

State of the Town Address - 2024

“The First 100 Days”

Town Supervisor Joseph D. Cavaccini

President Kennedy said in his address to the National Association of Manufacturers, “We must use time as a tool, not as a couch”. In other words, we must not waste the time we are given, but rather act to get things done as efficiently as possible. Ladies and Gentlemen, changing the narrative and the philosophy of local government is what we have accomplished thus far, and I welcome you to the 2024 State of the Town Address, highlighting our first 100 days in office, together.

As we gather here today, it's my honor to present to you the state of our Town government, recapping the progress we've achieved over the past four months. In the spirit of transparency and accountability, I want to commend the dedication of my colleagues in government, our town employees, elected and appointed officials and our collective efforts that have propelled us forward.

Earlier in April, we hit our 100-day mark in office, which coincidentally fell on my anniversary date of when I began my public service career with our Town Government well over a decade ago. I believe everything happens for a reason, and I am forever grateful for the opportunity to serve my hometown.

I will address five areas of progress:

- 1). Land Use and Planning
- 2). Accountability and Efficiency
- 3). Parks and Recreation
- 4). Community Collaboration
- 5). Public Safety

Land Use and Planning

As I prefaced in my Inaugural Address this past January, it is our mission to ensure that the future of our great Town of Wappinger is secure and the quality of life of those who live here is protected. In keeping our promise, we launched the **Wappinger Protection Act**. A series of legislative actions to strategically plan and protect the character of the Town. In doing just that the Town Board has taken action to support farmland and agricultural programs by **expanding agricultural programs** at Carnwath Farms Historic Site & Park to 10 acres of community farming plots. We thank the Kolb family for their partnership in offering this incredible program to Wappinger. In addition to this, we made efforts to support the **preservation of Emerald Creek Farm** in the Diddell hamlet of our town through conservation easements and covenants that will ensure that this property will not be developed. I am most proud that in March, our Town passed historic legislation, in Local Law 1, to protect our quality of life by adopting a **moratorium on the construction of large-scale multi-family housing developments** in the Town of Wappinger. Following a public hearing and noticing,

this local law was unanimously passed during the March 11, 2024, Regular Meeting of the Town Board.

A point of reference, at 28 square miles, the Town of Wappinger is the **smallest geographical town in Dutchess County**, while being the **second most densely populated** town in the County: with a housing ratio of 60% single family and 40% multi family.

We are looking to identify areas to preserve, limit further congestion and overcrowding, as well as foster new development in places that are innovative and that make the most sense for our community. This pause is crucial to ensuring that we do not contribute to traffic, crowd our schools, and overburden our police, ambulance, or volunteer fire companies.

We will be working to match our Town Code to the Comprehensive Plan to eliminate any question of what is wanted in Wappinger. Earlier this year, I initiated the process of creating various “taskforces” and committees on issues across the Town. The decision to appoint a Supervisor's **task force on clean water protection** underscores a critical commitment to environmental stewardship and public health. With increasing concerns over water quality, quantity, and pollution, this group of qualified residents will play a pivotal role in developing comprehensive strategies, monitoring water sources, and recommending necessary regulations to safeguard this precious resource.

Through this, we remain active in planning for the future in reconstruction and or decommissioning of our aged in-Town sewage treatment facilities at Wildwood, Fleetwood, and Royal Ridge as well as working with the Tri-Municipal Sewer Commission on locating millions of gallons of stormwater that have infiltrated the plant and pushed the facility to capacity.

Simultaneously, the establishment of a **task force focused on housing** addresses an earlier point made on the housing we have here in Wappinger, coupled with the pressing affordability crisis in the nation, in particular, New York City that is impacting us. Although we appreciate the Dutchess County Housing Needs Assessment, its flawed design based on a voluntary survey does not accurately depict the needs of the Town of Wappinger. By studying the ratio of multifamily to single family they will identify the true numbers needed through our own housing study for review.

By appointing a **bipartisan majority to the Planning Board** for the first time in a decade, we have ensured that we have opted for balanced decision-making and representation of qualified viewpoints. This comes with authorizing in-house training on the Town Code, policies, procedures, and the Comprehensive Plan for the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals for the first time in six years. Demonstrating our commitment to equipping our officials with the necessary skills and knowledge needed to get the job done.

