FROM THE CHAIR...

A Monthly Roundup of News from the Chair of the Sullivan County Legislature

HERE'S TO A NEW YEAR OF PROMISE

BY ROBERT A. DOHERTY, CHAIRMAN, SULLIVAN COUNTY LEGISLATURE

I agree: 2020 was really tough. I won't miss it any more than you will.

But we did get some important things done, and now that this new Legislature has its footing, 2021 is a year worth looking forward to.

I don't make promises I can't keep, so I'm not about to guarantee that all things coronavirus-related will disappear in 2021. Even when the vaccine distribution really gets rolling, plenty of people will choose not to take it, and we'll have to figure out as a society and as a government how we're going to deal with that.

The economic impacts of COVID-19 will also continue to be felt well into the new year. Many of our businesses have suffered incredible losses, and some may not stay with us. Those that do survive will have a rough winter, and who knows what spring and summer will bring.

But as this year proved more than any other, Sullivan County is strong and resilient. We tackled the problems coronavirus threw at us, and we kept our numbers from becoming as bad as our neighbors in Orange, Ulster and other counties, thanks especially to the hard work of our Public Health Services team.

We also benefitted from a hot real estate market and the attendant spending, boosting our sales and mortgage tax revenues above the catastrophic predictions we initially expected.

So we're doing better than others, and that should be recognized.

Your Legislature didn't stop working either, as we saw the successful end of the new Jail project and the beginning of the transformative broadband wireless project. We took emergency measures to stave off fiscal trouble, and we took a hard look at the future of

the Care Center and the Certified Home Health Agency. We furloughed dozens of County employees at the height of the pandemic, then found ways to bring almost all of them back. We cut out waste where we found it and kept critical needs met. In short, we did what you elected us to do.

That's what I intend to keep doing in 2021, starting in January, when I expect we'll name an operator for the Care Center, launching a new era for that facility and for the County.

For those legislators who want to work together, it will be a year of positive change and growth. And for those taxpayers who'd like to see government spend less without reducing services, count on this Legislature taking that mandate seriously.

Here's to a truly Happy New Year for us all...

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STEPPING IT UP AT THE DMV

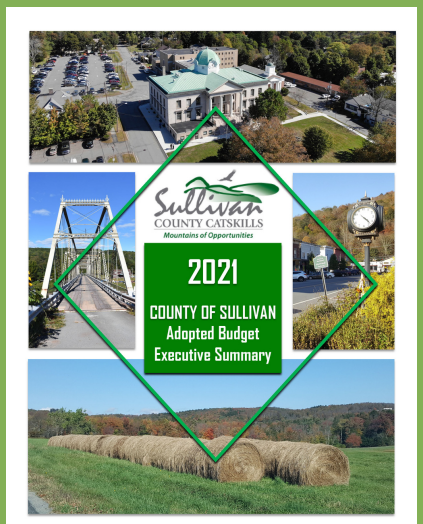
COVID hasn't made it easy to provide services, and a lot of you probably found that out when trying to replace license plates or renew a driver's license. It's absolutely been frustrating.

So we're doing something about it. Your Legislature authorized the purchase of two more testing machines, doubling what we have, to reduce wait times. We also authorized overtime for existing staff and brought back some retirees to work part-time. We even added two new employees, starting in 2021.

We're not alone in these difficulties - every DMV office in the State is weeks behind.

But we're not sitting on our butts with fake tears in our eyes. We're actively making changes that are meant to get you into - and out of - our Department of Motor Vehicles office faster and with less frustration.

Passing a fiscal plan for 2021



It's not the sexiest thing to talk about, but our County Budget is one of the most important topics you'll hear me discuss. After all, it directly affects your tax bill - which, I'm glad to say, won't be going up significantly in the new year.

Thanks to some hard choices (yes, including the unpopular 4% Energy Tax that will sunset in 2023), the Legislature and the County Manager's Office were able to stay under the State-mandated property tax increase cap of 2.24%. Mix in the $30 drop in the residential Solid Waste Access Fee, and most of us shouldn't see any County tax hike in 2021. We'll still pave roads. We'll still provide social services. We'll still run our buses, house our homeless, feed our elderly and maintain our parks. And yes, we'll still devote major resources to our Public Health and DMV offices, which deal directly with a huge number of residents. Details are at sullivanny.us under "Helpful Links."

