



State of New York County of Broome Government Offices

Office of the Broome County Executive

Jason T. Garnar, County Executive

2022 Broome County State of the County Address Meeting of the Broome County Legislature, February 17, 2022, 5:00 PM

Good evening. Thank you to Chairman Reynolds, Majority Leader O'Brien, Minority Leader Weslar, and all Legislators for allowing me to deliver my 2022 State of the County Address this evening

Thank you to the elected officials, business, and community leaders who are also joining us.

Thank you to our Department Heads for your work in leading your respective offices to help carry out our mission to make Broome County a better place to live, work, and visit.

And most of all, thank you to the hundreds of County employees for their dedication to serving the 200 thousand people of Broome County.

You all have gone above and beyond the call of duty over the past two years; from working remotely, juggling quarantines with work, helping us with contact tracing, and everything in between, your commitment to our community can't be overstated...

Without all of you, the programs and services we provide would not be possible and my administration and I are grateful for all that you do.

Tonight I will be discussing a lot of great things that are happening in Broome County and I want to note that NONE of them would be possible without my colleagues in the County Legislature...thank you to all of you for partnering with me to create a better Broome County...

Unfortunately, I once again have to deliver this message to you virtually; and while I wish we could be together in person, Zooming tonight's State of the County is a perfect example of how we have adapted to the challenges of the pandemic.

Perseverance very well may be the trademark characteristic of this community.

Throughout the History of this great County, the men and women who have called Broome County home have always found ways to rise to the occasion.

From natural disasters and emergencies to economic recessions and depressions to pandemics...we are a community that bands together, rises to the occasion in the face of adversity, and comes out stronger and better on the other side.

COVID-19 has been one of the greatest challenges Broome County has ever faced, but one thing that has become clear among all the uncertainty of the past two years: the State of Broome County is strong!

Over the past two years, we've created a new community response playbook;

When masks and PPE became necessities, we distributed them to every corner of our County;

We provided testing when needed, first through an award-winning mobile unit, then through our rapid testing site at the County Health Department, and then by providing at-home tests directly to residents of Broome County;

When vaccines became available, we worked quickly to get shots in arms at our mass vaccination site, our health department, our schools, and directly to people who couldn't get to an appointment and so far we've vaccinated more than 35 thousand people;

Thank you to Health Director Mary McFadden and her entire team at the Health Department, as well as Director of Emergency Services Patrick Dewing and his Office of Emergency Services staff for this gigantic undertaking...

We've worked directly with schools and businesses to provide them with the information and resources they've needed and have worked directly with our hospitals and health care providers in ways we never have before...

I'd like to acknowledge both Kathy Connerton from Lourdes and John Carrigg from UHS for their leadership and partnership over the past two years...

For every challenge, every difficulty, that COVID presented, it also gave us an opportunity to rediscover our strengths, find new ways of doing things, and created a roadmap for the future...

And as we continue to come out of this pandemic, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to not just "get back to normal" but truly transform our County.

No longer should we hear people talking about what once was; it is time to start talking about what is HAPPENING NOW...and a central part of this transformation is taking former economic engines and, one by one, turning them into the new anchors of our community:

We've already seen the former Carnegie Library turned into SUNY Broome's Culinary School...Binghamton University opened its new nursing school in the former Endicott Johnson box factory and continues to make investments throughout the Triple Cities

The former IBM Country Club, once a symbol of economic prosperity and now one of the biggest eyesores in Broome County will turn into 75 units of much-needed affordable housing;

The mammoth EJ Victory Building that had fallen into disrepair has had new life breathed into it by same group - Paulus Development - who redeveloped the aging ANSCO Camera Factory;

And the Oakdale Mall, once the center of commerce in Broome County for 40-plus years, has been purchased and will continue its transformation into a new, mixed-use business center...thank you to Doug Matthews & Mark Newman for your commitment to Broome County...

All these projects, which alone represent a \$150 million public/private investment, have been made possible with the help of American Rescue Plan funding, a once in a lifetime shot in the arm for our economy...

Additionally, we are investing federal money directly into businesses that were impacted by the pandemic:

Working with the Agency and Greater Binghamton Chamber of Commerce, we created a one million dollar COVID Recovery Fund to provide grants to local businesses to offset costs incurred during the pandemic;

This year, we will also launch a program using ARPA funds that will provide a boost to our local restaurants by providing a direct match to each dollar spent on gift cards, doubling the money spent at these businesses...

