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**BROOME COUNTY LEGISLATURE  
REGULAR SESSION  
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2006**

The Legislature convened at 5:07 p.m. with a call to order by the Chair, Daniel A. Schofield. The Clerk, Louis P. Augostini, read the fire exit announcement and called the Attendance Roll, Present-13, Absent-6 (Schafer, Hull, Miller, Hutchings, Sanfilippo, Marinich).

The Chair, Mr. Schofield, led the members of the Legislature in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

**RESOLUTIONS INTRODUCED AT THIS SESSION**

**RESOLUTION NO. 113**

By Public Safety and Emergency Services Committee

Seconded by Mr. Shafer

**RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE OFFICE OF THE BROOME COUNTY SHERIFF TO ENTER INTO AN INTER-AGENCY AGREEMENT WITH THE CITY OF BINGHAMTON'S POLICE DEPARTMENT FOR THE SHARED MUNICIPAL SERVICES INCENTIVE PROGRAM GRANT FOR 2006-2008**

WHEREAS, the Broome County Sheriff wishes to enter into an inter-agency agreement with the Binghamton Police Department to participate in the Shared Municipal Services Incentive Program Grant for the Broome County Firearms Enforcement Program for the period April 1, 2006 through March 31, 2008, and

WHEREAS, said program Grant provides the funding for the Broome County Special Investigations Task Force to expand its efforts to reduce the level of illegal firearms in the County as part of its undercover narcotics program, and

WHEREAS, the City of Binghamton Police Department shall be the lead agency for the application of the Shared Municipal Services Incentive Program Grant in the amount of \$180,000 from the State of New York with the City's Police Department and the Office of the Broome County Sheriff equally sharing in the local match of \$20,000 for said Grant, now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that this County Legislature hereby authorizes an agreement between the Broome County Sheriff and the City of Binghamton's Police Department to participate in the Shared Municipal Services Incentive Program Grant for the Broome County Firearms Enforcement Program for the period April 1, 2006 through March 31, 2008, and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Office of the Sheriff and the City of Binghamton's Police Department will equally share the local match of \$20,000 for said Grant, and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, that the payment of \$10,000 hereinabove authorized for the Office of the Sheriff shall be made from budget line 996025.603000 Subsidiary Trust Account 525525029, and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, that the County Executive or her duly authorized representative is hereby empowered to execute any such agreements, documents, or papers, approved as to form by the Department of Law, as may be necessary to implement the intent and purpose of this Resolution.

**Carried**, Ayes-13, Nays-0, Absent-6 (Schafer, Hull, Miller, Hutchings, Sanfilippo, Marinich).

**WRITTEN OR ORAL PRESENTATIONS OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE:**

Chairman Schofield introduced County Executive Barbara J. Fiala presenting the State of the County Address for 2006.

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## 2006 STATE OF THE COUNTY

Good afternoon, Chairman Schofield, Lawmakers, Broome County employees, members of the media and special guests. Thank you for this opportunity to update you and the community on the State of Our County.

It is hard to believe it has been a year already since I delivered to this group my first State of the County address. It has been an active year, and I am eager to move forward on the projects we began in 2005.

Broome County is at a real crossroads. We are at a crucial time where decisions that are made now could mean the difference between our area becoming a dynamic community once again, or remaining a community that continues to struggle.

We are a stable county but we do have financial concerns. The good news is we are not facing a crisis like many communities in the Northeast. However, we are not experiencing a strong resurgence in our economy either.

I want to change that and become a community that can boast of turning things around and become a model for others to follow. We can do that, if we work together.

Broome County is in decent shape financially. We have a solid budget in place for this year. We do have concerns, however, like health care, Medicaid of course and energy costs.

We implemented a number of programs and initiatives last year to do a better job of controlling spending.

They include; stricter oversight on purchases, payroll, and travel, stricter oversight on Medicaid expenditures and a more focused approach to creating a structurally sound budget; one that is not dependent on gimmicks, one shot revenue streams or bloated appropriated fund balances.

On the issue of oversight, I want to update this body on the State Comptroller's report on Broome County's payroll operation.

I am told by the Comptroller's office that this report will be issued within the next few weeks. I look forward to the findings in this report and working with you on implementing the recommendations.

I would like to encourage lawmakers to push forward with your review of the administrative rules. As County Executive, I implemented measures to protect the county from another sick pay controversy; however, we still need legislative action to firm up these rules. I look forward to your recommendations.

In regards to the 2006 budget, I once again commend lawmakers on their foresight to continue to maintain the tax stabilization fund. This is the responsible thing to do. It is in the best interest of our taxpayers.

