

STATE OF THE COUNTY

2013-14



JOHN M. BECKER
MADISON COUNTY BOARD OF
SUPERVISORS CHAIRMAN

INTRODUCTION

2013 started out on a fairly quiet note with business as usual, though we knew we would have another tough budget year. Thanks to the creative budgeting help from department heads, the County continues to provide top-notch programs and services for our constituents.

Here are some of the highlights.

911 TELECOMMUNICATIONS

A \$4.2 million grant from Homeland Security will improve communications for first-responders. The grant covers additional channels, upgrading dispatch consoles and 911 logging recorders, vehicle location and emergency vehicle data equipment, and tower site and 911 Center surveillance equipment. The CAD system will be upgraded early next year.

BOARD OF ELECTIONS

Elections consolidated districts in one town and consolidated districts within towns for the 2013 primaries, requiring fewer inspectors and ballots and signed a multi-year ballot-printing contract, saving nine cents per ballot and providing free absentee envelopes, postcards and notices.

Consolidating primaries will continue, with potential savings of more than \$40,000.

BUILDING MAINTENANCE

Maintenance smoothly integrated Central Service into its oversight this year and settled staff into their positions after a new hire, promotions and lateral moves in late 2012. As of Dec. 15, the crew addressed nearly 9,300 service requests, periodic/preventive maintenance tasks, emergencies and building projects.

The biggest challenge the department faces in 2014 is the ongoing maintenance and replacement of aging equipment critical to facilities operation in a climate of shrinking budget dollars.

COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE

The County Clerk's Office has seen increased dealer work and acquired more than 4,000 renewals from a rental company, which increases revenue.

We initiated a web-based application for researchers of public records held by the Clerk's Office with no taxpayer support needed. This funds further records digitization.

HEALTH DEPARTMENT

The Health Department helped form the Rural Health Council, a group of health and social service providers working to identify and resolve health-related challenges.

The Department addressed post-flood health issues including mosquito control, mold, sanitation, vaccinations and safe operation of shelters and food operations in Oneida.

HIGHWAY

The Department recycled 13.40 of 19.86 miles paved; 44.26 miles were preserved by chip-sealing. Structurally deficient bridges in Sullivan and Lebanon were replaced. FEMA-declared flood damage totaling nearly \$300,000 was repaired. The Department will replace the North Court Street bridge and work to obtain funds for other required bridge projects.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

In 2013, IT utilized a state Homeland Security grant secured by Joe DeFrancisco to install a disaster recovery site at DSS, a redundant system that ensures uninterrupted IT operations should

our primary system fail. This year, the department will determine the most cost-effective solution to replace the aging tape backup library with the various technologies available today.

MENTAL HEALTH

The department successfully transitioned the ADAPT Program to a private agency in 2013. The department will examine the operations in the clinic to improve processes and make things more efficient and continue to examine the best way to provide mental health services to the residents of Madison County.

PERSONNEL DEPARTMENT

The Department negotiated a contract with the Teamsters, coordinated civil service for 1,600-plus public sector employees at the county, towns, villages and schools, administered 36 exams, provided new employee orientation for 25 and conducted mandatory employee training, partially grant-funded. Personnel continues to balance responsibilities to taxpayers and employees.

PLANNING AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Planning constructed a bridge at Oxbow Falls, assisted with the Oneida Rail Trail TEP grant, launched the Buy Madison Program, and trained 200-plus planning and zoning board members.

The Career Center served more than 14,000 people in 2013; uncertain funding will impact the continued operation of the Center.

PROBATION DEPARTMENT

Probation continued to protect the community, promote offender rehabilitation and adapt to new legislation and (often unfunded) state mandates. We are implementing software that will integrate our computerized probation functions, increase efficiency and streamline

recordkeeping; this will continue to be a time-consuming endeavor and significant transition for staff.

SHERIFF'S OFFICE

2013 saw the video surveillance system installed, STOP DWI Program integrated into the office, NY Safe Act implementation, apprehension of 22 individuals using the Top 10 Most Wanted List and assisting with flood issues.

