

SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE

SPECIAL MEETING

THIRD DAY

JANUARY 24, 2006

**MEETING HELD AT THE
PATCHOGUE THEATER OF THE PERFORMING ARTS**

71 EAST MAIN STREET, PATCHOGUE

MINUTES TAKEN BY

LUCIA BRAATEN, COURT STENOGRAPHER

[THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 5:42 P.M.]

P.O. LINDSAY:

I'd like to call this meeting of the Suffolk County Legislature to order. If we could all rise. If Legislator Barraga could lead us in the Pledge.

(Salutation)

It is now my pleasure to introduce Sister Elaine Borra of the Lighthouse Mission and the Reverend Roderick Pearson of the Hope Missionary Baptist Church who will give the invocation.

SISTER BORRA:

Hi. It's a privilege and honor to be here tonight to pray for Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy and the elected officials, Legislative body and the government officials. So let's just pray. Let's go before God and just pray.

Father, we thank you tonight, Lord. We thank you for what you do, and we thank you Father. And we especially ask, Father, for a blessing upon Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy, for the position that he holds in the coming 2006. So, Lord, we ask that you strengthen him, you bless him, you give him the wisdom that he needs. And, Father, help him to stand by the

principles that he believes in. Father, I pray that the government body, the governing body, Father, for 2006, they will come together in unity in one mind, and, Father, that they will stand with each other and they will work things out, and that, Father, there'll be divine intervention, so that Suffolk County, Lord, will rise up to the standards that the •• that Suffolk County is looking for. And I just thank you and praise you that you'll be in it. And we thank you, Father, and just give you all the glory. In Jesus name, amen.

PASTOR PEARSON:

Passage of scripture from New Testament, First Epistle of Paul, the Apostle of Timothy, Chapter 2 says, "Therefore, I exalt, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all Godliness and reverence, for this is good and acceptable in the sight of our God, our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

Let us pray. Oh, Lord, magnificent God, our Father, we are honored and we're grateful to be here in this assembly of these, your creation. We thank you, God, for the purpose for which we come on this evening to hear the state of our county. We pray, God, as your word has commanded us to do. We pray for our government leaders. We pray for our County Executive, Steve Levy, we pray for our Legislative body. We pray for all of those who have a say•so in the governing and the ruling of these, your people. We pray for guidance, wisdom. We pray for peace and security. And, most of all, we pray for unity, that we would be one county of one people, of one love, of one God. We ask your presence, we invoke your spirit to be with us and upon us. In the name of our Lord we pray. Amen.

P.O. LINDSAY:

I thank you, Sister Elaine and Reverend Pearson. Mr. Clerk, could you, please, call the roll?

(Roll Called by Mr. Laube, Clerk)

LEG. ROMAINE:

Present.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

(Not Present)

LEG. BROWNING:

Present.

LEG. CARACAPPA:

Here.

LEG. LOSQUADRO:

Present.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Present.

LEG. MONTANO:

Present.

LEG. ALDEN:

Here.

LEG. BARRAGA:

Here.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Here.

LEG. NOWICK:

Here.

LEG. HORSLEY:

Here.

LEG. MYSTAL:

Here.

LEG. STERN:

(Not Present)

LEG. D'AMARO:

Here.

LEG. COOPER:

(Not Present)

LEG. VILORIA • FISHER:

Present.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Here.

MR. LAUBE:

15. (Not Present at Roll Call: Legs. Schneiderman, Stern and Cooper)

P.O. LINDSAY:

This is a Special Meeting to hear the County Executive's State of the County Address, and in the advertisement there was advertised a one-hour public portion. Mr. Clerk, do we have any cards?

MR. LAUBE:

No, we don't.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Is there anyone in the audience that would like to address the Legislature?
Hearing none, I'll entertain a motion to close the public hearing.

LEG. ALDEN:

Motion.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Is there a second?

MR. MONTANO:

Second.

LEG. MYSTAL:

Anyone would like to throw something at us?

P.O. LINDSAY:

Who made the motion? Motion by Legislator Alden, second by Legislator Montano. All in favor? Opposed? Abstentions? The public portion is closed.

MR. LAUBE:

15. (Not Present: Legs. Schneiderman, Stern and Cooper)

P.O. LINDSAY:

At this time, we will recess until 7 o'clock to hear the County Executive's State of the County.

[THE MEETING WAS RECESS AT 5:48 P.M. AND RESUMED AT 6:50 P.M.]

P.O. LINDSAY:

We're going to have a roll call. And, again, I ask the audience to, please, take their seats. Mr. Clerk, would you please call the roll.

(Roll Called by Mr. Laube, Clerk)

LEG. ROMAINE:

Here.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Here.

LEG. BROWNING:

(Present)

LEG. CARACAPPA:

Here.

LEG. LOSQUADRO:

(Present)

LEG. CARACAPPA:

He's here.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Here.