### **Medicaid**

Medicaid is a concern but our Medicaid situation is in much better shape than it was a few years ago, thanks to the state Medicaid cap. But I feel it is important to note that even with the cap in place our costs increased by \$1.7 million from 2004 to 2005 and they will continue to increase this year by approximately \$1.2 million dollars.

The cap has been a tremendous help in planning for the future but everyone needs to remember this does not make our Medicaid problem disappear. It is still quite a drain on our local resources, comprising about 11 percent of our overall budget or about \$34 million dollars a year.

That is why we need to work on continuing to reduce the Medicaid burden that exists for property taxpayers across New York State. This is not to say that those in need will be sacrificed or ignored. I absolutely do not believe that should happen.

However, the system and how it is administered by New York State is broken. It seems there is complete incompetence, fraud or both.

The New York Times reported last year that our Medicaid system which is quote-*the most expensive and most generous in the nation*-has been mis-spending billions as a result of fraud, waste and profiteering. This has got to be stopped.

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I strongly advocate an aggressive approach to cracking down on fraud. That is why I sought to have Broome County become one of the first counties in New York State to join the Verify New York Program.

This program will enable counties like Broome to flag inefficiencies and billing irregularities. The demonstration project makes counties partners in the effort to detect, investigate and prosecute Medicaid provider fraud.

By participating in this project, we are not assuming there is fraud on the local level, however, if we do nothing, we will never know and I would rather take steps to protect the taxpayers' dollars than simply hope there is not a problem.

This is not costing Broome County a dime and if any money is recovered as a result of fraud, we will share in those recovered funds.

I want to assure you that Broome County Security Department efforts, to investigate user fraud, will continue as well.

### **Shared Services**

The Press & Sun Bulletin recently reported that our area has one of the highest percentages of government related employees than any other community in New York State. They were talking about the number of school district, as well as federal, state & local government employees.

What they reported probably did not come as a surprise to anyone. I hear it everyday, "*Why can't we reduce the size of government?*"

I am here today to say we must do something about the size of government, sooner rather than later.

I started the Shared Services initiative because I strongly believe there has got to be a better way of providing services to our constituents and providing those services in a more cost efficient manner.

Less than one year later we are making progress but we need more people in leadership positions that recognize the need to reduce the size of government. One way of doing it is by sharing services and yes even consolidating governments.

Many dismiss the idea as not leading to real cost savings or have been critical of the lack of progress that has been made.

First of all this project has been going for less than a year. In just the past 10 months communication lines have been opened and people have been educated about the need for a more coordinated effort.

Secondly, Sharing Services initiatives have and will cut costs.

Broome County's inter-municipal agreement with the Village of Endicott which, allowed the county to handle the village's labor relations and negotiations, is a shining example.

In 2005, Broome County's personnel and law departments helped the Village settle all 7 contracts with its employees at a savings of approximately \$60-thousand dollars to village taxpayers. I want to recognize Mayor Pulse for having the foresight to work with the county on this effort.

Also as a result of my Shared Services initiative, the City of Binghamton, hopefully this year, will be transferring its entire tax collection operation over to Broome County's Real Property Tax Department.

I want to thank Mayor Ryan for supporting this initiative and seeing it through. This will save the city thousands of dollars and most assuredly bring in additional revenue to Broome County coffers.

We are also in the final stages of an agreement with the Town of Chenango, which will allow the town to use our fuel refilling station on Route 12. This will save the Town more than a half a million dollars! I want to recognize Legislator Jerry Marinich for the role he played in these talks.

In addition, we are exploring ways for all of us to save on skyrocketing insurance costs. The search has led us to explore the possibility of joining a health care consortium.

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There are still a lot of questions to be answered. The group has to decide if we can join in the first place. We have to decide if this really makes sense for us. And the municipalities have to decide if they would benefit from joining as well.

But these are the kinds of conversations that need to be taking place. We need to look at everything to determine where we can share a service, consolidate, contain costs and even reduce costs.

The Sharing Services initiative has also gotten us talking with the City, Towns and Villages about our highway operations and our parks systems.

However, this does not have to be all that is discussed. There are so many more opportunities for sharing services and consolidation and I hope to keep pressing forward and making progress on a number of fronts. There is planning, payroll, personnel, police, fire, libraries and much more left to explore.

This cannot be a one-way street. We need all of the communities committed to reducing the size of local government in Broome County. Without their commitment this cannot work.

### **Economic Development Efforts**

Economic development must remain a major priority this year. We have laid a strong foundation in 2005, and I plan to keep those ideas and initiatives progressing.

