

SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE

SPECIAL MEETING

**THIRD DAY
FEBRUARY 7, 2007**

State-of-the-County Address

**MEETING HELD AT THE ACCOMPSETT MIDDLE SCHOOL
660 MEADOW ROAD, SMITHTOWN, NEW YORK**

**Minutes Taken By
Alison Mahoney - Court Stenographer**

*(*The meeting was called to order at 5:40 PM*)*

P.O. LINDSAY:

Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen. Could I have all Legislators to the auditorium stage, please?
Mr. Clerk, would you please call the roll?

MR. LAUBE:

Yes, sir. Good evening, Mr. Presiding Officer.

*(*Roll Called by Mr. Laube - Clerk*)*

LEG. ROMAINE:

Present.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Here.

LEG. BROWNING:

Here.

LEG. CARACAPPA:

(Not present).

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

(Not Present)

LEG. LOSQUADRO:

Present.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Here.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Here.

LEG. MONTANO:

Here.

LEG. ALDEN:

Here.

LEG. BARRAGA:

Here.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Here.

LEG. NOWICK:

Here.

LEG. HORSLEY:

Here.

LEG. MYSTAL:

(Not Present).

LEG. STERN:

Here.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Here.

LEG. COOPER:

Here.

MR. LAUBE:

Fourteen (**AMENDED VOTE: 15-0-0-3 - Not Present: Legislators Caracappa, Vilorio-Fisher, Mystal)

P.O. LINDSAY:

Thank you very much. Mr. Clerk, this is a Special Meeting, would you please read the meeting notice?

MR. LAUBE:

"Please be advised that a Special Meeting of the Suffolk County Legislature will be held on Wednesday, February 7th, 2007 at 5:30 PM in the afternoon at the Accomsett Middle School located at 660 Meadow Road, Smithtown, New York, pursuant to Section 2-6(B) of the Suffolk County Administrative Code for the following purpose: One-hour public portion starting at 5:30 PM; the State-of-the-County Address by Steve Levy, County Executive of Suffolk County, at 7:02 PM; and continuation of the public portion at the conclusion of the County Executive's State-of-the-County Address, if necessary."

P.O. LINDSAY:

Was that notice duly advertised?

MR. LAUBE:

Yes, it was.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Thank you. Would everyone rise for the Pledge to our flag led by Legislator Barraga.

Salutation

Now it's my pleasure to introduce Father Brian McNamara who is the Pastor of St. Phillip and James Church in St. James, New York.

Father, would you come forward for the Invocation.

FATHER McNAMARA:

Let us now pause for a moment to place ourselves in the living presence of God and let us pray. In the Solemnity we read, "Praise God, this holy dwelling. Praise him on his mighty throne. Praise God for his marvelous deeds, that every creature that breathes, praise the Lord."

Lord God, Master of the Universe, we give you thanks and praise for all the wonderful things you do for us and for your presence and action in our world. We ask you to send your holy spirit upon us, the same spirit that hovered over the world's creation, the same spirit that inspired the prophets to speak the truth. Send that same spirit upon us today and let that same spirit help you to create a more just and compassionate world. Let that same spirit inspire us to do all the right things at all times, even if it is the more difficult thing. Let that same spirit energize us and help us to realize that when we touch those in need, we touch the face of God. And we ask this in your holy name, amen.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Thank you, Father, very much for those elegant words. Please be seated.

I would be remiss if I did not thank a couple of groups that helped with the arrangements this evening. The Smithtown Chamber of Commerce, as well as the Smithtown School District, we thank you for your hospitality in hosting this annual Special Meeting of a message from our County Executive on the State of our County.

With that, I will officially open the public portion. We do not have any cards; am I correct?

MR. LAUBE:

You are correct.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Okay. Is there anyone in the audience that would like to address the Legislature? Seeing none, or no hands, I will entertain a motion to recess --

LEG. LOSQUADRO:

So moved.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Second.

P.O. LINDSAY:

-- until 6:50.

LEG. MONTANO:

Tomorrow.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Today. I think -- am I correct, Counsel; we need a super majority?

MR. NOLAN:

To close the public portion, you need a motion to close the public portion and then you can just recess.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Okay. So the motion is to close the public portion and we have a motion by Legislator Losquadro, a second by Legislator Eddington.