Challenges will be adequate staffing to meet state requirements and locating the criminal division together.

SOCIAL SERVICES

DSS saw four children adopted, designed a landlord/tenant handbook and implemented a universal assessment tool for home care. A DCJS grant will provide diversion services to juvenile delinquents.

As the Affordable Care Act is implemented, the impact will be significant on DSS. The state healthcare marketplace has helped residents find health insurance.

SOLID WASTE

Solid Waste sent 122,660 pounds of agricultural and rigid plastics for recycling, earned \$135,000 from the landfill gas-to-energy facility, will install a second solar array at the landfill and celebrated the first anniversary of the Reuse Store.

ARE Park development continues; Johnson Brothers Lumber will build a drying kiln there.

TREASURER

The Treasurer's Office received an unqualified opinion on the County's audit again this year; it is the best possible result. This provides County taxpayers assurance that public funds are properly

accounted for. The county's bond rating was upgraded by Standard & Poors from A+ to AA- with stable outlook.

The Office now offers online taxpayer services.

In 2014, the new Enterprise Resource Planning System will be implemented, which will involve all County departments; this office will play an integral role in ensuring its success.

VETERANS AGENCY

The Veterans Agency advocates for veterans, active duty service members and dependents, conducts outreach activities and provides services through its Morrisville satellite office.

We promote Homeless Veteran Prevention programs and secure \$24 million annually for veterans through a variety of benefits.

YOUTH BUREAU

The Youth Bureau coordinated job-shadowing experiences for 27 students representing five school districts, and the Bureau and its community-based contract agencies positively impacted more than 1,500 young people through its cost-effective prevention and youth development programs. Continuing to serve youth with dwindling resources from the state will be a challenge.

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

In late April, the County was looking forward to the Supreme Court decision in May – just weeks away – on the long-awaited Oneida reservation question.

Then the phone call comes.

The Governor's office wants to meet. After a flurry of meetings, telephone conferences and emails over a 30-day period, we had an agreement. Not the best, but not the worst, either. To do nothing or go it alone would have put our whole County in a very bad position, costing taxpayers millions more in attorneys' fees, with only a slim hope of besting not only the Oneida Nation, but also New York State.

The agreement is here; it may be ratified sometime in 2014, then we can get on with our lives. Our agreement not only gives us a continual stream of revenue from the state, but also the back taxes owed up front.

If this all goes through, Madison County should be in good shape for quite some time. It is funny how things turn out sometimes.

A relationship with the Governor that did not start out very well at all was salvaged.

As we talked and worked through our issues, I think his perception of myself and our team, as a County, changed for the better.

Since that time, the County was hit with devastating floods. When the first flood hit Oneida, the Governor's Office was on the phone with me asking what we needed. Again, when DeRuyter, Eaton and Nelson were all hit, a personal call from the Governor came with, "What do you need, Mr. Chairman?"

The next day, it was done.

Oneida was hit hard in the area referred to locally as "the flats." The County – through the efforts of the Highway Department, Public Health and the Sheriff's Office, to name a few – worked with Oneida city officials and Oneida Indian Nation representatives to help those affected by the devastation.

DeRuyter, Eaton and Nelson, also saw damage to infrastructure, though very little displacement of residents. A number of roads in DeRuyter were impassable due to the water damage. Eaton also suffered extensive damage to culverts and roads.

I want to single out one County employee for recognition of his work throughout this event: Joe DeFrancisco. Though it is his job, Joe went way beyond the call of duty in coordinating efforts to get through this crisis and mitigate the impacts on victims affected by these types of catastrophic events.

A big push will begin this year to prepare for and prevent wherever possible the catastrophic damages we have seen in the past. The state and federal governments cannot and will not continue to pay for the

same damages in the future, event after event. To that end, I am appointing a task force on emergency preparedness to look at future potential disasters and do what we can to prevent them now. This task force will be made up of about nine people from various facets of emergency response and members of the Board of Supervisors.