Residents of Broome County and our media have often debated publicly whether County government should be involved in the business of economic development. I think the focus of that debate is misplaced.

As elected leaders we **are** involved in economic development. The focus of the debate should be on the extent of our involvement.

I would like to outline my philosophy. Broome County needs economic growth. County government can help achieve that goal by doing the following:

County government can **facilitate** economic growth. We can actually assist existing businesses, developers and entrepreneurs.

We can act as a **coordinator** of economic development. In other words we can try to get all of the various groups working together. We need to make things easier for our employers.

We can actually **promote** economic growth by protecting and enhancing our infrastructure. When available, we can also use incentives and grants to help employers.

When appropriate, we can also act as a **developer** in the delivery of certain types of services. This is especially true for recreational and entertainment services like those delivered at the Arena, Forum, En Joie and Grippen Park.

I truly believe that County Government has an obligation to act as a **facilitator, coordinator, promoter and developer** of economic growth. As long as we act responsibly with our goal of spurring economic growth in mind, we will have success. We will improve our quality of life, attract employers and do our part to stimulate economic growth.

As a **facilitator** of local economic development efforts we need to do more to develop programs and incentives designed to create, grow and retain jobs.

One method is to give small and emerging businesses a helping hand when starting out. The technology and products these small companies are creating could lead them to be the next IBM or Link Simulation companies of the future. We need to help them get started.

Today I am pleased to report that through the assistance of Senator Clinton's office, we have received a \$250-thousand dollar federal grant to create an incubator facility for these new and emerging businesses.

This money will help refurbish a building in the Broome Corporate Park. We anticipate housing at least 4 businesses that need development and manufacturing space.

This initiative is a perfect example of Broome County **facilitating** economic development. We are excited about the prospects and we are thankful to Senator Clinton for her help with this project. Work will begin immediately.

During the last year we met with various groups and individuals involved in spurring economic growth and a few things emerged as main priorities.

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Local companies need venture capital. We **facilitated**, along with one of our partners, the Southern Tier Opportunities Coalition, by creating a process for local companies to seek venture capital. This had never been done before.

Local companies need a trained workforce. We **facilitated** by reorganizing the Workforce Investment Board and bringing it into New York State compliance, which it had not been under the previous administration. The board is streamlined and re-energized.

This community needs a one point of contact for all economic development efforts. To help **coordinate** this effort we are working with Senator Schumer's office to secure \$270-thousand dollars to study this one point of contact project.

We are **coordinating** a one point of contact economic development web site that is about to become reality.

We are **coordinating** an update of our own go-Broome-County web site to make it a more effective marketing tool.

With help from our economic development partners, we have **coordinated** the creation of a Rapid Response Team to go after opportunities. This has received enthusiastic response from business and community leaders.

We would like to work closely with Binghamton University, helping them transition any research and technology advances to the market.

We have also developed a relationship with Cornell University and its Cornell Center for Technology, Enterprise and Commercialization for the same purpose.

Another one of our goals is to include the entire Greater Binghamton region and beyond in economic development efforts. We need everyone working together for the same goals.

If one thing taught me a lesson this past year it is that regional successes can be successes for all of us.

Lockheed Martin's ability to secure the Marine One helicopter contract has meant tremendous things for Broome County. We cannot be so narrowly focused with our own efforts. What is good for one sector of the region is good for the entire region.

To that end we are meeting with and talking with other counties in our region to see how we can partner on economic development efforts.

Also in the last year, we have provided advice and counsel to the Greater Binghamton Coalition and its Executive Director Jim DiMascio. We have worked with the G-B-C on its "One Point of Contact" initiative.

It includes an excellent marketing plan for Greater Binghamton and a Capital Improvements plan that focuses on brownfield redevelopment.

Its basic theme is that this community must find a sustainable revenue stream for infrastructure improvements and other large-scale projects.

In 2005, with legislative support, we also secured an economic development planner, whose job it is, to aggressively go after any and all grants. In 2005 we secured nearly a million dollars in grants and appropriations. In 2006 we are going after \$1.7 million dollars.

Broome County can also **promote** economic growth. We can accept the responsibility of creating and nurturing a positive quality of life for the people who live here.

Employers need to realize that Broome County is a great place for their employees to live, to work and to raise families.

That means we must help revitalize the County's urban core in downtown Binghamton; we must protect our infrastructure, parks and recreational opportunities and we must protect our older citizens.

We are working on several capital projects, which will promote economic growth and move this community forward.