LEG. MONTANO:

(Not Present)

LEG. ALDEN:

Here.

LEG. BARRAGA:

Here.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Here.

LEG. NOWICK:

Here.

LEG. HORSLEY:

(Not Present)

LEG. MYSTAL:

Here.

LEG. STERN:

Here.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Here.

LEG. COOPER:

Here.

LEG. VILORIA • FISHER:

Present.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Here.

MR. LAUBE:

16.

LEG. ROMAINE:

Tim.

LEG. BROWNING:

Tim.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Tim, you got me, right?

MR. LAUBE:

Yep.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Did you get Legislator Schneiderman?

MR. LAUBE:

All 18 present.

P.O. LINDSAY:

All 18 are present. Just an explanation to the audience, is we're timed to go on television at 7 o'clock and we can't deviate from that schedule. And I assure you, the County Executive is here.

(APPLAUSE)

Could I ask everyone, both in the audience and on the stage, to shut off any cell phones. Thank you.

Thank you very much for your attention, for quieting down, and so respectfully. It is now my pleasure to introduce the Mayor of this wonderful Hamlet of Patchogue, Mayor Paul Pontieri, Jr., who is going to introduce our County Executive.

(APPLAUSE)

MAYOR PONTIERI:

We need to wait a moment, because we are live, so I have to get my cues when to start. So I stand here awkwardly, I apologize.

Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen. As the Mayor of the Village of Patchogue, I would like to welcome you to the Patchogue Theater for the Performing Arts.

The strength of any community, whether it be a Village, a Town, or the County, is based upon the ability of those elected officials to work together for the greater good of all its residents.

If one believes that the role of government is to give to the people those things the people cannot give to themselves, such as you shovel your sidewalks, we plow your roads, but, more importantly, you maintain your properties, but, through our housing codes, we prosecute those who don't, to protect those who do and maintain the quality life.

The Village of Patchogue is an example of a community that has had a long history of support and cooperation from all levels of government: Brookhaven Town support for the renovation of the old Town Hall into what would be our new Village Hall. Suffolk County support of this magnificent theater that you're in this evening through the efforts of County Executive Steve Levy and former Legislator and now Brookhaven Town Supervisor,

Brian Foley. County Executive Levy's support of our Workforce Housing Development, and his commitment to the smart growth concept of downtown revitalization and economic development. And the list goes on.

We thank Congressman Bishop for his support, Assemblywoman Eddington for her support. But none of these things ever happen without strong leadership, leadership that has a vision, leadership that has conviction, leadership that understands the needs of all of its citizens, and most of all, leadership that understands that all levels of government must work together for the betterment of the greater community, which is Suffolk County.

With that being said, I would like to introduce our leader, Suffolk County Executive, Mr. Steve Levy.

(APPLAUSE AND STANDING OVATION)

COUNTY EXECUTIVE STEVE LEVY:

Hey, everybody. Thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you. Please, be seated. Thank you so much.

Thank you, Presiding Officer Lindsay, Minority Leader Losquadro, members of the Legislature, and the many residents throughout Long Island who are joining us live here tonight, courtesy of News 12. I would like to extend a special thank you to Patchogue Village Mayor Paul Pontieri, who has so graciously agreed to host this year's State of the County Address in this remarkable venue, the Patchogue Theater.

(APPLAUSE)

I chose Patchogue as the site of this year's State of the County because this Village is symbolic of the kind of revitalization that communities can experience with the rebirth of their downtowns. Such a rebirth requires a solid plan, and planning for our future is one of the major themes of my address to you tonight. But, first, let us focus on the state of the County.

I am pleased to say that the state of our County is strong.

(APPLAUSE)

We are headed in the right direction. Things that should be going up are going up. Our open space preservation programs, our affordable housing starts, and the County's bond rating are all indeed going up. Those things that should be going down, such as our General Fund taxes and the crime rate, are indeed going down. But there is important work to be done.

Recent surveys show once again that high taxes remain the number one concern of our residents. Most of our constituents are doing all they can to make ends meet. Consequently, we must do all we can to make cost containment our number one priority. Let us dedicate this upcoming year to these two important precepts, protecting our taxpayers and planning for our future.

Over the course of this coming year we will see hundreds of pieces of legislation come before this Legislature for adoption, and requests for hundreds of additional positions. Now, individually, we could find justification for passing or funding them all. However, if we fail to prioritize, if we do not exercise fiscal constraint, when added together, these individual programs will collectively lead to higher tax rates our constituents simply cannot bear. All the programs in the world are irrelevant if we can't afford to live here. This is why we must continue to practice smarter government. We must provide reforms and innovations. We must continue our policy of doing more with less. We must show that together we have the will to take on the special interests that benefit from the status quo, and most importantly, we must have the courage to say no when no is the prudent answer. Saying yes is easy. Anyone can say yes. You can pick a person randomly out of the phone book, make them an elected official and have them say yes to every program that comes before them. What makes us special is when we can show that we have the ability to distinguish the good programs from the unnecessary ones, and to demonstrate that we can prioritize. While there may be some short-term political flack over such an approach, it's the right thing to do.