Mr. Clerk, would you call the roll.

*(*Roll Called by Mr. Laube - Clerk*)*

P.O. LINDSAY:

Yes.

LEG. MONTANO:

Yes.

LEG. ROMAINE:

Yes.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Yes.

LEG. BROWNING:

Yes.

LEG. CARACAPPA:

(Not present).

LEG. LOSQUADRO:

Yes.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Yes.

LEG. ALDEN:

Yes.

LEG. BARRAGA:

Yes.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Yes.

LEG. NOWICK:

Yes.

LEG. HORSLEY:

Yes.

LEG. MYSTAL:

(Not present).

LEG. STERN:

Yes.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Yes.

LEG. COOPER:

Yes.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

Yes.

MR. LAUBE:

Fourteen (**AMENDED VOTE: 16-0-0-2 - Not Present: Legislators Caracappa & Mystal).

P.O. LINDSAY:

Okay, we will recess until 6:50.

*(*The meeting was recessed at 5:47 PM*)*

*(*The meeting was reconvened at 6:50 PM*)*

P.O. LINDSAY:

Okay, we're back. Everybody please take their seats. For those of you who might not know me, I am Bill Lindsay, I am the Legislator from the 8th Legislative District and the Presiding Officer of the Suffolk County Legislature and my roll in life is to shhhhh people and listen.

I would just remind everybody, if you would please at this moment check your cell phone and make sure it's either on buzz mode or else off altogether, so we do not have any ringing while the County

Executive is speaking. And with that -- geez, everybody is nice and quiet, I wish we could go on the air now; she says no, three minutes, two minutes.

LEG. MYSTAL:

Tell a joke.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Okay, it's my pleasure to introduce the Supervisor from the great Town of Smithtown who is our host this evening, Patrick Vecchio, who will introduce our County Executive.

Applause

SUPERVISOR VECCHIO:

Thank you. Ladies and Gentlemen, it is with great pleasure that I welcome you to Smithtown. It is indeed an honor that Smithtown has been selected as the site for the State-of-the-County Address, so I thank you all for being here this evening.

Some of you may know that I am -- have been the longest serving Supervisor in Long Island history; I would like to think that some wisdom has taken hold. One of the important lessons that I have learned over these many years is that those who champion for reform come in many packages. During 29 years in this office, I have seen many of those packages unwrapped and out come headlines, slogans, sound bites, one-liners and filing cabinets full of empty promises and not much substance. On occasion, though, the wrapping gives way to something new, a public official willing to cast aside political affiliation, dig beyond the status quo, fight past the bill credit malaise and work tirelessly for substantive reform, and that's what brings us here this evening.

Our speaker tonight is not one of those typical, new-age politicians obsessed with being pretty or popular or all things to all people; he's a man who is willing and able to work hard, who is convinced that we can do better and be more, who strives each day toward improvement. He is a man who wants us all working together for a better Suffolk County.

In Smithtown, we believe we are part of a new and better Suffolk County and we want to join with Suffolk County in a brighter future and we want to join with Suffolk County in a bright future and we want to unwrap the package that finally delivers to our residents the gift of reform.

And that's why it is with great appreciation, and despite our political party enrollment, that I accepted the invitation before you in my own town and made this introduction; and I'm told I have to pause for television. Somebody once asked President Eisenhower what does he do as President, he said, "Well, you sit behind the big desk and people come in and tell you what to do"; I came here, they tell me what to do and that's that.

Applause

So, did I tell you the one about -- no. Two minutes.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I proudly introduce you to County Executive Steve Levy.

Applause

COUNTY EXECUTIVE LEVY:

Thank you. Thank you all. Thank you. I thought I told you to shut the beepers off. By the way, speaking of the beepers, I overheard Legislator Lindsay telling everyone to shut their cell phones and beepers off, but Bill, did you remind Legislator Eddington to shut off his GPS system? That's an inside Legislative joke, for everyone in the audience.

Thank you, Supervisor Vecchio, for the kind introduction and for your years of outstanding public

service, all 740 of them. He's the longest serving Supervisor in the State of New York, let's give him a nice round of applause.

Applause

And thank you, Presiding Officer Lindsay, Members of the Legislature and our friends at home watching live courtesy of News 12 Long Island. Thank you as well to our friends in Smithtown who have opened their doors to us here at Accomsett Middle School.

