

North Hempstead State of the Town Address

January 30, 2008

Supervisor
Jon Kaiman

First of all, I would like to thank the League of Woman Voters for hosting the State of the Town here at the George Washington Manor. I also thank and acknowledge all who are part of the Town of North Hempstead team, especially my fellow elected officials who serve with dedication, integrity and ability.

I thank my wife, Kim, my children, Shaun, Jared and Iyana, and my mother Regina Feldman and the rest of my family for your love and support. I would like to acknowledge my predecessor, May Newburger, who has served her community in so many ways and continues to serve even today working with our County Executive Tom Suozzi as Executive Director of the Nassau County Planning Federation.

I thank my staff and all of the department heads who manage the Town of North Hempstead. I thank and acknowledge all who serve as public servants, as employees or municipal government, and as board members of the various boards and agencies that help our community in so many ways.

Looking back over the last four years, I can see that we've done so much and I am proud of the contribution that this administration has made towards making this wonderful town such an extraordinary place to live.

Our goal from the beginning has been to build upon the notion of community. We are a town of neighborhoods, hamlets and villages. We are the North Shore, we are the suburbs, we are Long Island. We have our individual hopes and dreams, our successes and failures and creativity and productivity.

There is so much that defines a place like North Hempstead and so I look back over the last four years and I can see that we have touched upon something that I believe is very special. The town of North Hempstead is a community unto itself with all its varied parts and we have worked towards expanding the notion of our town as a community because it is important to part of something larger than ourselves.

We join political parties and local organizations, we may be part of a religious or spiritual community, a cultural organization or any other organized group, but we are also part of our geographic community. It has been our goal, then, to provide a support system, an

infrastructure, and community base for people who live here to be part of something that improves upon each others own quality of life.

This is what local government is supposed to do. We are responsible for roads and parks and picking up the garbage. We provide security and regulation to make sure that we can all live together in a harmony. We educate, provide water, build sewers, and the list goes on.

Over the last four years it has been the goal of this administration to support that infrastructure, to provide that support, and to weave the various parts together so that our community could have comfort and confidence in their local governments. And there are many forms of government within our one town.

To that end, I have spoken in years past about our investment in our parks and roads, the new equipment that we purchased, the new programs that we developed. I spoke of the events that we host in order to bring our communities together – Beach Fest, Eco Fest, North Hempstead Day, Spooky Walk, Winter Wonderland, and our Memorial Day Fireworks commemoration.

Having served in government before having the privilege of serving as Town Supervisor, I was aware of the cynicism that exists and grows when people cannot access their officials. This is why we developed the 311/TownStat system and we built upon the community based planning concept called “visioning”, and we created the Office of Intermunicipal Coordination so we have the ability to work with all those who have public responsibilities within our community.

And so, where are we today and what can we expect this coming year?

To begin with, we must look to our town finances to see if we have sustained our basic fiduciary responsibilities. I am proud to announce that once again the town is in the black and our finances are in exceptional condition. Our bond ratings remain at the highest level in town history and we once again finished the year with a surplus as we have done in each of the last four years.

In fact, we actually cut the tax rate by a nominal amount for 2008 and we continue to bring in millions of dollars in grants helping us stretch our tax dollars further.

I would like to touch upon that for a moment. This town is considered one of the wealthiest town’s in America and though we have our areas of distress and need we are largely a successful community. But that also means that we contribute an extraordinary amount to our various governments in taxes. It is only fair that we seek and receive support back from those governments in the form of grants and financial support. In this regard, we have had great success bringing in millions of dollars each year for programs and projects that we would otherwise fund ourselves.

This past year we brought in millions of dollars in such grants from the county, the state and the federal government. We obtained awards for remediating our ponds and waterways, for our environmental initiatives, and for our senior programming. In 2007 we obtained for this first time a \$10 million Water Resource Development Act (WRDA) authorization from the federal government for restoring our bay and harbor. And while this is not hard cash, it will provide the basis for future allocation in the years to come.

We have also pursued private grants where appropriate. Just last month we received our first check from the Neptune Regional Transmissions System LLC for \$3 million which is going towards the construction of a 40,000 square foot community center in the New Cassel/Westbury area. We will be receiving another \$3 million dollar check from Neptune later this year as well. These monies stem from an agreement between the town and the Neptune Company in relation to an energy facility that they've now built in the New Cassel area. This facility is expected to singly handedly reduce the cost of energy for all of Long Island and for hosting this extraordinary facility the town will receive the funds necessary to build that long needed community center in that area of the town.

