



# TOWN OF EAST HAMPTON

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## State of the Town Address 2023

Good afternoon! I would like to welcome everyone to the Town Board Organizational meeting of 2023. It is my pleasure to be here to serve another year as your Town Supervisor, and I am excited to work together with my fellow Councilmembers and the community on the many issues and challenges we face as a town.

### Covid-19 Pandemic

The Covid-19 Pandemic has continued to impact us throughout 2022 with supply chain issues, anxiety, fatigue, frustration, economic and human losses. We were able to resume many of the activities that we previously had to avoid, but now once again we see a resurgence of Covid and precautions are warranted. The Town continued to offer free Covid home test kits as well as Flu and Covid testing at the former CDCH building at 110 Stephen Hands Path throughout 2022. We now know that the effectiveness of vaccines wanes over time, and it is therefore imperative to get booster shots to prevent serious illness or death from this insidious disease. We encourage everyone to get vaccinated and stay up to date with booster shots. We will continue to work with local businesses to reduce the economic impacts of Covid-19, for example, by encouraging outdoor dining through zoning changes. We lobbied for passage of legislation sponsored by Assemblyman Fred Thiele that supports our offsite catering businesses by modernizing State Liquor Authority regulations and are pleased that Governor Kathy Hochul has signed this legislation into law. We will continue to monitor and work to mitigate the effects of the pandemic for as long as is necessary.

### Housing Affordability

One of the most acute impacts from the pandemic has been the skyrocketing cost and dramatic shortage of housing. Businesses, school districts, our community hospital, and municipal government are all struggling to hire and retain staff. Restaurants and other businesses are operating fewer days of the week and commute times from more affordable areas are becoming unbearable. Housing continues to be one of the most serious and immediate threats to the well-being and sustainability of our community.

Last January, I announced an initiative, "ALL HANDS ON HOUSING," to advance solutions to address the housing crisis as fast as possible. Each board member was tasked with a specific aspect of this problem: development of a Community Housing Fund Plan and informing the public of the ballot referendum, review of potential zoning changes, acquisition of land, and developing housing units. We have been busy moving projects forward by partnering with the East Hampton Housing Authority on the 50 affordable apartment units under construction on Three Mile Harbor Road and advancing plans to build 16 affordable single-family homes on 12 acres of town-owned property at 395 Pantigo Road. Partnering with Habitat for Humanity resulted in another affordable house, this time for a local single parent and veteran.

Working with both the East Hampton Housing Authority and the Sag Harbor Community Housing Trust the Town Board is advancing plans for an additional 50 affordable rental units with one, two, and three bedrooms for those with moderate incomes at the former Triune Baptist Church property on Rt. 114 in Wainscott. We have discussed and reviewed several potential code changes to further encourage participation in the town's Affordable Accessory Apartment pilot program and have increased the allowable density of affordable single-family homes from two units per acre to four per acre, as allowed under Suffolk County health regulations.

I am so proud that our community has overwhelmingly supported the Community Housing Fund referendum with 69% of voters saying "yes" to create an ongoing funding source to address our housing crisis. This ½% transfer tax is paid only by the purchasers of real property within the township and does not increase property taxes. The fund will be audited annually to ensure compliance with state and town statutes.

We will be appointing a Community Housing Fund Committee early this year, as prescribed by the recently passed housing legislation, which will advise the town on developing policies and procedures and will vet and recommend expenditures of the Community Housing Fund (CHF) to the Town Board. The committee will comprise at least one member each with a background in banking, construction, and real estate, and at least 3 members with backgrounds in community housing or human services.

These efforts comprise the town's most significant housing effort to date and will continue our commitment to improving the housing situation this year.

## **Airport**

With the expiration of FAA grant assurances in September of 2021 and after an extensive series of Town Board work sessions, public workshops, and studies, and with the guidance of FAA officials, our intention has been to transition East Hampton's Town owned airport to a Prior Permission Required (PPR) model of operation, which we believe will give the town the most flexibility in crafting restrictions that balance the needs of the entire community. We planned to begin implementing restrictions in May of 2022 so that they would be in place in time for the 2022 summer season.

This past May, aviation interests initiated multiple lawsuits against the Town in an attempt to prevent us from implementing community supported, reasonable restrictions on the hours of operation, traffic volume, noise, and environmental impacts. New York State Supreme Court Judge Baisley, in response to these complaints, issued a Temporary Restraining Order (TRO).

In October of 2022, the same Judge Baisley ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, barring the town from implementing our reasonable restrictions, citing among other things,

non-compliance with the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) and requiring the town to conduct an Environmental Impact Study (EIS). We have appealed the judge's decision and have also initiated a full Generic Environmental Impact Study (GEIS) as the court has required which will study alternatives ranging from implementing various restrictions to closure. The Town Board remains committed to successfully reaching our community's goal to gain meaningful relief for the ever-growing multitude of people whose quality

of life is negatively affected by aircraft noise, and to improve the environment by reducing emissions.

## **Wireless Master Plan and Communications Improvements**

There has been ongoing public interest and discussion of the issue of emergency communications as well as cell carrier coverage throughout the town and especially in Springs-- topics the Town Board is fully aware of and has been working diligently to try to resolve.

