



Office of the Town Supervisor

The Honorable William W. Moehle

State of the Town of Brighton

February 28, 2024

By Supervisor William W. Moehle

Thank you for joining us tonight for the Community State of the Town message for 2024. This is my 13th State of the Town message and I am proud to return to update our residents and stakeholders again this year.

As we do regularly at significant events and gatherings here, I first acknowledge that the Town of Brighton is situated on the ancestral and traditional lands of the Onödowá'ga tribe of the Haudenosaunee confederacy--whom we recognize and respect as the traditional custodians of this land throughout the generations. We pay our respect to Onödowá'ga elders both past and present. The history, culture and traditions of the Onödowá'ga are truly worthy of our understanding and study and we praise those who keep those traditions alive. We recognize that the study and understanding of the Onödowá'ga history, culture and traditions is of ongoing importance if we are to truly understand the history, the culture and the traditions of our community and our nation. We support efforts to ensure that we and future generations continue to respect and recognize the Onödowá'ga in a way that is honest and truthful so that in the words of Sagoyewatha, the great Haudenosaunee chief and orator, also known as Red Jacket, we may always work together to brighten the chain of friendship.

Recently, as I was walking on the Brickyard Trail, I ran into an old friend and neighbor, Cary Jensen, walking towards me on the Trail. We stopped and talked. He told me that he had been out of the country for three years, doing missionary work for his church. Now that he is back, he is working for a refugee group from Buffalo. As we talked, we discussed some of the changes in Brighton since he had left, in particular the changes to Elmwood Ave., to calm traffic and create bike lanes. Cary, like so many others that have talked with me about these changes, was happy to see them. We also talked about the upcoming total solar eclipse on April 8. I told him that we would be holding our community eclipse event in Buckland Park, that we anticipated a large crowd of people with music and food trucks and family fun activities for all, and I asked him who I needed to talk with to see if we could use his Church's parking lot on Westfall Rd. for overflow parking that day. I learned through that conversation that since his return to town, he has served as the community outreach representative for the Church, and with his help, and with a little bit of paperwork we still have to fill out, they have agreed to help with parking

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on April 8 for the Eclipse. Thank you, Cary, and thank you to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints on Westfall Rd.

These are the connections that make Brighton special. Brighton is a town with beautiful and diverse, inclusive neighborhoods. Brighton is a town with family businesses, businesses that are unique and that make Brighton a destination for shoppers looking for something different than what they can find at the mall. Brighton has over 500 acres of town parks and miles of trails. Corbett's Glen is a gem and apropos of my story about Cary Jensen, the Brickyard Trail has proven again and again the truth of one of my favorite sayings; that Trails connect more than just places; they connect people. Brighton is all of those things but more than anything else, Brighton is a community of people, living together, working together, bridging different faiths, different backgrounds and different life experiences connecting as neighbors to make Brighton a very special hometown.

Tonight's State of the Town address is an opportunity to reflect on some of our collective accomplishments over the past year. They are significant and they lay the groundwork for our future aspirations for Brighton. Brighton is the most diverse town in Monroe County, and probably one of the most diverse in the state. That is a great attraction for our community; people come to Brighton because of our diversity to avoid the isolation that can occur in so many other communities, when your daughter might be the only child in school wearing a hijab or your son might be the only one with two mommies. Brighton is different. Our diverse population makes it all the more important that we work together as a community to recognize and respect our differences without undermining what makes us strong or unnecessarily putting people, particularly children, at risk. I want to echo the words of BCSD Superintendent Dr. Kevin McGowan when he wrote to families in Brighton this past weekend. "Kids have a lot on their plates. Please help." Dr. McGowan's words, and my words tonight seek to reinforce how important it is that we as a community can continue to engage with each other thoughtfully and peacefully, reflecting our diversity of thought but just as importantly, our shared commitment to a safe and progressive community. In recent days, a number of community members have reached out to me about three demonstrations that were held about two weeks ago in the Twelve Corners Park, two of which were held during school dismissal periods. We have all heard friends and neighbors speak of the difficult times we live in; maybe we have said so ourselves. We may have differences of opinion as to the cause of the challenges we face today, but I am certain we also recognize that the stresses of daily life can particularly affect children.

