



YVETTE M. AGUIAR
Town Supervisor

TOWN OF RIVERHEAD Tel: (631) 727-3200 / Fax: (631) 727-6712
200 Howell Avenue, Riverhead, NY 11901 www.townofriverheadny.gov

Town of Riverhead 2022 State of the Town Address

Envisioning the Future

Good evening. I want to thank you for attending the Riverhead 2022 State of the Town address. I am grateful Riverhead's Tri-club re-established their long-term tradition of delivering the State of the Town before the members of the Riverhead Rotary, the Riverhead Lions, the Riverhead Kiwanis clubs, and members of the community. Thank you for working collaboratively and for your service to our community. The theme of this State of the Town is: "Envisioning the Future."

After a difficult campaign last year, it was humbling and gratifying to be overwhelmingly re-elected for another term as your Town Supervisor. It is exciting to be provided with the opportunity to address many of Riverhead's leading voices and discuss the future of our great Town as we rebound from the pandemic. I am here to share with you unequivocally, Riverhead's future is bright and full of promise.

I am committed to continue working with our Town Board, town employees and most importantly - the public - to ensure all of Riverhead's potential is realized, with a balance.

Today, I will provide you with the State of our Town, and highlight where we were, and where we are going, united as a Town. I will also highlight some of the accomplishments we have achieved.

I want to thank the Town Board, Councilman Tim Hubbard, Councilman Frank Beyrodt, Councilman Ken Rothwell, Councilman Bob Kern, all of our Town Officials, Chief Hegermiller and our Police Department, our Department Heads and our talented staff, who have all been dedicated to our mutual goal of making Riverhead a better place to live, work and play. We have accomplished great things. Success is about bringing the right people, at the right time, to the right place.

On Finances:

In October, the Town Board adopted the first budget in more than 20 years, which did NOT increase property taxes. In fact, the Town Board's sound fiscal planning resulted in a reduction of taxes in the Highway Department, while keeping taxes in the General and Street Lighting Funds at the same level as 2021.

Moody's Investor Services provided another sign of Riverhead's fiscal strength and stability, when they increased our bond rating from Aa3 to Aa2.

Obligations rated Aa2 are judged to be of high quality and are subject to very low credit risk. This is the first time Moody's has upgraded the Town of Riverhead's bond rating since January 2008.

As Chief Financial Officer, I have stated in the past, my administration will continue to take a proactive approach, in all budgetary matters, and I am proud of the accomplishments achieved to protect our taxpayers.

On Police:

The Town of Riverhead hired 19 police officers in 2021, mostly due to attrition, and we intend to increase the number of police officers every year. We are waiting additional funds from the State in the very near future, which will be utilized to increase our police force. Public safety is without a doubt one of the top concerns of this administration.

Also, in 2021 we activated the Riverhead Town Law Enforcement Advisory Panel (Riverhead LEAP) to work collaboratively with the entire community to examine current policies and procedures of the Police Department and its relationship with the people they serve. LEAP was formed in October 2020 and included, various committees, the clergy, business owners, and community groups. The goal was to obtain input from the entire community and to create a consensus on the future of policing in our town.

Furthermore, In 2022, we initiated funding to equip our Police Officers with body cameras.

On Code Enforcement:

A priority of my administration is to focus on code enforcement to protect the safety of taxpayers through aggressive code enforcement. We recently hired an additional Spanish speaking officer to assist with rental housing inspections and code complaint investigations. Code enforcement issued a total of 1,191 violations and enhanced referrals between Code Enforcement and the Police Department. Some efforts were hampered by State and Federal moratoriums under the pandemic. However, our professional Code Enforcement staff is dedicated to the safety and well-being of our residents.

On Water:

The Town commenced on the long overdue painting and rehabilitating of the Northville and Route 58 water storage tanks at a cost of \$5 million. In addition, a Map and Plan for a new Wading River underground water storage tank is in process.

We continue to take measures to protect and maintain our water infrastructure. We as a Town, are committed and invested funds to protect our residents in Manorville, some of whom are threatened with contaminated water containing high levels of PFOS and PFOA.

