

Supervisor Kaiman's State of the Town Address



Supervisor Jon Kaiman

Welcome. It is a privilege to continue a long standing North Hempstead tradition here today, accepting the League of Women Voters invitation to present my first State of the Town address.

After completing my first month as North Hempstead Town Supervisor I can tell you that I am excited and proud to be serving my community in a position such as this.

I am honored to have been elected to succeed May Newburger who served our town with distinction, integrity and accomplishment. I look forward to the months and years ahead with the hope that I too can build a legacy of distinction such as that achieved by May Newburger during her decade of service. as Town Supervisor.

The Town of North Hempstead begins a new era not only with a new supervisor, but with a new town council elected from six separate council districts instead of the previous four at large seats. This change brings a new level of community representation to North Hempstead, bringing Town government even closer to our residents. Our town board members are adapting well to this new structure, and I would like to introduce them to you now:

In District #1, we have Robert Troiano Jr., the first African American councilmember ever elected to the North Hempstead Town Board. He is an accomplished professional and community activist. Councilman Troiano comes to the town board not only with his finance and banking background, but his experience as the former president of the Westbury School District. He is thoughtful, smart, and committed to his community. Councilman's Troiano's district includes New Cassel, Westbury and Carle Place.

Councilman Tom Dwyer represents Roslyn, Greenvale, East Hills, Albertson and Searingtown, in District #2. He has been a personal friend for many years and I know that we are both proud of each other's achievements over these last several years. Councilman Dwyer brings his financial and business experience to the table, and is one of many generations of Dwyers who have committed themselves to public service. His father, Judge Thomas Dwyer, with whom I worked, campaigned, and appeared before for over a decade was assigned to be my official mentor upon my being sworn in as a District Court Judge in April of 2000. I looked forward to working with and learning from Judge Dwyer. Unfortunately, he was too sick to come to work during my first weeks as a judge. When he died soon after that, we lost a great judge and a great man. Having lost my own father this past year, I know that the sense of loss never quite goes away. I did have the

opportunity to wear Judge Dwyer's robes, however, when I swore in his son Thomas Kennedy Dwyer as a North Hempstead Councilman the following year.

Councilman Angelo Ferrara returns to the Town Board after a brief respite, representing New Hyde Park, Mineola, Williston Park and Garden City Park in District #3. They tell me he is the lone Republican on the Board. I welcome him and look forward to working with him. We've known each other for some time and it is clear to me that he is a committed public servant. He believes in his community and he fights for its interests in the true spirit of representative government. We may approach our jobs with different philosophies, but the goals are the same, and that is to do the right thing by and for the residents of North Hempstead. Welcome back Angelo.

Fourth District Councilman Wayne Wink Jr. has been a member of our North Hempstead family for some time, starting his career here more than a decade ago as legislative aid to the late Councilwoman Barbara Johnson. Councilman Wink, who is also an attorney, represents parts of Great Neck, Manhasset, Plandome and Roslyn. I am sure that Barbara Johnson is smiling from above as she watches Wayne fill her shoes with distinction and ability.

Councilman Tony D'Urso has served our Town as an elected official for more than 12 years. Councilman D'Urso was a major factor in the Newburger Administration's success and continues to be a tremendous resource for me as the new town supervisor. Councilman D'Urso is now in District #5 which includes parts of Great Neck, Herricks, and New Hyde Park.

Councilman Fred Pollack represents District #6, bringing his legal talents and years of experience in governmental service back to the board. After a brief hiatus from the Council, Councilman Pollack returned as diligent and dedicated as ever. The sixth district includes much of the Port Washington peninsula including parts of Plandome and Flower Hill.

We are also fortunate to have two other town-wide elected officials who are committed and capable public servants.

Michelle Schimel is in her fifth year as Town Clerk. Under her leadership the Clerk's office has made major strides in modernizing records management and bringing in the latest record management technology. She continues to work towards making records more accessible and, with a team of dedicated staffers, the Clerks's office is in the process of preserving more than 200 years worth of historical records. Michelle's deputy is Jim Burton.

Just as I am taking over for May Newburger, our new Receiver of Taxes, Rocco Iannarelli, is succeeding Anne Galante who served with dedication and distinction as our Town Receiver of Taxes for nearly 12 years. Thank you Anne for all those years of service and welcome Rocco Iannarelli as North Hempstead Receiver of Taxes. Rocco is embarking on his four-point plan to enhance the Receiver's telephone information system, expand our ability to provide on-line tax information, establish a tax payment by credit card option and to establish additional tax payment sites. Those

credit card payments may generate a lot of frequent flier miles – the Receiver of Taxes office takes in almost one billion dollars in revenue a year, which it then distributes to school and special districts, the county and other local taxing districts. Rocco's deputies are Lou DeRosa and Dolores Conelley. I would also like to take a moment to thank Charles Berman for serving as our town tax receiver the last quarter of last year. Thank you, Charlie.