With our strong fiscal position and with grant dollars coming in, we are now able to build upon the programs that we've been developing over these last four years.

In 2006 we initiated our Project Independence pilot program which was meant to help our seniors "age in place," with the support of government and community.

I am proud to announce that the Town of North Hempstead is taking Project Independence from pilot to program bringing it town wide for all seniors and their families to utilize.

Over the last two years, we have focused on two small census tracts located in northern New Hyde Park. In this catchment area, we and our partners – North Shore LIG Health System and F.E.G.S. – have established a program that helps our seniors remain living in their homes longer than they otherwise might have been able to. Through Project Independence we are able to provide general and specific information to our seniors, provide basic health care, social worker assistance, community programming and we are working on obtaining handyman and snow shoveling assistance.

This year, the Town of North Hempstead will connect Project Independence to our 311/TownStat system and provide similar services to all who need them throughout our town of over 230,000 people. We are speaking to our original partners in this endeavor and also seeking new partners such as the United Way, Nassau County Department of Social Services, Parker Institute and the Kings Point Merchant Marine Academy.

The 311 connection to this project gives us the simplicity of easy access for all who call. It also gives us the sophistication of having our 311/TownStat system connecting all calls with the appropriate service provider whether the resident simply needs information regarding where their local senior group meets, transportation to and from the supermarket, or support navigating through the complicated health and social services

systems. All calls will be logged in and tracked so that the connection from resident to Project Independence isn't just a one time exchange, but the growing of a relationship where our support staff will follow up to make sure that the assistance was effective. As we build our program we will better assist our residents by understanding the particular needs of each individual.

Our expansion of 311, however, is not limited to Community Services and Project Independence. In 2006, our 311 call center took in about 40,000 calls. In 2007, we received almost 100,000 calls. In time that number will double as we add new services and connect to more departments.

For example, in 2007 we added our Summer of Clean initiative to our Keep it Green program where we advised our residents to call 311 to report litter wherever it may be. During the summer months of the program, the "Green Team" responded to hundreds of calls and picked up approximately 2000 pounds of litter off our sidewalks and town rights of way.

The Keep it Green campaign involves many facets, by the way. It includes our Clean Sweep program where we do a complete Spring Cleaning of our town streets every Spring. Clean Sweep picks up over 1000 tons of dirt, sand, and refuse off our streets during this annual month long program. This is dirt that sits on our streets, mixing with oils and pesticides and other contaminants and eventually would flow into our storm drains and then end up in our ponds and waterways. Instead we pick it up and dispose of it in an environmentally appropriate way.

We have also focused on cleaning our air with our hybrid bus initiative. Our first hybrid electric bus was delivered this year and we named it "The Madge," after Commissioner Kaplan who passed away last year.

In the spirit of our Keep in Green campaign, we partnered with Nassau County this last year to clean our bays and harbors as well. In 2007 Nassau County and North Hempstead began the reseeded of Hempstead Harbor with shell fish which provide a natural filter for our waterways.

This year, in addition to continuing with all of our other environmental initiatives including our Earth Day programs, our annual EcoFestival, Clean Sweep, the Green Team clean up operation, the Keep it Clean effort, the purchase of more hybrid electric cars and buses, the inclusion of green buildings technology in our municipal construction projects, additional re-seeding of our bays and waterways with shell fish, our brownsfields remediation projects, our open space acquisition efforts, the Sheets Creek clean up where, by the way, we have pulled over 300 tons of debris from the bay in this area over the last two years (500 tons of debris removed since I initiated this project in 1998 when I served as Harbor Master), and all of the environmental initiatives that we pursue in the Town of North Hempstead, this year we are making recycling a top priority.

I will be submitting a plan to the town board authorizing the expenditure and approval of a plan to bring all of our school districts, park districts and libraries into a unified program that makes recycling a reality. I recognize that many districts attempt recycling efforts, but that the expertise and expense required to make them a success is not always readily available. The Town has the resources, the professional staff, and the experience to make a comprehensive recycling program a reality.

First, the Town will enter into partnerships with our schools, libraries and local parks to make recycling easier and more accessible. This effort will include Town sponsored recycling containers – yes, that means we’re paying for them – in every school, library and public park facility in North Hempstead. We will also work with every school to create recycling programs that involve students at every level, and provide staff with the resources they need to make those programs work.

