, headed by Judge Karen Morris and Judge John Falk, as well as Court Administrator Lisa Pavlovych, handle thousands of cases each year, with a commitment to justice and an understanding that while many of those cases may seem minor to some, they can be extremely important to the parties involved, and confidence that justice has been served is essential. Our judges are well respected and court administration sees to it that appearances are scheduled and files maintained, and that people in Court have an opportunity to speak with someone who can help them understand the system.

Town Attorney Ken Gordon is another senior staff member who may not deal with the general public on a regular basis, but his service to the Town is tremendously important. As Town Attorney, Ken engages with Town staff, outside attorneys and other professionals on a wide range of issues. Ken works with our Town Board and with the Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals and Historic Preservation Board, as well as providing general legal and professional guidance to the Town staff in a variety of areas.

IT Director Jeremy Lutz was highlighted last year for his rapid response to taking so much of the Town's activities to remote operations. Now we continue to take advantage of Jeremy's skills in incorporating technology into our day to day operations. Jeremy is also responsible for keeping our operations safe from an increase in cybercrime, a job that becomes more and more difficult as new techniques for hacking and other incursions into information technology must be stopped.

Gary Donofrio is the Town's Facilities Director. Again, his position required an immediate response to the COVID pandemic and he was responsible for much of the work that was done to ensure the safety of employees and residents once Town Hall reopened. Now, he is involved with planning for improvements to the HVAC system and other elements of Town Hall, to make the building safer for users and to more efficiently use available space in the building, in addition to the day to day work of maintaining Town Hall.

Assistant to the Supervisor Bridget Monroe runs the Supervisor's Office and is the primary point of contact for people and organizations that wish to meet with the Supervisor. She has worked closely staffing the IDEA Board since its establishment in 2019, and also organizes many Town special events and media opportunities. Perhaps most significantly during the past year, she has been the primary point of contact for people with concerns about their RG&E bills in light of the billing errors relating to the community solar program. Bridget has spent countless hours talking with residents about billing issues and interfacing with RG&E and Roctricity in the process.

These are the key leaders of our team. They work together and with me to provide the services you receive from the Town. I commend each of them for the work they have done, particularly during the pandemic, and for their willingness, and in fact eagerness, to embrace new initiatives such as our IDEA Plan and our DEI work in general.

The Town Board, Jason DiPonzio, Chris Werner, Robin Wilt and Christine Corrado are elected officials who serve, along with myself, as the legislative body of Town government. They also serve on Town Board committees that provide us with an opportunity to do a deeper dive, with public participation, into specific issues in the areas of Finance, Public Safety, Community Services and Public Works, and act as liaisons to various volunteer boards in Town. Each one of them, like me, is open to hear from you, the residents of Brighton, about issues of importance to you. In many cases, they can bring such matters before the appropriate town board committee, for fact finding and a determination as to whether further town board consideration is appropriate.

The COVID pandemic has taught us many lessons. One of the most important is that collaboration is essential for an efficient and effective response to crisis. The relationships that are built during crisis also serve us well in more normal times. In particular, I want to note the collaboration during the past two years with Monroe County. The County made it possible for us to distribute masks and test kits and has coordinated vaccination clinics, all with the goal of protecting the public health of Brighton residents. In recognition of that important collaboration, the Brighton Rotary Club recently named Dr. Michael Mendoza, Monroe County Director of Public Health as its Citizen of the Year for 2022. I couldn't agree more with the selection of Dr. Mendoza and I congratulate him on this recognition. Monroe County also shared relief funds from the CARES Act program with local municipalities, like Brighton, that were not otherwise eligible for CARES Act funding.

