



“ROADMAP TO FISCAL RECOVERY”

ALBANY COUNTY

STATE OF THE COUNTY 2013

Daniel P. McCoy, Albany County Executive

Monday, March 11, 2013



Chairman Morse, Majority Leader Commisso, Minority Leader Benedict, Comptroller Conners, Sheriff Apple, District Attorney Soares, County Clerk Clingan, members of our State Legislative delegation, members of the Albany County Legislature, invited guests and my fellow citizens of Albany County, I thank you for joining me for my State of the County address.

This year marks the 330th anniversary of the incorporation of Albany County and gives us a unique opportunity to reflect on the rich heritage of our community. Our celebration of this historic event during the month of November would be an opportunity to do just that.

Tonight I would like to look back and review our work over the past year, and share my vision for the future. 2012 was a year marked by innovation, efficiency and change. Beginning with my Transition Team's work, we reviewed the County's finances and operations. We brought together some of Albany County's most notable leaders. We dealt with those issues that needed to be addressed immediately and laid the ground work to tackle the long term challenges ahead.

I remain committed to continue working collaboratively with our community partners and government leaders at all levels to find solutions to meet those challenges.

Our financial plan in 2012 was a jumpstart for Albany County on the road to fiscal recovery. This long term financial plan ensures that Albany County can meet the 2% property tax cap by 2015. Meeting the tax cap is the fiscally responsible thing to do. However, the ability to meet the cap must include a willingness to forge new partnerships and face challenges that have been left

unresolved for decades. We also hope that the small signs we are now seeing for economic recovery continue. We have seen home sales increase and our sales tax revenues recovering from the depths of the great recession.

We have cut costs, seen some assistance on unfunded mandate relief from Governor Cuomo and the State Legislature, implemented greater efficiencies and consolidation and found a solution to the issue that has confronted us for more than a decade...the Albany County Nursing Home.

Tonight, I recognize Schenectady County Community College President Dr. Quintin Bullock and Denise Murphy McGraw of the Schenectady County Community College board of trustees. Six weeks ago, we announced a partnership with the college that means by this time next year, we hope to see up to 1,000 Schenectady County Community College students taking classes on the second floor of this building. And this is just the beginning.

Through this partnership, we will provide an excellent alternative for Albany County students. We anticipate a significant savings for our taxpayers.

I'm a father myself with a daughter who is considering her options for a college education. Like many of you who are juggling how to get more for every dollar you spend, I am looking for how to maximize our partnerships and minimize the costs to you and to Albany County.

This initiative maximizes the use of our county office space, creates additional economic development opportunities, provides alternative higher education options for Albany County students and reduces the high cost of our community college payments. I

will continue to advocate for our taxpayers on behalf of Albany County to reduce this \$10 million dollar cost overall to protect taxpayers. I look forward to working with the Albany County Legislature on this exciting and innovative initiative.

I have said our success will rely heavily on our partnerships. The strength of our programs and services lies in those partnerships as well. An important service Albany County provides is to our veterans through the Albany County Veterans Service Bureau. I am proud to have recreated the Albany County Veterans Service Bureau under the leadership of Director Charles Burkes. Thank you, Charles.

As a veteran, I know about the challenges I faced when I came home. Returning veterans need our support now more than ever. The challenges they face are unimaginable. That's why in November, we announced our partnership with John Downing and Soldier On...a nationally recognized program for homeless veterans. Soldier On has established an Albany County Resource and Referral Center on property near the former Heritage Park site. This is the first of its kind in New York State. This project includes plans to develop housing for our veterans throughout the Greater Capital Region on the site of the Ann Lee Home. We expect to announce phase two of that project in the coming weeks. Thank you, Soldier On and representatives Mike and Steve who are with us tonight!

Recently, we also helped veterans through an outreach campaign to ensure they are accessing benefits they are entitled to. Our latest effort was to make sure veterans and Gold Star parents, who own homes, had applied for the Veterans Property Tax Exemption before the March first deadline. We heard from many

grateful veterans who had not known and were able to apply in time.