Accountability and Efficiency

You expect your Town government to be held to the same standard that you are held to each day. In doing so, on day one, we mandated that all town employees are to clock in and out of work for accountability and safety reasons. In recognizing the importance of fiscal prudence, we've cut back on excessive overtime on clerical work, and transferred all department heads to being paid salary rather than hourly; all of which have optimized our resources without compromising on quality.

Furthermore, by bringing the preparation of Town Board meeting resolutions in-house, we've managed to **save taxpayers a significant \$40,000.00** so far this year. This move underscores our dedication to responsible financial management as I anticipate **saving taxpayers close to \$100,000.00** this year through this practice.

We've initiated internal audits and investigations into financial and personnel activities, ensuring transparency and integrity in all our operations.

The Town Board formally accepted and **committed nearly \$3million** of American Rescue Plan Funds, allocated to us by the Federal Government that were nearly lost had we not acted on it.

Earlier this year, the Town Board utilized a portion of these American Rescue Funds toward the introduction of new Tyler Technologies software. Currently, all Town departments use their own outdated software, not allowing any communication with each other. My goal has been to **promote communication** and by partnering our efforts to be unifying in Town Hall with moving forward with this new technology, we have dismantled silos, fostering communication and collaboration across departments. In the coming months, we will be rolling out a new public-facing component that will allow residents to sign up for E-billing as well as being able to see real time municipal water usage, and so much more. The addition of this new software has already eliminated the need for outsourcing payroll, printing of checks, and other personnel/finance functions that will save **taxpayers over \$30,000.00** annually moving forward.

For the first time in a decade, I have instituted consistent bi-monthly department head meetings that have enhanced coordination and synergy among various departments and branches of our government.

Scaling back on wasteful spending such as high attendance at various conferences and cutting back on dozens of employee cell phones; have resulted in significant savings, demonstrating our commitment to prudent expenditure and our proactive approach to resource management. We have found that hundreds of thousands of dollars in outstanding bills were not paid, going back to 2021, and that the Town was operating without contracts with many of our professionals, which we have corrected. In putting professional services out to bid through a request for qualifications and appointing them based on merit, we uphold the principles of fairness and competence in Town appointments.

In reviewing our strong finances, our Town as a whole is in an excellent financial position, we noticed that some of our smaller water and sewer districts were operating in the red due to non-balanced budgets and no increases for years. Drawing down any surpluses these districts had over that last 3 decades has been lost due to these practices. This is dangerous as many of these smaller districts operate with under 200 homes within them and any major repairs can easily shift a hefty burden onto the taxpayers. We are working as diligently as possible to make our Water and Sewer Districts whole and balanced again with as little impact on our residents as possible. It is crucial to have any kind of fund balance in general to ensure that you are not facing any serious bills or commitments on your end. We will continue to be fiscally responsible when it comes to these crucial infrastructure improvements.

In being strong financial stewards, we looked at innovative strategic portfolio diversification. Through this we've begun **generating an additional approximately \$60,000.00 per month** in interest payments on town funds, ensuring optimal returns while safeguarding financial stability. This was money that was previously left on the table as a lost opportunity of \$4.4 million dollars from the last 6-years. Previously millions of dollars were deposited into a few low interest paying banks versus the strong diversification of these funds. Just this year alone, we anticipate **generating close to one million dollars in interest** which will be allocated to alleviating the burden to taxpayers. When government, local government, is working on behalf of those who have chosen to make their home here, we can see significant improvements to our community through this diversification of funds.

I've often noted that a good leader doesn't need or expect to be the smartest in every room. A good leader brings together the best and brightest and is willing to listen and learn. This is a team effort and we have assembled an amazing group of individuals, paired with many of our very knowledgeable and dedicated employees who currently serve our neighbors. Welcoming a new team comprising our new Town Attorney, Town Engineer, Labor Counsel, Stormwater management consultant, Town Comptroller, and Personnel Assistant signifies our dedication to assembling a skilled workforce capable of addressing the town's needs effectively.

Each of these appointments, coupled with our long-dedicated employees, represents a strategic investment in the talent and expertise needed to address the challenges and opportunities facing the Town of Wappinger.

It is also important to note that we **put an end to the two-year long arbitration** between our CSEA members of the Highway Department and the Town government. Ensuring that we look out for the best interests of our employees and hold firm on contracts.

