

## State of the Town by Supervisor Wicks

The current fiscal health the Town of Lysander is great. We are poised to head into the future with confidence knowing we will continue to provide the citizens of Lysander with excellent services while always being conscious of our property tax rates. The tax rate over the last four years, which includes this year's preliminary budget, has been reduced each year, and we've been able to accomplish this even with the hyperinflation that we are currently facing.

Under my direction, in the past year the town has held assessments steady through this economically uncertain time, we have passed a property tax exemption for Volunteer Firefighters and Ambulance Workers in the interests of community safety and well-being, and to recognize their valuable contribution to our community. We've also raised the Senior Citizen Disability Exemption income levels in recognition of their limited income, to allow more seniors to qualify for the exemption.

I've worked diligently to maintain a healthy fund balance, which according to the New York State Comptroller, helps us reduce the cost of borrowing for cash flow, offset revenue, shortfalls, during poor economic times. Maintaining a healthy fund balance helps with unexpected expenditures which stabilizes taxes and maintains services without budget cutbacks, improving long term planning initiatives, and enhancing the credit rating [of local government].

The New York State Comptroller created the Fiscal Stress Monitoring System as an early warning system for communities and school districts with fiscal problems. The system is designed to objectively identify issues with budgetary solvency. The ability to generate enough revenue to meet expenditures for each town through a series of indicators. For example, our fund balance is one of the indicators used to determine our score. For this score, lower is good, like in golf, the scale goes from one to 100, with zero being like in golf; or hitting a grand slam. The fund balance operating deficiencies are included in the Comptroller's score. In 2019, TOL had a 3.3 Fiscal Score and an Environmental Score of 13.3. In 2020 our Fiscal Score went to zero. The lower the better - so that's as good as a town can get, and TOL's Environmental Score was still 13.3.

The reason being, [NYS Comptroller] goes back five years and TOL's score was low, because at that time the housing prices were not keeping up pace with the rest of the county. But in 2021 and 2022 our scores for both fiscal and environmental were zero for each one. That's the best that you can get.

The New York State Comptroller's criteria verifies that Town of Lysander is in great fiscal condition. Another fiscal instrument that we have at our disposal is debt for various needed capital projects. Debt is an effective instrument, and when used wisely it can help Lysander with expenses while simultaneously assisting in cost cutting and tax rate consistency.

Some of the projects from 2020 include the Radisson Sewer Project ending in 2028, and the LED street lighting project ending in 2035. Along that time period, the LED project will significantly lower utility costs for street lighting throughout the town, where everyone will benefit.

Prior to the interest rates rising, we financed some of our debt at a lower interest rate, resulting in significant cost savings. I will continue to monitor interest rates as our current debt dissipates. We will be prepared to take on some additional capital projects which will benefit the entire town in the future.

As we talk about funding, it is also important to understand property taxes. Fund balance and debt are not our only sources of revenue. I've been diligent in seeking out other sources of grant and project funding to offset the tax levy. We've completed over \$2 million worth of infrastructure projects utilizing grant funding. Some which includes numerous road improvements, such as town-wide drainage and culvert repairs, and sewer and water projects in the West Phoenix in Indian Springs district. We've received grant funding from each branch of our government [County, State and Federal]. We've also had several grants allocated for the future.

We have future grants for park projects and road projects amounting to over \$450,000. There's a large amount of funding that the town was fortunate enough to receive as part of the American Rescue Plan Act, or ARPA as it is better known, and the town received approximately \$1.8 million in ARPA funds. We've made a conscious effort to use ARPA funding in a responsible way with two main goals in mind, ensuring funded projects do not result in a large increase in annual costs to the taxpayer and benefits to the community.

Some of the highlights of spending include fixing several drainage issues, infrastructure issues, including Whispering Oaks, Melia Park, Clinton Heights, the Phoenix Sewer District, and the Fireside Inn water main relocation site, all of which have resulted in sorely needed infrastructure improvements and large cost reductions to the taxpayer.

There will soon be a new soccer field in our park, which was paid for not only with our funding, but also the previously mentioned Onondaga County grant. The fields are a great addition to our park and it was a perfect project for [that source of spending] and the upkeep costs going forward will be minimal.

We have supported organizations in the local community with these funds as well. ARPA funds were also used for a much-needed ambulance for GBAC in the amount of \$50,000. ARPA funding also paid for the redesign of the Engine 91 website used by Volunteer Firefighters. I believe both of these projects to be vital to the safety and health of our community.

We made sure to improve the efficiency of our Highway Department through championing some new fleet upgrades: Three new plows with another one on the way, a tractor with a mower, several trucks, an excavator, and a payloader. The upkeep and safety of our roads and infrastructure is an important priority, and [we are] always remaining conscious of our bottom line and fiscal responsibility to the taxpayers.

The Town of Lysander has a strong vision for the future. We want to help increase small businesses creating a unique destination experience. I'm currently working with County Planning (who is assisting me on) a Waterfront Development grant. The funding will help our community develop a plan to revitalize and capitalize on one of our greatest commodities, our many miles of waterway. The plan will provide a roadmap for further grant opportunities, and some of the possibilities for funding could go towards providing additional recreation on and along the river, small business growth and enhancements to our community's aesthetics.

I'm working with the Village of Baldwinsville and the Town of Van Buren on this project to ensure the whole community benefits from this, including the additional senior housing. Parents and grandparents will have the opportunity to downsize without having to leave our community, while providing existing housing for young families.

Finally, I'm working with State and County officials to ensure that our community continues to enjoy the quality of life that we are all accustomed. With Micron coming to Onondaga County, I will be the voice for the residents regarding any discussions that might impact the Town of Lysander.