

State of the Town

Address by Stony Point Supervisor William E. Sherwood

Tuesday, April 13, 2010

My fellow Stony Pointers:

It is my pleasure as your Supervisor to tell you what you already know – the State of Stony Point is solid and our Town remains the best place in Rockland County to live and raise a family. I am even more convinced of that than I ever was after what I have seen and learned firsthand after my first 102 days on the job.

My time has been spent very actively—working closely with our Town department heads and dedicated employees making decisions and solving problems; meeting and speaking with hundreds of Stony Pointers and hearing their ideas and concerns; partnering with federal, state, county and other municipal elected officials and members of this Town Board on priorities facing our town.

FISCAL STABILITY

Today we received our outside auditor's report, which will be distributed to the Board this week and officially presented at our May meeting. I am pleased to say we continue to make great strides in rebuilding our fiscal house. In spite of some drops in revenue in a few areas due to the very tough economy, the Town's total revenue actually increased by some \$344,000 last year. Also the very tight financial controls imposed over the last years resulted in some substantial savings in expenses so that the Town was able to increase our reserves by over \$600,000. Jennifer Sciscente, our Finance Director, deserves much of the credit for the strides we have made; and I thank her for all her successful work on the Town's behalf. We will build on our excellent 2009-ending fiscal position and work hard to weather these economic tough times.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

"Stony Point welcomes responsible businesses." That is the message that our new Economic Development Advisory Committee, under Councilwoman Konopko's leadership and volunteer Steve Porath's guidance, is strongly selling. We are promoting our Town at every opportunity and are intent upon maximizing revenue from our existing assets and turning our unproductive surplus property right here in Patriot Hills into revenue producers by getting it back on the tax rolls.

The closing of the Gypsum plant, tragic to its employees and a threat to our tax base, may however open up other opportunities for improved waterfront redevelopment.

We can all look forward to buying our Thanksgiving turkeys this year right here in town when the new Shop Rite opens. That opening is still on schedule for October, 2010—and I expect that its opening will re-invigorate that entire area of stores and shopping center.

I have met with the enthusiastic volunteers of the re-constituted Master Plan Committee. They will be working to propose immediate common-sense improvements as well as starting on a more comprehensive overview of the future of the town. Because the economy—as it always does—will turn, Stony Point must be shovel ready when that happens by having approved development plans for our three key commercial areas: the riverfront, our retail corridor and our beautiful Patriot Hills complex. Even in this economy there is interest in Stony Point

as a business location. I have received several inquiries—all too premature to discuss here—but all warmly welcomed and given information on how to proceed to do business here in our Town.

To complement our economic development program, I will launch a Volunteer Beautification Committee to work with our Architectural Review Board so that commercial development fits our vision for our historic and beautiful town.

CONTROLLING COSTS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

We will improve our fiscal situation and control the cost of providing town services through continued operational reviews. Every invoice, every operation, every department is under review. I appreciate the openness and innovation I am seeing from our department heads and together we will make our operations as tight as possible. Whether it's the Police Department, the Golf Course, our legal representation, or any other department we will be responsible stewards of the public trust and we will run a tight, tight ship because controlling property taxes must be our top priority.

Just three quick examples:

1. Under Highway Superintendent Larry Brissing's capable leadership, we are saving money on the cost of equipment replacement by short term bonding instead of leasing.
2. Jim O'Connor and his staff in our Sewer Department have reported substantial savings on effluent shipped to the Joint Regional Sewer plant through reduced infiltration and more efficient processing. Working with our Town Engineer we have obtained approval for long term bonding at very favorable rates through the New York State Environmental Facilities Corporation for up to \$8 million to continue to upgrade our facility. We work closely with Rockland's Solid Waste Management Authority to develop better and more efficient ways to modernize our plant and this year (*although it's not glamorous*), we will be adding a centrifuge to replace an aging processor that is long since past its useful life and is very inefficient.
3. Police operations, with the full cooperation of Chief Brophy and the PBA, are very closely monitored to cap costs in this very necessary but very expensive service. With careful scrutiny and with the benefit of the retirement of several officers the police were able to come in substantially under budget in 2009.

On tonight's agenda we will consider a proposal initiated by Receiver of Taxes Kathy Campbell-Lyons to introduce credit card payments as a convenient option for our taxpayers. Town Clerk Joan Skinner is working on new advertising procedures for Town bids. At Councilperson Konopko's suggestion, the Town will be implementing a process so that we will be able to get more and lower bids by using the Hudson Valley Regional bidding website "Bid Net" used by Rockland County. Purchasing directly off county and state approved bid lists will enable the town to further trim costs.

During the last year the former administration arranged energy audits on some of our buildings and we have been able to capitalize on that. Councilperson Konopko spearheaded an effort to write grant applications for energy improvements recommended by the audits and to work with other town employees and myself to apply for grants from Community Development funding.

Those efforts have already paid off and we have received notification of a grant for improvements to Kirkbride Hall here at the Patriot Hills campus that will help us control the substantial utility costs in that building. I

congratulate her and Finance Director Jennifer Sciscente for their hard work in putting those grants together within very tight time frames and getting our Town in line for funding.

I am pleased to tell you that we were informed today that one of our grant requests to the Community Development Fund has also been approved so that we can construct a new handicapped-accessible bathroom in the Town's Emergency Operations Center.

We have had a great new level of cooperation with the County of Rockland; and its expertise in purchasing, personnel, tourism, planning, and emergency preparedness helps our town provide better and more efficient and economic services to our residents. The county is now working on its own updated Comprehensive Master Plan and, I believe, that by working with them we can reduce the costs involved in our own planning process.