These residents deserve clean and safe water. We were recently awarded \$3.5 million in federal funds, thanks to our Senators and Congressman.

We are working on obtaining additional funding and have agreed to work with the Suffolk County Water Authority (SCWA) to bring clean drinking water to those residents.

Finally, and most recently, Riverhead is moving forward to ensure future developers commit to investing in our Water Infrastructure improvements, lessening the tax burden on our residents. We will continue to make the necessary investments to improve our water quality and supply capabilities.

On Sewer:

The completion of the Calverton Sewer District Treatment Plant upgrade took place in 2021. The \$10.5 million upgrade, was possible due to \$7 million of grant funding, which defrayed construction costs. In addition, to significant environmental benefits, the improvements will result in a 4 to 1 reduction in biosolid waste and a cost savings of \$27 million over the next 30 years. Design, permitting and bidding will be completed next year.

On Economic Development:

Just over a year ago, the Town purchased three blighted properties on East Main Street, opposite the Suffolk Theater. In October 2021, two of the blighted buildings were demolished to make way for the future Riverhead Town Square on our riverfront.

This bold action resulted in the state awarding a \$10 million grant to revitalize our downtown. From the town's perspective, two of the most important projects slated to substantially impact the future of downtown are: First, the Riverhead Town Square and second, the Transit Oriented Development project. These two projects will require significant public - private partnerships in order to be successful.

Downtown Riverhead is truly in the midst of a transformative and reimagining stage. Just a few months ago, following a lengthy public engagement process, the Town Board selected a master developer for our Town Square. The developer has demonstrated over 25 years, a commitment to downtown, as the visionary of the Long Island Aquarium, the Hyatt and the Preston House. We are excited to continue this mutually beneficial relationship to revitalize our downtown.

Similarly, after an RFQ issued in 2021, this past February, the Town Board selected master developers to lead our Transit Oriented Development (TOD) project at the train station area. This is presently the most blighted area in downtown. This project will vastly increase public transportation options for our residents to live, work and play in downtown Riverhead and beyond. We expect to have shovels in the ground in less than a year.

I want to extend my utmost gratitude to the TOD Committee, who put forth a tremendous amount of effort to inform the Town Board of the potential and impressive proposal.

The Town Board and I look forward to starting the qualified and eligible hearing process on both of these projects, which will include further opportunities for public engagement. I will work hard to encourage development is completed in an expeditious manner, in order for residents to benefit from a revitalized downtown, as quickly as possible.

On EPCAL:

The Town Board took another bold step this year towards the advancement of the sale of Calverton Enterprise Park by agreeing to file application with Calverton Aviation Technology (CAT) to the Riverhead Industrial Development Agency (IDA). This action will expedite the sale of the EPCAL property and ensure the 1,000 environmentally sensitive acres will remain protected forever.

This landmark action by this Town Board allows the sale to advance prior to the completion of a subdivision. The transfer of title to the IDA will allow much greater local control of the redevelopment process and require CAT to take continuous and immediate action to ensure its financial commitment to expend at least \$1 million in infrastructure improvements to the runways on the property within the first two years.

This development will generate millions of dollars within the town, school district, ambulance and fire districts. Perhaps, most importantly, it will create thousands of quality jobs for the eastern Suffolk County region, and once again allow the site to reclaim its place as one of Long Island's key economic development generators.

It is my intention to recommend to the Town Board to utilize \$10 million for property tax relief and lower our property taxes for our residents, along with further increasing our Police Department personnel.

On Planning:

The department now has three full-time planners, for the first time in 10 years. New this year is the inclusion of new site plans availability on our Town website. The Town is proceeding with the preparation of the Comprehensive Plan update and vetting a new company to complete the process.

On Seniors:

Over the last two years, the Town of Riverhead upgraded its fleet of vehicles used to provide essential services and meals on wheels. Funds from federal CDBG COVID CARES and New York State Department of Transportation were used to purchase two, fourteen-passenger vans valued at \$135,000 with the Town's share being \$27,000 and the state portion \$108,000.