The Brighton Central School District has long collaborated with the Town and with the Brighton Police Department to protect the safety of our children, and we continue to do so every day even as new concerns emerge. The Brighton Police Department was on the scene as those demonstrations took place in the Twelve Corners Park, and in my opinion, they handled a difficult situation very effectively. Thank you to Chief Catholdi and to your officers. Unfortunately, on two occasions, people from outside the Brighton community chose to go beyond protected speech and engage in physical altercations. The altercations were quickly controlled by the police and arrests were made, because the police were already on the scene, but these incidents serve as a reminder that physical acts of confrontation are never acceptable.

At the same time, we cherish our Constitutional right of free speech, along with our other Constitutional rights and freedoms as Americans. We cannot and we will not adopt policies that will ban or unreasonably restrict free speech or gatherings from our public places, or seek to preemptively prosecute people based on perceived identity. We have the right to express ourselves, but as adults we can and we should serve as role models for our children and we should consider whether the times or venues we choose to express our free speech will put our children or our neighbors' children at risk or cause them discomfort needlessly. We must show our children by our own conduct that threats or actual physical violence are never acceptable, and that name calling or bullying don't belong on the playground, much less on the streets, parks and meeting rooms of Brighton.

I believe that these goals of public safety and free speech are not mutually exclusive. Moving forward, I urge all members of our community to consider the impacts of our words and deeds not just on our children but on the diverse mosaic that we have built and that we celebrate here in Brighton.

I think we sometimes forget what a unique community Brighton is and how that serves as a draw for people who are looking for a diverse community where education and sustainability are not just words but our reality; our shared core values. Through it all, tonight, together, we can be proud to live in Brighton and proud of our many accomplishments from the past year. Tonight, I will lay out some of those accomplishments, and share my vision of Brighton's future, understanding that we will face challenges. Meeting those challenges will take hard work and will require collaboration at all levels. I know that we are up to the test and that our shared commitment to Brighton as a diverse, welcoming, safe and sustainable community will serve us well on the good days and the challenging ones.

Perhaps the most notable physical accomplishment of the past year was the opening in November of the Brighton Winter Farmers Market facility on Westfall Rd. in Buckland Park. The project consisted of the renovation of an existing barn on the site and the construction of a new connected addition to that barn. The project would not have been possible without the financial support of NYS, starting with an initial grant from former Assembly Majority Leader, now Member of Congress, Joe Morelle followed by additional grants from our current legislators, Senator Jeremy Cooney and Assemblymember Sarah Clark. We have now moved the Winter Market from a tiny gymnasium at the former Brookside School, to its new home, in a highly visible location that has its own historic agricultural heritage. The Winter Farmers Market building was recognized with an award from the Genesee Valley Branch of the American Public Works Association and nominated for statewide recognition by the APWA. The Market will return to Brighton High School for the summer Market season, on April 21, and it will remain outdoors at the High School until Thanksgiving for our 17th Market season, under the leadership of our extraordinary Market Manager Sue Gardner Smith.

Another important recently completed Town building project was retrofitting our first net zero Town public building, the Town Park lodge in the Town Park on Westfall Rd. Net zero means a facility has no carbon emissions, and we have taken advantage of grant funds to install a new heat pump-based HVAC system in the lodge and add solar panels on the roof. We expect to make similar installations at other park facilities in the not-too-distant future, all with a goal of dramatically reducing carbon emissions,

consistent with our Brighton Climate Action Plan and the NYS Climate Leadership and Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act. We also completed the update of the Town Climate Action Plan in 2023. That Plan serves as a roadmap for future reductions in emissions, not only from Town operations but also reductions in emissions throughout Brighton. Completion of that Plan also helps qualify us for future sustainability grants. We continued our purchases of electric and hybrid vehicles in 2023, and as the supply chain issues in the auto industry are alleviated, you will see more and more of these vehicles here in our operations and more EV charging stations, thanks again to a State grant that we just received this week. These and many other actions demonstrate that Brighton is a statewide leader in sustainability, having been recognized as a Bronze Certified Climate Smart Community and a Clean Energy Community by NYSERDA. These programs recognize our accomplishments and serve as vehicles for procuring grant funds to support additional sustainability efforts in Brighton. Thanks to our Sustainability Oversight Committee and our Planning staff who have led the way in going green in Brighton.