I welcome all of our new town board members and elected officials.

It is my intention in this message to outline for you where we are as a town government and where I see the town going during the coming year. I will then present my staff and department heads to you.

In municipal government it is always appropriate to begin with the state of our town finances. I am proud to report that we are in an excellent financial position today and our future outlook continues to look bright.

North Hempstead is a town of approximately 225,000 people with a combined budget of approximately 90 million dollars. Our bond rating status with Moody's Investors Services is Aa3, the highest it's ever been in North Hempstead Town history.

We do, of course, have financial concerns and pitfalls as all municipalities do. The cost of providing medical benefits is skyrocketing, pension costs are out of control, and municipal debt is always lurking in the shadows of our financial prosperity.

I would like to take a moment to address our town debt situation inasmuch as it has been the subject of much debate and acrimony. Over the last 20 years, the town has accumulated a sizable debt burden. It is important to understand how we accumulated it and where it stands today.

To put it simply, our debt burden revolves around solid waste disposal and the variety of actions – and inactions - that have occurred over the past several decades to address this issue. The single largest element of the solid waste debt problem involves the closing of our town landfills, one in 1983 and the other in 1991.

The story begins in the 1970s when the town received much of its revenue through tipping fees for dumping garbage at our town L4 landfill in Port Washington. During those years the town brought in tons of garbage, and made tons of money doing it. Yet while the money rolled in, no financial planning took place for the inevitable closing of L4. And when it did close in 1983, it was allowed to simply sit for a decade, spewing toxins, waste and gasses. It was eventually identified as a NYS superfund site. When May Newburger took office in 1993, she took the necessary steps to remediate, clean and close the L4 landfill site – absolutely necessary steps that cost more than \$40 million.

The Town's neighboring L5 landfill was closed in 1991. Again, no money was set aside for closing, cleaning and capping this landfill despite the millions of dollars of revenue that it produced during the 1980s. Again, it was left to the Newburger Administration to fix the problem – and it was fixed, in both an environmentally and financially responsible manner costing about \$12 million.

But those landfill closures are only part of the story. As the 1980s came to a close, and revenue from tipping fees neared its end, the town was facing a substantial financial crisis. The answer at the time was to build a mass burn incinerator to handle town garbage which could no longer be dumped, and make additional money on the tons of additional garbage that would be trucked into town to be burned. To accomplish this plan, the town purchased the Morewood property for approximately \$30 million.

Fortunately, the incinerator plan was overwhelmingly rejected by the residents of our town. Without solid waste revenues coming in, and unable to pay the debt burden on the Morewood property, the town refinanced the debt. In 1993 the Newburger Administration inherited a \$70 million debt burden on the Morewood property.

In an effort to address the solid waste crisis, the Town was required to build a solid waste transfer station to ship trash out of town, the construction of which cost an additional \$10 million.

Needing both a transfer station operator and a place to send the waste, the town entered into a waste management contract which guaranteed the town \$16 million upfront – but the operator later defaulted, and competing claims to the \$16 million paid to the Town eventually ended up in court. This case - now known simply as the Sumitomo decision – led to a judgment against the Town for the entire \$16 million, plus costs, interest and penalties.

This is the story of how North Hempstead accumulated its town debt. The end result was clear - solid waste turned from a cash cow into a financial albatross. Confronting these issues head-on, May Newburger and her administration made the difficult decisions necessary to literally clean-up a mess, and over her decade as Supervisor brought this town to a position of financial strength and stability.

Thanks to these efforts, the environmental, waste management and financial issues which grew from the garbage crisis confronting North Hempstead were successfully addressed. The Town budget is stable, the landfills capped, and we are paying off the accumulated debt in a consistent and responsible manner. We operate within the confines of a debt management plan even when we incur new debt through necessary capital projects. And we've addressed our financial needs in such a professional and responsible manner that Wall Street bond rating agencies have awarded North Hempstead three bond rating upgrades.

And the Morewood property – once planned to house a massive garbage incinerator – is now a nationally-recognized, environmentally sensitive golf course, recreational area, wildlife preserve, and

new home to hundreds of North Hempstead seniors, generating both revenue and recreational opportunities for the entire town.

Having reviewed our current financial position with our financial advisors and Moody's credit rating agency, I believe that we are now in a position to continue to chip away at the town's debt burden through refinancing as we have been doing over the last several years, and by paying down debt when we have the resources to do it.