Thank you to Stacey Duncan at the Leadership Alliance for your partnership on these great projects!

We've also seen great success using federal money to help residents get back on their feet in the wake of COVID:

Our Department of Social Services, led by Nancy Williams, has been one of the most successful in the State in implementing the Emergency Rental Assistance Program which has helped hundreds of tenants stay in their homes while ensuring landlords can still pay their bills

The seriousness of food insecurity in our region became clear over the past two years as pantries across the region worked nonstop to keep up with demand...

As a result, Broome County is working with the Food Bank of the Southern Tier and our local schools this year to put a food pantry in every district in Broome County so children and their families have access to food right in their own communities

We are also utilizing the amazing team at our Mental Health Department to create new programming in our schools to bring mental health education to some of our youngest students, teaching it in a way that is fun and impactful. It's never too early to start talking about mental health and this program will help reach children at an age where it can set the tone for the rest of their lives

I've already mentioned two of our housing initiatives, but that isn't enough to meet the needs of our community...

Working with SEPP, we will be increasing the availability of affordable housing with a new development in Endicott;

We've fostered a new relationship with the Community Land Trust, which will work directly with our Director of Real Property Mike Decker, to utilize foreclosed properties to create more affordable units;

And we will continue working closely with the Broome County Land Bank and its Director Jessica Haas to turn blighted properties into new opportunities for even more housing...

As we continue providing important programs and services for our residents, our work to encourage businesses to move here continues...

Two years ago, we invited Amazon to come to Broome County; this fall, the brand new Amazon fulfillment center opened in Conklin, bringing hundreds of new jobs with it...it's nearly impossible now to drive around town without seeing one of the signature Amazon delivery vans...

If you drive down 17 East, you'll see the gigantic new FedEx facility being constructed.

And in Western Broome, the spirit of industry and innovation is alive and well once again...

National Pipe & Plastics opened its new corporate headquarters this past summer and we appreciate Dave Culbertson's commitment to Western Broome;

New companies like Imperium 3, C4V, and Ubiquity Solar have moved in and are developing and building the technologies of the future, creating thousands of jobs in the process;

And as a result of the progress happening in this part of the County, the Village of Endicott was recently awarded the State's Downtown Revitalization Initiative which will further assist with Endicott's comeback.

As our economy grows, our Office of Workforce Development, led by Bob Murphy, is helping make sure these businesses have the workers they need by providing important education, certification, and training programs.

This economic activity over the past year has helped us achieve an unemployment rate of 3.3%...the LOWEST unemployment rate in more than 30 years!

We are also seeing historic highs in the value of homes locally and the prices they're selling for...people have a new confidence in Broome County and are CHOOSING to move here; this is a direct result of the progress we're making in our local economy

And people are also spending more money in Broome County than they have in the past two years;

During the holiday season, I did a tour of local businesses to encourage residents to buy local...and I'm happy to say our community went above and beyond to support our local economy, generating some of the highest sales tax revenues that we've seen in years...

This is money that is invested directly back in our local economy...

One of my proudest accomplishments in my time in office is working with Budget Director Jerry Knebel to rebuild our County's finances...

COVID-19 dealt a blow to this work, but with responsible budgeting year after year, support from the federal stimulus, and activity generated at our local businesses, I'm proud to report that our fund balance remains strong and we once again cut taxes for residents and businesses for a fourth-straight year;

We remain committed to saving taxpayers money and this past year the Broome County Purchasing Alliance, led by our Departments of Purchasing and Risk & Insurance under Directors Robin Laabs & Tom Dellapenna, has also helped local governments and school districts save millions of dollars...

This group has leveraged its collective buying power to reduce the cost of health insurance, resulting in a savings of \$9 million for taxpayers across the County

When we save money, we can invest more in the things that matter...and one of the biggest concerns our residents have is the County's aging infrastructure...

In 2021, we repaired more miles of roads - 63 - than ever before, doubling what we did the year prior

Our engineers and maintenance crews are also fixing more bridges across the County than ever before, and I'd like to thank Commissioner Leslie Boulton, Highway Director Sue Brown, and our entire Department of Public Works for their efforts...