At this time I would ask you to join me in recognizing the 12 employees who are currently serving here and overseas.

Help for our veterans has been given in many ways. I want to also recognize Katie Drobner of PG's Café, who came to us in December with an idea to collect coats for veterans and the homeless. We partnered with Tim McCann of Best Cleaners and Liz Hitt of the Homeless and Travelers Aid Society. Our employees and the residents of the Capital Region donated over 12-hundred coats in 30 days! Katie, Tim, Liz- please stand so we can recognize all you've done to help the homeless and homeless veterans!

Despite what we've been doing for our veterans, we **CAN** and **WILL** continue to do more!

Over the past year we have also built stronger relationships with our community partners to help communicate information that saves lives. Just last month, we joined forces with the American Heart Association and Emergency Medical personnel from throughout the county to announce free training for hands-only C-P-R. If a loved one goes into cardiac arrest, you may be the only difference between life and death. Learning hands-only c-p-r takes just minutes. At a press conference announcing our free training, I had the opportunity to meet young Joey Mendrick. Joey is living proof that hands-only c-p-r can save lives. He went into cardiac arrest last year when he was hit in the chest with a baseball. He would not be here without hands-only c-p-r. Joey

now shares his experience with others to help save lives. Joey, please stand up so we can all thank you!

Another partnership we announced last week is a campaign to educate the public about the dangers of unsafe sleeping. This is when young children, often infants, have died most commonly from an adult rolling over on them in bed and accidentally suffocating the child. Albany County has had twelve unsafe sleeping deaths since 2009. One is too many. In most cases, families had cribs for their babies. It's about education. We have launched a grant-funded media campaign on buses and bus shelters that will go on for several months to end this deadly trend.

Government service partnerships help to better our lives in many ways. And the 19 municipalities within Albany County are working closer than ever before. I promised county government would change and that together we would achieve savings and increase efficiencies. I visited each municipality over the past year. We have worked to turn ideas and talk into concrete and measurable action. I am proud to say that we have made significant progress. We have consolidated E-9-1-1 systems with the Sheriff's Office in Watervliet, Cohoes and Green Island which has saved taxpayers money and made emergency response more efficient. I am pleased to say we are pursuing consolidation of E-9-1-1 systems with other municipalities.

We've successfully partnered with the Sheriff's Office and District Attorney's Office in many other ways including a bus campaign involving the danger of using prescription drugs and then driving. No one should drink alcohol, take prescription drugs or anything that will impair your ability to drive and then get behind the wheel.

It's dangerous; there are consequences and we will make sure everyone knows it!

And this past winter we also implemented a municipal partnership at our Department of Public Works. For years, our D-P-W crews have had to lift their snow plows during storms to cross town roads on the way to plow county roads. The same has been true of town plow crews. How inefficient is that? By working together we've ended this practice in our hilltowns. We've reached agreements to split the plowing of roadways so we don't start and stop when town and county roads intersect. It's more efficient and just makes sense!

It also made sense when the Town of Berne needed a new salt shed. We talked about sharing one. The county had a shed just over four miles away from the Berne site. Why not create a shared services agreement that would save money and better serve residents? Thank you to everyone involved in this project, including Berne Supervisor Kevin Crosier and our county legislators who approved a resolution authorizing this.

We've also had success with municipal partnership on the Rail Trail. In June, we announced work on a 2-point-4 mile section of the Rail Trail in New Scotland and Voorheesville. The County was notified a few months ago about a \$500-thousand grant to go toward completing the connection from Bethlehem to Albany. While there is much work to be done, the determination and hard work of many to keep this project on the forefront will be the catalyst to another successful partnership.