At this time, I'd like to recognize and thank our friends in labor, CSEA 1000 Town of Wappinger Highway Employees and Teamsters 445, as well as our non-union staff for your continued dedication and commitment to our community. I can understand and appreciate all that you do, and we will continue to navigate this journey together. We are undergoing the process of now **updating our Town's employee handbook, in house, now nearly 15 years old**, as well as pursuing contracts for department heads/confidential/and appointed employees. We have also started to standardize employee time and clean up several outstanding errors that will put both the Town and our employees in a better position for union negotiations next year.

In working to increase departmental efficiencies, we have now **streamlined the process in granting building permits** for all heating, cooling, and general HVAC work. When the heat goes down in your home, the last thing you should worry about is waiting weeks to obtain a permit for this essential work.

I am personally proud to note that we have **halted additional fines and fees** for 2024 under the previous administration's "permit amnesty" period, alleviating the financial burden on residents as we clean up open building permits. It is crucial that residents close out their permits, but it should not be a task that breaks the bank, and we acknowledge that.

We have taken significant steps in launching a “Quality-of-Life Taskforce”, through our Code Enforcement Office. Efforts will be focused on **removing illegal signs that clutter our roadways and street corners, addressing and subsequently removing abandoned unsafe buildings.** We need to focus on enhancing the aesthetics and safety of our town. Eliminating these eye sores further demonstrates our promise to **protect your property values.**

Parks and Recreation

On that note, in March, I issued my first Executive Order, demolishing an unsafe structure on Route 9D that the Town recently purchased, demonstrating our **swift action to remove these blighted and dangerous structures** around our community. The purchase of 2513 Route 9D marks **the first expansion of the Wappinger Town public parks system in nearly 25 years** following the purchase of Carnwath Farms Historic Site & Park.

The 1.75-acre property sits on the Village of Wappingers Falls incorporation line, just north of Middlebush Road. Following the demolition, that occurred just 24 hours after the Town announced the purchase of the site, the Town plans to include a new trailhead, parking area, children’s playground, extending the sidewalk along the roadway from the Village line, and overall offer an improved highly visible entrance to Reese Park from Route 9D.

The trailhead will be named in memory of former Town Supervisor Louis Diehl, whose family resided on and near the property for many years. The project, over a decade in the making, began when former Town Historian Brenda Von Burg, the daughter of former Supervisor Diehl approached the Town to recognize the legacy of her father, who served as Town Supervisor from 1967 to 1983.

This historic expansion of our parks system demonstrates our commitment to not only improve our infrastructure but also to expand what we offer our residents. The Louis Diehl Memorial Trailhead at Reese Park Town Nature Preserve will not only **expand recreational activities for Village and Hughsonville residents**, but also, provide an attractive point of access for those wishing to engage with nature and wildlife. I am excited to share this property with all in our community.

I would like to note that in collaboration with this expansion, we are moving full speed ahead with our **Wappinger Parkland Infrastructure Improvement Act**, announced earlier this year. Through streamlining efficiency by **implementing work orders** in our Buildings and Grounds Department to fully funding projects such as authorizing funding to **complete the (Challenger) Inspiration Field** and enhancing amenities like **light towers at the Martz Field tennis/pickleball courts**, activating the wellhead at Airport Park to **bring water to the soccer program for the first time in 30 years**, **paving Rockingham Park**, removing large overgrown dirt and debris piles in various parks, a **new racquetball wall** at Martz Field, and **funding the completion of the nearly decade long – unfinished Spook Hill Park** project; reflects our dedication to promoting recreational opportunities for all residents and proving our commitment to optimizing resources and improving service delivery.

We are actively checking items off our list and as we progress forward, exciting projects such as **rebuilding the Chelsea Boat Ramp** and **bringing a new live performance stage to Brexel-Schlathaus Park** will soon become a reality. I would like to thank the Town Board for their continued support and persistence in getting these projects accomplished.

Community Collaboration

“The future of every community lies in capturing the passion, imagination, and resources of its people.”