To further those efforts, I will be proposing to our town board that we appropriate \$1 million from our fund balance this year to pay down North Hempstead Town debt.

I believe our success in this area is due to the extraordinary work of our financial team. I would like to thank and acknowledge Town Comptroller Helen Chen who is the current overseer of our financial plan. She has done an extraordinary job and we are deeply indebted to her for our achievements in this area. I would also like to acknowledge the work of Deputy Comptroller Angelo Ferrara. Finance and Operations Director Matthew Miner has been and will continue to be central to the success of our financial plan. He has been steady as a rock, and we would not be in the strong position that we are in today without his skill, dedication, and commitment.

In addition to continuing to promote responsible financial stewardship, we have other plans as well. One major goal will be to continue the ongoing efforts the Town is making on behalf of the New Cassel community. These efforts are important for two reasons. First is the transformation of an economically depressed area of our town to new levels of prosperity and vitality, benefiting both residents and businesses and strengthening the entire community. Second is the successful use of a community-based planning program which can be adapted for use in other areas of North Hempstead.

Under May Newburger's leadership, the New Cassel community began a visioning process, through which community residents participating in community meetings discussed, debated and developed a series of plans for their community. I was fortunate to participate as a member of the New Cassel Vision Implementation Committee along with North Hempstead Buildings and Planning Commissioner David Wasserman; Rev. Patrick Duggan of Sustainable Long Island; the Unified New Cassel Civic group headed up by Reverend Lionel Harvey with help from Sheila Tate; the Nassau County Economic Development Corporation represented by Raffaella Petrusek, with help from Shawn Brown; the North Hempstead Community Development Agency represented by Neville Mullings and attorney Andrew Hyman; and the law firm of Crowe Deegan. Together we produced a Request for Proposals for a combined seven projects - some of which are a block long - with the goal of building a main street consistent with the vision of the local community.

This plan, which centers on mixed commercial and residential development was developed by the New Cassel community, and reflects a modern planning trend that incorporates housing and retail in

walkable communities, complete with innovative landscaping, lighting and traffic calming. The plan encourages projects targeted by the New Cassel community, including a bank, a pharmacy, a supermarket, a restaurant and retail stores – a true Main Street.

I am pleased to report that these RFP's have generated more than 30 proposals from 16 different developers, including many creative plans with the potential to truly uplift the New Cassel community. These proposals are now under review, with finalists to be selected by the North Hempstead Community Development Agency for presentation to the Town Board. It is our goal to break ground on some of these projects this year.

Working together, the Town, the community, the county, and other agencies and organizations that had experience, ideas, and resources to offer created a community-based plan for New Cassel. In fact, what made the planning process so successful was the central role played by the community. Focusing community planning around the community simply makes sense – and it's my intention to communicate with and engage our residents when we are called upon to make decisions that affect development and planning in their communities.

We've recently hired April Brown Lake of Westbury as our Community Based Planning Coordinator. She will be working with the rest of the Supervisor's staff and department personnel to pursue this policy of interaction with our residents.

The Town of North Hempstead - the fifth most populous town in New York – has some 225,000 residents, 31 incorporated villages and numerous special districts in its 51 square miles. We have 12 delineated departments in addition to our Clerk's office and our Receiver of Taxes office. We now have six council members and, of course, the supervisor's office and staff.

Making this government more responsive to the community will be another of my major goals as Supervisor. I plan to establish a constituent-based communications and response system that will address community and resident concerns, questions, complaints, ideas and problems through a contemporary application of computer and communications technology.

This has been referred to as a 311 system, a 211 system, a city-stat system or simply a constituent service program. The name of the program will fall into place, but the bottom line is that it will change the way we govern this town. Our goal is to implement technology in a way that provides real time data to the management personnel and the elected officials of this town. As calls come in, the information is logged and compartmentalized. The response is recorded and evaluated. Patterns of complaints will be scrutinized and resources will be redistributed as needed. Within this system will come all code and building complaints; highway and road complaints; questions about parks, and services; issues involving records and taxes and ordinances and finances. The town will move into the modern technological era and bring our management operations along with it.

Now that our financial situation is on a solid footing, we are able to focus town resources on quality of

life issues and modern management techniques in a way that we could not in the past. Our ability to respond to our residents in a timely, meaningful way as a result of today's technological advances is an exciting prospect with extraordinary potential.

One of the pioneers of just such a response-oriented approach to governing is Mayor Martin O'Malley of Baltimore, who joins us today as my guest. Mayor O'Malley is in the process of revitalizing the Baltimore waterfront, he is providing constituent response in record time, and he is on the cutting edge of improving the way government manages itself. I look forward to watching and learning from Mayor O'Malley and hope that we in North Hempstead might contribute to the new methodologies in the near future as well.