The most pro-child or pro-family thing we can do is not tax our children and parents out of their homes.

(APPLAUSE)

That is why we must continue on our path of fiscal restraint. That is why we remain focused on protecting the taxpayers and planning for our future.

We can be very proud of our fiscal record over the past two years. We've had six budgets in all, two college budgets, two capital budgets, two operating budgets. All six I have presented to you, including two General Fund budgets, were at or below the previous year's tax rate. And our Police District fund was the leanest it has been in years, lower even than the rate of inflation. And, of course, we have provided for two straight General Fund property tax cuts.

(APPLAUSE)

Now, though the rate of taxes at the County level has been stabilized, the rates at other levels of government, including our schools, have continued to rise. I will continue to personally appeal to our colleagues at all levels of government to create a different system on Long Island, one that maximizes accountability within all of our local districts. While there is one County Executive who is the chief budget officer of county government, and while there is one Town Supervisor who is the chief budget officer of town government, there is no single accountable, independently elected individual within our other districts which account for more than 70% of our tax bill.

Our residents deserve greater control of their fate beyond the futile remedy of simply voting down a school budget to register protest. Residents should be able to vote for or against a single budget officer in each of these districts.

Now, as an incentive to keep school taxes within the rate of inflation, the Governor has recently proposed a STAR•Plus Program, providing a rebate for taxpayers in districts where expenditures are kept within 4%. I propose to you the creation of a new Suffolk Senior STAR Program for 2007. Under the

Suffolk Senior STAR Program, we will guarantee no increase in any county taxes for any seniors in the enhanced STAR Program in those districts that are keeping taxes within 4%. Hopefully ••

(APPLAUSE)

Hopefully, these plans, in tandem, the State and the County, will provide extra incentive to keep school taxes reasonable.

We at the county level have been leading by example. We managed our finances so prudently, we were able to cut our General Fund taxes for the second straight year and still suspend the energy tax by 40%. For the first time in 35 years, the County budget I submitted actually called for less spending than the previous year. This responsible fiscal policy helped raise our bond rating to an A+, Suffolk's highest rating in 30 years.

(APPLAUSE)

To continue these successes into the future, we must never stop in our efforts to restructure and reform this government to maximize efficiency. That will require bipartisan cooperation. The people of Suffolk don't care about party labels, they care about smart ideas and common sense.

Common sense has been the key ingredient to our recipe for success in these first two years. It was common sense that dictated the decision to hire a

professional manager for the County-owned Westhampton Airport. As a result, we increased revenues 100 times over what was collected the year before I took office. It was common sense that drove us to take highly trained professional police officers doing audio-visual or accounting work out from behind the desk. As a result, the same is being done by civilians earning much less, and there are more officers on our street.

Last year our smart government reforms took a controversial health care plan that was 36 million dollars in the red and made it flush again. We put fiscal experts on the review panel, replacing political appointees, and injected the process with competition. We said we'd do it and we did it. Working in partnership with our friends in labor, our efforts saved the taxpayers 18 million dollars.

(APPLAUSE)

Protecting the taxpayer and planning for the future, that must be a major priority in the months ahead. For the last two years I've been saying that our government must operate more like a business, always paying close attention to the bottom line. That is why I am calling for a major restructuring of various departments to enhance efficiency over the upcoming years. I ask your help in consolidating our computer databases scattered throughout the County into a single department of Information Technology. Last year at least four different departments were duplicating efforts to purchase and maintain County map data. One centralized department can eliminate this inefficiency. And upon creation of the department, I will submit the name of Sharon Cates-Williams as our Commissioner. In addition to her sterling qualifications, Sharon will be the first African-American female Commissioner in Suffolk history. Sharon, where are you?

(APPLAUSE)

Our smart government mindset dictates that we utilize the talents of the private sector where it makes sense to do so. I am announcing today that we will be soliciting proposals to help the County more aggressively oversee Workers Compensation claims and eradicated fraud. I will also be seeking proposals from experts in the private sector to assist the County with our real estate leases, to solicit grants from previously untapped sources, and to help the County uncover waste and abuse in the Medicaid system.

We recently reaped the benefits of just such a public/private partnership through the creation of our Suffolk Prescription Drug Discount Program that can save families an average of 20% on their prescription drug costs. Our citizens get lower drug costs and our taxpayers will save over one million dollars next year through our high volume discount purchases.

We are also promoting a reform to bring the County sick•day policy more in keeping with the private sector. We have seen cases of some retiring employees receiving cash•out checks of a quarter of a million dollars for unused sick and other accumulated time. Let's help those who are truly sick, not perpetuate a system that pays no heed to the bottom line.

