



TIOGA COUNTY LEGISLATURE

Raymond P. Case
Ed Hollenbeck
Richard L. Huttleston
Tracy Monell
Michael Roberts
Martha C. Sauerbrey
William H. Standinger III
Loretta A. Sullivan
Dale N. Weston

CHAIR

Martha Sauerbrey

Ronald E. Dougherty County Office Building – 56 Main Street – Owego, New York 13827
Telephone (607) 687-8240 – Fax (607) 687-8232 – Website: www.tiogacountyny.com

Good evening ladies and gentlemen and thank you for being here tonight as I share the State of the County which is an overview of 2014 and goals and objectives for 2015.

I have completed my first year as Chair of the Legislature and it has been a year of learning new things and beginning each day with expectation. I have been able to work alongside staff and I have learned that we have some hardworking, dedicated employees that care about providing quality programs and services to the community.

As a Legislature, this year proved to be challenging and yet productive. Of course, there are always the day to day issues to address but there were two major issues that required a lot of time and examination. These two issues required that we make serious decisions about our county transportation system and choose a financial software vendor.

The Legislature took a teamwork approach working with staff as we examined the information and made final decisions that would best benefit the public and the county operations.

As we look at our Administrative Departments:

In 2014 the **Board of Elections** saw three significant efficiencies which included:

- The ability for a “Full Document” image of every transaction.
- The consolidation of seven election districts into other districts.
- A NYS grant was approved to cover the cost of one year’s extended warranty on the voting machines.

The **Tioga County Clerk’s Office** implemented:

- An online search service called ESearch, which became available to the public in May 2014. This service provides access for a fee to our records without having to make the trip into the office.
- They also coordinated with their new program vendor Cott to load the Index books into the system making it possible to search land records back to 1791.
- Our friendly DMV office continues to receive the support of the public. It is important to know that when the public utilizes our offices for transactions the County is allowed to retain (12.7%) of the fee.

The **Real Property Tax Services Department** continues to be a resource center for municipalities, other county departments and the general public. They are always looking for better, more efficient ways to serve the public.

In October of last year, **Tioga County Historian, Emma Sedore**, hosted the Region 10 Association of Public Historians Meeting at the Town of Owego Hall.

The **Tioga County Veterans Office** provides important support to our US Veterans. Last year, they collectively served over 300 veterans, family members, and agencies. They moved to new office space at the HHS building on Route 38.

Finance/Legal

The **County Treasurer** reports for 2014 a sales tax collection of 5.29% for 2014. The County distributed over \$5.2 million dollars to our towns and villages.

- In March, we made the final bond payment for the Public Safety Building which cost \$11 million dollars.
- All delinquent property taxes from 2007 and 2008, which were previously protected by federal bankruptcy actions, were redeemed during the year.
- The Treasurers' annual property tax auction sold 31 properties last summer generating \$106,000.
- Community College tuition billings cost \$2.4 million dollars or 11% of the county tax levy this past year. This State mandate benefited over 3,000 county residents pursuing higher education.
- The Treasurers' Office received a clean audit from the independent auditors of the entire County's financial reporting to the State Comptroller for 2013.
- For the second straight year, Tioga County received a very positive score from the Comptroller's annual fiscal monitoring analysis of all municipalities.

A new **Budget Officer** was hired in July 2014. She reports that:

- The 2015 budget was published and adopted within the State's established deadlines. The budget presented some fiscal challenges that included employee contract raises, escalating health insurance costs, and inflationary increases for several service contracts. Some of the changes that helped to offset a growing budget gap were the elimination of the Public Transit System, reduction of staff, and decreases in NYS retirement and workers' compensation premiums. In addition, most County departments maintained a zero base budget from the prior year.
- For the last 3 consecutive years, Tioga County has stayed well below the allowable 2% property tax cap. This was just one criteria needed for Tioga County residents to qualify for the newly implemented tax freeze rebates.

- Tioga County has been able to reduce its workforce, cut over \$2.5 million dollars in costs, minimize the impact of dwindling State and Federal revenue and continue to invest in needed capital assets and infrastructure, all while staying under the State imposed cap and continuing cost effective services to the residents. This has been achieved by conservative spending, contributing surplus towards needed savings, and appropriating additional fund balance to absorb deficit gaps.
- These efforts have run their course and will strangle the County's financial condition in the very near future, unless we as a County can create our own opportunities and wealth. Additional grant awards, business growth that produces jobs and additional sales tax revenue, efficiency planning with possible consolidation of services, and real mandated relief will need to be the stabilizing financial influences.