The Town will also commit to developing a plan to manage the collection of all recyclables from our partners, saving schools, libraries and parks money while ensuring that what is collected is actually recycled.

We will make our North Hempstead 311 system a focal point for every resident for information on what, where and how to recycle. And we will further expand recycling by working with our business community to ensure we are recycling as much as we can wherever we can. Working together, we will make recycling in North Hempstead more successful than it has ever been, and a model for communities everywhere.

I should note here that to make sure that all of our solid waste is disposed of in an environmentally sound and safe manner, the Town is working on a new long-term disposal agreement. Collecting and disposing of solid waste has long been considered a core function of local government. Working cooperatively with 28 villages, the Town negotiated a long-term disposal agreement in 1995 which has ensured that transportation and disposal through the Town’s solid waste transfer station has met stringent environmental regulations, as well as providing consistent, economical service. This agreement expires in 2010. We are now working to assure all of our residents and businesses that the next long-term agreement meets all of our environmental, quality of life, and financial concerns. We will be meeting with our villages and representatives from the solid waste industry in near future to make this town-wide effort a reality.

The Town of North Hempstead has never been stronger and better poised to make substantial improvements to the town’s infrastructure. It is not only our strong financial positioning, but also our ability over the last several years to bring in the millions of dollars of federal, state, county, and private grant dollars that puts us in this position.

This year, our multimillion dollar Mill Pond renovation will begin. Over the last several years, starting during the Newburger Administration, the town has accrued over five million dollars in grants for this project and it is finally permitted, approved and funded.

Other projects include, as indicated earlier, the construction of a new 40,000 square foot community center in the New Cassel Westbury area; developing a plan for a townwide arts center, building a parking garage in the Port Washington area; and planning an indoor sporting facility possibly on the land given to us by Nassau County. We will also be making major renovations to the Tully Park Indoor Pool complex; restoring our 12 acre Clark Botanic Garden and adding an energy learning center on the property; upgrading the senior center recently acquired in Manorhaven; and continuing to improve our parks with new ball fields, new playgrounds, and new attractive fencing.

Another area of capitol improvements involves the recent Parks and Roads consolidation plan with Nassau County. This agreement is a refreshing approach to the allocation of public resources and I thank Tom Suozzi for his vision and foresight in this effort. Tom Suozzi and I took a fresh look at how and who should manage and maintain certain parks facilities and roadways. We concluded that where local residents are most likely to use certain parks and roads then it makes sense for the local government to be responsible for them. This transfer of seven parks and 20 miles of roadway to the town from the county allows the town to invest the appropriate resources into such facilities consistent with the needs and desires of the local residents most likely to use the facilities in the first place.

A shining example of the benefits of this transfer is the New Herricks Ball Field. If you drive down Herricks Road you will see what was once a county park with limited activity primarily because the park consisted of one baseball field and old playground. There was not much incentive for the county to dedicate resources to such a small and local park. The Town, however, had great interest in this park. Once taking possession of the property, we immediately put in a turf infield, an irrigated outfield, a home run fence, a modern playground, and a black iron fence. We are putting in benches and trees and lights as well. The park looks great and will be an asset to the local community for years to come.

Other parks include Plandome Park which will continue to be a beautiful passive park; Sagamore Field which will continue to be a local baseball field; Manhasset Valley Park and Whitney Pond Park both of which need a good cleaning and a major capital investment; and Hempstead Harbor Park which is larger than the others, but underutilized for such a magnificent natural resource. It is our intention to take down the fence separating Hempstead Harbor Park and Bar Beach Park and make it one large, wonderful park. I will be recommending that we rename the combined parks the new North Hempstead Beach Park.

The Town has already partnered with the Residents for a More Beautiful Port Washington in obtaining a \$150,000 grant to retain a landscape architect to help guide us through the redevelopment of the new North Hempstead Beach Park and the surrounding 168 acres located across the street.

And the Town will continue to form partnerships as we have done with the Residents for a More Beautiful Port Washington. In fact we are working with the same organization in other areas as well, such as in Blumenfeld Park where we installed a water play feature

after obtaining funds from former legislator and now state Senator Craig Johnson. Those funds and the water play feature was a brain storm of the Residents organization and they coaxed us ever so gently to move on the improvement until we finally made it happen. We are also working with Residents on bringing movie night to Sunset Park in Port Washington, expanding our programming from last year and including the local businesses in that effort as well.

