A Community on the Rise!

As I embark on my third term as town supervisor, it seems appropriate to review the progress of the past 8 years.  In that time, we have stabilized the town’s  finances by cutting over $10 million in debt, reduced operating costs and protected the town’s fund balance.  We have expanded our tax base and attracted millions in new investments and new businesses to our community that has helped us rebuild our commercial corridors and attract thousands of new jobs.  The town has also made significant enhancements to our parks, pedestrian trails and other assets while increasing investments in our town fleet, capital projects and paving programs.

Highlights of the past twelve months alone include securing the historic Yates Mansion, saving one of this county’s most historic homes; expanding our park trail system to connect two of our major parks; launching our first “Thursday in the Park Series” welcoming new many new businesses like the Maple Sugar House on Route 5, Verizon and the approving the much anticipated Aldi’s.

I am also proud to announce that we have secured millions of dollars in federal and state money to clean up environmental hazards that have plagued our town and threatened the health of our residents for decades.  The Town Board adopted a new Comprehensive Plan that will position us for smart growth and passed a new solar law that will help all residents harness renewable sources of energy.

Perhaps somewhat overlooked, but critically important, was this Board’s recent enactment of a fund balance policy that has allowed us to finally establish a capital reserve fund that will allow us to make critical investments in our infrastructure and other assets without increasing the debt or adversely impacting the levy and establishing a debt reserve fund that has allowed us to retire our debt faster than anticipated.  Each offer an important management tool to help us plan for future needs.

Lastly, this town has made significant investments in technology that will help us cut costs, increase efficiency and help us serve our residents better.  Whether it was investments in new computers, software, automatic read water meters, telephones, or GPS each improved our ability to deliver services while cutting costs.

I am proud of the work we have done as a Board together.  From day one we promised each other that we make the hard decisions that need to be made – that for too long many politicians avoided; too afraid to do what was necessary to put this town on the path to financial stability and unparalleled growth.   Working as a team over these 8 years: John and Gina – Alan and Sid – Jim and Dave, with the strong support and help of Jamie MacFarland, Mike Cuevas, and Jason Cuthbert we took on those hard decisions – we made them and because of it, this town is a better, stronger, more vibrant, financial heathier and more united community than we ever have been.  We are a community on the rise and we have  ery bright days ahead.

This does not mean that we don’t have our challenges – but it does mean that united as a team, working together toward our common goal to continue our growth that we can meet those challenges.  It means that labor and management; elected and non-elected; volunteer and employee can join in as one help continue building this community.

Over the next 4 years, my administration pledges to continue the progress that we started over 8 years ago.  That means that additional focus on enhancing the quality of life for our residents while continuing to attract the right balance of new businesses and economic development projects for our town.

Our 4-year vision includes:

Redevelopment of the Freemans Bridge Gateway that will beautify it while encouraging “Complete Streets” elements that will help attract more retail, recreational and mixed uses, while further developing the Route 5 agritourism corridor and the Business and Technology Park. These three commercial areas will be our focus – Freemans Gateway will help us re-vitalize one of our most important commercial corridors; the Route 5 Agritourism corridor will encourage new visitors, and the re-developed business park will welcome new jobs.

Invest in our town by investing in capital projects. this includes projects like restoring the historic Yates Mansion so we have a proper backdrop for the town’s history and community center.  This building will give the town the ability to finally interpret and present the town’s rich history and culture for the public while providing space for the community to come together in meetings and events. Also a focus, refurbishing the Municipal Center that will help us keep pace with our growth as a town – currently we don’t have enough meeting space, we are inefficient and many of our employees work in cramped conditions. We will explore the rehab of the municipal center and finally have a Town Center that we all can be proud of, next, we will enhance our security at the water plant that protects our precious water supply from flooding., continue infrastructure upgrades in our neighborhoods that includes unprecedented paving and drainage work to help fix the long-term water issues that have plagued our residents for years, begin the Senior Center expansion to help them meet their growing needs and  pursue a town and village Public Safety Training Center to give our police officers, firefighters, and highway employees an proper training facility.

Our next focus, celebrate the town’s 200th Anniversary in 2020 and enhance the town’s cultural offerings through new public events, fairs and festivals in our parks, commercial corridors and public spaces.  This will be a year-long event that starts in 2020 and ends on January 4th, 2021 to mark the town’s first Board meeting.  We plan on a parade, perhaps a ball, and many public events celebrating our great history.