Of course, the Whole Foods Market and the Whole Foods Plaza opened in 2023, after years of frivolous litigation that cost the community millions of dollars, and believe it or not, the same people that opposed Whole Foods are still trying to get the New York Court of Appeals to hear their case, long after the store has been open. Today, the Whole Foods Plaza is nearly fully leased, with Crumbls Cookies and the Good Feet Store about to join the many local and national tenants already in the Plaza. Across the street, Chipotle has recently moved from Pittsford to Brighton, to be in proximity to the Whole Foods Plaza. As part of the Whole Foods Plaza project, the Auburn Trail was constructed by the developers of the Plaza at no cost to taxpayers, and the Trail was honored this past year by the Community Design Center of Rochester. Thanks to our use of incentive zoning and thoughtful detailed land use review, this project has increased our tax base, and provided additional community amenities, with little or no unmitigated traffic or other impacts. Not only did Brighton residents get the new award-winning Auburn Trail at no cost, but access management improvements were also built on the other side of Monroe Ave., one of the reasons Chipotle has moved to Brighton, providing a further catalyst to property tax base growth.

Going forward, we remain committed to prompt review of proposals to bring much needed affordable housing to Brighton. We do not develop affordable housing ourselves, but we have been working with developers as they put together possible proposals that would include affordable housing and I certainly look forward to receiving and reviewing firm proposals for affordable housing in Brighton. We also look to consider potential code amendments concerning mixed-use opportunities along our major commercial corridors, like Monroe Ave., which would add new market rate residential units and commercial uses, further energizing the business environment and increasing the number of convenient walkable local businesses here in Brighton. In addition, I will be asking that Brighton take the necessary steps to qualify as a Pro-Housing Community, under Governor Hochul's housing framework, and continue to work to make housing opportunities available for all in Brighton. In doing so, I am committed to protecting the look and feel of our existing neighborhoods, because they have been a base for our community, and with sidewalks and attractive homes, they are already consistent with our goals of diversity and sustainability.

Incentive zoning is also a way to help senior living communities expand in Brighton, providing sought after housing options for seniors, while also receiving community amenities. Jewish Senior Life, whose campus has evolved over the years thanks in no small part to the collaborative use of incentive zoning, plans on constructing an additional residential building, along with ancillary construction, later this year. Even though Jewish Senior Life is a tax-exempt organization, Town residents will benefit from the amenity of new sidewalks that will be built by the developer along Winton Rd. from Westfall Rd. past the I-590 diverging diamond interchange, at no cost to Brighton taxpayers.

Brighton continues to take the lead in diversity, equity and inclusion. Our IDEA Board, Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity Advisory Board meets regularly with Chief Diversity Officer Miriam Moore, and the membership of the Board reflects much of the broad diversity of Brighton, so that it can take the first hand collective life experiences of its members in advising the Town. Our Chief Diversity Officer has led training sessions for Town staff in a variety of formats and she has organized outreach events recognizing holidays like MLK Day, Pride and Black History Month. We are the only local Town to have ASL interpreters at all Town Board meetings, and at many other community events sponsored by the Town. We are the only Town that marches in the Pride Parade and we have a regular DEI presence at the Brighton Farmers Market. At a time when I read about Wall Street firms cutting back on their DEI programs in response to perceived blowback, in Brighton we know how important it is to include all members of our community, regardless of race, ethnic or religious background, gender and gender identity, disability and all the factors that make up who we are as individuals and as community members, and we will continue to make diversity, equity and inclusion a core value in our policy making and in our daily operations.

The safety of our community is an essential function of local government. It is also essential that the community is served by its first responders and law enforcement in a way in which every member of the community can feel confident. Brighton is served by the Brighton Police Department, the Brighton and Henrietta Fire Departments and the Brighton Volunteer Ambulance. Each of those agencies is highly trained and locally controlled. I am grateful to the men and women of each organization for your selfless work.

Each of our agencies has engaged in training to help ensure that they are able to recognize and work with individuals who are facing mental health crises. Ironically, just as we did last year, on the same night as the State of the Town address, on tonight's agenda, the Town Board will receive a communication, with identifying information redacted, from a Brighton resident and mental health professional, thanking the Brighton Police Department for the professional and sympathetic manner in which they recently handled a mental health issue. That is always the goal of an agency committed to community policing, as the Brighton Police Department is. Thank you to each of our homegrown public safety agencies, Brighton Police, Brighton Fire, Henrietta Fire and Brighton Volunteer Ambulance, and to your representatives who are here tonight.