We are also investing in the infrastructure of the future; working with regional partners, our Department of Planning and Director Beth Lucas is undertaking a mission to bring high-speed, broadband internet to every corner of Broome County;

This service is no longer a luxury, but a utility that everyone should have access to that will help grow business, provide our students with the educational resources they need, and connect family and friends regardless of where they live.

The residents that call Broome County home, and the ones that we hope to attract as we continue to transform our community, deserve to live in the safest community in New York State

Under the leadership of Sheriff David Harder, Broome County has added 5 deputies over the past several years...these hard working men and women patrol our roads and neighborhoods, leaving their families each day to protect ours...we thank them for all they do for our community.

Sheriff Harder will be retiring at the end of the year after a 58 year career in the Broome County Sheriff's Office. He's been a greater partner to work with, he leaves big shoes to fill, and we wish him well in retirement.

We are also close to completing our new emergency communications network, replacing a system with parts that date back 50 years...the final tower went up in the Town of Sanford in December and the whole system will go online soon.

This new network will improve communications between the public, dispatchers, and first responders and will allow our police, fire, and EMS to respond faster than ever before...

Thank you to Chuck Rogers at the Office of Emergency Services for leading this project; and I'd also like to thank Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo and Senator Fred Akshar...without their support in Albany, this project would not have been possible

And every morning when thousands of Broome County parents put their children on the bus to go to school, they deserve peace of mind knowing their kids will get to and from school safely;

Our Office of Emergency Services is managing the County's new School Bus Stop Arm Camera program which records each and every time a vehicle illegally passes a school bus

We are one of just three counties in the State to implement this program and in its first five months our stop arm cameras have caught 1,477 violations...a shocking number of times drivers have made the decision to ignore a bus's flashing red lights and stop sign and put our children in danger

One thing drivers in Broome County can count on: if you illegally pass a school bus, you WILL be caught and you WILL be fined...

We are committed to keeping our County safe and we are also committed to creating one of the cleanest communities in New York State.

Working with our Division of Solid Waste and Director Debra Smith, we have developed a series of new programs to help clean up Broome County;

We're adding more electronic and hazardous waste collection days; increasing municipal clean ups; purchasing a truck specifically designed to remove graffiti from properties across the county; as well as hosting a community shredding event to help residents safely dispose of documents with personal and confidential information...

With people spending more time at home during the pandemic, household clean ups and remodeling projects were taking place across Broome County...this resulted in a big increase in traffic at our County Landfill.

The Solid Waste team did a terrific job keeping up with this demand and helped people learn about this great resource for County residents...

In terms of County services people "rediscovered" during COVID, our landfill and Division of Solid Waste are second only to Parks & Recreation

Our parks saw more traffic than ever before throughout the pandemic, and the demand has continued even after other recreational opportunities reopened...

We want to make sure we have one of the best parks systems in the State and we will continue making investments to enhance the recreational experience;

We've added a disc golf course at Cole Park and are building a brand new adaptive playground at Dorchester which will open this year;

Led by our Parks Director Liz Woitdt, the County won a national grant competition that will help us build a brand new dog park at Otsiningo North;

We will also be making needed improvements at BAGSAI to help attract softball teams and tournaments from across the country;

We've already made several enhancements at Grippen Park and we are now in the process of breathing new life into the building there which will provide a variety of new opportunities for all visitors to the park...

And I'm excited to announce that starting this summer, our parks will accept credit cards for all transactions...

In 2022 we will break ground on a brand new park, the Sturges St. Forget Me Not Memorial Garden...and in the coming months and years, you will see things you've never seen before at our Broome County Parks!

With events like Spiedie Fest, Broome Bands Together, Festival of Lights, the Broome County Triathlon, and WinterFest - which is scheduled for February 26th at Cole Park - there is always something to do in our parks...

Our parks weren't the only places seeing traffic like never before - EnJoie Golf Course saw an increase of 5,000 golfers over the past two years - more than at any other time in its history

People from around the state and country are visiting Broome County to play where the pros play...and they keep coming back thanks to the great work being done at EnJoie by Golf Pro Mike Deuel and Course Superintendent Anthony Chapman...

At the Visions Veterans Memorial Arena, our Arena Manager Chris Marion continues to do a great job of bringing in a variety of entertainment events and acts...