(APPLAUSE)

Now, while we can and must tighten these rules, we must also keep in mind that our recent successes would simply not have been possible without the dedication of our outstanding County workforce.

(APPLAUSE)

These are the dedicated men and women who protect our streets, plow our roads, clean our parks and care for our needy. We have with us here tonight a group of County employees in our Park Stewardship Unit who this year went above and beyond the call of duty. This past May they noticed smoke coming from a house adjoining County park property. Their quick and courageous actions led to a sleeping family inside being safely evacuated. Let us recognize their selfless actions. Ladies and Gentlemen, would you please stand for us? Our friends from the Park Stewardship Unit. Thank you for your service and your bravery.

(APPLAUSE)

Now more revenue will be available for recreation as we continue to weed out waste and fraud within the bureaucracy. We hired more auditors, implemented cash control systems to keep better tabs on public funds, and installed new consumer friendly reservation systems that will allow our resident to spend more time enjoying our County parks and less time waiting on line or experiencing delay in the reservation process.

Implementing smart government principles not only helps us to save taxpayer dollars, it helps us create a more compassionate County government. Three years ago the homeless population in Suffolk was housed primarily in motels, costing up to \$5,000 per month per family. I'm happy to report that we have turned the corner. In January 2003 there were 190 families housed in motels. Today, that figure is down to six.

(APPLAUSE)

And thanks to the creation of new shelters, the number of singles living in motels was reduced from over 200 last winter to a mere eight individuals today.

(APPLAUSE)

And, by the way, this smart government approach has also saved us over 7 million dollars in emergency housing costs, so that's not a bad ancillary benefit as well.

At the start of this year, we created two mobile nursing units to bring important prenatal health care to underserved communities. As a result, we are seeing a greater number of healthier outcomes. There have been a 9% increase in prenatal care, which in turn has reduced the number of infant malpractice claims from an average of six to ten per year to only one in 2005.

(APPLAUSE)

Protecting our taxpayers, that must be the primary goal for all of us in County government. We need to work more closely with other levels of

government to share in cost cutting. I have already met twice with our Town Supervisors to explore ways of sharing services such as park and road maintenance, the results of which will be announced in the upcoming months. Department heads from Nassau and Suffolk Counties have been meeting to come up with ways to consolidate our purchasing power to bring about efficiencies through the joint purchases of paper, petroleum and other supplies. And later this month, the Nassau County Executive and I will meet to discuss potential plans to match Suffolk's expanding commercial needs for sewers with Nassau's excess sewer capacity. Under this scenario, we save money in not having to expand an existing plant and Nassau receives money it can parlay into environmental protection. We need to be less Balkanized and more regionalized.

(APPLAUSE)

We recognize that you cannot go back to the taxpayer over and over again to meet the demands of government. That is why it is so important to continue to grow our economy. Expanding our tax base spreads the tax burden across more shoulders and lessens the weight we bear individually. We must continue to attract good paying jobs that will allow our families to take root here.

One of the many challenges we face on Long Island is balancing our desire to grow with our •• with preserving our fragile environment. We want the jobs that come with economic growth. We need more housing for our young. We also want to preserve our open spaces and our clean, plentiful water supply. In the past, these issues were viewed as mutually exclusive. We changed that. We have shown that with proper planning, these interests need not be pitted against each other. We can indeed grow our economy, build more affordable housing and do so without sacrificing our precious environment.

(APPLAUSE)

We will succeed in striking that delicate balance only through proper planning. Good government starts with good planning.

(APPLAUSE)

We have worked vigorously to identify those locations ideal for preservation while at the same time targeting previously developed areas for expansion of our economic base. Why destroy our beautiful open spaces and farms when we can redevelop the abandoned shopping centers, warehouses, and industrial complexes that are blighting our neighborhoods? Last year we worked with the Nassau County Executive in reinvigorating the Long Island Regional Planning Board. This year I am calling for a review of the Regional Master Plan to be coordinated with the plans of local towns and villages. Included in this analysis will be a study of the convergence of numerous big box commercial developments on traffic flow, especially the Long Island Expressway/Sagtikos corridor where the Towns of Huntington, Babylon, Islip, and Smithtown meet, and along Route 58 in Riverhead, the gateway to the North Fork.

(APPLAUSE)

Our plans to bring hundreds of high tech jobs to Suffolk through the development of County•owned Westhampton Airport as an economic hub are

ready to be marketed. At last year's address I laid out my vision for a state of the art workforce housing center coupled with a sports entertainment or cultural venue to create a new sense of identity for both the Hamlet of Yaphank and the County. I am pleased to tell you that we are now at this stage where we are receiving plans from the development community to make this vision a reality.

(APPLAUSE)

And we will promote economic development further by assisting the Center of Excellence at Stony Brook that is becoming a leader in wireless technology. I will be issuing an Executive Order to allow our County land to host the equipment needed to make us in Suffolk a wireless county.