The State-of-the-County Address is designed to reflect upon the overall condition and direction of our County. But before we truly appreciate where we are now and where we are going, it is important to look back on where we were just a few years ago.

Three years ago, County spending was increasing at a very high rate. Our Open Space Program was on life support, Medicaid costs were out of control and our health plan was \$36 million in the red. More than 150 homeless families were housed in motels. There was little dialogue or consultation between the County and our ten towns.

A few years ago I put in place an aggressive agenda for change, a new proactive, innovative mindset. In a bipartisan fashion, we ushered in a new concept of smart government. We took special aim at the more wasteful elements of government so that money would be freed up to provide services in a better way while giving our taxpayers a break. We started off by setting the right town tone, removing hundreds of cars that were allowed for personal use and placed them in pools for County workers who need them to carry out their responsibilities. We cut back on unnecessary travel vouchers and put experts of the highest professional caliber in leadership positions, regardless of their political affiliation.

We committed to running this government with oversight and innovation, and most importantly with the understanding that these are taxpayers dollars that we are safeguarding. This new tone was very helpful in our efforts to address a record \$238 million budget shortfall that we inherited just a few years ago. We did not sit back and hope a miracle would erase this shortfall, nor did we throw up our hands and resign ourselves to the thought that a huge tax increase would solve the problem. Instead, we committed ourselves in bipartisan fashion to create the largest budget restructuring plan in our County's history.

The reforms we implemented not only erased the shortfall but gave us enough fiscal stability to provide for a General Fund tax cut in 2005. Better yet, we followed that tax cut with a General Fund tax cut in 2006, and just recently a third straight tax cut for 2007.

Applause

Let us commit today to work together to deliver a fourth straight General Fund tax cut for the people of Suffolk County in 2008.

Applause

Stabilizing taxes is so important. Everywhere you go people complain about how hard it is to afford to stay here on Long Island. It is our number one issue and priority. Summing up the fiscal conditions surrounding the 1992 National Election, a political pundit said bluntly, "It's the economy, stupid." Fast forward to 2007 on Long Island and we can say with certainty, "It's taxes, my friend." People are looking to us for leadership, we must keep taxes under control. And make no mistake, the only way to control taxes is to control spending.

There are two ways to handle spending; one is to examine each potential project to determine its worth, with all those deemed worth while being placed in the budget. Now, the problem with this approach is that while they all might seem justifiable when looking at them in a vacuum, when

totaled, you could find yourself having to spend an extra 13% over the previous year, as New York State's government did last year.

The better approach, in my opinion, and the approach we have employed over the last few years has been to set a spending limit at the beginning of the budget process and thereafter prioritize. We must resist the temptation to spend money to make every special interest happy. Families aren't made happy when they're forced to pack up and move off the Island because taxes are too high.

Applause

Just like in our personal household budgets, the revenues must balance out with the expenditures. The only thing worse than raising property taxes is raising spending dramatically while cutting revenues at the same time. This is what Nassau County did in the 1990's and it brought them to the brink of bankruptcy. You know, the Federal government is notorious for this as well. But unlike the Feds, we do not have a printing press in the basement to print money, we must have a balanced budget. We should be proud that we have been able to control taxes without raising fees or resorting to gimmicks or smoke and mirrors; such practices would certainly have been sniffed out by the independent analysis of the Wall Street Bond Raters.

Our fiscal prudence and solid budget management have been rewarded. Last year we received the highest bond rating in the history of Suffolk County.

Applause

Today I ask the Legislature to work with me in maintaining a balanced budget and our historically high bond rating. This government must resist the urge to remove revenue streams without corresponding cuts or offsets; doing so might get you a quick headline and is politically expedient in the short term, but it is irresponsible.

Over my many years in government, I have seen officials who want to spend lots of money and were willing to raise taxes to do so. I have seen others who fought for tax cuts and had the guts to trim programs to offset the loss in revenue, and I have seen others who sought to have it both ways; folks, we can not have it both ways. We can't spend, spend, spend and then introduce legislation to cut the revenues needed to fund all the spending that has been proposed.