Now this next item, I want to talk directly to the town employees: I know the extraordinary work you all do each day.  It’s by-in-large because of your hard work and dedication that we have been able to achieve so much these past 8 years.  I know you have carried much of the weight from many of these hard choices.  Now is the time to begin evaluating the town’s staffing needs to help meet the growth that we are experiencing while still balancing the impact on the budget, and continuing the investment in our technology upgrades to realize efficiencies within our operations.  This does not mean mass hiring – it means that we must continue to analyze every position and determine where we need to invest….we started that process with adding an additional police officer last year into the 2018 budget….only through careful long-term planning can we address staffing needs so that we don’t fall back into the budget issues of the past.

Complete the pedestrian trail system that connect us in a town-wide network that will ultimately connect our parks, our neighborhoods and our commercial corridors.  This is an important part of being a more livable and vibrant community – we are committed to the aesthetic benefits of the trail system as well as the health benefits and advantages to the environment that come with a community where the residents can get up and move…we will study a town-wide system and begin the long-term construction of the trail.

Reduce the allocation of the fund balance to zero and further enhance the town’s capital reserve and debt reserve accounts and reduce debt by an additional $5 million while keeping any potential levy adjustments under 1% per year. This is important for us to secure our future whilel significantly reducing the threat of levy increases for our residents.  Simply put, we must live within our means.  This objective obviously puts restraint on some of our other initiatives that we talked about tonight, but I believe that we can reach balance and ensure that the budget remains structural sound.

 If I can say that I believe that there would be one area that we will see significant growth, I think it would be in the expansion and upgrades of our parks.  This means that we have a dedicated park and recreation program and that we will work to enhance our parks with upgrades to Maalwyck, installation of a fitness park and increasing events in each of the town’s parks

Rewrite zoning and codes in accordance with the town’s new Comprehensive Plan. This town board, with the help of staff and residents engaged in a 3 year effort to rewrite the town’s comprehensive plan. That was difficult work…but now we have the hard task of syncing our zoning and codes up with the plan.  I am glad that Jim Martin has agreed to help lead us in this effort.

Enact a solar strategy for the town that is affordable, sustainable and beneficially to the environment, the town, and the residents.  The town of Glenville is a leader on solar energy implementation – we installed it before it was in vogue to have.  We recently passed a solar law that will help all our residents to better harness the power of renewable energy.  But we will not be blind followers so that we can grab good PR – there are many bad deals for municipalities out there that other government entities have engaged in just so they say they did a project.  In many cases the numbers don’t add up….we will pursue a policy that works to protect our environment while truly benefitting our residents.  When you see a government entity engage in what they call Power Purchase Agreements – what that is a solar provider locking that government into a long-term contract to purchase the solar power at a pre-determined price based on today’s market and assumptions on future pricing….that means the resident (taxpayer) carries all the risk for 20 to 25 years.  We will pursue solar arrangements that lead to land leases for town property – thereby allowing the solar farm and protecting the taxpayer.  When it comes to solar -we need to be smart, not flashy.

Now we come to our greatest and most elusive challenge: fixing some county arrangements so that the municipality and its taxpayers are better protected.  Through a strengthened relationship with our county legislators, we will engage the county to improve services provided at the UCC and advocate for the town’s fair share of county sales tax that helps alleviate the burden on the local property taxpayer.  Regarding the UCC: despite rosy portrayals of cost cutting the UCC is failing all of us.  This is not the fault of the dedicated men and women who work there…they are doing their best with the what they are given…but the facts remain that they are not provided the tools they need to do this very important job and our first responders are suffering.  The UCC us understaffed – we pay for 44, but they only have 36, which means calls are going unanswered and service is slipping.  Instead of the county taking this service on and making the proper investments with county dollars pumped into them from the casino, they have taken over $ million to create a task force that will address street crime issues in Schenectady.  We need to invest in the basics first – fix the UCC.  Another area where we need to address our legislators on is the unfair share of the county’s sales tax with the towns.  The county and city hording .97 of every new dollar while we get the scraps – just .03 on every dollar – is morally wrong.   There is nothing more detrimental to our fiscal stability than the county’s unfair share of sales tax.  This is something that you have heard a lot about and I am glad to report to you tonight that we now have legislators indicating that they are ready to discuss this…so we will begin.

These policies are not easy…they are not small matters that help us to simply mark time.  They are big and bold and they require great thought and great action so that we can continue the transformation that we began so long ago.  This is a watershed moment in our town’s history.  We have a choice now – one we couldn’t have hoped for just 10 years ago: we can choose to do great things that are worthy of a great town and working together we can stand here perhaps 8 years from now celebrating all that we accomplished… By enacting these ambitious policies, Glenville has a bright future.  We have always been known as a quality community, but know we’re known for being a community on the rise!  I look forward to our great days ahead.

Thank you

Supervisor Chris Koetzle