Central to our vision is the belief that an informed and engaged community is essential for meaningful progress. Through efficient, thought-out Town Board meetings and proactive outreach efforts, we are fostering stronger bonds between our neighbors and their local government. By listening to concerns, soliciting feedback, and prioritizing transparency, we are rebuilding trust and hopefully instilling confidence in the Town's leadership. I am proud to announce the many relationships we have developed throughout our 100 days together including strengthening our relationship with the Village of Wappingers Falls and Village Mayor Kevin Huber through this we are working collaboratively on various initiatives including **mirroring the Village's parking ordinance to the Town's** to alleviate fines and penalties on residents and visitors alike. Our two governments are partners in a truly beautiful space in the Village, and moving forward we will be working together to **utilize the Lower Wappinger Creek Boathouse for community use** and activities including a special artist exhibition featuring two local artists during the Festival at the Falls this Summer. I would also like to acknowledge the memory of famed musician, community member, and Wappingers Falls resident, **John Reagan**. Whose family has worked to offer an incredible line up of music this Summer at Mesier Park for the John Reagan Memorial Music in the Park series. We will never forget John and his impact on so many lives here in Wappinger.

We are proudly cultivating invaluable community partnerships with organizations like James' Warriors, dedicated to **mental health advocacy and suicide prevention**, and the Melanie Chianese Foundation, committed to **raising awareness of domestic violence**. Through these partnerships, we amplify our collective efforts to support and protect our residents. James' Warriors provides vital resources and support networks for those children and parents grappling with mental health challenges, offering hope and assistance to those in need. The Melanie Chianese Foundation honors the memory of a cherished community member by shedding light on the scourge of domestic violence, working tirelessly to educate and empower individuals to break free from abusive situations. I am proud to announce that the Town will be co-sponsoring events with both organizations at Brexel-Schlathaus Park this summer to raise awareness of their respective missions. In anticipation of our Town's 150th anniversary, we will strengthen our bond with the Wappinger Historical Society and our past. In offering new events and programs focused on our community's rich history. I thank Historical Society President, Beth Devine, for her continued dedication and stewardship over the course of her time with the Society. These partnerships exemplify the strength and compassion inherent in our community, as we unite to safeguard the well-being and safety of all our members. Mark your calendars for the beginning of June, as we are proud to work with the New Hackensack Fire Company to ensure that their 75th anniversary is one to remember with three days of concerts, a parade, a car show, and a full carnival.

We have also **resurrected our Town's Arts and Culture Committee**, made up of bright and vibrant individuals who, collectively, will work to bring live music performances, artist installations in public spaces, and innovative ideas to our community.

Our efforts to continue to grow our Recreation programs have been truly successful as we have created strong partners in the Hughsonville Fire Company, New Hackensack Fire Company, Ulster Savings, Tractor Supply, RPH Auto, JanCare, and Grinnell Library to sponsor various events and programs throughout the year, **saving taxpayers thousands of dollars**. I am especially proud to announce that our recent partnership with the Pines at Poughkeepsie, has resulted in **free monthly birthday parties to all seniors in our Senior Center**. We realize that our senior citizens are on fixed incomes and should not have to be concerned with paying for social activities and programs that keep them moving. These partnerships will ensure that our seniors will not have to worry about either attending a Town program or putting food on the table.

In continuing to beautify our community and public spaces, we have partnered with Aguado Landscaping to **“adopt” the new roundabout in New Hackensack**, at no cost to the Town, located at Route 376, New Hackensack Road, and All Angels Hill Road. This project has allowed for an improved flow of traffic and was beautifully designed. I remain proud to have worked with State representatives on this project during its development and I am excited that through this partnership, it will stay beautiful. We will continue to advocate to our representatives in State government to make much needed improvements to State owned infrastructure such as along Routes 9 and 9D.

We will continue to recognize and pay tribute to those in our community who have exemplified what it means to be Wappinger Proud. Through recognition ceremonies and receptions, we will show our Town’s appreciation and admiration for them, with hopes of developing a passion for community in our young people. Encouraging them to stay here in Wappinger and Dutchess County. We recently hosted a successful “once in a lifetime” Solar Eclipse Party that brought together hundreds of our neighbors of all ages at Wappinger Town Hall. Pop-up community events such as that will hopefully accomplish our goal of uniting families and invoking long-lasting memories of this Town.