In 2005, we suspended 40% of the tax imposed on home heating oil and gas, and did so by finding specific setting expenditures. This year, let's give our motorists a break by committing a full recovery of our lawsuit against LIPA overcharges to our residents to cut their gasoline costs rather than throwing that money into the General Fund.

Applause

I propose to return the savings in the form of a credit card entitling every household to a free fill-up of gas. The processing will be paid for by the participating credit card company, and if the process works we'll take it one step further by contracting with a credit card company to allow our Suffolk residents to earn credits toward their property taxes every time they use the card to make their every day purchases. Instead of acquiring frequent flier miles, how about earning frequent tax credits?

Applause

I like that one; it can work, believe me. While we must resist the temptation to spend to excess, we must embrace the idea of spending smarter. The smart management principals we have employed have proven that you can do more with less and actually improve services. This is not just rhetoric, we have made promises and we have delivered.

We said we would address the homeless problem and we have. We increased rental subsidies to those in need to afford their rents and worked in concert -- in concert, excuse me -- with contract agencies to house the homeless. While we had over 150 families in expensive and inhumane hotels a few years ago, today we have none.

Applause

We said we would lower prescription drug costs for our residents and we have. Our new SCRIPTS Program which allows residents of any age or income to pool their prescription purchases has saved 8,500 residents over 24% on their average prescription bills. Additionally, the process saved the County over a million dollars in costs for our County employee prescriptions; folks, that's called smart government.

Applause

Working with the Legislature, we enhanced the salaries of our nurses so we can be more competitive in attracting and retaining these professionals. County-wide, we have 411 wonderful nurse care professionals providing important services for the public, of these, 265 are in our health centers; this is an increase of 8.6% over what we had in January, 2004. And most recently, we introduced a plan for four new nurses to deliver services to the east end which is particularly vulnerable due to its elderly population and transportation challenges.

Applause

We said we would improve services for those seeking prenatal care and we have. Our new Minority Health Bureau is bringing nurses and social workers directly into communities. Our prenatal units have resulted in 6% increase in patient care over last year, thereby promoting the birth of healthier babies and, of course, savings to the taxpayers by averting problem births.

We said we would better serve our troubled youth and we have. Our Alternatives For Youth Program sends social workers to families in crisis to keep children with their parents and out of remote institutions that can cost as much as \$180,000 per child per year. Of the 705 families we have serviced, only four wound up in the courts, a 98% success rate.

Applause

We said we would give greater priority to those suffering from mental illness and we have. Our new Dual Recovery Program combines the services of our Health and Probation Departments to provide a two-track treatment to individuals suffering from mental illness and substance abuse problems. A prerequisite to proper treatment is a location to place and counsel people with mental illness. We recently added 42 beds to care for this vulnerable population and plan to add another 150 in 2007. A placement for treatment sure beats a placement in the Riverhead Jail, and that's true for individuals of mental illness and the taxpayers as well.

Applause

We said we would create a new phone line so residents seeking police assistance in non-emergencies would not be forced to flood the 911 lines, we have. Now you can get that assistance by calling 852-COPS and leave 911 for true emergencies, that proposal makes sense and will save lives.

We said we would improve bus service and we have. We've added more routes, free transfers and for the first time opened up bus routes to competitive bidding. While others talked about the need for a cap on Medicaid costs, we went to the State and got one. We took it a step further by giving District Attorney Tom Spota and Comptroller Joe Sawicki the resources necessary to audit and prosecute Medicaid fraud. Thank you, Tom and Joe.

Applause

We said we would expand opportunity for minority and women-owned businesses to compete for County contracts and we have. High-priced performance bonds required by the County had shut out many of our minority-owned businesses from competing for County work. Our new policy waves that bond requirement from business owners of all colors and gender on smaller projects. We're leveling the playing field without lowering standards or setting quotas.

In my inauguration speech I stressed how in this County a person named Patel, Diaz, Chen or any other name should have the same opportunity to live in the neighborhood of their choosing as someone named Smith or Jones. Last year, this Legislature joined me and cosponsoring Legislators Montano and Mystal in passing the most comprehensive human rights law we have seen in decades to combat housing discrimination.

Applause

We said we would fight hard to create and maintain new quality jobs and we have. Together we led a multi-level bipartisan lobbying effort that preserved over 1,000 jobs at our Air National Guard Base at West Hampton Airport.