(APPLAUSE)

As I stated a little earlier, overall growth in Suffolk cannot progress without a serious investment in enhancing our sewer capacity. Our most recent capital budget infused a new commitment to construction and expansion of sewer districts to a level not seen in more than three decades. Creating more sewer capacity will help us meet our goal of allowing businesses to grow on our Route 110 corridor, in the Hauppauge Industrial Park, and numerous other industrial sites throughout the County.

A hallmark of smart government and smart planning means that we must also make it easier for our companies to do business here in Suffolk County. The red tape and delays inherent in our overlapping bureaucracies result in

frustration and lost revenue. In the business community, time is money. It is absurd for businesses to have to wait 16 weeks, as was the case two years ago, for an application to be reviewed by government personnel. Our smart government restructuring has reduced the review time to less than four weeks for both commercial applications and residential subdivisions.

(APPLAUSE)

The formerly frustrating process has been expedited even further by innovative cross•referencing, a program we adopted earlier this year. Now agents from our Departments of Public Works and Health meet on a bi•weekly basis to perform simultaneous reviews of an applicant's paperwork. I propose that this year we pursue having the towns participate in this process as well.

Our businesses are being further boosted by our reinvigorated Downtown Revitalization Program. The rebirth of the Village of Patchogue is a shining example of the successes that can materialize when various levels of government work together to strengthen communities.

(APPLAUSE)

Look around you and see what Patchogue has done here. This historic hall, which first opened its majestic doors onto Main Street as Ward and Glynne's Patchogue Theater in 1923 is a symbol of the Village's ongoing renaissance. We want to assist our towns and villages in replicating this type of success.

Formerly, County downtown funds were spread so thin there was very often little lasting impact to our expenditures. The new merit-based policy that the Legislature has supported allows us to concentrate our funding on a few large scale projects that will truly make a difference for local communities. An unused blighted park in Brentwood will be resurrected to become a gateway to a resurgent downtown. A parking lot alongside the Peconic River is being developed into a scenic entree into downtown Riverhead.

Over the next year, our concept of business incubators in economically distressed areas, particularly within our diverse communities, will come to fruition. Entrepreneurs who would not otherwise think of investing in distressed areas may now be convinced to do so with the many incentives available through the incubators. Fledgling businesses run out of garages and attics can now come together in the incubator to share not only their ingenuity but their office space, secretarial staff and equipment as well to help their up and coming businesses thrive. The investment is indeed contagious, and as more businesses settle in distressed and diverse neighborhoods, their energy and success will uplift nearby establishments.

Our minority and women-owned businesses have been helped even further over the past year through the creation of our new website dedicated specifically to aiding these companies that will soon receive direct e-mails from the County whenever a bid is being solicited.

Our constant refrain repeated over and over by large or small businesses is the lack of affordable workforce housing on Long Island. They believe it is hampering their ability to grow. If we are to prosper, our businesses need young, educated, talented workers. Unfortunately, they're in shorter supply as more and more of our best minds take the fateful decision to pack their

bags and leave Long Island for more affordable pastures. This brain drain not only tears families apart, it has the potential to tear our economy apart as well.

The Workforce Housing Commission that we brought together has converged representatives from Towns and County to join forces with builders, environmentalists and civic leaders, not simply to talk about affordable housing, but rather, to find specific parcels appropriate to create more affordable housing.

(APPLAUSE)

With the cooperation of towns and villages, we have identified numerous such parcels. The very first projects to come through this process is sited right here in the Village of Patchogue.

(APPLAUSE)

This project will produce 80 new homes, 40 of which are affordable and are in the works right now. Suffolk assisted this efforts in various ways and will assist further with sewer and water hookups from the 15 million dollar fund we established in our Capital Budget. Other successes include our bid to lure the not•for•profit entity ArtSpace, which will help created affordable lofts for artists in downtown Patchogue and Riverhead.

(APPLAUSE)

And we're currently working with the Village of Westhampton Beach to facilitate several hundred workforce homes in that particular hamlet and a program in the Town of Southold that provides new homes and accessory apartments as well. Several thousand more workforce units are slated for the grounds of the former Pilgrim State Hospital, and we remain committed to developing workforce homes at our County-owned Yaphank site. These homes are being kept affordable in part because of the generosity from the fine folks in the Long Island building trades, many of whom have agreed to provide up to a 50% discount in the construction of these dwellings. Please join me in recognizing Mike Conroy and Allan Ehl from the Empire State Regional Council of Carpenters. Thank you, guys, for your generosity. Allan, Mike.

(APPLAUSE)

Our careful planning and smart government also opened the door of opportunity for many families previously shut out from the participation of affordable housing programs. New, more realistic eligibility requirements now allow couples earning up to \$85,000 to find homes valued up to \$390,000.