The **Tioga County Law Department** was involved in several large and diverse projects during the year including;

- The resolution of the outstanding flood claim for damages to 56 Main Street with NYMIR making the final payment to the County.
- After years of negotiating with FEMA, our flooded documents were sent to a vendor for restoration. This was a long involved process that had gone on since 2011. We are happy to say this is very close to being completed.
- The Law Department sought and obtained a grant to fund the Tioga County Office of Assigned Counsel. The Assigned Counsel Administrator, appointed in December of 2014, will seek funding and administer grants to improve legal services for Tioga County's indigent population. Tioga County received more than \$55,000 in grants for indigent legal services.
- The Law Department oversaw the bid process and contract negotiations for the Financial Management and Accounting System Project.

Safety for employees and the public are our utmost concern and we continue to provide safety programs and trainings to improve the County's compliance with Federal, State, and County safety requirements through the year.

- We secured Public access to the Ronald E. Dougherty County Office Building by restricting entrances and adjusting opening and closing hours of the building, along with other safety measures and procedures.
- Tioga County was presented with a the New York Municipal Insurance Reciprocal (NYMIR) Risk Management Safety Award given annually in recognition of a member municipality's commitment to sound risk management, safety, and training efforts. Tioga County stood out among the 832 counties, cities, towns and villages.

The **Tioga County Coroner** reported 85 cases were handled by their office; almost all cases are assigned through the 911 call center.

District Attorney Kirk Martin took office last January and he was off to a busy start. Last fall the third murder trial for Cal Harris was moved to a new venue in Schoharie County. The trial is currently underway and is expected to last 6 to 8 weeks.

- The DA successfully prosecuted a number of cases that generated media attention relating to Grand Larceny and Manslaughter in the First Degree with other cases pending.

Health and Human Services

During 2014, the Department of Social Services continued to provide critical services to the communities that we serve such as:

- They completed their first full year of Family Assessment Response (FAR) focusing on child safety while improving our ability to engage families in identifying strengths and needs.
- They significantly drove down Foster Care costs by more aggressively focusing on level of care and strengthening access to preventive programs.

- Through the Summer Youth Employment Program, 41 youth across the County learned new job skills, earned income, and explored career interests.
- Tioga County was one of only a few Counties across the State that successfully reduced our Cash Assistance caseload through our employment activities and Tioga Works programming.
- We continue to work with the State in their takeover of the administration of the Medicaid program, targeted for completion in 2018.
- The termination of our Public Transportation System occurred in November of 2014 due to changes at the State level in how Medicaid transportation is brokered.

Our **Mental Health Clinic** continues to offer a comprehensive care for citizens of Tioga County who have needs related to Mental Health, Substance Abuse, and/or Developmental Disabilities. Services continued to be challenged due to ongoing changes in the Behavioral Health Care System and funding at the Federal, State, and Local levels.

In the past three years they have reduced department staff by 16, and reduced department expenses by close to \$700,000.

The **Public Health Department** was awarded a competitive grant from the New York State Department of Health which provides trained staff to visit homes and apartments to help identify health and safety issues. They developed and implemented a public Automated External Defibrillator (AED) program. Developed and administered an Opioid Overdose Prevention Program.

- Thanks to the Floyd Hooker Foundation, the Tioga County Dental Health Program received a grant for a Fluoride Varnish Program which provided dental sealants for 850 students.

- Through increased performance and efficiency, the rabies program has increased the number of animals vaccinated by the Tioga County Health Department to 1,200 animals in 2014.
- A modification of Rabies Order 599 by the Tioga County Board of Health will allow unrestricted public contact of exhibited mammals. However, to continue protections to the public the revised order will require all exhibited animals to be vaccinated for the rabies virus prior to public contact. We hope this modification will support and promote agriculture and agri-tourism in Tioga County.
- The Tioga County Health Department completed the closure of its Certified Home Health Agency (CHHA) reducing total staff by 10 members. As the agency was phased out, staff assisted patients to ensure a smooth transfer of care to the appropriate provider. The announcement of the closure is a reflection of the transformation of public health.