The final policy focus that I would like to address today is the issue of business development within the town. The business community is an essential component of our community. Not only does the business community provide us with a sizable portion of our tax base, it provides services, jobs and much needed resources. From the business community comes resources to clean brownfields, restore downtowns, build housing, and support youth athletics, charitable causes, and social programs.

With that being said, we must still require that the business community operate within the confines of our town codes and local laws. The business community must be part of the solution on such critical issues as over-development, traffic congestion, and noise pollution. It is my hope that the years ahead will see the entire North Hempstead business community participate as active neighbors and allies in enhancing our Town's quality of life.

As part of those efforts, I plan to ask the Town Board to establish a Business Development Corporation (BDC) within the Town of North Hempstead as a resource for business while also serving as a voice for our town residents. A BDC could provide information that will help businesses make decisions; provide training and expertise for businesses in need of assistance; and obtain funding from various government and private sources to help meet the bottom line even when the government is adding costly conditions to business development projects. A North Hempstead BDC can provide a voice so that Town policy makers can better understand the impact of our proposals upon the business community.

It is my hope that we could use a resource such as this to promote the high-tech and bio-tech industry developing in this area. Our industrial parks in Port Washington and New Cassel, I-Park in Lake Success, and main streets throughout our town, all could use a support system to help them achieve their goals in a manner consistent with the goals of the community.

And so these are some of the priorities of my administration. Of course, we will continue to pursue the environmental agenda established by the Newburger Administration. We will continue to purchase and preserve open space, build new trails, and clean our bays and ponds. We will also

look to create additional athletic fields for our youth sports leagues, and we will rededicate our efforts to improve our animal shelter, which will begin accepting cats sometime this year.

To do all these things, we must deploy our incoming management team, many of whom already have a long history with our town. And we must recognize and support the efforts of our town personnel as well. During my first month in office, I've seen close up just how hard our town workers perform their jobs. I am impressed with the effort that they make each and every day. I am impressed with the results of their labors. Despite the economic realities of serving on a public payroll with limited resources, our employees work hard for this community and I thank them for their effort.

I would now like to introduce the leaders of that workforce. First, I must acknowledge the yeoman efforts of our highway superintendent Thomas Tiernan, his Deputy Mike Matarrazzo, and all the entire Highway team as they did a masterful job handling the recent storms that poured snow and ice onto our nearly 300 miles of town roads. I would like to thank the other departments that deployed personnel as well. Our Highway Department is always busy with signs, roads, and sidewalks and they are doing a great job this year under difficult conditions. We will be purchasing some new trucks and sweepers this year to help our Highway Department do its job in the future and it is my hope that we can accomplish a thorough "Spring Cleaning" this Spring so that our streets and sidewalks are clean and safe.

Our Administrative Services Department has also been hard at work handling weather related problems. Commissioner Ray Levan is doing a great deal with limited resources. This year we will be looking into installing a new HVAC system in Town Hall, and Ray will be taking the lead in this project.

Commissioner Gil Anderson of our Public Works Department is one of our greatest resources along with his Deputy Jill Guiney. They provide technical know-how when it comes to everything from maintaining our town structures, fixing our roadways, and addressing environmental issues. The North Hempstead Public Works department is instrumental in project upon project and doing a fantastic job.

Our Building and Planning Departments are also on the cutting edge of so many Town endeavors, including the New Cassel visioning plan and implementation discussed earlier. Commissioner David Wasserman and Deputy Commissioner Joe Madden are professional, smart and dedicated to their calling and we are lucky to have them. The planning and building department personnel have an overwhelming amount of work and they are doing an excellent job for us all.

Commissioner of Public Safety Edward Neidich and his Deputy Janet Wohlers along with Code Enforcement Director John Macedo are pro-active and aggressive in addressing the many public safety issues that confront our town. We will be embarking upon many additional public safety projects in the coming months.

Among the most important of those new projects will be a renewed focus on illegal housing

enforcement. While we appreciate the limited housing opportunities in the town, unsafe and illegal apartments are not the answer. While we work to address these serious concerns, we are simultaneously working to add to the Town's housing stock through the implementation of the New Cassel vision plan.