Later this year I will be traveling throughout the County to tout what may be the best kept secret in Suffolk, our Employer Assisted Housing Program. Few are aware of this program, which can leverage a \$3,000 employer grant into as much as 32,000 in government assistance for employees purchasing a home in Suffolk. Imagine converting a Christmas bonus into a real opportunity for a young family to experience the American dream here in

Long Island. So, to all of our business leaders I say, be part of the solution. Joining the program can turn out to be the best raise you'll ever give to an employee.

(APPLAUSE)

The reasons we want to live in Suffolk County are obvious, Our exceptional schools, our stunning shoreline, and the breathtaking parks, Our low crime rate, our diverse economy and our proximity to good paying jobs. And perhaps most importantly, our quintessential suburban environment. Those settling in Suffolk, more often than not, do so with the goal of owning a single-family home in a nice neighborhood that is well maintained and safe for their children. It's what the concept of neighborhood is all about.

Our local civic associations work very hard to defend the concept of neighborhood, and rightly so. This administration and this Legislature understand that no family wants to work hard their entire lives only to see their largest investment placed at risk because local zoning codes are ignored. How did we ever get to the point where 60 people were allowed to live in a 900 square foot single-family home? Those residents and community leaders who have spoken out against this abomination are right to do so, and are looking to their government to defend the integrity of their neighborhoods.

(APPLAUSE)

And those speaking out are not cold-hearted, they're not narrow-minded,

and they should not be labeled as such.

(APPLAUSE)

One out•of•touch advocacy group has gone so far as to label the Village of Patchogue, the Village of Patchogue as one of the meanest municipalities in the country for its "Operation Clean Sweep" which combats public drunkenness and drug dealings. To them I say, help us improve the quality of life in our neighborhoods or get out of the way.

(APPLAUSE)

Suffolk's hard•working families pay our salaries and look to us for leadership. I am proud that this administration and this Legislature have responded in kind. Our Police Department, along with District Attorney Tom Spota, is aggressively pursuing these slumlords who exploit both the tenants living under these conditions and their neighbors in the surrounding communities. Our combined efforts toward neighborhood protection reached a crescendo this past month with new legislation that provides incentives for towns to adopt tougher codes to help combat the more egregiously overcrowded facilities, and I thank you again, Legislature, for doing so. It was very, very important.

(APPLAUSE)

You know, two years ago our Open Space Program was dead in the water, mired in controversy. This new administration and the Legislature combined to draft new laws to weed out conflicts, prioritize parcels and expedite the mechanism for land acquisition. We appointed a renowned environmentalist to head up our program, assigned additional attorneys to help close our deals, and we created three master lists of over 9,000 environmentally sensitive parcels targeted for preservation. These parcels were chosen not for political reasons, but by the leaders of our environmental community, And the results have been extraordinary. In our first year alone, we doubled the number of acres closed on or in contract over the previous year's total.

(APPLAUSE)

And over a two-year period, we have acquired or reached agreement upon nearly 3,000 acres of open space and active farmland, more than three and a half times the size of Central Park.

(APPLAUSE)

Now, to ensure that we have the resources necessary to win the race against overdevelopment, we collectively passed a 75 million dollar open space bond that was overwhelmingly endorsed by the voters. Our program is in such high gear that we will run out of funds next year, before our work is done. We owe it to our grandchildren to finish the job. I am proposing that we leave them a legacy, an Environmental Legacy Fund of 50 million dollars to match funds with other public and private sources for a total of 100 million dollars to preserve our open spaces and farms and restore our parks.

(APPLAUSE)

But our environmental record extends beyond preserving open space. We are simultaneously engaged in restoring our bays and revitalizing our shellfish industry. In the 1980's one quarter of the nation's scallop harvest came from right here in Suffolk. Over time that production virtually disappeared, but we're on the comeback trail. Our landmark program to reseed millions of scallops in the Peconic Bay, the largest such program in the County, is now bearing fruit. The recent harvest showed promise, and we are hopeful that next year our previously decimated scallop population will be on the way back.

(APPLAUSE)

And this year •• and this year, through an initiative from the Legislature and in concert with the Nature Conservancy, we are embarking on a one million dollar clam restoration program in the Great South Bay. Thank you, Bill.

(APPLAUSE)

Our waterways and wetlands will be further protected through the mitigation of pesticide use in our ongoing efforts to battle the devastating effects of mosquito•borne illnesses. We are learning to utilize innovative methods that will reduce dependence on pesticides. Last year I stated for the first time Suffolk would not engage in new ditching in our marshlands. This year we will go further by restoring wetlands in an environmentally sound manner, and creating new habitats in which fish populations can flourish. We believe

healthy wetlands and natural predators of mosquito larvae can help us reduce our dependence on pesticides by as much as 75% over the next decade.