The County's **Information Technology Department** had a busy year providing services throughout the County. These include:

- Installing a flexible new County phone system that will save over \$40,000 per year in ongoing costs.
- Installing advanced conferencing tools in all buildings to facilitate more efficient communication.
- Placing new tools, such as tablet computers, in the hands of Legislators and department heads to make the County's operations run smoother.
- Performing significant upgrades of the "back end" computer infrastructure of the County on many fronts, resulting in cost savings going forward.
- Shifted most of the County's service and maintenance from single year contracts to multi-year contracts which result in reduced cost.

The County's **GIS Department** continued the process of leveraging the GIS tools to enhance the information available to different departments and agencies of the County such as:

- Assisting the local fire departments with mapping of water resources through the County.
- Assisting Public Works Department with sign inventory and reflectivity analysis required by the State.
- Helping the Soil and Water Conservation District accurately inventory County wetlands and stream management projects and more.

2014 has seen two major projects begin for the **Records Management Office** of the County.

- The first is the construction of a new central records facility at the Health and Human Services building on Route 38.
- The second project is flood-related; recovery of flood-damaged documents. Both projects will be totally completed this year.

As always, the **Legislative Office** provides critical support to the Legislature. The success of the Legislature depends largely on their attention to detail and follow through.

A major accomplishment for the year was made in late fall when an agreement was made by the Legislature to purchase a much needed Financial Management Accounting System (FMAS) and we entered into a contract with Tyler Technologies. The Legislative Clerk and Deputy Legislative Clerk were appointed Project Manager and Deputy Project Manager for the Project. The process is well underway and it is an 18-month implementation process and will be done in two phases; financial being the first phase, and payroll the second phase. This is a much needed, highly intense process that will lead to greater efficiencies and real time data for the County.

The **Personnel Department** primarily involves civil service administration, fringe benefits administration, and labor relations matters. They are mandated to provide Civil Service administration to all County Departments as well as the Towns (9), Villages (6), Schools (5) and Special Districts (2) within Tioga County.

- The Personnel Department also administers the Tioga County Self-Insured Workers' Compensation Plan, in which all towns and villages participate as well as the County.
- Tioga County offers creditable health insurance to retirees, which is Medicare Part D Reimbursement from the Federal government; in 2014, the 2012 reimbursement of \$97,000 was received. With agreement from retirees, 190 County retirees & spouses of retirees age 65 & over were changed to a Medicare Supplemental Plan as of January 2014, saving the County almost \$1 million dollars in health insurance premiums in 2014.
- The bulk of Tioga County's 345 full-time employees are represented by three labor unions. During 2014, negotiations with two of those unions for collective bargaining agreements took place and are on-going.

Public Safety

For the Sheriff's office, appropriations finished the year under budget. Revenues finished at over \$750,000 which exceeded our revenue budget projection by 15%. The Corrections Division, along with the E911 Center and Civil Office, showed slight increases in activity during the year. The Law Enforcement Division showed an increase in the number of Calls for Service they handled while the remainder of their measurable activity remained static. The E911 Center and Road Patrol Division worked the majority of the year with staff shortages.

Stop DWI operational costs came in 15% under budget. Revenue from fines collected were 15.5% lower than the 2014 budget projection.

The **Tioga County Probation Department** works with 15 Justice Courts, Family, County, and Surrogate Courts in the County. With a small staff of 11 sworn Officers, the Department completed over 255 investigations during 2014.

- In addition to investigations, the Department supervised 363 defendants/respondents sentenced or placed on probation.
- For over 20 years, Tioga County has been involved with Alternative to Incarceration programming. Probation runs two programs: Pretrial Release, which saved the County over \$120,000 in jail costs and Community Service, which provided the County with over 5,000 working hours last year. These hours, at minimum wage, would have cost over \$45,000 in wages.
- 2014 was a difficult year in Tioga County due to the rampant use of illegally obtained opiates and heroin among 20 to 40 year olds. This year was difficult when three young (20s) probationers lost their lives due to drug/heroin overdoses. It was a graphic reminder that this small county agency is working with defendants who are involved in life threatening addictions.