In fact, our municipal leaders signed onto a grant application that the County has been awarded. It's a Local Government

Efficiency grant from New York State to allow for a study of all of the municipal DPW services in the County. The objective of the grant is to identify opportunities for collaboration and consolidation. As I indicated earlier, wherever and whenever possible we should be looking to save the taxpayers money on all levels of government. Other counties in the State have done it and been successful. Why shouldn't Albany County be one of them? I look forward to working with municipal leaders on this important study.

There are important issues that needed to be officially recognized in Albany County. We will not tolerate... discrimination of any kind. I issued an Executive Order in June to make sure that all employees of Albany County and anyone looking for a job within Albany County, know that they will not be discriminated against based on gender identity or expression. The time to recognize that there is no room for gender identity discrimination was overdue!

Also long overdue but a priority for my administration...diversity in the workplace. I'm happy to say that since I took office, Albany County government more accurately reflects the diversity of our community than ever before. In July, I appointed Christine Quinn as Deputy County Executive...the first woman to hold this position.

To protect and to serve...my administration is working hard to do just that. Last April, Albany County identified an abandoned former dry cleaning establishment on Washington Avenue that was a potential hazard to the community. I issued an Executive Order and Directive calling for help from the Department of Environmental Conservation. Officials responded and since then,

the building has come down, the air and water have been tested and the D-E-C continues its investigation. My administration will continue identifying any and all situations that pose a danger to our residents and I will make sure you are protected!

As we continue to protect our residents from dangerous properties like these, I would also like to take a moment to talk about a couple of what I call the “jewels” of our county... those hidden places that make wonderful destinations for families and that, for whatever reason, many have never visited.

Lawson Lake County Park is located in Feura Bush. Until last year, it was used by the Boys and Girls Club as part of Camp Opportunity... a summer camp for kids. A haven for fishing, hiking and enjoying the beauty of nature...I am committed to bringing this jewel back to life. Soon, I will be announcing the details of a partnership with Sheriff Apple, District Attorney Soares, Chairman of the Legislature Shawn Morse and leaders of some of our non-profits, to once again make Lawson Lake a destination for families in Albany County.

Another such jewel is the Shaker Heritage Society located on the grounds of the old Ann Lee Home, soon to be the new Soldier On Veterans Campus and Homes that I mentioned earlier. This amazing organization has been nationally recognized on C – Span as a leading destination for those who are historically inclined. Mother Ann Lee created the first Shaker site there and she is buried there. She preached and led the Shakers, which for a woman, was way ahead of her time. Mother Ann was outspoken and a pioneer who left England to come to America and leave us this legacy. Artifacts and educational information can be found here, as well as an opportunity to explore the site

and original buildings. The Executive Director of the Shaker Heritage site, Star D'Angelo is here with us tonight and I thank her for her work.

As important as these wonderful programs and sites are, we must also realize that one major storm or event can devastate them or other parts of our community. We must be prepared to deal with potential disasters.

Last October Superstorm Sandy destroyed parts of New York State and some areas have yet to recover. I've seen the damage and helped during the recovery efforts on Long Island. We worked together as partners to begin the healing and rebuilding process.

Closer to home, in 2011 several towns in Albany County suffered significant damage during Irene and Lee. Sheriff Apple, District Attorney Soares and I went back to the hilltowns last August, one year after these communities were hit, and hosted a celebration... a time for everyone to come together and applaud how they stood together to rebuild!

Because we never know when an emergency situation will occur in our county or when we may be called on to assist neighboring counties, it is important to plan, to train and to execute our emergency planning function.

I am proud of the work that the county has done with Sheriff Apple and other first responders to prepare a comprehensive emergency management plan so that in the event of an emergency we can carry out our duties and protect the people of Albany County.

We also need to coordinate our planning efforts with the federal and state governments and we will continue to seek additional resources to ensure that we are prepared for any situation that may arise.