(APPLAUSE)

Equally damaging is the pollution from road tar, salt and other byproducts from rainstorms that wind up in our ground and surface waters. Years ago the Legislature envisioned an innovative method of using charcoal filtering devices to stop pollutants from seeping into our waterways. To accommodate this program, we transferred 19 employees to help ensure that many catch basins throughout the County are equipped with these filters. And for the first time in this County, we are making a serious effort to monitor and manage thousands of acres we have preserved over these many years to inhibit dumping and ensure that our open spaces remain pristine. We ••

(APPLAUSE)

And we can be additionally proud of our environmental record when we look at our successful joint efforts with the federal government and Brookhaven Lab in cleaning up the Peconic River.

(APPLAUSE)

Additionally, we have become the state leader in energy efficiency and the

use of cleaner alternative energy sources. This year we will save over one million dollars on energy costs through our Clean Energy Action Plan. We were the first municipality on Long Island to adopt this plan, and thanks to bills promoted by both our branches, cleaner biodiesel fuel is now being used in a north shore dredging project and in our heavy duty fleet. Thank you, Danny. Thank you, Vivian.

(APPLAUSE)

The County is purchasing an additional 25 hybrid vehicles, and we are working with a private company to convert excess grease produced by the restaurant industry and recycle it for energy purposes rather than see it dumped illegally.

(APPLAUSE)

And to top it all off, this past year Suffolk became the first county in New York State to adopt tax incentives for residents and businesses that install solar equipment.

(APPLAUSE)

But our beautiful County parkland is not all reserved for open space. Our active parkland provides an oasis of recreation that helps make Suffolk County so unique. Over the last year we saw a renewed investment in our

park infrastructure. Major repairs were effectuated at Meadowcroft, Sagtikos Manor, Flanders Gun Club and the West Neck Farm, just to name a few. We are reopening our Trap and Skeet Range at Southaven Park and hired nine additional full•time Park Police over the last year for greater security, The largest increase since 1977.

(APPLAUSE)

We also enhanced our restrooms for visiting public at Southaven Park and Smith Point, and implemented a new water•to•campsite project at Indian Island Campsite in Riverhead.

Now last year we achieved an unprecedented level of success in seeking assistance from our colleagues in Albany. As one of the four County Executives on the committee to bring about Medicaid reform, I worked with our Albany delegation to cap Medicaid costs for our local property taxpayers. Now we will ask our delegation to set its sights on several other items of importance.

Last summer I hosted a meeting with mental health professionals and our State delegation to discuss ways in which Suffolk County could be reimbursed by the State government for the disproportionately high number of people with mental illness in Suffolk. For decades Suffolk County hosted numerous psychiatric institutions that housed up to one•third of the State's mentally ill population. Upon closure, the occupants settled overwhelmingly here in Suffolk County. What is most unfortunate is that far too many have had the correctional facilities in Riverhead and Yaphank as their latest place of residence. It is estimated that up to 10% of our jail population suffers from mental illness. It is my hope that the creation of a Mental Health Court next

year will be a first step in assuring that these individuals stay on their medication, remain healthy, and on the right course.

We will be seeking assistance from both the state and federal governments to ensure that we have resources to deal with manmade and natural disasters. While Suffolk is ahead of the curve in relation to other counties throughout the state, Hurricane Katrina showed us that even our best laid plans may have gaps in the face of nature's fury.

(APPLAUSE)

We have since implemented a top•to•bottom review to help ensure that we have an adequate number of evacuation sites, cots, vaccines, supplies and backup equipment on hand. Additionally, I met with our Congressional delegation in Washington to coordinate and upgrade our disaster response plans.

We will also be asking the State to pass legislation to benefit those who serve their community and their nation. It is becoming increasingly difficult for our volunteer fire departments and ambulance companies to recruit and retain members. That is why I will be lobbying for State legislation to award bonus points on civil service exams to those selfless volunteers.

(APPLAUSE)

As you probably know, our veterans already receive a civil service bonus, and they deserve even more. As it presently stands, war veterans will receive a property tax exemption, however, only after they are discharged from military service. But veterans need this assistance most at the time they are away from their families and sent to foreign lands to defend our nation.

We have with us today members of the 106th Air National Guard base at Westhampton County Airport. Last year our collective lobbying efforts helped prevent the closure of this important facility, one of the largest east end employers. So please join me in recognizing Colonel Michael Canders and the members of the Air Guard who have recently returned from serving their country in Iraq. Colonel Canders and men and women.

(APPLAUSE AND STANDING OVATION)

The tax benefits we give these heroes should kick in while they are actively engaged in defense of our country. They should not have to wait until they are discharged.

(APPLAUSE)

Our veterans defend us abroad, and our outstanding Police Department defends our streets here at home. We also have with us members of our County Police Force who have recently returned from service in Iraq. Please join me in welcoming them home. Ladies and Gentlemen.

(APPLAUSE AND STANDING OVATION)

Thank you again, Ladies and Gentlemen, for your service.

