



## CORTLAND COUNTY

60 Central Avenue  
Cortland NY 13045

Kevin Whitney  
Chair, Cortland County Legislature

Eric Mulvihill  
Clerk of the Legislature

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June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2019

### **2019 State of the County Message**

Good Evening fellow Legislators, Employees, and Residents of Cortland County. It is my great honor and privilege to present the State of our County Address. It is no secret that we are facing some significant issues at the present time. We also have some very positive items underway as well that I will touch on.

As you are aware, I became Chairman of the Legislature and Acting County Administrator in October of 2018. One of the first issues I was tasked with addressing is the state of our finances. We are required to file an Annual Update Document with the State of New York. This document allows us to receive revenue through various funding streams. We are sorely delinquent in this area. This document is required to be filed by April 30th of every year. The last time we filed this document was in 2016. We are not meeting our mandate. I want to assure everyone that we are continuing to receive our grant funding as a result of appeals I have made to every State agency informing them of our status. It is important to acknowledge our State partners and their immense patience and understanding of our current situation.

In response to this issue and in consultation with the Budget and Finance Committee, the County released a "Request for Proposal" to hire a firm to address our financial issues. We received three proposals and chose ProNexus out of Rochester to assist us. They have been on site since January and have found our books and accounts to be in complete disarray. They have been charged with fixing all our accounts, filing our mandated financial statements and providing a complete Policies and Procedures Manual for our Finance Department and County employees to operate by. I will state that we are not frivolously spending money and that speaks volumes to the dedication of our County Department Heads and Employees. We are doing a horrendous job of tracking our expenses and revenue intake on the back end. This will be addressed by ProNexus. However, this review has become more complex than originally anticipated. While ProNexus is sorting through our financial records, the County Legislature is taking steps to ensure sound financial operations and has hired a Director of Finance that starts July 1<sup>st</sup> and is poised to hire a Manager of Audit and Financial Projects this evening.

As the County works to address its finances and fiscal management, the Legislature has also begun the process of searching for a County Administrator. I wish to recognize, thank and commend Legislator Beau Harbin and his committee for working so hard to seek out qualified applicants for this key position. Mr. Harbin and his group have implemented a sound process that I believe will result in hiring a competent administrator to lead our County. I would like to thank the entire committee for your hard



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work, dedication and most importantly your genuine concern for the health and growth of Cortland County.

I can tell you first hand serving as Acting County Administrator that Cortland County desperately needs a County Administrator. While I have enjoyed acting in this capacity it is unsurmountable to provide the service our Departments and County deserve as a part-time fill-in. It is irresponsible to our County. I have a true affection and admiration for all our County Department Heads and employees. However, from the standpoint of Acting County Administrator I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge several Department Heads that are working way beyond their normal work duties to assist me in making decisions on a daily, nightly and a lot of times weekend basis. Those individuals are Director of Information Technology Rob Corpora, Personnel Director Annette Barber, Legislative Clerk Eric Mulvihill and Deputy Legislative Clerk Karen Fuller. They have been instrumental in assisting me with the ad-nauseum amount of Administrative decisions that are necessary to operate the County. Their wisdom, length of service to the County and willingness to do whatever it takes is greatly appreciated and needs to be commended.

An example of earnest concern for the finances of our County is we finally rewrote our investment policy and actually have invested our money. This hasn't been done in over 15 years I am told. I need to thank Legislator George Wagner for leading this charge to make our money work for us and help to reduce the burden on our taxpayers. While a small step initially, Legislator Wagner continues to evaluate our investments with an eye towards the greatest return. I want to be certain to thank our local banks in assisting us with this program.

