

Wydysh shares key points from State of the County

A few weeks ago, I had the honor to deliver my fifth State of the County address. I view these types of speeches – whether it's the president delivering the State of the Union, the governor giving a State of the State, or a local official talking about their county or city – as kind of a status report on how things are going. It's an opportunity to look back a little bit and then discuss what might be coming around the corner.

So, with that context, I want to use this month's column to reiterate some of the important issues I touched upon in the speech. First, the State of County is strong. Our budget is in good shape and we stayed under the property tax for the 13th straight year. Our employees are doing their very best to meet and, hopefully exceed, the expectation of taxpayers in delivering services.

In the course of our team doing



Becky Wydysh
Chairwoman

was not a criticism, but rather a call to pursue collaboration, new ideas and fresh approaches.

That's why I made sure to recognize one particular innovative approach from our Department of Public Works (DPW) to address the issue of lack of those with commercial driver's licenses (CDLs). A CDL is required to drive snowplows and heavy highway equipment used for roadwork and maintenance,

their job, I did challenge everyone – including myself and my fellow legislators – to not become so wrapped up in day-to-day operations that we lose sight of big-picture thinking and long-range planning. Let me emphasize: This

so it's really important for us to have enough workers with those licenses. This shortage has been a growing problem, with school bus companies, private contractors and others competing for a very limited pool of applicants.

So, our DPW team convinced the legislature to create a truck driver/CDL trainer and four new truck driver trainee positions. The plan was to establish a new program that would have the county hire DPW workers, and as part of their work duties, have them train for their CDL. It has been a huge success. Our four trainees completed their training, passed their road test and were promoted to full-time truck drivers. And off that success, we are looking to begin recruitment of our next class in the very near future.

That's how you solve a problem!

Economic development is an-

other area where we have been aggressively pursuing new ideas. The Amazon project in the Town of Niagara – which, by the way, is progressing forward nicely – showed the importance of shovel-ready, developable land. And the fact is Niagara County – and really all of Western New York – has a lack of such land. This is why the county has embarked on the development of the Niagara County Business Park in the Town of Cambria.

One of the keys to moving the business park forward is securing funds to put in the necessary infrastructure. That's why we are all excited that we were awarded \$3.2 million from New York state under the FAST NY grant program. FAST NY is designed to prepare and develop sites across the state to jumpstart New York's shovel-readiness and increase its attractiveness to large employers and high-tech manufacturing

companies.

The funds will allow for site preparation including electric, gas, water and sewer extensions, extending a 13.2kV electric line to the 60-acre park, and launching planning and engineering for tapping into a nearby 115kV power line.

The business park is no small undertaking, but I believe it's something we must do to attract investment.

There were many more topics that were covered during the speech – including inter-municipal cooperation, support for manufacturers, and frustration with New York state – that I will cover individually in future columns. If you would like to read the full State of the County address, it can be found here: https://cms5.revize.com/revize/niagaracounty/Document_center/News/State%20of%20the%20County%202024.FINAL.pdf.

Niagara County awarded \$3.2M for site prep at Niagara County Business Park in Cambria

Submitted by the Public Information Office

Last week, Gov. Kathy Hochul announced Niagara County will receive \$3.2 million for the Niagara County Business Park in the Town of Cambria under the Focused Attraction of Shovel-Ready Tracts New York (FAST NY) grant program. First announced in February 2022, FAST NY is designed to prepare and develop sites across the state to jumpstart New York's shovel-readiness and increase its attractiveness to large employers and high-tech manufacturing companies.

Niagara County Legislature Chairwoman

Becky Wydysh said "The lack of shovel-ready sites in Niagara County – and really, all of Western New York – was one of our driving forces behind the plan to develop the Niagara County Business Park. The fact is, we just lack sites to compete for big projects. And that means we need to do something about it.

"The business park is no small undertaking, but we continue to meet with officials at all levels of government and seek grants from different sources so we can fund the capital infrastructure necessary to bring the park to fruition. The state's commit-

ment of FAST NY funds is a major boost to that effort."

According to the governor's announcement, the funds will allow for site preparations and infrastructure improvements including electric, gas, water and sewer extensions. The project includes extending a 13.2kV electric line to this 60-acre campus, as well as launching planning and engineering for tapping into a nearby 115kV power line. The site is in close proximity to significant power lines, access to low-cost New York Power Authority hydro-power, and access to substantial capacity

of water and sewer. The infrastructure upgrade supported by FAST NY will position this site as an ideal location for advanced manufacturing.

The site features proximity to highways and access to major U.S. and Canadian markets.

The governor's full press release can be read here: <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-hochul-awards-more-45-million-fast-ny-grants-transform-seven-commercial-sites>.

Niagara County launches 'Façade Program 2.0'

Submitted by the Public Information Office

Following the success of its first façade program that was created in 2022, the Niagara County Legislature on Friday announced "Façade Program 2.0," offering matching grants up to \$50,000 for qualified business to make exterior capital improvements to their properties. The program is being run by the county's Center for Economic Development.

"As a new legislator, I have heard mainly two things from businesses in my community about the original façade program," said Legislator Chris McKimmie, a member of the county's economic development committee. "The first was from those who took part in the program and raved about how beneficial it was to helping them invest in their business. The second was from those who, for whatever reason, failed to take part and lamented the missed opportunity. So, one of my goals was to work with my colleagues to fund a second round."

Niagara County Economic Development Commissioner Mike Casale said "Façade 2.0" is looking for projects that, among other things, can jumpstart improvements of traditional downtowns;

support the expansion of small businesses; address issues of code enforcement, energy efficiency and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance; and preserve significant or historic buildings.

"The original program helped 200 businesses and unlocked more than \$10 million in total investment," Casale said. "You can see firsthand many of the completed projects as you drive across the county. The program worked just as intended and we are hoping history will repeat itself with 'Façade 2.0.'"

Eligible applicants for "Façade 2.0" include:

- ✓ For-profit businesses that have been in business since or before January 2020

- ✓ Not-for-profit organizations that have been operating since or before January 2020

- ✓ Property owners (landlords) that have owned the property before January 2020

- ✓ Lessees of space within build-

ing located in a qualified property (lessee must have occupied the spaced since or before January 2020)

Prior awardees of Niagara County Façade Program funding are eligible to apply, but preference will be given to new applicants

Casale said information and applications for "Façade 2.0" can be found at <https://www.niagaracountybusiness.com/facade-program-2.0>. The deadline for application submission is 4 p.m. March

26. Given the requirements attached to the federal funds being used for the program, applicants must be able to complete projects by Oct. 31, 2024.

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