Our Suffolk County Police Department is second to none. A great department has been made even better over the past two years with the smart government principles we have implemented. While the number of sworn personnel on the force has remained rather constant, the number of officers out on the street patrol has increased, placing civilians in department desk jobs earning one•half to two•thirds less than sworn personnel has allowed for more of our highly trained dedicated officers to be transferred to the front line of defense in our neighborhoods.

(APPLAUSE)

We are deploying officers where they are needed most, when they are needed most. I'm proud to report that for the second year in a row Forbes Magazine has designated our suburban community as the safest in the nation.

(APPLAUSE)

In fact, our reforms have helped bring about an 11% decrease in crime over the past two years. We created new specialized units, anti•gang units, as well as units to combat identity theft, drag racers and other reckless drivers,

and sexual predators using the internet to prey upon our children. But thanks to our partnership with Parents for Megan's Law, Suffolk County has one of the lowest sex offender registration failure rates in the nation.

(APPLAUSE)

Through collaboration with the police, schools, and the Parents of Megan's Law, concerned parents will be able to obtain sex offender notifications quicker through e•mail alerts.

Next year we will enhance our Police Department even further by installing video cameras in our police cars and creating a new unit to recruit a more diversified department. We will also consider upgrading the requirements to two years of college credits or above before an officer is eligible for promotion.

The innovations we promoted last year in cross•referencing suspected felons with the immigration lists will be followed this year with a new program cross•referencing arrestees with child support arrears. If assets are seized and money is owed for support, we'll take it and make sure these assets get to the children.

(APPLAUSE)

I'd also like to note that the first class of more than 100 officers under my

administration will be graduating shortly. They will be combined with the new class of 100 recruits that will begin training later this year.

Several months ago I authorized new positions within the District Attorney's Office and the Department of Social Services that are helping us uncover fraud in our schools and in the Medicaid system. Recent reports indicate that up to 10% of Medicaid applications are tinged with fraud. We will not tolerate such abuse. I want to thank Suffolk County Comptroller Joe Sawicki for assisting my administration and District Attorney Tom Spota's office in this effort.

(APPLAUSE)

Smart government means professionalizing our government. Appointments to County boards and commissions should be made far less political and more professional. I will be seeking to work with the majority of Legislators to reverse the misguided actions of last year, when we saw a noted environmentalist removed from our Council on Environmental Quality. Let us ensure that legislation is passed that will have highly qualified individuals on this council, as well as on our Planning Commission and Water Authority.

(APPLAUSE)

And in an historic approach, we will seek to revamp the office of Off Track Betting, long a den of patronage abuse, to see that excessive salaries are cut and unnecessary cars are taken away. Let us work together to enhance people's confidence in the government that serves them.

In conclusion, our upcoming year will be one where we concentrate on reform, restructuring and cost containment. We all know how property values have risen in this county. As I said earlier, it's no surprise. So many people want to live here and for very good reason. We have a duty as the people's representatives to keep taxes stable for today's generation and to lay out professional visionary planning for our future generations. We can protect our taxpayers today by creating a Suffolk STAR Program to freeze county taxes for our seniors, by advocating for the election of single accountable elected budget officials in schools and other special districts, by working with the private sector to control leasing, Workers Compensation and Medicaid costs, by curbing sick time abuse, by creating efficiencies through department consolidations, by reforming management of OTB with directors committed to cutting costs, By promoting Town/County coordination on purchasing and maintenance, and by continuing our policy of smart government in every department at every level of County operations.

(APPLAUSE)

While we do this, we can set the course for tomorrow by creating the 100 million dollar Environmental Legacy Fund, by coordinating the Regional Master Plan with those of towns and villages, by undertaking greater analysis of regional traffic issues, by promoting economic growth through sewer expansion for our businesses, by partnering with Nassau County to match our commercial sewer needs with its excess capacity, by promoting business incubators in economically distressed areas, by encouraging economic development through the use of Empire Zone, by balancing our need for economic growth with our need to preserve our precious environment, and by continuing to promote affordable and workforce housing programs so that the generations to come will have the means, as well as the desire, to establish roots and raise their families here in the great place we call Suffolk County.

(APPLAUSE)

When our children look back on whether we provided the leadership to make Suffolk the envy of the state, let us be able to say, indeed we did. Thank you. Good night. God bless America and God bless the County of Suffolk. Thank you all very much. Thank you, Bill.

(APPLAUSE AND STANDING OVATION)

P.O. LINDSAY:

I thank the County Executive Steve Levy for a very lengthy and thorough report. And I will entertain a motion to adjourn.

LEG. MONTANO:

Motion to adjourn.

LEG. VILORIA • FISHER:

So moved.

LEG. BARRAGA:

Second.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Second by Legislator Barraga. Motion was by Legislator Montano. All in favor? Opposed? We stand adjourned.

MR. LAUBE:

18.

[THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED AT 8:00 P.M.]