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## **Capital Projects and Economic Development**

### **George Harvey Justice Building**

I still strongly believe in the need to rebuild the George Harvey Justice Building. We must move forward with plans to use the tobacco money for this project. It needs to be done before the building falls apart and then we have a different and more expensive problem on our hands.

We have an opportunity to save the taxpayers a half a million dollars a year in rent. We have the opportunity to centralize all of our court functions once again. We have the opportunity to provide a safe and secure environment for our employees. We have the opportunity to promote additional private investment in the City. And we have the opportunity to save an historic structure.

We must make a decision soon. Delaying a final decision will open the County to financial penalties that could be severe.

We must act now.

### **The Intermodal**

Another project that is moving forward this year is the Intermodal in Downtown Binghamton. If we stay on track, we should break ground for this transportation center this fall.

This is a wonderful project that Congressman Maurice Hinchey laid at our doorstep. It lay dormant until this administration took over. This was one of the first projects my administration aggressively pursued.

I want to thank Congressman Hinchey for helping with the funding for this project and for being patient.

This transportation hub is not only going to improve the operations for several transportation agencies, including our own BC Transit, it is going to improve a section of Downtown Binghamton that is in need of a little boost.

### **New Nursing Home**

Plans for a new nursing home will move forward as well in Broome County in 2006. I want to thank Senator Libous for helping to facilitate our using land at the Greater Binghamton Health Center. This project would not have been able to move forward in a timely manner without the use of this property.

Many have asked me why I support a new nursing home. I have been challenged by other nursing home providers to rethink why Broome County should be in the nursing home business at all.

I strongly support a County run nursing home. I feel it is the only way to guarantee that those in need will be taken care of when they finally realize they need a little help.

I do not want any members of our older generation that lived here their whole lives, to have to move to another community for nursing home care because they are a Medicaid patient.

I dealt with this issue with my mother in law. She spent 5 years at Willow Point. If Willow Point had not been available, we would have had to send my mother in law to another community where we could not have visited on a regular basis. We could not have done that and I do not want any family to ever face that decision.

My mother in law is no longer with us but I can have peace of mind knowing that she lived her last years, living near family and receiving the best care possible.

My personal feelings certainly drive my beliefs on this topic but a new nursing home also makes fiscal sense. This is yet another project that will save taxpayer dollars.

A new nursing home will lead to a rebasing of our Medicaid reimbursement rates. Right now we are losing money on the nursing home operation.

We can stop those losses and actually get reimbursed what we are owed by building new. I look forward to working with our State lawmakers our local legislators and our community leaders on moving this project forward.

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The state's "right sizing committee" will have quite a bit of input on our future plans. We plan to work closely with them to make sure our community is able to provide the best possible care for all of its residents no matter what their income level.

We intend to pursue our obligations as a **promoter** diligently. We will continue to protect our infrastructure and we will push these capital projects aggressively. In turn our promotional activities will enhance Broome County's quality of life.

Local governments, including Broome County, can also enhance quality of life and economic growth by developing and delivering certain services, primarily entertainment and recreation.

Broome County already owns and manages the Forum and the Veterans Memorial Arena. We are working on ways to increase activities and revenues at both venues. We are also involved in the delivery of various recreational services to our residents.

Broome County must help deliver these services.

#### **En-Joie**

En-Joie Golf Course, in my opinion, is an example of both prudent economic development and consolidation.

We have two highly qualified gentlemen in place to operate the golf course. We feel very good about their ability to manage this course and to make money for both Broome County and the Village of Endicott. Both of these gentlemen are with us today.

Michael Deuel comes to En Joie from the Binghamton Country Club. He has great ideas about the En Joie operation and how to market it and make it a positive for all in Broome County.

Andrew Cain is a highly qualified agronomist who comes to us from the Mark Twain Golf Course in Elmira Heights. Andrew is looking forward to getting the course in shape for all golfers, all season long.

Both men are up to the challenge and we look forward to the improvements and enthusiasm they will bring to the course and the entire operation.

Thank you gentlemen for coming today and thank you for leading our efforts at En Joie.

I wanted to take a moment to thank Public Works Commissioner Henry Weissmann for his work on putting this team together and a special thank you to members of the En Joie Advisory Board who have provided us their time, talent and expertise. We truly appreciate their efforts.

I also wanted to thank the Legislators who saw through the controversy to the opportunity that was before us. I strongly believe we made a difference in the eyes of the PGA. I believe our actions went a long way in influencing the PGA in terms of giving us a second look at playing host to a Champion's Tour.

We are anxiously waiting to hear if En Joie will be a stop on the Champions Tour but in the meantime our focus must be on this year's golf season and this year's B.C. Open.