To boost the emergency communications system in the Springs area until a new tower is erected and equipment can be installed, the Town has had a “cell on wheels,” or “COW,” located at the Town Dock at Gann Road since June. The East Hampton Town Planning Board and Town Architectural Review Board recently approved a long-awaited emergency communications tower in Springs. The Camp Blue Bay tower will complete the Townwide emergency communications upgrade as well as provide cellular communications in several areas of the hamlet of Springs which currently are communication “dead zones.” However, it has become clear that no single tower site will completely eliminate coverage and capacity gaps within Springs or the town at large.

By engaging CityScape, a communications consulting firm, we’ve identified the areas where there are issues with both coverage and capacity. These issues are likely to grow with an increased demand for data and streaming services by our community members.

Pending updates to the Town Code and our Wireless Master Plan are designed to make it easier and more efficient for cell phone carriers such as Verizon or AT&T to add equipment sites in “dead zones,” filling coverage gaps. These changes include revisions to the process by which approvals for cell sites can be obtained, removing a number of those procedures from Planning Board review, and making them administrative where appropriate.

Changes in the minimum required setbacks from adjacent property lines, which recently went into effect, will give the town and providers more flexibility in the siting of these services which we know are in great demand.

A town-wide survey conducted by CityScape showed that almost 91 percent of the respondents townwide supported improved communications and new cell sites, over concerns for aesthetics. Cellular service is provided by independent private corporations and to the degree that the Town can encourage wireless providers to improve service, we will do so.

To further this effort the Town's Draft Wireless Communications Plan will be presented and discussed in January/February of 2023.

## **Building Projects**

There are several important building projects that are being planned or are now under way. The Town Board recently purchased property next to the town-owned Terry King ballfield which is well suited as the site for construction of a new Senior Center. We have hired R2 Architectural and Engineering who conducted a public engagement process to fully assess the needs of seniors and the community to better inform the design for the center. The board has discussed with our consultants, at several public work sessions, a variety of potential design programs and we have narrowed the focus to two possible designs. A decision will be made early this year with site work immediately following. This will also be the first building project undertaken by the Town of East Hampton with the goal of reaching "net zero" emissions by producing as much energy as it uses -- which aligns with our Climate Crisis declaration and sustainability goals. We are extremely excited about this project that will meet the needs of our aging community now and well into the future.

The Town began constructing two new baseball fields at the Town's Stephen Hand's Path recreational property to replace ballfields displaced by the new Stony Brook/ Southampton Hospital Satellite emergency room. The hospital will be contributing \$1.75 million dollars for the construction of the new ballfields in exchange for the long-term lease of the Pantigo site.

Construction on the hospital emergency facility will also begin later this year providing much needed medical access here in East Hampton.

This past year we dedicated an accessible multi-use bike and pedestrian path at the Buckskill Preserve in memory of Zachary Cohen, longtime Nature Preserve Committee Chairman and community advocate. More accessible trails, a pavilion, and bathrooms are scheduled for construction at the 57-acre former Boy's and Girl's Harbor property on the west side of Three Mile Harbor.

Plans for the construction of 2 pickleball courts in Montauk are under way. The basketball and tennis courts' resurfacing at Springs School is planned for completion in the spring of 2023.

The reconstruction of the Lars Simenson Skatepark in Montauk was the highlight of our recreational efforts this year. This public/private partnership resulted in significant funds being privately raised to supplement the Town's contribution, resulting in a world class facility we can all be proud of.

These are a few of our many park and public space improvements designed to create more opportunities to improve access to enjoy our beautiful open spaces for all our residents and visitors alike. For a full listing visit our website: [ehamptonny.gov](http://ehamptonny.gov)

We are continuing our efforts to preserve our local history by acquiring or restoring properties such as Carl Fisher House, Second House, and Brooks/Park. The Board recently authorized the hiring of respected Preservationist, Michael Devonshire, to advise the Board as to what should be done with the Brooks/Park structures.

Several important road infrastructure projects are also under way. The Stephen Hand's Path drainage project is nearing completion. Two other drainage projects are scheduled for Montauk: one at Industrial Road and Second House Road, and the other at Flamingo Road at the base of Tuthill Road. These projects to address chronic flooding are long overdue and are expected to be completed this year.

The Stephen Hand's Path/ Long Lane roundabout is being designed and construction should begin this year addressing congestion and safety concerns at one of our most heavily traveled roads.

We have begun the Montauk Gateway project which is one of the final stages of a private-public partnership to bury utility lines along the Old Montauk Highway and at the intersection with Route 27 at the entrance to downtown Montauk. This project improves the amazing scenic ocean vistas along both roadways and builds storm resilience.

There are several other projects planned, accomplished, or underway which may be accessed by going to the Town's website [ehamptonny.gov](http://ehamptonny.gov)

## **Renewable Energy and Sustainability**

On the renewable energy front there are several milestones to report. First, the terrestrial work for the South Fork Wind project is nearing completion. We continue to monitor the project to ensure consistency with the Environmental Management and Construction Plan (EMCP) and the conditions the Town has imposed in our agreements with the project sponsor. We look forward to New York's **first** offshore wind farm going online and producing enough clean, renewable energy for 70,000 homes and furthering our commitment to reaching our 100% renewable energy goals.