These local partnerships are important and there are many partners out there. For example, we are also partnering with the Special Olympics for a Winter Festival which will feature the Special Olympics Polar Plunge. I am happy to announce that I too will be plunging into the frigid waters of off North Hempstead Beach Park on March 8 later this year.

Of key importance are our partnerships with the 100 municipal governments located in our town including 31 villages, 14 school districts, and almost sixty special districts and authorities. There is a great amount of discussion evolving around the issue of districts and intermunicipal cooperation. Here in the Town of North Hempstead we established the Office of Intermunicipal Coordination in order to better coordinate our efforts.

The new office is a great success. We've entered into intermunicipal agreements with over 30 other municipal entities and there are more being negotiated as we speak. Through these agreements the town now provides a variety of services to villages and districts at a reduced cost and with full accountability. We believe that we've saved local government over \$1 million over the last two years and there are more savings to come.

Another component of intermunicipal coordination includes our efforts relating to emergency management. The Town has been working with the Nassau County Health Department and the Nassau County Division of Emergency Management on a number of projects including the POD program where we are setting up Points of Distribution for medical supplies and inoculations in case of a medical disaster. In fact Senator Craig Johnson's office organized a flood summit in partnership with the town and county leading us to change the way the local municipalities throughout the town address flooding and other storm damage issues.

Included in the flood damage remediation effort is a new partnership with the state, the county, the town and the village of Mineola where we are looking to resolve flooding issues that existed for over 50 years in the Mineola and Carle Place area. We believe that through this cooperative effort we will finally put an end to the extreme flooding in these communities.

I am also proud to announce a new partnership in our town between North Hempstead and the helicopter industry. Through the good offices of Senator Chuck Schumer, the Eastern Region Helicopter Council has agreed to change their flight path from New York to the Hamptons. Presently, the helicopters fly directly over our town. Come this summer, they will fly over the bay and out to the sound.

Also, when possible they will fly at 2500 feet which will reduce noise levels. This does not mean that we will never see a helicopter flying over our community, but it does mean that such occurrences will be reduced and, hopefully, rare.

In order to make this plan work, the Eastern Region Helicopter Council has agreed to partner with the town and our 311 system. If anyone sees or, better yet, hears, a helicopter flying low and loudly over their house, they should call 311 and report it. We will pass the information onto the association which has the authority to enforce the new flight path agreement.

Another partner working with my offices to address the affordable housing crisis in this town and, in fact, the entire region are the many organizations promoting affordable housing. While the Town of North Hempstead will never be able to build the number of affordable units necessary to solve that problem, we can find ways to mitigate that problem.

I am therefore proposing that the Town amend our town code to allow for a density bonus when building housing if affordable units are included in the proposal. Such an application, however, will require a special permit authorized by the town board. While this may have limited impact, it does give us the ability to include affordable units when multifamily projects are being proposed.

I am also proposing that the Town of North Hempstead amend our code to allow for accessory housing. We already allow Mother/Daughter housing, but this new proposed accessory housing law will expand the pool that could participate in this type of housing.

What we've learned over these last four years is that we need to partner with local organizations, local community groups, other municipalities and our county, state, and federal officials if we want to put ourselves in the best possible position to serve our community. We know that the decisions that we make impact other leaders, decision makers, and communities. We know that the decisions that we make have a financial impact, an environmental impact, and an impact upon our communities.

This is why the visioning model of planning has become standard fare in the Town of North Hempstead. What we started in New Cassel under May Newburger has now become the planning model of choice for pursuing master plan decisions that affect entire communities. We initiated a peninsula wide visioning in Port Washington, and now have visioning projects in Manhasset, Carle Place and New Hyde Park as well.

This year the county and the town will join together to fund a visioning project in Great Neck. This peninsula which is comprised of nine villages, a number of special districts and portions of unincorporated areas as well will come together as "one Great Neck." The county and town have each committed \$100,000 to this effort.

There is, of course, so much more that I could speak of. The Town of North Hempstead is stronger than ever in terms of finances, intermunicipal partnerships and programming that helps our residents in so many ways.

Our commitment is to continue to build upon these efforts ensuring that this town, with all its diversity and varied neighborhoods, hamlets and villages, continues to grow as one town, one community.

I am proud to serve as the Supervisor of this extraordinary place, I thank you for giving me the opportunity to present this state of the town this afternoon, and I look forward to an exciting year.

Thank you.