A year ago, our AHL hockey tenant broke its contract and left Binghamton unexpectedly...we acted quickly and worked closely with Chris to secure a new hockey team and were lucky to bring the Black Bears of the Federal Prospects Hockey League to the Arena

The Black Bears have brought a new energy to the ice and we are proud to say that they are averaging better attendance than not only our former AHL team, but also better than 17 current AHL & ECHL teams!

Thank you to owner Andreas Johansson for believing in Broome!

We are also proud to be the home of one of the best ABA basketball teams in the nation: the Binghamton Bulldogs, whose owner Jimmy Evans has made new investments in the community with a beautiful facility in the Town of Union that is home to Bulldogs games, as well as youth programs that are helping reach at-risk students in some of our schools...

As winter gives way to spring, we are looking forward to a new season of baseball at Mirabito Stadium where the Rumble Ponies will be taking the field under the leadership of new owner David Sobotka...as well as the 10th season at Animal Adventure, where Jordan Patch has worked to create a wonderful family destination...congratulations to Jordan and his team on becoming ZAA accredited this year; we can't wait to see what you have in store for us this season!

This summer we will once again welcome back PGA Legends for another exciting Dick's Sporting Goods Open; one of the top-rated events on the Champions Tour;

And no longer will the former motel turned eyesore across the street welcome golfers, workers, volunteers, and fans; I am proud to announce that this property will be transformed into a brand new hotel that visitors to the golf course can use and neighbors can be proud of... During the pandemic, Broome County welcomed new Library Director Josias Bartram; under his leadership and that of Library Board President Joanne Hanrahan, our Library is creating new programs, services, and opportunities for our community...

We also have a number of contract agencies that provide important recreational and educational opportunities for our community...Cornell Cooperative Extension, the Binghamton Zoo at Ross Park, GiGi's Playhouse, Visit Binghamton, the Broome County Arts Council, the Four County Library System, and the Broome County Soil & Water Conservation District...we thank all of you for working with us to make Broome County a great place to live and visit...

Our Books for Babies program is once again providing every newborn in Broome County with its very first book, and to date more than 4,000 books have been distributed...

From our youngest residents to our older residents, Broome County is committed to providing the best services to all and we pride ourselves on the programming offered through our Office for Aging...

This past year we said goodbye to our former Director and long-time county employee Lisa Schuhle who retired...but in her place we were fortunate to bring in Mary Whitcombe who has hit the ground running and is continuing to do a terrific job on behalf of Broome County's seniors, building on our designation as an age-friendly community that we received from AARP in 2019...

And for members of our aging population who can no longer live on their own, we continue our commitment to providing the best possible care for them at Willow Point Nursing & Rehabilitation Center

I can honestly say all 2,000 of Broome County's employees have gone above and beyond the call of duty over past two years, but none more so than the men and women at Willow Point

We are grateful for the tireless care they provide to residents and we are entering a new era at the facility with new Administrator Adam Aranov

Adam understands the unique challenges Willow Point faces and is working to fill vacant management slots, ensure proper staffing and start accepting new admissions, improve billing, reopen the rehabilitation unit, and reopen all closed units to have the facility run at full capacity.

We need every possible nursing home bed in Broome County and we are confident in Adam's abilities to increase capacity at Willow Point...

Other Departments are also working to modernize and help move the County into the future...

We're proud to welcome our new Chief Information Officer Doug Camin who is making needed improvements in our Department of Information Technology to create a more reliable network throughout County government, making the work we do more efficient as well as increasing our cybersecurity...

Our fleet at BC Transit continues to be enhanced and modernized under Commissioner Greg Kilmer;

New electric buses, with technology created right here in Broome County at BAE, will be hitting the streets soon and brand new shelters have been built for riders who await their bus...

We are a community on the cusp of a new day; one in which we can put COVID-19 behind us and capitalize on the opportunity this adversity has presented us...

As a former history teacher, I often think of the leaders of our past and how they responded to our greatest challenges.

On June 6, 1944, just before the invasion of Normandy, Commander of the Allied Forces, General Dwight D. Eisenhower wrote to his troops: "I have full confidence in your courage, devotion to duty, and skill..."

With great leadership in our County Departments, the support of a dedicated and hardworking workforce, and the help of our partners in the County Legislature, we have a chance to make once-in-a-lifetime investments that will truly transform Broome County and I know that working together we can accomplish great things...

Thank you and God Bless!