Through working to help the towns, the County as a whole, getting FEMA's ear, talking and working with State Division of Homeland Security Director Gerry Hower, a good working relationship with the Governor's Office has sprung up through the process of negotiating the Oneida deal.

That is a plus for Madison County.

As we moved through 2013, the fall brought us yet another tough budget year. As we progressed, it was abundantly clear that the 2-percent tax cap would not hold.

Even though we passed a nearly 8-percent increase this year, I will still stand by my record on this board, for the silent majority of property owners, for the past eight years, we have increased the county's tax levy by 15 percent or 1.9 percent per year, staying well below the cap, on average, compared to the years 2000 through 2006, a total of 62 percent increase on the levy or 10.4 percent per year, which was absolutely unsustainable.

Under this leadership, we have done our job cutting costs and delivering the best services for the lowest cost. In previous years, we had seen significant cuts to the Highway Department and Sheriff's Office pool of vehicles, the time to restore those cuts was this year, and we did: restoring a road project and equipment to the Highway and eight new vehicles to renew the fleet of aging equipment – some with 200,000 miles or more on them – in the Sheriff's Office.

We also are investing in new software for the Treasurer's Office; this will allow us to get rid of the ancient and cumbersome way we do payroll and replace our outdated (WAY outdated) DOS-based software from the early 1980s. Some have asked why that upgrade

needed to be purchased. The answer is simple: if the software crashed, we would be out of business.

Our leadership team, without question, has and will continue to move this County forward, whether it be through spearheading economic development projects, overcoming challenges like the Court House or addressing the many other things that may pop up.

All while under the scrutiny and criticism of armchair quarterbacks.

We will be prepared for those challenges.

Also in 2013, we saw a significant, productive and positive working relationship with our partners in the unions. We will continue to foster this relationship because we realize not just one employee, but all of our employees are part of the team that make Madison County the special place that it is, and we must all work together to make our future even brighter.

Also for 2013, I asked Board of Supervisors staff to create a record of supervisors' attendance at committee meetings. The County pays very well in total compensation for each supervisor to represent us here. I will be asking for the same thing in 2014 and beyond, and I will be reporting on this data every quarter.

For the five new team members, it is very important that you take the obligations of the County very seriously. I look forward to working with each and every one of you – each of you brings unique experience and skill sets to the team that will help execute the day-to-day operation of the County and resolve the crises that arise from time to time.

You will get out of your County experience the effort that you put in.

For the Board of Supervisors to work as a cohesive team toward productive goals, you need to be here and seriously participating in your obligations as a supervisor of this County. When you are late or absent, it lets down your fellow elected officials and department

heads, reflects poorly on those who reliably show up for work and damages morale.

When a meeting has to stop to get a latecomer up to speed, it is an inconsiderate waste of time and disrespectful of the time expended by those also involved in the process and who arrived as scheduled.

It can be expected that conflicts will arise from time to time – that is life; however, it is your duty as a responsible member of this Board to notify your committee chair or myself should a major conflict arise that will cause you to be late or absent.

This is a paid position like any other and should be considered the priority any job would be.

CONCLUSION

In closing, we lead to make our community a better place. A strong leader gets things done: he or she deliberates and weighs the facts, confident he or she has made the best possible decision with the information available at hand and moves forward. A weak leader debates, debates, debates, then wonders if they have done the right thing, if anything gets done at all.

We will only know if the right thing was done by living our future, and we cannot live our future unless we move forward together.

Let me lead, and our Committee chairs lead, to get things done with your input and let 25 years from now be the decider of whether we did the right thing or not. I say this because the 1980s brought us new prosperity, but today we are just realizing it.

I believe we are in the same cycle as we were in the late 1960s and '70s, stagnating federal and state government; high unemployment; high inflation, the working – and I emphasize the working – people are stuck in a revolving treadmill and need a reason to feel good about themselves and hopeful about their country and their circumstances.

Let us do our part and start that feeling for the residents of our county and the silent majority when we pay our bills and conduct our business together.

I would like to wish everyone a happy, healthy and productive 2014. May our challenges be few, but met head-on, and worked out cooperatively as a team.