Before I became County Executive, I started a key partnership with the appointment of a group of experts from all sectors of the community to suggest ways to improve County Government. Recommendations called for consolidation of some staff in Health and Mental Health. This process is underway – a new Bill-able Hours System, developed by the Division of Information Services, allows for consolidation of staff but keeps grant money separated. This system will greatly reduce the time it takes to compile the billing information to get federal and state reimbursement for grants. Consolidation of the fiscal and administrative services through this new system in these departments allows for greater efficiencies, enhanced collaborations and cross-training for employees. Going forward we hope to be able to expand this system. It will be used as a management tool to find staffing gaps, enhance staffing reimbursements and to identify new staffing models.

My vision also called for the consolidation of the law department. I am happy to report the Department of Social Services and Department of Children, Youth and Families' legal staffs have been integrated into the County Attorney's Office. Thank you to our county legislators for recognizing the importance of this move and approving this action. It is already a success! Consolidation means the cost of doing business will continue to go down. This will enable us to reach the two percent property tax cap. That means you, the taxpayer, will save money.

My office will continue to foster relationships between departments and seek out opportunities not only for consolidations but also cooperation and communication on projects and initiatives.

A priority of my Administration has been increased communication within county government. I am happy to report that communication between Purchasing and Management and Budget has never been better. We've improved our efficiencies and accountability by seeking opportunities to enhance regional cooperation. This has been championed by the governor. Working together, the county has been able to enter into multiple cooperative agreements such as an agreement with BOCES. Albany County's Purchasing Department is leading the way when it comes to cooperative purchasing in the State. Currently our Purchasing Department is working with the New York State Office of General Services to identify and expand local cooperative purchasing agreements. If we buy these common goods together, we all save money. Saving money by cutting costs will help us reach our 2 percent property tax cap.

During my first year in office, we took innovative approaches to complex problems and found pioneering solutions. Through careful monitoring, we were able to decrease the Tax Anticipation Note taken in the fall by \$1.5 million. In another move which will save money, I'd like to thank the Legislature for passing my proposal to cap vacation payouts for new non-union employees at 6 weeks. In order to meet the 2 percent property tax cap, we must get our financial house in order. It's common sense approaches like this, combined with the big actions like the

nursing home proposal that I'll talk about shortly that will allow our county to achieve the property tax cap by 2015.

Our Department of Social Services investigators and the Sheriff's Office have also been successful in identifying those people who claim they deserve programs and services to which they aren't entitled. Last year, our work together resulted in 37 Arrests totaling over \$340-thousand in fraud uncovered. Albany County **will not tolerate** people making fraudulent claims at the expense of those who truly need it! We changed things around in our investigators' office to make a difference and it has! D-S-S investigators and the Sheriff's Office, thank you for your hard work in saving taxpayer dollars! Investigators, please stand to be recognized.

Another very important initiative is to continue the work we've started toward a "greener" Albany County. Today, I am issuing an Executive Order to form Albany County Team Green...a Task Force to propose ways that the county can further cut costs and reduce our carbon footprint. I will announce the members of that team in the coming weeks.

Over the years, we have worked on the H-VAC and ice system at the Times Union Center; lighting at the Hall of Records; H-VAC, lighting and elevators here at 112 State Street; and solar power, dehumidifiers, boilers and lighting at the Hockey Facility. This has resulted in an overall energy savings of more than \$450-thousand dollars a year and an anticipated 20-year return on our investment of 365%!

We have proposed projects for consideration at the Times Union Center, 112 State Street and the hockey facility that could save another \$300-thousand a year in energy costs.

Last year, we focused our efforts on reducing paper usage throughout the county.

In this age of technology, the public would be surprised to see the staggering amount of paperwork to be signed on a weekly basis. I am happy to announce that we have found a way to reduce this unnecessary waste of paper. We are purchasing “CoSign,” an approved and secure software program that will allow for digital signatures. We will be rolling this out. This low cost, easy to use software will allow for a significant reduction in the amount of paper currently being used.