The next pressing issue since becoming Chair was the emergency closure of our jail on January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019. You are no doubt aware a portion of our jail roof failed causing water damage to the facility. In response the New York State Commission of Corrections closed our facility and all inmates were transported to contiguous County Correctional Facilities. This emergency has uncovered many issues / problems within our facility that resulted in a substantial expense to the County. At this time, I am pleased to report repairs and renovations are complete and inmates have been returned and the facility has resumed normal operations. I want to acknowledge and commend the Sheriff's Department and Corrections Staff for their swift response in mitigating the situation, protecting our inmates from any harm and swiftly transporting all inmates to other facilities in less than 12 hours. Definitely no small task. It needs to be known while many repairs have been made to our jail as a result of this situation, they serve as no substitute to address the long-term overcrowding issues in our jail.



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On a positive note, after several years of negative press and financial losses, it appears our landfill is turning the financial corner with many enhancements being added to assist our residents and commercial haulers. This is attributable to our County Highway Superintendent Charlie Sudbrink. Superintendent Sudbrink and his staff have been working very hard to turn things around at the landfill as well as addressing inefficiencies within our Highway Department. Since taking over, I have received many compliments regarding our roads and the responsiveness of Superintendent Sudbrink's department. Again, another testament to the quality and dedication of our County employees. I have had an opportunity to see them operate in many situations and they do an amazing job for our County.

I need to thank Legislator Linda Jones for her persistence in getting the Legislature to pay attention to Dwyer Park and focus on some much-needed repairs and upgrades that have sorely been needed and at the same time sorely neglected. Helping to kick start and really take this project to the next level was \$300,000 secured by Assemblywoman Lifton to paint and place a new roof on the pavilion. Her funds are paying dividends in that we have also been able to afford installing a new chlorinated water system, upgrading our bathroom and address other needs of the theater and park. I want to thank the many volunteers and donors that have been working with Legislator Jones to address the other needs in our park. Everything looks amazing and I would highly encourage all our residents to avail yourselves to the ongoing improvements being made at the park.

In this regard I think it is very important to acknowledge the Cortland Repertory Theater (CRT). It is my true belief if it wasn't for them, the pavilion would have fallen into disarray and been torn down. They took a leap of faith in 1972 investing in the pavilion at Little York. The original banister railing is still in place on the second floor in their dressing room area because the feeling at the time was the theater would fail and would need to be restored to its original condition. I guess we were wrong at the time and they knew they had a product our County needed. I cannot thank CRT enough for having the courage to provide this opportunity to Cortland County. It truly is a landmark that provides off the chart, high caliber productions. It is one of the crown jewels of our County.

Along the lines of the park, I want to formally invite all of you to join us at the park on July 3<sup>rd</sup>. Thanks to Meghan Lawton, Executive Director for the Cortland County Convention and Visitor's Bureau and Legislative Clerk Eric Mulvihill, the two of them have created a brand-new day-long schedule of events for the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July Fireworks Spectacular at Dwyer Park. These two have put together a schedule of bands starting at 1 p.m., which will entertain throughout the day leading up to the fireworks themselves at dusk. In addition to the musical entertainment, food trucks have been secured to showcase local flavor and the budget for the fireworks themselves has been doubled due to the increased availability of occupancy funds. The event should be a wonderful start to the July 4<sup>th</sup> Holiday Weekend here in Cortland County as well as showcase the many improvements being made to the park.



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I would be remiss if I didn't mention the new leadership and direction of our Convention and Visitor's Bureau (CVB). Over the past nine months, since the hiring of new Executive Director Meghan Lawton, the Cortland County Convention & Visitors Bureau, better known as Experience Cortland, has been working diligently to bring visitors into the County. Working with the Leadership Cortland group, the CVB launched a brand-new Experience Cortland mobile app and increased awareness of said app via print ads and by wrapping two Cortland Transit buses. The CVB has worked very closely with the County Legislature to streamline the Occupancy Allocation process to better ensure the collected funds are put back into the community enticing more visitors to visit and stay overnight in Cortland County.

