

## **2011 State of the Town of Parish Address by Supervisor Steve Stelmashuck Given Thursday March 24, 2011 at the Mills and Petrie Memorial Gymnasium**

Good evening. I'd like to take a few minutes tonight to review some things Parish has accomplished over the last few years, give you an update on a few others, and make some proposals for the future.

First, while it is always easier to look at what isn't working or what can be improved, we can't overlook the progress, that we, as a community, have made over the last several years, despite being in the midst of the current Great Recession. This progress includes the fact that planning for improvements to the library and the park in front of the library are complete and will be part of the Main Street reconstruction. Also many new businesses have opened or re-opened, including the Italian restaurant and dog groomer downtown, the liquor store and car wash by Interstate 81, the ATV repair shop on Union Street, the u-store-it facility on State Route 69 East and the Candlelight Restaurant has re-opened under new management, just to name a few.

The Merrill Park gazebo has been relocated to the Town lot downtown and been given electric service. This new venue has been a centerpiece for the re-activated summer weekend farmer's markets and a greatly expanded Olde Home Days celebration. The Village has made many sewer pump station improvements and the senior nutrition site has been expanded and relocated to the Presbyterian Church Annex. We're inching ever closer to high speed internet service for all those in Parish who want it, and it may become a reality for many later this year.

Our medical center has an improved and stable medical service including physical therapy and State Route 69A has been resurfaced and culverts have been replaced. Both the Gym and Town Barn have seen energy efficient improvements including a new roof, windows, lights and furnace at the Gym and new lights at the Town Barn. These improvements not only save energy but tax dollars as well.

The Village and Town in conjunction have received a \$30,000 grant to be pro-active and plan for the adaptive re-use of Parish Elementary when it closes in the fall of 2012, and we recently received word of a nearly \$13,000 grant to upgrade and improve our court facilities.

Our public library has seen improvements to the children's reading room and its' parking lot has been expanded and resurfaced. KeyBank now has a 24-hour access ATM and our community now has a newsletter to keep the public informed.

To bring more tourism dollars into the community the joint Town/Village Task Force working in cooperation with State DOT has announced that the State Route 69/Main Street reconstruction includes a kayak launch on the North Branch of the Little Salmon River as well as a park-and-ride at the Interstate 81 interchange large enough to accommodate truck and trailer parking for snowmobiles in the winter season. These are just some of the accomplishments we as citizens can be proud of.

We must also remember that for over two decades now, the Town of Parish, unlike most other municipalities, has no structured debt, saving our taxpayers literally tens of thousands of dollars in interest payments over the course of those years.

Yet even with much to cheer, we as a Town and Village still face many challenges, foremost is the need for public water for all those who both need and want it. While making progress on this front over the last several years, changes in funding rules in 2010 brought progress to a halt. It is my intention to work with the Village through our Joint Economic Development Task Force to find new sources of funding or new ways to structure this project to at least bring water to the residents of the Village. Parish is one of the last villages in Upstate New York not to have public water for its' residents and many of our other current challenges and needs could be addressed if municipal water were available.

Another project that has been stalled for too long is the Main Street reconstruction in the Village, now scheduled for 2013. It is my intention to actively lobby our state legislators to keep this deadline or actually move it to the 2012 construction season. Both the Town and Village have recently passed resolutions urging this work be scheduled and completed in a timely manner. We must work with our citizens to put pressure on Albany and firmly say "No more delays!"

In order to quickly bring more revenue into the community and promote our economic goals, it has been suggested that we create a municipal parking area for already popular recreational activities. Working with the Square Valley Snowmobile Club and the Oswego County ATV Club, it is my intention to explore the feasibility of this proposal in order to make an informed decision before the midpoint of summer.

We must also ensure that the adaptive re-use of Parish Elementary is one that has the support of our citizens because it benefits our residents either through direct use as senior housing and/or a community center for example, or because it becomes a business base pumping tax dollars and jobs into our community. We must not allow such a valuable resource to sit idle or unoccupied and it is our intention to work with the Village and School District to see that this facility is used to its' full potential.

I would also like to address the current real property revaluation taking place in Parish

. The purpose of the reval is to ensure a level playing field for all property owners. Your assessment should be no more or no less than the realistic full market value of your property. It is the intention of our Assessor to make sure all property owners have the "how to" information and the opportunity to grieve their assessment. We have a grievance process in place and available for people to use. But in speaking of assessments you have to remember that property value is only part of the equation when it comes to how much property taxes you pay, the tax rate based on the budgetary needs of the municipality is of equal importance.

With this in mind, it is my intention to within the next month appoint an Efficiency Committee to line by line review the current Town Budget and make recommendations for cuts or consolidations. This committee to be made up of representatives of the Town Board, Village

Board and private citizens will have the opportunity to not only review the Budget but also to look at areas of consolidation or cost cutting with the Village, the Fire District, the School District, and the County among others. I would also like to see this committee review information or suggestions from the general public on cost cutting or consolidation ideas. It is our duty as elected officials to think outside of the box in these tough economic times and be prepared to make hard decisions to promote a lean, efficient Town government that provides needed services to its' citizens and not unnecessary burdens. The Efficiency Committee should give its' report to the Town Board no later than August 1<sup>st</sup>, so the Town Board can begin constructing the 2012 Budget in a timely manner.

In this same vein, it was announced this week that the State Comptroller's Office intends to conduct an audit of some Town departments within the next 30 days. It is my intention to act on any recommendations coming out of this audit and implement remediations or suggestions as quickly as possible and have all such recommendations in place by the 2012 Budget Year.

In speaking to you tonight I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the following. People often ask what do I get for my tax dollars locally. To mention just some: how about local roads cleared and repaired so that our citizens can get to work and our children to school, how about fire protection by well trained and dedicated volunteer firefighters who protect our homes and businesses and come to our aid in accidents and medical emergencies. How about code enforcement to ensure that our buildings are safe and public health is protected, how about our schools educating our children ensuring well informed citizens and skilled workers for the future, how about dog control to make sure pets are protected and people safe; and in the Village how about street lights, public sewers and garbage collection to again promote both health and safety.

These are just some examples of your tax dollars at work for you. Are we perfect? "No." Can we make improvements? "Yes." Tonight I'd like to remind all of you it is your responsibility to watch your government, local, state and national, it is your responsibility to elect leaders who work for your best interests and not those who try to promote private or personal agendas. It is our collective responsibility to work together to build our community and it is our collective responsibility to ensure that Parish is and will continue to be, the Place.

Thank You!