Our paperless project has extended to our Request for Legislative Action or R-L-A system. All R-L-A’s are now input electronically by Executive departments to be approved by my office. This has cut down on the amount of paper previously created by departments and then sent to my executive team. The county would benefit even more if 100% of the process were paperless. The County Legislature still receives hard copies of R-L-A’s. I recently became aware of a system that would allow legislators to access all legislative materials electronically and securely. Other counties in New York State are currently utilizing similar systems. This would enable us to move county government into the 21st century and become more open and transparent to the taxpayers. Our County Clerk, Tom Clingan, has been ahead of the curve in providing information to taxpayers online like deeds, mortgages and electronic FOIL requests.

We CANNOT afford to wait to implement more energy efficient, cost saving and green initiatives in Albany County! As a father, I know how important this is for the next generation...our children. We will leave a better planet for our kids!

By carefully looking at how Albany County does business, my administration has been able to cut costs and save the taxpayers millions of dollars with the initiatives highlighted on the screen.

While we have accomplished so many things in Albany County during the last year, there is still so much more to do...including acting on the fate of the Albany County Nursing Home. The transition team said Albany County should close the facility and not be in the nursing home business. I have done everything in my power to keep that from happening. One year ago, I stood here and proposed four options: build a new facility, own and operate it; hire an outside management company; explore the option of a public benefit corporation; or transfer the license to a qualified third party.

The journey through this process resulted in unanswered R-F-P's and one response that would actually have cost the county even more money for an outside management company to run the nursing home. The New York State Department of Health turned down our Certificate of Need, saying taxpayers could not afford a new nursing home. Make no mistake, my commitment to those residing at the nursing home and to the most vulnerable of our citizens has not and will never waiver.

Therefore, during this time, I found the solution that the county has struggled to find for over a decade. Upstate Services Group would lease the Albany County Nursing Home. We would be

protecting our vulnerable seniors by still providing a safety net. We would be protecting our taxpayers by saving at least \$100-million over ten years. By doing this, we are finally accepting financial responsibility.

My administration has offered unlimited access throughout the entire process to legislators. We have been open and transparent with the public, and most of all, with nursing home residents and their families. There is a nursing home lease proposal section on AlbanyCounty.com that has the agreement, meeting notices, transcripts, r-f-p's, details on how we arrived at our cost savings and all kinds of information regarding this entire process.

We retained outside counsel from the law firm Nixon Peabody, who are experts in the healthcare field and nursing homes in particular, to assist my staff during the lease negotiation. I held four question and answer sessions to help legislators understand, and offer suggestions, on the proposed contract. Additionally, U-S-G has met with legislators on multiple occasions and held meetings with the nursing home Resident and Family Councils.

Let me be clear: each month that an agreement is delayed is costing taxpayers \$1-million dollars.

Partnership with the legislature is critical to move forward. They too need to recognize their obligation to our seniors and our taxpayers and this lease agreement preserves that!

2013 is a pivotal year for Albany County. We have started to pave the way down the road to recovery. Partnerships are behind much of our success in 2012. The future requires similar cooperation. I have pledged to continue working with our municipalities on consolidation and each and every way we can

be more efficient and save money. Cutting the costs of county government means you will save money.

We will continue to explore ways internally to save money through restacking and identifying and eliminating duplication of efforts.

We will continue to develop innovative, cutting edge methods of delivering quality services.

We will continue to collaborate with partners on economic development that will enhance programs like Soldier On for our veterans and Schenectady County Community College which benefits all our taxpayers.

We will save and be green with the help of our Team Green Task Force and leave the planet in better shape for our children.

We will protect our seniors, the taxpayers and accept financial responsibility by working together and approving the lease agreement for the Albany County Nursing Home.

By doing this, unless more unfunded mandates are passed down to us or a natural disaster hits, **we will** reach a 2% property tax cap by 2015.

Most of all, **I will** continue to make sure Albany County government provides all of its residents the information they want and need in an open and transparent fashion.

And **I will** continue to live by the oath of office I took over a year ago to protect and serve the citizens of Albany County.

Thank you all for joining me tonight!