Over the last two years, the Riverhead Senior Center served just under 100,000 meals to our senior residents. The total includes meals prepared for our meals on wheels program for the homebound, and meals served at the senior center.

The Senior Center continues to provide daily transportation for medical appointments and weekly shopping trips.

In addition, the Residential Repair program serviced nearly 500 seniors during the last two years.

On Engineering:

The Engineering Department oversaw the renovation of the Riverhead Ambulance Barn driveway replacement. Additionally, the department conducted site plan reviews and inspections for the Planning Department, saving approximately \$120,000 annually, compared to the hiring an outside consultant.

On Open Space & Farmland

In late, 2020, the Town, with the Open Space Committee, Farmland Committee, and Peconic Land Trust, completed its update to the Comprehensive Preservation Plan.

Further, the County Legislature preserved a 93-acre waterfront parcel off Sound Avenue in January of 2021, and in April 2022, they preserved another 96-acres on Route 25 in Wading River.

Most recently, the Peconic Land Trust successfully preserved Broad Cove, a 100-acre former duck farm located in Aquebogue and a vital part of the Peconic Estuary.

In addition, the Town provided letters of support to the Peconic Land Trust for the preservation of three properties known as the Wading River Farmland Initiative.

We will continue to strengthen preservation efforts with the update to the Master Plan and revising the Transfer of Development Rights program.

On Parks and Recreation:

Last month, our Little League Baseball Team began playing night baseball games under newly installed lights at Stotzky park. New little league batting cages and a scoreboard were also installed.

The Town has utilized \$10,000 in CDBG funds to make extensive improvements to the Honor Garden at the George Young Community Center in Jamesport. The community center was enhanced with walkways and a gazebo. This beautiful space pays homage to Riverhead's heroic veterans.

Our talented Buildings and Grounds staff built new beach attendant booths for all town beaches. They also undertook other recreational upgrades, including repainting parks areas and beach restrooms.

The Recreation Department has made significant improvements to its services for residents at its beaches and parks including the implementation of an online beach-sticker program, wifi at all beaches, new beach booths at all entrances, new playgrounds at the George Young Community Center, Bayberry Park and Iron Pier Beach, newly resurfaced multi-purpose pickleball and tennis courts at South Jamesport, resurfaced basketball and tennis courts at Bayberry Park, new pickleball courts at Veterans Memorial Park and the addition of water at both dog parks.

The Island Water Park, 22 years in the making, a 43-acre year-round project in Calverton, will host various family attractions, with simulators, the world's largest floating aquapark, kayaking, paddleboarding, an indoor surf pool, among other family activities. The park is scheduled to open this Fall.

Further, the entire community is extremely excited, to move forward with the prospect of bringing ice hockey to Riverhead. We are working with the Peconic Ice Hockey Foundation to create a Memorandum of Agreement to move this prospect forward. Once we reach an agreement, we anticipate Ice Hockey here in Riverhead late this Summer.

On Drag Racing:

Riverhead's residents enthusiastically welcomed drag racing back to Long Island last year, after the Riverhead Town Board approved a series of drag races on one of the EPCAL runways. The family friendly events attracted over 1,500 people at each event, many who supported our local economy. Drag racing is back again this year with a completed Spring series, and upcoming Summer and Fall series.

In Conclusion:

Diligent work and planning efforts have created an exciting new chapter in our Town. We are most certainly in the midst of revitalizing our Town

I am excited about the prospects of Riverhead's future, and I am committed to working tirelessly, to make our mutual goals a reality. Our residents deserve nothing less.

Please know, I and the entire Riverhead Town Board are committed to seeing a fully revitalized downtown and to improving the quality of life for residents and visitors. In addition, we will focus our efforts to ensure all our businesses districts and most importantly our residents continue to thrive, flourish, and prosper.

Again, I want to personally thank our Town Board, our Town officials, our Police and Fire Departments, our Department Heads, and all our dedicated town staff, along with our committee members, volunteers, as well as each and every resident who cares about our great town. Without you, none of these accomplishments would have been possible.

We are proud of the spirit and resilience of our community. Thank you all for being here today. God Bless Riverhead, and God Bless America.