COVID: Not over yet

I'd like to say we'll leave COVID-19 behind when 2021 rolls around, but you know I can't.

What I can tell you is that all of County government has been preparing for whatever coronavirus (and the State and Feds) throw at us in 2021.

Public Health, of course, has been at the forefront, keeping tabs on everyone who has the virus or has been exposed to it, and issuing advisories and information when necessary.

The division of which they're a part, Health & Family Services, has been making sure people get the services for which they're eligible, from rental and heating assistance to mental health and adult care services.

Our new Division of Community Resources has taken a lead role, too, running buses across the County, sending Meals on Wheels to senior citizens, and meeting any need presented to our Emergency Community Assistance Center.

The Sheriff's Office and our other emergency response folks have not stopped (and will not stop) making sure you're safe and protected, even when it endangers their own safety. It's what they do.

Our Information Technology Services Division has kept us all up and running with desktops, laptops, tablets and cellphones, so that we can communicate when and where we have to.

The rest of our offices, too, have stepped up to the demands COVID-19 has brought in undertaking screenings, appointments, teleconferencing - sometimes from home.

And your Legislature has made sure all these people are supported, funded and guided, so that 2021 is remembered for what we conquered, not just what we endured.

Check out these updated pages...

We're always adding info to sullivanny.us, but unless you regularly check a page, you don't know it's been changed. So here are a few of our recently updated pages:

- **Board of Elections** - complete election results, from 2020 back to 2004
- **Broadband LDC** - agendas and minutes of the board of our new wireless broadband project
- **Ctr. for Workforce Development** - local jobs and training
- **Co. Legislature** - your key to our bios, agendas, minutes and streaming video of our meetings
- **DMV** - the place to sign up for an office appointment
- **Public Health Services** - COVID-19 info and much more
- **Purchasing** - search for bid opportunities
- **Solid Waste & Recycling** - what we accept and charge

HOW TO GET IN TOUCH

- **Looking for the Chairman? 845-807-0435 or Robert.Doherty@co.sullivan.ny.us**
- **General question? 845-794-3000**
- **Need a specific name or number? www.sullivanny.us/countydirectory**

Officers & gentlemen

If you've attended one of the Legislature's recent meetings, you've noticed the Sheriff's officer standing to the side of the Hearing Room. Typically that's Deputy Markus Pratti, a very friendly guy, and I'm glad we've got him.

At times in the past few weeks, I've asked him to be at our meetings - not to intimidate or scare anyone, but to ensure decorum is maintained. Unfortunately, we've had a few folks who've lost their tempers at our meetings and have either interrupted our discussions outside of public comment or, worse, verbally assaulted County employees and officials.

Our meetings can get heated - nothing wrong with that, especially when we're talking about change. But it's entirely inappropriate to yell profanities or refuse to let the Legislature conduct its business during or in between these meetings, and as Chairman, I have the authority and obligation to see that those rules are respected. That's the only reason a deputy may be present.

WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO

While Legislature meetings are viewable online, not everyone has the time or ability. So let me fill you in on our activities in the month of December...

- **We passed** a $235 million budget for 2021, with a 2.24% tax levy increase that should be more than offset by a drop in the Solid Waste Access Fee.
- **We authorized** bonding $3.75 million to pave County roads in 2021.
- **We agreed** to allow the County Clerk's Office to hire two more staffers and add testing machines in the Department of Motor Vehicles office, to alleviate delays.
- **We enacted** a Facebook Local Alerts Policy, which will guide staff on how and when to issue a Local Alert on our Facebook pages, reaching Facebook users throughout the County with important and pressing information.
- **We allocated** $35,000 to two demolition projects in the towns of Thompson and Neversink, as part of our commitment to the Remove Unsafe Structures (RUSt) Program, to which we had restored COVID-cut funding earlier this year.