#### **Grippen Park**

There has also been quite a bit of discussion about the future of Grippen Park. As you all know, the facility was heavily damaged in last year's flooding and we did have an environmental problem as a result.

I am pleased to report that the environmental issues at Grippen are being addressed and every lab test has indicated the water is safe.

I am also pleased to report that we are moving forward aggressively to get that ice rink operational again.

From all reports to my office and from what I hear in the community, there is a tremendous demand for ice time for all of our ice skating enthusiasts.

This is a quality of life issue for me.

During 2005 we made good progress in the area of economic development. Broome County initiated steps to **facilitate, coordinate, promote** and **develop** economic growth.

We need to build on this foundation. There is a lot to do and this is only the beginning. We have a good plan and the right people. I am confident we can move forward with a lot of success.

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### **Greater Binghamton Airport**

Our Greater Binghamton Airport is undergoing some major improvements.

Some bright spots at the Airport include the soon to be finished runway rehabilitation project, a new visitor center at the airport and a return of the Greater Binghamton Air Show this summer.

The visitor center is operating and providing handouts and information about the area and what we have to offer. This is a long overdue marketing tool and we are excited to be able to make this happen.

And the Air Show will be part of our Bicentennial Celebration and it promises to bring aviation sights never before seen in Greater Binghamton.

Carl Beardsley has been overseeing operations at the Airport since mid-year last year. Carl is doing a terrific job and he is working aggressively to market our airport to the people of this community and to market our strengths to the airlines.

On a nationwide basis, 2005 was a difficult year for the aviation industry as a whole with multiple Chapter 11 bankruptcy filings and significant downsizing of some major airlines. I am proud to say that the Airport endured this difficult year and is working toward a more prosperous 2006.

We hope to have more announcements about improvements at the airport in the months to come.

### **Challenges; Health Insurance & Energy Costs**

As I mentioned at the beginning of this address we do have challenges before us. First and foremost, skyrocketing health care costs. Last year I commissioned our Risk Manager Bob Murphy to investigate and create a list of options for the County to review. We will be taking his recommendations and looking for ways to reduce our costs.

I also look forward to the recommendations coming from the Chairman's task force on health care. We all understand we cannot continue on this track. Our employees cannot afford it. Our property taxpayers cannot afford it.

We need to be creative and we need to be aggressive with our health care options.

Our energy costs are also creating challenges for us. I did make the decision at the beginning of our winter season to reduce the temperature in all county buildings to 68 degrees. It had to be done.

We may not have reduced our energy costs by dropping the temperature but we definitely kept our costs from skyrocketing even further. The mild winter helped us but I am afraid this is something we are all going to have to get used to every winter season.

Because of the fuel price increases our transportation costs have risen dramatically. This is going to continue to put pressure on the county budget. We are looking at ways to contain these costs. We are reviewing the work schedules of our public works employees and reviewing the BC Transit operation, including the routes and fares.

There are not going to be any easy answers. This is about cutting back where possible, becoming more efficient and still trying to maintain quality services.

We must turn to alternative energy sources when possible.

That is why we are part of a larger group, looking into purchasing hybrid buses for our BC Transit operation. Maybe even some of our public works vehicles can become hybrids as well.

We must explore all options.

### **Broome County's Bicentennial**

I would like to finish this State of our County with news on our Bicentennial Celebration. I am excited about the schedule we have put together to mark our community's 200<sup>th</sup> birthday. We have several events coming up soon and I would like to see people from across Broome County participate.

The entire schedule and any updates will be on our own go-Broome-County web site.



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As I mentioned at the start of my address, Broome County is at a crossroads. I believe this Bicentennial can be viewed not only as a major milestone but a rebirth for our community as well.

We have had 200 years of a rich history. Our community began with a small group of people trying to eke out an existence at the confluence of the Chenango and Susquehanna Rivers.

We grew into a mighty industrial power with the help of companies like IBM and Endicott Johnson. They laid a strong foundation. They set the course for this area to be known for its opportunities and its innovative people.

Let's take these first two hundred years and let's begin to build on the foundation that has been laid by the generations before us. Let's leave this crossroads behind and start making good decisions that will take our community on the right path to economic vitality once again.

We can do it if we work together. I am excited about working with all of you this year to move Broome County forward.

My hope is that when those who celebrate our Tri-Centennial look back on this time, they will say this moment in history was a real positive turning point for Broome County's future.

Mr. Mather made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Shafer. **Motion to adjourn carried**, Ayes-13, Nays-0, Absent-6 (Schafer, Hull, Miller, Hutchings, Sanfilippo, Marinich). The meeting was adjourned at 5:47 p.m.

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