Applause

And we can be most proud that our intervention is helping to bring the Cannon Corporation's North American headquarters right here to Suffolk.

Applause

More than 2,000 high quality jobs will be coming to Suffolk thanks to these efforts, jobs upon which individuals can build careers and upon which families can take route.

One way to attract high paying jobs is give Suffolk an identity for specific high paying job sectors. Twenty-six percent of the nation's venture capital goes to Silicone Valley because it is known as a high-tech juggernaut. We need a new business identity for Long Island. Our development that Westhampton Airport that will go out to bid this year seeks to make us a base for Homeland Security Development. Our Yaphank Center will attract businesses from outside the area to develop new products in the field of alternative energies and wireless technology. And next year we will unveil a new program to grow Suffolk's bio-tech industry by helping to secure a greater share of the \$2 billion available through the Federal government.

We will continue to nurture Suffolk's growing reputation as a great place to produce films and an equally great place to attract entertainment and sporting events. The new arena that we have planned for Yaphank already has a verbal commitment for a tenant; the owner of the New York Islanders has expressed his desire to site a Minor League Eastern Conference hockey team in the Yaphank arena.

Applause

Through our smart management approach, we recognized that how you deploy your County workforce is just as important as how many you deploy. The answer to maintaining and improving County services does not always lie in a knee-jerk reaction of spending more money and hiring more people to carry out the tasks; our approach is to do it better, not more expensively. We do not subscribe to the theory that the only way to cut crime is to raise people's taxes through the roof and hire hundreds of new officers. What's important is not how many sworn officers are on the payroll but rather how many are on patrol protecting the public.

Applause

Prior to our reforms, even though there were more sworn officers, too many were out on Worker's Compensation or deployed in white collar and clerical functions creating an illusion of enhanced patrol. Well, we added physicians to help get injured officers back to active duty quicker. We aggressively civilianized the department and redeployed officers to where the people want and need them, sector patrol cars and newly created units. These changes have resulted in 73 more officers on patrol today than in January, 2004.

Applause

Our administration started a new policy of placing officers in our downtowns and malls during the holidays, in part by pairing academy recruits with experienced officers on training patrol. One December day, recruits Keith Liere and Timothy Farino, along with 6th Precinct Officers Michael Maresca and Philip Dluginski, came upon a burning car and pulled the trapped motorist to safety. These brave officers are with us this evening; please join me in recognizing not only their heroic deeds, but the dedication of all of our outstanding officers who make the Suffolk County Police Department the nation's best. Gentlemen, please stand.

Standing Ovation

Well deserved. As a result of our smart management policies in the Police Department, we not only stabilized taxes but we gave the 7th Precinct full-staffing for the first time in its history. We have the largest number of bicycle and foot patrols ever and we created new speciality units to combat sexual predators, gang members and terrorists. The bottom line is we have saved money and we have cut crime significantly since January of 2004. We should be very, very proud of this outstanding Police Department that has helped our area be named the safest suburban community in the entire United States of America by Forbes Magazine two years in a row.

Applause

Now, redeployment has worked in our other County departments as well. In our Health Department, for example, backlogs for residential and commercial building applications were reduced from 16 weeks down to four. The time it takes to investigate disease outbreaks was reduced from 21 days to seven. This was never more evident than in the prompt and efficient way our Health Department identified and tracked the recent E-Coli outbreak; their response received nationwide praise. Also receiving national acclaim was our new program to combat the rise in diabetes which is labeled a model program by the National Association of County Health officials.

Last year, our Health Department began a new program to provide free prostate screenings at Stony Brook University and we enhanced access to mammographies. And next year, working with Legislator Alden, we will be expanding our state-of-the-art digital mammography units to more health centers.

In our Department of Social Services, the time to process Medicaid applications was reduced by 29% and this year we'll reduce it even further. Meanwhile, the number of open Child Protective Services files has been reduced by 50% in just a six month period.

Our enhancements to services can be witnessed in the Parks Department as well. Improvements such as allowing golf reservations over the web have resulted in more positive feedback and fewer complaints from the public than in the past. Additionally, we made substantial investments into rehabilitating our historic structures.

We said we would change a culture where government perks were a common theme on the local political scene and we have. We put an end to sweetheart rent deals for individuals living in County buildings, and we even slashed inflated salaries and removed cars from employees at sacred cows like Off-Track Betting, saving almost half a million dollars.