Parks Commissioner Gerry Olsen and his Deputies John Darcy and Warren Schein will have their hands full this year as we build our new golf course clubhouse. We've not yet settled on a specific plan, but I hope to present to our town board a number of options in the very near future. In addition, our parks, gardens, fields and beaches are a wonderful resource and we will make an extra special effort this year to encourage all our town residents to enjoy these jewels within our community. Finance Commissioner Helene Raps-Beckerman will continue to work her magic when it comes to human resources and personnel. North Hempstead over the years has had to do more with less, and it has not been easy. We've gone from having over 600 employees ten years ago to having less than 400 today. Through it all Helene and her department have helped get this town through very difficult times.

Commissioner Anne Croce of Community Services continues to be a great source of comfort and aide to our senior community. Her staff has developed an extraordinary sensitivity to those in need. Our community services personnel are unsung heroes who provide the little things that make people's lives better in so many ways.

The Town Attorney's office has been through an extraordinary run of big cases with limited staff over the last several months. On behalf of the Town of North Hempstead I would like to thank Linda Zuech for her service as acting Town Attorney. She is an extremely capable lawyer who stepped up to the plate when we needed her most. I would also like to thank Michelle Darcy who also did an excellent job helping to manage that office. I am proud to announce that the town has hired a new Town Attorney, Richard Finkel who I've known for over 20 years. I am confident that Rich will be an excellent Town Attorney and I welcome him to our North Hempstead family.

Also new to the town is Office of Information and Technology Director Sharon Williams. Sharon comes to us after spending 17 years at Lehman Brothers, bringing her experience and skills at an opportune time as we embark on our new technology plan. I would also like to thank Tom Lanscron for his service as director, and for his new role overseeing programming relating to our Govern computer system.

Let me now introduce to you the Supervisor's staff. First and foremost is our Director of Operations, Matthew Miner who I've already introduced. Many have heard May rave about his work and I now join that chorus. He is an outstanding and brilliant public servant. New to our town team is Deputy Town Supervisor Chris Senior who previously served North Hempstead as a deputy town attorney, then worked in Washington DC for the National Association of Home Builders. He recently served as counsel to the Nassau County Planning Commission, and like myself and Richard Finkel is also a Hofstra Law graduate. Our Chief of Staff is Jo-anne Taromina, formerly of Keyspan and then Nassau County. Jo-anne is already working tirelessly on our behalf and making great strides in helping me

organize my office. Other staff additions are Rafael Lieber as Director of Legislative Affairs; David Chauvin as Director of Communications; Deena Lesser as Director of Intermunicipal Affairs; April Brown Lake as Community Based Planning Coordinator; Kimberly Corcoran as Director of Energy and Environmental Affairs; and Dan Nachbar as our Grant Writing Coordinator. Helen McCann, JoAnn Porrello and Brian Blessey continue their work as support staff to me and the entire team. Rosemary Kelly will now be serving as executive secretary to our new Town Attorney Richard Finkel.

Here we stand, poised to bring the Town of North Hempstead into a new era of modern communications, constituent services, and technology in general. We are looking forward to breaking ground in New Cassel on a brand new main street and we will use this community based planning model throughout the town in order to engage our town residents when we are making planning decisions. And we will be looking to build our economic base through sustainable business development.

In 2004, with the help of our county officials including County Executive Tom Suozzi, Comptroller Howard Weitzman, Tax Assessor Harvey Levinson and our local legislators Lianne Altmann, Roger Corbin, Craig Johnson and Richard Nicoletto we will work hand-in-hand on behalf of our town residents. We look forward to working with our State Senator Michael Balboni, and Assembly Members Thomas DiNapoli, David Sidikman, Maureen O'Connell, and Donna Ferrara in pursuit of state resources for local projects. Naturally we will be looking to Governor Pataki, Attorney General Elliot Spitzer and State Comptroller Alan Hevesi for continued support as well. We've certainly had a great deal of success obtaining funds through Senator's Schumer and Clinton and Congressional Representatives Ackerman and McCarthy and we are already pursuing future federal funding in a number of areas. Our elected officials at all levels of government have assisted us in the past in obtaining resources to achieve our goals and we thank them for all that they have done and all that we hope they can do in the future.

I look forward to working with our village mayors and trustees, special district commissioners, civic leaders and activists and all who dedicate themselves to making our town a better place. I look forward to working with the town board and our clerk and receiver of taxes our as well as the rest of our town personnel. I look forward to working with our local CSEA union leader Dan Lamonte on our upcoming contract which I hope will be one in which both labor and management will be declaring victory.

We will continue to focus on the environmental issues that were so important to Supervisor Newburger and we will continue to make sure that town finances remain a top priority. We have a great deal of work ahead of us in order to accomplish our vision and we will pursue that vision with vigor and enthusiasm and never forget that our daily responsibility is to make our residents comfortable, safe, and happy living here in the Town of North Hempstead.

Thank you.