Not to take away from many of our great boards and partners that work tirelessly on behalf of the County, there are two other County partners that I would like to mention that help grow and make Cortland County a great place to live. They are the Cortland County Business Development Corporation (BDC) and the Cortland Regional Sports Council. Economic growth is extremely important to all communities including Cortland County and we are extremely fortunate to have the talented group from the BDC. I am always amazed at how well Garry; Chairman McMahon and their group do at filling vacant space. We are always concerned when businesses close and abandon their facilities, but I don't grow as concerned as I used to because I have seen how hard the BDC works to fill those facilities. Some great recent examples are Pyrotek at the former Monarch Machine Tool Company in South Cortland, Forkey Fabrication at the former Borg Warner facility on Luker Road, Northeast Transformers at the former Saulsbury Fire Apparatus site in Preble and Suit-Kote Corporation at the former Barden Homes plant right next door to that.

Even better is how the organization works with its many partners to secure funding from various State and industry resources to help retain and grow the businesses that are already operating here. The Royal Motors relocation comes immediately to mind, and I know the BDC has been intimately involved in the microenterprise program benefitting small businesses in the Village of Homer and across Cortland County, as well. In all the BDC has played an integral role in bringing more than \$20 million to Cortland County for projects and initiatives over the past eight years alone, and that's not counting the \$10 million DRI grant for downtown.

The BDC has also been an active partner with the Cortland Regional Sports Council in promoting sports tourism as an economic driver in Cortland County, most recently with the completion of the first phase of the Gutches Lumber Sports Complex in the Town of Cortlandville. The facility has been in active use since early spring bringing new people and their dollars to Cortland County. Through its many events, including New York State Public High School Athletic Association State Championships for girl's lacrosse, girls' soccer and boy's lacrosse semi-finals and the New York State Senior Games and AAU basketball, the Sports Council has brought tens of millions of dollars to our community since its creation in 2003 and is a key player in the work to move Cortland County forward.



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Finally, I want to acknowledge the people of our business community, the folks who put their energies, imagination, and hard-earned money into their businesses for not only their own benefit, but for the benefit of us all. Think of downtown Cortland without McNeil & Company's decision to spend millions expanding its campus. Think of Steve Franco's state of the art Bailey Place offices, now under the new roof instead of the old blue roof, or Judd Seales fantastic Bru 64 in the center of downtown and vast investments that George Seibel and Tony Caruso have put into bringing us amazing cuisine through their significant and desperately needed rehabilitation of many restaurants located in the City of Cortland, Homer and Cortlandville. Dave Yaman's investment in the Crescent Commons apartments and commercial space saved not only the building, but perhaps the neighborhood, as well, and in Homer, investors are shoring up what was already one of the most attractive small downtowns in New York State.

Our greatest asset within Cortland County is our employees. They work tirelessly on behalf of our County. Since being involved with the Legislature, one of my biggest priorities has been the safety of our employees and citizens visiting our buildings. Over the years we have implemented many safety changes, policies and implemented an incident command system for our County. We have asked our Department Heads to operate in roles and participate in Incident Command Leadership Courses that are well outside their comfort levels and expected roles. We also created a Crisis Management Team within the County to focus on issues and needs of our employees. Every Department Head and their Deputies have stepped up willingly and performed admirably. It should be noted the driving force behind every one of these County safety improvements and enhancements is Deputy Director of Emergency Response & Communications Courtney Metcalf. Without her persistence, determination, and hard work none of these improvements would be in place today.

I will end with saying it truly has been a great honor and privilege to serve as a Legislator for Cortland County for the last eight years. At first, I did not think I would like serving as a Legislator. However, over time, I have met so many amazing people and learned so many new things about our great County that I am truly thankful to have had this opportunity. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge Ted Testa for getting me involved as well as his and Dick Tupper's support and guidance during my tenure. The item I will miss the most though is my daily interactions with our Department Heads and Employees. They are the sole reason I kept serving as a Legislator. I have the greatest admiration and respect for their work ethic and how much they care about Cortland County. They made serving this great County worthwhile and enjoyable.

Thank you,

Kevin Whitney  
Chairman – Cortland County Legislature  
Acting County Administrator