Additionally, the concept of government workers retiring from County service with payments approaching \$200,000 in unused sick and vacation, time is finally being addressed. The reforms we passed early last year will help curb these abuses into the future.

We banned party officials from serving on our ethics and planning boards, and we hired the County's first Ethics Director. And let this be the year that we pass a package of bills to reform the process by which Legislative Districts are drawn, campaign funds are raised and discretionary member items are spent.

Applause

We're already working with Legislator Barraga very closely on the latter and we appreciate his assistance in that regard.

As you can see, we've accomplished a great deal together in just a few short years, but I believe the best is yet to come. Every day I have the privilege of gazing out upon this beautiful County from the vantage point of the 12th floor of the Dennison Building in nearby Hauppauge. It is remarkable how beautiful this County still is. As you take in this view, you realize very quickly how different we are from Queens and Brooklyn and even our neighboring Nassau County to the west. Many may think we're built out, but we are not. There are still thousands and thousands of beautiful open acres that remain and that's just the way we want to keep them.

Applause

When you look out at this County on a town-by-town basis and all of the applications within their respective building departments, it becomes evident that this County will look very different within the next 20 years if we do not act now. Studying our geography on a map, one sees bold dividing lines separating one town from the next; from my view 12 stories up, however, there are no such borders.

As this suburb developed over the last century, each town did its own thing, but it's quite clear that development in one town can have a significant impact on its neighboring town. The only way to combat haphazard, ugly sprawl is to communicate and coordinate, town-to-town and town-to-County. If we do coordinate, we can grow our economy in step with the necessary infrastructure to handle the commensurate traffic and with the protections we need to guard our precious environment. Let us commit to preserve the suburban and rustic quality of life which drew so many of us to live here in the first place and recognize further that the only way to accomplish that goal is by adapting to our changing demographics. The days of balkanization are over, the days of regionalization are upon us.

Applause

In recognition of this new way of thinking, just last year I called a historic summit of Town Supervisors and County officials to discuss methods by which our planning departments can coordinate with each other. At last year's State-of-the-County Address, I directed our Planning Department to evaluate the five major points of potential development throughout Suffolk County. That report, issued two months ago, determined that there are still millions of square feet of commercial, residential and retail development that can potentially occur. The report stressed the necessity of municipalities working together to create better land use plan. It also stressed the need for a concerted lobbying effort for the Federal and State funds we will need to complete an infrastructure that can deal with the additional traffic that will come with the applications that the towns may approve.

We are already seeing the results of this meeting. At our urging and with the assistance of Legislator Stern, a consortium of Town, County, State and Federal officials are lobbying vigorously for infrastructure improvements in the Commack/Sagtikos corridor.

Applause

These include alternative truck routes to residential Commack Road for access to the new Tanger Outlet in Babylon, the proposed Pilgrim State Development in Islip, the Home Depot Project right here in Smithtown and other retail developments slated for the region.

This year we will see further infrastructure improvements on the east end. This fall, working with Legislator Schneiderman, we will start paving a second eastbound lane on County Road 39, the gateway to the Hamptons; hallelujah.

Applause

This will eliminate the bottleneck that causes delays for motorists of up to one hour to travel a short four mile distance. You know, we do a lot of things in government for the people of this County, but perhaps nothing affects their daily lives more than reducing traffic nightmares as this will happen this year when we start this project; it's finally here.

Applause

Later this year we will begin safety and traffic flow improvements on County Road 111 which has long been a burden for people of Manorville who bear the brunt of the heavy flow of motorists traveling from the LIE to the south fork. Gridlock is not germane to the east end alone. A number of projects are now in the works to alleviate the congestion at clogged roadways in the heart of Suffolk County. This year we will expand overpasses at Pinelawn Road and at North Ocean Avenue. We will also begin the acquisition of land for the expansion and beautification of County Road 80 in Mastic and we will begin design work for improvements to reduce rush hour traffic along Nicoll's Road at Suffolk Community College.

Applause

We're going to be putting a lot of people to work out there, a lot of construction guys.

As evidenced by our regional coordination with the towns on land use and infrastructure, 2007 will be the year of thinking big. That concept will be evident, once again, in the upcoming year as we work with our education officials to find ways to save money at the school district level.

