

**GREENE COUNTY
STATE OF THE COUNTY ADDRESS**

March 17, 2010



**By: Wayne C. Speenburgh, Chairman
Greene County Legislature**

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Distinguished members of the Legislature, Interim Administrator Frank, County Attorney Stevens, Tammy, Linda, members of the press and guests, as Chairman of the Legislature it gives me great pleasure to extend a warm welcome to you. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to address you tonight.

2009 proved to be a very challenging year. The uncertainty created by New York's weak state economy, higher state taxes and fees, and soaring unemployment rate is putting undue stress on the citizens of our county. New York State continues to reduce funding for those services that they themselves mandated and they continue to find ways to pass those financial obligations back to local government and ultimately to our property taxpayers. This is being done at a time when we are experiencing double digit growth in the demand for public services especially those relating to health care. The overall economic mood is somber as delinquent property taxes increase and sales tax revenues decline.

As a Legislature we continue to remain cognizant of these challenges as we find new methods of delivering our services in more efficient ways. In 2009, we continued our multi-year plan to trim spending, to reduce the size of our workforce and to find better ways to meet the needs of our residents.

Our 2009 budget anticipated the use of \$3.7 million in fund balance. However, thanks to our diligent effort, our preliminary numbers for 2009 indicate that we only used about \$1.5 million, saving the taxpayers of Greene County over \$2 million dollars. We continue to be proactive rather than reactive in the way we manage our business affairs and we continue to adjust our spending to more closely match our revenues.

Thanks to the efforts of our Courthouse Committee, we will be successfully completing the courthouse renovation in the next month or so. In fact, the courts are scheduled to move back into the courthouse in about four weeks. I am pleased to report that the project will finish on budget and only a few weeks late. It is important to note that our final construction costs will be \$1.5 million less than the original amount anticipated at the commencement of the project.

Revitalization of our communities is extremely important for economic growth and vitality. Last year we partnered with the Village of Catskill and the IDA to develop a strategy that will build upon the great progress made in Catskill over the last few years. While this is primarily a Village driven project, the county will continue to support Village leadership during this process.

In 2009, I announced an initiative to revisit our Solid Waste business model in an effort to reduce the financial impact on our residents. Thanks to the efforts of Bob

VanValkenburg and our Conservation Committee, we were able to make a number of changes including the renegotiation of our waste-hauling contract, saving taxpayers over \$100,000.

Public transportation is of critical importance for our residents, especially seniors and others, including those who need it for employment. In 2009, we initiated our County Wide Transportation study. This study will identify all of our county needs as well as identify opportunities for improvement. We are nearing the completion of that study and anxiously await the results so that we may develop a comprehensive transportation plan for the future.

As we continue into 2010, and look forward to 2011 and beyond, the financial challenges for all counties in New York are very significant; Greene County is no different. Over 50% of our revenue comes from the federal and state government for “mandated” services. Many of these mandated services are underfunded by both the federal and state government. In an effort to help counties offset the impact of falling revenues, the federal government temporarily increased the federal contribution for Medicaid reimbursement for fiscal years 2009 and 2010. However, in 2011, that additional funding will no longer be available, resulting in a decrease in funding to Greene County in the amount of approximately 1.7 million dollars.

There is nothing more concerning to the members of the Greene County Legislature than the poor financial condition of New York State and its impact on state funded programs. Counties, towns and villages depend on state provided CHIPS funding to help defray the cost of road repairs and maintenance. In 2009, Greene County received approximately \$1.4 million to help maintain our roads. Looking forward, state officials have yet to disclose the level to which we will be funded. However, preliminary indications of future funding continue to be dismal.

Unfortunately, that is only the beginning of the bad news regarding the fiscal crisis facing New York State. Our recovery from this malaise can only come from economic growth, yet the state continues to take away those tools intended to help us accomplish this. As we work to save jobs and promote the development of new ones, we are constantly reminded by our larger employers that New York's over-regulation, high taxes and high energy prices put us at a disadvantage with other states and foreign competition. Greene County was one of the last counties in New York to be given Empire Zone authority. Empire Zones have been very effective in helping us attract new business investment and job creation. Companies like Empire North, Ducommun Industries and Peckham Industries have all made substantial investments and created significant employment in Greene County as a direct result of Empire Zones. This program will sunset later this year with no viable replacement program, leaving this county without a significant economic development tool.

Tourism is one of our major industries. Hundreds of thousands of visitors enjoy our ski areas in the winter, golf courses in the summer and our resorts and attractions all year long. However, just last week we were advised that the State would no longer be helping us fund tourism promotion through their matching grants program. This will be a major setback in the promotion of tourism in our County and will force us to rethink our strategy to help grow our tourism related businesses. We need to send the message to Albany that we must have the economic tools necessary to compete in a global marketplace.

During this economic downturn and, more recently as demonstrated through the recent snow emergency on the mountaintop, it has become apparent that we, as a county need to work more closely with our towns and villages on issues of common concern. Villages and towns are sharing the same financial pressures that we face here at the county. We need to create an open dialogue with our communities for the purposes of working cooperatively. Mike Flynn, our County Clerk, is already initiating a plan to help municipalities' with their records management. Our Highway Department has helped many communities as well, through various in-kind services. In the coming months, I plan to open the dialogue with municipalities on how we can best develop a mutually beneficial working relationship.

As we go through this year, we need to remain flexible and be prepared to adjust to financial curveballs thrown to us by Albany. The taxpayers can rest assured that we will do everything in our power to minimize the impact on our residents.

In conclusion, I want to personally thank all of our employees and management staff for helping us during these challenging economic times. Thus far, your hard work and diligence have enabled us to survive this economic storm with very little disruption to the services we provide to our residents.

By working together, we'll not only get through this economic downturn, but we will come out of it as a much stronger government entity.

Thank you.