Brighton also works in partnership with New York State. Our New York State elected officials have also worked to support important initiatives, both for the Town and for the Brighton Central School District. Thanks to Assemblymember

Sarah Clark, the Brighton Memorial Library will soon have a new roof, eliminating roof leaks that have been a problem for many years. State Senator Jeremy Cooney has obtained funding for the Town to finally complete a sidewalk link along East Avenue, near Allens Creek School, enabling both Brighton and Pittsford students to get to school more safely, and allowing a continuous pedestrian route from Rochester through Brighton to the village of Pittsford. Together Senator Cooney and Assemblymember Clark have also addressed the long standing problem of underfunding State Aid for the Brighton Central School District. For years, the Brighton Central School District has received far less than its fair share of Foundation Aid, one of the core state school funding programs. Thanks to Senator Cooney and Assemblymember Clark, that disparity is being eliminated over the next few years, ensuring that local taxpayers do not pay an excessive share of school taxes, while our Brighton Schools will continue to have the financial resources to remain the finest and most inclusive school district in upstate NY.

I am grateful to Representative Joe Morelle, and Senators Schumer and Gillibrand for their support during the pandemic. Thanks to their efforts, the Town of Brighton will receive over \$3.6 million in federal American Relief Plan Act funding. Our first priority for those funds will be to upgrade the HVAC system in Town Hall, to ensure that this building has the technology needed to make it a healthy workplace. Building ventilation has been cited as one of the most important safety measures to protect not only against COVID but also against other airborne viruses. We will also use ARPA funds to help address other community needs, including needs that reflect a focus on justice and equity. The pandemic has exacerbated its impacts on underserved populations, and I am committed to allocating a portion of our ARPA funds to mitigate those impacts.

The Town also collaborates with neighboring Towns on a regular basis. This past year, we worked with the Town of Henrietta and the Henrietta Fire District to reach an agreement that West Brighton would receive fire service from the Henrietta Fire Department, which will lead over time to significant cost savings for taxpayers. As we speak, I am working with Supervisor David Dunning of

Chili and a number of other Monroe County Town Supervisors, as well as Monroe County, the City of Rochester and Lollypop Farm, on new solutions for kenneling stray dogs picked up by our animal control officers in each of our towns. Whether it is other levels of government or other groups like the Chamber of Commerce and Rotary, collaboration helps us do more with less.

We also continue to focus on sustainability. Just as Brighton is the leader in addressing issues of diversity, Brighton is also the regional leader in sustainability. Brighton has been recognized by NYS as a Clean Energy Community and a Climate Smart Community. This week, the Town-owned streetlights on Elmwood Avenue have been converted to lower cost and longer lasting LED fixtures, and Town-owned lights on Monroe Avenue will be converted later this week, using state grant funds. Neighborhood streetlights, which are owned by RG&E, are scheduled to be converted to LED starting later this year, beginning in the Struckmar neighborhood. In most neighborhoods, this will require some significant infrastructure improvements, all of which will be made by RG&E, but in the end, our streets will be lit more reliably and more efficiently, at lower cost.

We will be initiating new programs, including additional EV charging stations, using grant money from the State. Our Climate Action Plan update will be completed later this year. It is our data driven approach to reducing carbon emissions, both from government operations and from the community as a whole. Again, funding for this Plan is being provided by the State of New York.

Community Choice Aggregation has been successful in not only dramatically reducing carbon emissions by creating a 100% renewable electricity supply program, but also in reducing electricity supply costs for residents by locking in a fixed rate for 2021 and 2022. Going forward, it seems very likely that the cost of electricity in our community choice aggregation program will increase, because market forces have dramatically increased prices. However, Brighton will continue to make it possible for you to take advantage of price allowances on renewable electric supplies because we “buy in bulk.” We will solicit bids and negotiate a new fixed price agreement at the end of the current two-year

term that will likely be higher than the current price, but still provide protection against further market price increases.

Preserving open space and promoting trails, sidewalks and bicycle also reduces carbon emissions and enhances our quality of life. Earlier this year, the Town of Brighton reached an agreement to purchase approximately 44 acres of land from Faith Church. This purchase, which is expected to close later this year, will mean that the Town will own over 190 acres of the former farmland south of Westfall Rd. We are grateful to have worked with Faith Church and Pastor Edlin so that we could buy this land for the residents of Brighton. Going forward, we will discuss with the community any future use of that land, recognizing the importance of maintaining natural habitat.