Now, we in Suffolk have done a fine job of stabilizing taxes. In fact, three years ago the County portion of a resident's tax bill accounted for about 13% of the overall bill; today that percentage is down to 11.3%.

Applause

But stabilizing taxes on the County level means little to our residents if school taxes, which account for more than two-thirds of your bill, continue to rise at a pace that far exceeds the rate of inflation. So we will continue to work with our school officials, the community, and Legislator D'Amaro in particular, promoting consolidation of functions within our school districts.

Long Islanders' thirst for home rule make consolidation of districts an unlikely possibility. On the other hand, consolidating functions such as security, buildings and grounds and printing and purchasing are doable and can save money. We will also be looking in the coming year to create a consortium allowing schools to obtain lower-cost financing for health care and dealing with Workers Compensation claims. Our school officials have agreed that there are potentially big savings in this type of regionalization and consolidation.

This upcoming year we will also be thinking big in creating the nation's largest wireless network. Last year we announced it, this year we implement it.

Applause

I'm sure Legislator Horsley, who is co-chairing the County's Wireless Committee, will agree with me when I say that we in Suffolk County continue to be on the cutting edge of technology and government efficiency.

Applause

We said we would take the lead in the field of energy conservation and alternative energies and we have. Working with our local utilities, we have invested a great deal in installing energy conservation materials within our County buildings. These measures have saved our taxpayers over \$1 million annually in County and energy costs.

Early last year, I proudly signed a Legislative initiative, promoted by Legislator Vilorio-Fisher, making Suffolk one of the first counties in the nation to adopt a policy that requires our larger buildings to be constructed in an environmentally friendly fashion. We were the first County in the State to adopt legislation waiving sales taxes on the purchase and installation of solar-related equipment in our private residences. This year we will be installing solar panels at Police Headquarters and the 4th Precinct. This great work earned us a number of accolades, including the Solar Achievement Award from Renewable Energy of Long Island.

Applause

You know, there's an old saying that goes "Think globally, act locally." While we in Suffolk County cannot clean the Earth's precious environment by ourselves, we can play a small roll by leading by example. We were the first County in the State to be designated by the Sierra Club as a "Cool County" for our commitment to implementing policies to reduce fossil fuels in our environment. That's why we are working with Legislators Cooper and Losquadro to replace our County's vehicles with cost-effective, fuel-efficient and cleaner hybrid vehicles.

Applause

We're also replacing our County bus fleet with cleaner vehicles that have removed harmful emissions by over 80% of what was previously being spewed into our atmosphere. And perhaps no County initiative over the last several years better epitomizes the smart government approach than our Bio-Diesel Program that take excess restaurant grease and transforms it into fuel to run our County trucks. So the next time you see a County vehicle on the Long Island Expressway and it smells like french fries, think of us.

Applause

While others have merely talked about addressing the dangers of road runoff seeping into our waterways, we took action. While some charcoal devices have not met expectations, we still have invested more than \$20 million to reduce contaminants that run discharge directly into our surface waters, including storm water ponds and treatment basins.

Our efforts helped force the clean-up of pollutants at the Brookhaven Lab and we're working with Legislator Browning in helping to revitalize the Forge River. We gained national recognition by reseeded the Peconic Bay with one million scallops and are working with Legislator Lindsay to reseed the Great South Bay with one million clams.

Applause

And when Connecticut sought to dump its dredge spoils into its industrial harbors in the middle of our Long Island Sound, we said no and prevented it.

Applause

This year we are embarking upon an ambitious plan to rejuvenate the numerous Brownfields littering our landscape. Polluted parcels and abandoned gas stations and factories are blights on our neighborhood, drag down our property values and pay no taxes. This June we will have innovative auction that let's private investors take the liens on these properties in return for the payment of back taxes due on these parcels. They get the property, assess the cost of clean-up and have the option of selling them later for a profit; the County gets tax dollars and rids our communities of eyesores, that's called smart government and a win/win.

Applause

We're cleaning our air, our water and preserving our land. Our commitment to saving our open spaces is greater than at any point in Suffolk's history. And for that commitment, our administration was recently honored by the New York League of Conservation Voters. Over the past 30 years, our progressive County has invested over \$750 million in preserving open spaces, about 250 million of that amount has been committed in the last three years alone. It is our passionate quest to preserve our beautiful open spaces not just for aesthetic reasons, but also because we recognize that a cleaner County means a healthier County.