Public Safety

Since taking office, we have seen quite a few extremes when it comes to weather events. Through regular meetings and communication with our Superintendent of Highways Michael J. Sheehan and our Highway Department, the Town of Wappinger is fortunate to have efficient strategic planning and response during winter storms. Demonstrating this government’s approach to ensuring public safety and efficient response to emergencies. In ensuring that our employees have a weather tight, presentable, and safe space to work, the Town underwent a project to renovate our Highway Department facility. Although well-intentioned, this project got out of control very quickly and this administration instituted cost-saving measures, such as utilizing in-house labor for finishing the Highway Garage project and allowing for the Highway Superintendent to be his own project manager. By refurbishing the exterior of the buildings, replacing 20,000sqft of roof, and building a safe breakroom, under this new model, **the Town saved over \$100,000.00** and exemplified our commitment to fiscal responsibility and prudent resource allocation. This year, the Wappinger Town Highway Department will **re-construct and pave over a dozen roads** in the Town, all of which are over 20 years old.

I would like to preface this topic by offering a special debt of gratitude to our Town’s first responders including the volunteers of the Chelsea, Hughsonville, and New Hackensack Fire companies, the

Wappingers Falls Fire Department, Dutchess County Sheriff's Office, New York State Police, and Empress– Town of Wappinger Ambulance, the Village of Wappingers Falls Police Department, and all dedicated to serving and protecting our families, friends, and neighbors twenty four hours a day, seven days a week.

We have all seen the increased traffic and the increased severity of accidents across our Town in the past few years. It is our responsibility to safeguard for the safety of our neighbors and those who navigate through the Town of Wappinger. Thanks to the support of the Town Board, we have launched our “**Safe Streets Initiative**” which has resulted in **new street lighting** at critical intersections as well as setting the groundwork for new digital speed signs throughout the Town. We have also passed legislation requesting the New York State Department of Transportation establish school zones on Myers Corners Road in front of Roy C. Ketcham Senior High School and Middlebush Road in front of Wappingers Falls Junior High School to elevate the presence of the safety of our children and pedestrians. Each Councilmember reported back the top priorities from their ward for these new safety measures that will be introduced soon. In working with Lt. Neil Stuart and the men and women of the Dutchess County Sheriff's Office, we have jumped right in to restructuring the Wappinger Patrol to offer **new cycled targeted patrols** in our neighborhoods enhance our public safety, curb speeders, and offer additional peace of mind for our residents.

We have also strengthened our relationship with the New York State Police, our partner and tenant at the Emergency Services Building. We are forever grateful to these men and women for their continued watch of our Town of Wappinger.

Emergency medical services and reliable ambulance care are a necessity. But also, it is more and more of a rarity across the nation. I am proud to report that the Town of Wappinger is in fact the **model for ambulance service in our region**. The Wappinger Ambulance District, a legislative act twenty years old this year, not only ensures that Town residents will not pay a dime for an ambulance ride, but it also provides dedicated units to our community for when you need it the most. We have secured Empress, our Ambulance provider, to not only stay in our Emergency Services Building, but also expand their footprint in this facility, and **offer additional units to be stationed here in Wappinger** – all providing a stronger EMS service for you, but also generating more rental revenue for the Town. This action ensures that our residents will continue to have top-notch coverage. Our intention is that through these added safety initiatives, we will see a safer community.

Our first 100 days in office have been marked by a steadfast commitment to progress and prosperity for our Town of Wappinger. Through collaboration, innovation, and dedication, we have initiated crucial projects, addressed pressing issues, and laid the groundwork for a brighter future. From infrastructure improvements to community engagement initiatives, every step taken has been guided by the shared goal of enhancing the quality of life for all our residents. As we reflect on our achievements thus far, let us remain resolute in our determination to build a Town that thrives on our commitment to doing what is in the best interest for you. Together, let us forge ahead with optimism, knowing that our best days lie ahead. I want to extend my gratitude to our team at Town Hall, my family, and friends, and especially the nearly 30,000 people who call Wappinger home for their continued support and trust. The state of our Town is strong and together, we will continue to

work tirelessly to make this Town a better place to live and thrive. We have a lot of work to do, and this journey is just beginning.

God bless you, God bless the Town of Wappinger, and may God bless these United States of America.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'JDC', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right and ending in two small dots.

Joseph D. Cavaccini

30th Town Supervisor of the Town of Wappinger