The **Bureau of Fire and EMS Services** data in Tioga County shows that total calls for service were down slightly from the past year with a little more than a 3% reduction over the previous year. Securing volunteers for firefighters and EMS providers is becoming a challenge for some County Departments.

The **Emergency Management Office** hired a new Deputy Director who is refining the Human Needs portion of the County Emergency Plan. They updated the County Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) and worked with County Departments and Local Partners to submit for a New State Grant for emergency power for gas distributors.

- The County held three Governors Tier 3 trainings for Emergency Preparedness for Local Governments and sponsored emergency preparedness training for County residents supplied by the National Guard.

- The EMO Office worked with WSKG to install an emergency video link to be used for County Emergencies.

The **Department of Public Works Highway Division:**

- Installed culvert pipes and installed detours across the county.

The **Buildings & Grounds Division:**

- Remodeled the District Attorney's Office.
- Constructed new records storage area at A-frame building.
- Painted the interior of the Ronald E. Dougherty County Office Building.

Capital projects included:

- Reconstructed 800 ft. of Corporate Drive for heavy truck traffic.
- Completed \$2 million dollar Energy performance contract.
- Completed \$1 million dollar flood mitigation project at 3 County buildings.
- Reconstructed the Allyn Rd., Catatunk Hill Rd., Penn. Ave., and West Creek Rd. bridges.

Regarding **Materials Recovery**, in 2014, both recycling tonnages and recycling revenues increased. We completed our seventh year of our Tire Program in which more than 700 tons of tires have been cleaned up and properly disposed of within Tioga County since the inception of this program. We received over \$52,000 in grant funds for equipment to assist the Department of Public Works during emergency efforts.

In 2014, the **Economic Development and Planning Department**

worked to bring *new* business and keep our existing businesses in Tioga County.

- Tioga County received Consolidated Funding Application awards in the amount of \$662,960 in 2014 an increase from previous years. These funds will benefit two Tioga County businesses with facility expansions and also the Tioga County Local

Development Corporation toward the construction of a Visitors and Education Center.

- The Department completed a New York Main Street Revitalization grant for the Village of Nichols in 2014. This project resulted in 9 property owners participating with a total investment for the rehabilitation of residential and commercial buildings in the amount of over \$300,000.
- The Economic Development and Planning office has been working to develop the IDA owned site on Route 434 in Owego (ESite). There is a plan for the construction of a 62 unit, 55 and older housing complex. The developer of this project has signed an option for the purchase of 5 acres and is presently seeking funding for the project.

Last year, the **Legislature** did something out of the ordinary in that we dedicated the County Office Building to Ronald E. Dougherty in recognition of Ron's contributions to Tioga County Government and to the community throughout the years. This was a very well attended event and at the end of the day we all felt like we had done a good thing in recognizing an outstanding individual.

So now here we are in March of 2015 and I believe we are off to a great start.

Our **Economic Development and Planning Department** continues to work to help business grow. This February they hosted an event to educate Tioga County municipalities, businesses and not-for-profits about the State programs such as the Consolidated Funding Program. These additional programs will help businesses and organizations expand, produce more jobs, and hopefully increase sales tax income to the County.

Today the **Tioga County Employment Center** hosted a job fair featuring 61 businesses and every business that participated had jobs to offer the public. Over 500 people came out today looking for employment. This event was implemented through a teamwork approach through the efforts of highly motivated County employees and County organizations working together.

Tioga County is eagerly anticipating the completion of our Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan 2015 update this spring. Agriculture is an important part of our rural economy and quality of life and we need to keep working to support our agricultural community. Tioga County will be participating in two implementation projects:

- Locate a USDA inspected slaughterhouse and meat packaging facility in Tioga County; and
- Establishing a farmers' cooperative centralized food hub which would help transport goods to market by way of the railroad.

Although we were deeply disappointed with the results of the siting committee on casinos, should Tioga Downs need more help in the effort to secure a full casino license, we will be there to support them.

In closing...Thank you to our dedicated employees, professional staff, directors, and legislators who work together to help our government operate smoothly and efficiently. I look forward to making progress this year, and along with my fellow legislators, we expect to make good decisions and do the right thing for our Tioga County citizens.

Our focus has been a strong team approach, with collaboration inside and outside county government and a constant focus on the things that matter most to residents – protecting taxpayers, preserving essential services and promoting economic growth.