There are several public and private development projects planned to start in 2024. Most significant, is a major renovation of Town Hall. The core of Brighton's Town Hall was dedicated in 1953, and remarkably enough, the heating, ventilation and air conditioning system from that original building is still in service, although it's neither energy efficient nor effective,

particularly in extreme weather conditions. We are currently working with IN/EX Architecture, a certified WBE, to design the replacement of the system, as part of the overall renovation. This project will directly affect only the core of Town Hall, not the Library, the Police Department or the Court. In keeping with our Climate Action Plan and our commitment to sustainability, we are considering a geothermal system that will dramatically reduce carbon emissions. Two weeks ago, a test well was drilled on the Town Hall campus, to determine the geothermal capacity of the ground underneath Town Hall. We are awaiting final test results, but initial indications are encouraging. As part of the project, we will also install ramps to make the front entrance to Town Hall accessible to people with disabilities or mobility issues. We will improve the technology in Town Hall, make other changes while retaining the classic look of the building. We will also make drainage improvements to the campus and repave the parking lot. One of the challenges of the project is the need to abate asbestos that was used in construction in the 1950s. That will require that we temporarily leave Town Hall, likely late in 2024, for a year, if not longer. We are currently looking at alternate temporary locations and will be planning all aspects of the project and the move, over the remainder of 2024, with construction planned to begin in late 2024. As mentioned before, we will also be pursuing much smaller projects at some of our park lodges, to upgrade systems and reduce energy consumption and carbon emissions. We will replace the playground at Town Park. We are also planning to install a new splash pad at Town Hall, replacing the existing pool, which is nearing the end of its useful life. Our new splash pad will likely be installed either late in 2024 or in 2025.

Among several proposed private development projects, the most significant is the proposed Top Golf sports/entertainment facility, planned behind the existing Costco store in Citygate. At this time, we are in the midst of an environmental review of the proposal, which would be located on approximately 18 acres of land directly on the Brighton side of the City line. The developer has made an application for incentive zoning approval, and we will consider significant amenities to the community as part of the review of the application. Currently, there is only one Top Golf facility in New York, located on Long Island. The closest existing locations are in Cleveland and Pittsburgh. Top Golf appeals to golfers and non-golfers alike. Once the environmental review is completed, the Town Board will consider the project approval, following the completion of a public hearing. Top Golf will pay full Brighton property taxes, under the terms of the incentive zoning proposal, and when completed, would not only bring many visitors to the community, but add to our commercial tax base.

Also coming to Brighton in 2024 is a new Aldi's supermarket, which will anchor the new plaza on South Clinton Ave., across the street from the Tops Plaza. Also coming to that plaza in 2024 will be Jersey Mikes and Starbucks. Quiklees is planning to open two new locations in Brighton in 2024, one at the site of the existing Mobil station in the 12 Corners, where they have agreed to a design that will put gas pumps at the rear of the project and move retail activity closer to the street. The second Quiklees will be located on East Ave., next to Brighton Fire Station #1, in the long vacant gas station at that location. That tudor style gas station is a designated Brighton historic landmark and the developer will be preserving the look and feel of that historic building.

Fairness and equity are important core values in our work. The Town Board tonight will consider a proposal to conduct a townwide reassessment of properties to ensure that every property taxpayer in Brighton, residential or commercial, has a tax assessment that accurately reflects the fair market value of their property. We have heard a lot in the last few weeks about concerns regarding the City revaluation, and I was surprised to learn that City Council didn't even vote last year to conduct their reval. We are going to be open and transparent about this project right from the very start. The last townwide reassessment in Brighton was in 2018, and we know that real estate prices have skyrocketed in recent years, particularly in Brighton, where the 14618 zip code was recently recognized as the hottest zip code in America. It is important to update assessment valuations to ensure that no one is paying more than their fair share of property taxes. We will be engaged in ongoing communication about the revaluation, starting in earnest this spring, and continuing through the completion of the revaluation next year. If there is one message I would leave with everyone as we proceed with reassessment, it is the reminder that although it is almost certain that the assessment of your home will increase, probably significantly, because property values have gone up so much in recent years, that does not mean that your taxes will go up by the same percentage. Tax assessments are not a measure of tax increases; they are a measure of tax fairness, a matter of fairly assessing the fair market value of your home or other property. As your assessment rises to reflect the true fair market value of your home, your town tax rate will likely fall. When revaluation is completed, all property owners will have the right to contest the valuation placed on their properties. The Town Assessor, Pam Post, is working diligently to prepare for revaluation and will continue to work one on one with residents as we go through this process.