TOWN SERVICES

Stony Point remains a wonderful family-friendly community because of our great amenities and activities that families of all ages can enjoy. I am working closely with Recreation Director Noreen Smith to enhance our recreation programs—whether for kids or seniors—as well as better publicizing them. Our own Noreen Smith, by the way, not only does a wonderful job in the recreation programs, she is being honored this month by the Haverstraw PAL at a dinner next week on Friday, April 23rd for her outstanding community leadership and efforts.

I am committed to preserving our world-class baseball fields at Veteran's Park (*just seeing the kids' faces on Opening Day this past Saturday was a joy*), as well as our Premier Golf Course that brings in so many visitors who pay top dollar to play on one of the most exciting courses in the tri-state area.

Our Town swimming facility is a great family asset and I am proposing tonight that we reduce the membership fee so that more of our Stony Point families can enjoy it this summer. More and more of our families are struggling during this tough economy and they should be able to enjoy staying here in Town and having fun close to home.

The New York State budget crisis is certainly filtering down to us and hurting us now:

- I have prepared petitions addressed to Governor Paterson containing over 2000 signatures calling for keeping the Stony Point Battlefield State Park open. This historic battlefield is more than just a beautiful spot of greenery along our shore—it contains the blood of American heroes who died for freedom. With the assistance of our state legislators who fully support this effort I am hopeful that our message is getting through.**
- I am also working hard and hoping for a positive response to our call for the state to clean up Lowland Park promptly so that we can get our summer recreation program back there. I am pleased to inform you that today we received a call from Assemblyperson Nancy Calhoun with the happy news that Harrison & Burrows, the firm that did such a great job on the new Farley Bridge, will start this Monday to complete the work at Lowlands Park. Steve Avadutti of the construction firm said the Town had worked so well with them thought the construction project that they would not leave our children without a place for the summer recreation program.**

Tonight I am asking the Board to approve bidding for bus transportation both ways, to and from the Summer Day Camp program, to help boost participation in our proud and economical summer program and help our moms and dads and kids enjoy their summer.

We have great Seniors Programs to announce. More than 26 trips are planned for our seniors between now and the end of the year. These include an incredibly-wide range of activities from \$5 bus rides to nearby casinos to delicious lunches at our local restaurants to a Las Vegas trip and even a fall foliage cruise from Boston to Canada. Just this week we arranged for the Board of Elections to start visits to Stony Point with its mobile demonstration of the new voting machines we'll be using this fall to instruct our seniors and all of our voters on what to expect in the coming election cycles.

I am hoping to bring a Farmer's Market to our Town this summer on our Patriot Hills site. There is a great deal of interest in bringing fresh fruits and vegetables to our shoppers in the Stony Point and the North Rockland area. Councilwoman Konopko and I are working with the county tourism department to see if this is possible. In fact, this morning I spent nearly two hours with an organizer reviewing the site. We will have a proposal for the Board to review by next month's meeting.

This year we need to update our town website so that information about all our programs and services is easier to access and sign up for. My assistant Rosemarie Caramanno and our webmaster are working on this right now. I would also like to expand our site to contain Board Reports and opportunities for citizens to volunteer to help the town by either participating on boards and commissions or passing on their ideas and suggestions on how they can help serve our town. We will have a proposal on this improvement for the board's consideration at the May meeting.

VOLUNTEERS ARE THE HEART OF STONY POINT

I see it every day. In just the past three month Deputy Supervisor White, Councilperson Konopko and I joined (*on the shore not in the river*) with the Stony Point Seals in their Super Bowl Sunday plunge in the icy Hudson on behalf of Stony Point kids and families who need help. I believe the chairman of that event John Fox is here. They raised over \$30,000 that day – and on behalf of the Town of Stony Point, I want to applaud them.

Last month from my family room I watched our Stony Point firefighters hard at work at a house fire on Hummingbird Lane. The fire was raging and flames were clearly visible at my house nearly two blocks away. Our firefighters did a fantastic job in containing it. Seeing them in action and having the opportunity to thank them on behalf of the Town meant a great deal to me. Chief Ed Geary is not here but his Assistant Chiefs Joe Robinson and Kevin Huslinger are present. Join me, please, in saluting them.

I also want to acknowledge the wonderful support of the Stony Point Conference Center who came forward to shelter the family left temporarily homeless by the fire. Thank you for that.

And, finally, let me mention the upcoming North Rockland Community Run/Walk. This event sponsored jointly by Stony Point and our neighbors in Haverstraw will occur on June 6th. The proceeds will benefit two Haverstraw children with serious medical problems, Sean De Patto and Jimmy Place, and the young sons of Glenn McElroy suffering by the tragic and untimely death of their father in Stony Point. To sponsor or participate in this event, please go to the Town website and sign up and attend.

This is a community that cares And I am honored to thank them and all our Stony Point residents who volunteer their time, talent and money to help our neighbors.

AN INVITATION

In conclusion, our residents should all know that our Town Government is open and we are here to serve. You can stop by our Town Hall for information or just to say “hello” – but I must warn you we may ask you to sign up as a volunteer in any one of a growing number of worthwhile but understaffed projects. Come on in to see us – but also come on in to help us.

I want to thank my board members. Councilmembers Finn, Vicari and White have given me much help as I learn this new job. Their hard work before I got here helped get the Town into the strong position that I found when I came through the door. Councilperson Konopko and I started together and we both know we have much to learn, and much to offer. She has been a welcome presence during this first 102 days and I certainly enjoy her energy and enthusiasm as we have joined together to learn the ins and outs of town operations. I thank each of the board members for their efforts on behalf of Stony Point and I thank the people of Stony Point for giving me this opportunity to serve.