We are also planning for the development of a community center facility, to meet Brighton's long term recreation and related needs. Our consultants, SWBR are reviewing a number of options to best meet community space and recreation needs, and in doing so they are taking into account the surveys received from nearly 1000 people before they make their recommendations to the Town Board. It is important to note that for the foreseeable future, the Brighton Parks and Recreation Departments will remain at the Brookside School. While the Brighton Central School District has an agreement to sell that property to the Talmudical Institute of Upstate NY, which plans to expand the building and use that expansion for school use, we will use a portion of the existing building for our Recreation Department, as we have for many years.

We continue to build new sidewalks in Brighton, filling gaps in our system using Community Development Block Grants and incentive zoning amenities to fund the work. Next year, we expect to construct additional sidewalks on East Avenue and Elmwood Avenue, and future projects are also planned for Winton Road and Westfall Road.

When I became Supervisor, I committed to pay all full time employees at least a living wage, as computed by the City of Rochester. In light of the failure of a

minimum wage increase to \$15 per hour to pass in Congress, it is again time for Brighton to be first and to do more. I am committing to all of our employees, full and part time and seasonal, that we will increase the base wage to at least \$15 per hour as of January 1, 2023. That increase will have a modest impact on our budget, but more importantly, it will have a positive impact on our employees and help ensure that we can hire the best people at all levels.

Today, people who stop me on the street to ask about the Whole Foods Plaza project, do so not because they oppose it but because they want to know when it will open. They, like me, are excited that Whole Foods is coming to town. In 2018, the Town Board approved a proposal for a 50,000 square foot Whole Foods grocery store, the first in the Rochester area, along with other retail space. The total approved project size is just over 80,000 square feet, after the Town Board twice reduced the size of the project, in response to community feedback. The buildings will be constructed on land that is zoned for commercial development. Five public hearings were held and the Town conditioned its approval on the developer installing various traffic safety mitigation measures on Monroe Avenue, a conservation easement as a buffer along Clover Street, and the acquisition of rights of way and construction of the Auburn Trail, running from Highland Avenue to the Pittsford Town line, between Clover Street and I-590, connecting with the existing Auburn Trail in Pittsford.

Today, the Auburn Trail has been completed, we have received the conservation easement, and traffic safety measures, including the Access Management Plan service drive behind the stores on the other side of Monroe Avenue, have been installed. Construction on the project is well under way, despite ongoing litigation, apparently funded by a nearby competitor in Pittsford, to block the project. Upon completion, the project will pay full property taxes to the Town, the Brighton Central School District and Monroe County, estimated at approximately \$400,000 per year.

Thanks to prudent financial management and an open and participatory budget development process, Brighton's fiscal condition overall continues to be strong. Our Moody's AA2 bond rating remains

unchanged and the NYS Comptroller has again determined that Brighton has among the lowest levels of fiscal stress in the state. Even with increased inflation, Brighton has taken steps that will reduce costs, such as the restructuring of fire service in West Brighton and increased use of LED lighting. In addition, sales tax revenues have continued to trend above our conservative budget estimates, although the recent decision by Monroe County to cap gas taxes for the benefit of consumers impacted by higher gas prices will reduce the Town's share of gasoline sales taxes for the rest of this year.

The 2023 budget development process will begin soon, starting with the development of our 2023-2025 Capital Improvement Plan. As we develop the 2023 budget we will remain vigilant in balancing our fiscal responsibility with quality of life expenditures, as always with an open door to public participation.

While we live in difficult times, we must continue to be optimistic and continue to work together to make Brighton the very best hometown it can be. We must take the challenges we face seriously but we will also plan to reinforce Brighton's position as a leader, a community of diverse neighborhoods, and committed to sustainability. Today, the State of the Town of Brighton is strong and with our plans for dealing with a complex and challenging future, Brighton will remain strong. It is a privilege and an honor to serve you and this great community as your Town Supervisor. Thank you.