Brighton's fiscal condition has never been stronger. For the second year in a row, New York State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli awarded Brighton a perfect score for fiscal strength in his annual review of the fiscal stress levels faced by each municipality in the State, during 2022. As we have discussed before, Moody's bond rating agency rates Brighton AA2, one of Moody's highest ratings. We continue to practice prudent fiscal management and budgeting, relying on long term capital investment planning, conservative revenue estimates with particular adherence to State law and the Government Accounting Standards Board standards for government accounting. Our open and transparent budgeting process is second to none and it shows.

Tonight is not just a night to celebrate our successes. It is also a night to celebrate and acknowledge our Town of Brighton team, who work hard for the people of Brighton every day in so many ways. It is a night to celebrate our neighbors, the people who serve our community so well, whether they serve as first responders, as volunteers on our community boards and organizations, as leaders in church, synagogue or mosque, as unsung heroes of every kind. Just yesterday, Councilmember Corrado and I attended a BCSD School Board meeting where two such unsung heroes were recognized as Brighton Believers by the District's Brighton Believes Council. First was School Counsellor Jennie Viggiani was nominated by one of her students, for all she has done to support students in the high school as they look to their options for the next stages of their lives. Second was Peggy Dempsey, known to all regulars on the Brickyard Trail as a person who loves and celebrates the natural environment in Brighton, particularly along the Brickyard Trail, and who shares her deep knowledge with fellow park

lovers, and known to me simply as one of my Trail Buddies, one of the people that makes my morning walks on the Brickyard Trail a little more enjoyable and worthwhile. Peggy is organizing the second annual Brickyard Trail Art Exhibition, starting a week from Saturday, March 9 in the Buckland House on Westfall Rd. Both of you and so many others help make Brighton a place that people are proud to call home.

It would take too long to acknowledge each of our Town staff members individually and the contributions they each make to doing the work large and small every day for our residents. Suffice it to say, we are blessed to have such a diligent and capable team working for the Town of Brighton and working for the people of Brighton in every Department. I know I speak for all my colleagues on the Town Board when I say, thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

Congratulations are due to our two newest elected officials in Brighton. Judge Vik Vilku is our newest Town Justice, succeeding Judge Karen Morris who served Brighton for over 29 years. Judge Vilku is the first judge of Indian descent in upstate New York and the first Sikh judge in all of New York. Congratulations Judge Vilku and we are fortunate to have you and Judge John Falk serving on the bench here as Brighton Town Justices. Judge Karen Morris, thank you for all those years of dedicated service. Anyone who appeared in Judge Morris' courtroom knew that no matter why they were there, Judge Morris gave them their undivided attention and her deep understanding of the circumstances that can bring people to court. We will miss you.

Congratulations also to our newest Town Board member, Nate Salzman, who was also elected this past November. As a nearly lifelong resident of Brighton and a graduate of Brighton High School, you bring the local knowledge, as well as the life experience of a new generation, that is so important to our families in Brighton. Thank you also to Jason DiPonzio who served Brighton for 12 years with quiet wisdom and attention, as well as a commitment to justice that showed particularly in your work to eliminate racist deed restrictions in your Meadowbrook neighborhood. It is a pleasure working with all my colleagues in government at the federal, state and local levels, particularly Town Board colleagues, our Town Justices and Town Clerk Dan Aman, who truly covers all the bases and is a resource in so many ways for our residents and for all of us here in Town Hall.

I know that some of you did not come tonight primarily to hear the State of the Town message, and that's OK, but I hope that in these words, in our accomplishments and in our vision for the future, you will know that this is a place that is defined by its people. Tonight, we can choose to be the people we aspire to be in this special town we call home. Tonight, I ask everyone to aspire higher, to remember what brought us here and what keeps us here. Tonight, we may face a complex and challenging time, but I believe there is no place better prepared to deal with the challenges of a complex future than our hometown, the Town of Brighton. It is a privilege and an honor to serve you and this great community as your Town Supervisor. Thank you.