While on the national level, we can rejoice upon hearing that cancer rates have declined recently, this does not erase the fact that cancer rates on Long Island are still too high. Every person in this room knows someone close to them who was been touched by the ravaged of cancer.

Pinpointing the exact environmental factors contributing to cancer has been a very difficult task. In 1998, the State Department of Health conducted a study but did not connect the dots. To finish the job, I propose that Suffolk County join forces with Dr. John Kovach, an internationally-known expert in cancer research at Stony Brook University in a venture to seek grants for a follow-up study to test specific environmental factors prevalent on Long Island as possible contributing factors.

Applause

And we'll do our part in the County to lead by example. The County has already committed to use only non-toxic products for cleaning, landscaping and pest management. But we can go even further, we can go further by pressing New York State to follow the lead of California with its Green Labeling Law to mandate the labeling of household products containing any known carcinogens. We will continue to work with Legislator Romaine who has shown a great interest in this area.

Some have suspected that the overuse of fertilizers in our suburbia is further cause for concern. I will shortly be proposing legislation to reduce the nitrogen pollution entering our waterways and our groundwater. These measures will include prohibiting fertilizer application on frozen ground and requiring the posting of signs at retail establishments that inform consumers in a clear and simple manner which fertilizers are most harmful to the environment, and we will expand our efforts to educate consumers and professionals regarding the proper use and application of those fertilizers. We can still have great looking lawns, healthy gardens and cleaner waters if these measures are adopted.

Applause

In a similar vein, the County this year will be embarking upon an ambitious Wetland Stewardship Program to develop pilot projects that protect the County's 17,000 acres of title wetland. And oh yeah, one more thing about the environment; in the months to come, I will be working with Legislators Nowick and Kennedy to keep the park in Kings Park.

Applause

While we are cleaning up our environment, let's also recommit to cleaning up our neighborhoods. The practice of slumlords cramming dozens of people into single-family homes has the potential to destroy communities. While code enforcement remains the jurisdiction of our town governments, last year Legislator Caracappa and I passed a law providing incentives for towns and villages to implement a much stricter housing code. It permits local municipalities to bring legal action based upon their curb-side observation of obvious multi-family characteristics such as multiple electric meters; this shifts the burden upon the landlord to prove that the premises are indeed single-family. Just this past month, two major townships agreed to adopt these stricter codes. Hopefully with this new enforcement tool available, this will be the year that town authorities will have the wherewithal to carry out the will of law-abiding homeowners who demand an end to these grossly over-crowded, illegal fire traps cropping up within their communities.

Applause

We want our neighborhoods to be clean, to be safe and, just as importantly, we want them to be affordable. The seeds we planted within our Workforce Housing Commission are starting to bloom. Last year, with the help of Legislator Eddington, our first Workforce Housing Community opened in Patchogue, helping scores of young hopefuls experience the American dream. Thus far, we have fast-tracked 700 homes with almost a thousand more to come in Yaphank and thousands beyond that slated for Pilgrim State site and other locations throughout the County.

There are many challenges still facing our residents on Long Island. While we on the County level cannot control the cost of oil, the price of homes or school taxes, we must pledge to continue leading by example and keeping our own house in order.

So when people ask about the State of our County, all you need to do is look at the trends. Crime is down considerably over the last three years; General Fund tax cuts for three straight years; a record number of new Workforce Housing starts; preservation of several thousand acres of open space since January, 2004, equivalent to four and a half times the size of Central Park; the highest bond rating in our County's history. Ladies and Gentlemen, the State of our County government is strong and getting stronger all the time.

Applause

Thank you very much. God bless you and good night.

Applause

P.O. LINDSAY:

I'll entertain a motion to adjourn this meeting.

LEG. MONTANO,

Motion.

P.O. LINDSAY:

So moved by Legislator Montano, seconded by Legislator Caracappa.
All in favor? Opposed? Abstentions.

MR. LAUBE:

Seventeen (Not Present: Legislator Losquadro).

P.O. LINDSAY:

We stand adjourned.

*(*The meeting was adjourned at 7:48 PM*)*