In 2022, the town completed a solar array on the roof of the town's Parks Department which is combined with a battery energy storage system. In addition to the estimated \$10,000 in annual energy costs savings, this system will provide clean backup power at Town Hall in the event of power outages. We received a \$300,000 grant from the New York Power Authority (NYPA) for this project, the **first** municipal project of its type in New York State.

We are also planning additional EV charging infrastructure on the Town Hall campus which will support our transition from a fossil fuel powered fleet of vehicles to electric and electric/hybrid vehicles, consistent with our Climate Emergency declaration and new vehicle acquisition policies. This charging infrastructure will also be available for use by town residents.

Town-wide LED street lighting upgrades will soon be underway and should be completed in 2023 as part of our ongoing effort to reduce energy consumption

and fossil fuel emissions, and achieve cost savings. We are partnering with the New York Power Authority (NYPA) to help us complete this project.

We will continue to encourage residents to participate in the Town's Solarize/Energize East Hampton initiatives which help residents contribute to a cleaner, healthier future and achieve increased cost savings. More information is available at [ehamptonny.gov](http://ehamptonny.gov), or by contacting the Town's Natural Resources Department.

## **Water Quality and Land Preservation**

In 2022, the Town acquired 26 parcels equaling 72.8 acres using Community Preservation Funds (CPF). Among the notable purchases this past year were 33 acres of farmland in Amagansett and 10 acres of farmland in East Hampton. These acquisitions help maintain our rural character, increase our resiliency, sustainability, and secure an agrarian future for our next generation of farmers. Many of the additional acquisitions protect wetlands and groundwater or expand adjacent open space preserves.

Revenues for the CPF continue to be robust. The current unencumbered fund balance for the Community Preservation Fund is \$65 million dollars.

The recent acquisition of 18.8 acres in Montauk with general municipal funds is potentially another purchase that could directly benefit water quality in Lake Montauk and Fort Pond; both water bodies are currently listed as impaired. The Town has continued to search for a viable site for a sewage treatment plant to service the already densely developed Montauk Downtown, Docks, Train station, and Ditch Plain areas of Montauk. These areas directly discharge an

estimated 500,000 gallons of raw, untreated sewage into the ground daily. Due to high groundwater and space constraints, onsite treatment is not possible. To date, the only viable location identified to site such a plant is next to the capped landfill and communications tower farm in Hither Hills. The recently acquired Town-owned 18.8 acres adjacent to Third House County Park is being offered to Suffolk County as consideration for the 14 acres they own next to the landfill. We don't believe there is a better option for siting a waste treatment plant in Montauk, but we remain open-minded and encourage constructive community participation to address this untenable situation.



For many residential properties, Innovative Alternative (IA) septic systems are the best solution for treating septic waste by greatly reducing nitrogen, a pollutant that impairs the water in our ponds, bays, creeks, and harbors, as well as our drinking water. East Hampton Town's septic improvement program, initiated in late 2017, is the **first** town program of its kind on Long Island, and offers rebates that coupled with Suffolk County grants cover nearly all the costs of upgrading your septic system. We have approved 900 eligibility applications to date with 187 being approved in 2022. 149 Innovative Alternative (IA) systems were installed in 2022.

All new construction requires the installation of IAs and is not eligible for this program. We expect greater participation in this program following a recent decision by the USDA and IRS that rescinds the requirement to report septic grants as taxable income via a 1099 form. We will be contacting residents who were previously sent 1099s to inform them of this ruling and that they may file amended returns seeking tax credits or refunds. If you are interested in learning more about the Septic Rebate Program, go to the town website at [ehamptonny.gov](http://ehamptonny.gov) or contact the town's Natural Resources Department.

In 2022 the Town has moved forward with continuing to lead by example, through upgrading municipal facilities to IA sanitary systems focusing on Town-owned comfort stations, designing and installing stormwater abatement projects, and completing the **first** injection permeable reactive barrier on Long Island, to improve the quality of Three Mile Harbor.

In 2023 we will work with our State Representatives to seek modifications to the allowable uses of CPF funds to include the operation and maintenance costs of historic properties purchased with CPF funds and to increase the 20% cap for water quality projects and allow designated water quality funds to accrue year over year.

## **Communication**

The town continues to look for ways to better inform the public as to available services, town projects, and important information. We have a social media presence on several platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. In addition, our website: [ehamptonny.gov](http://ehamptonny.gov) is constantly being updated and contains links to meeting videos for all boards as well as work session agendas, materials, and resolutions. There are pages listing all town parks and recreational facilities and activities. We are now utilizing QR codes on town signs and notices to link to additional information. The weekly LTV show, Ask the Supervisor, discusses topics of interest.

Even with all these methods of communication, we find that there is still a lack of awareness of important facts and information. To improve public awareness and outreach in 2023 we will be adding newsletter mailings to residents.

I would also like to invite the public to contact me, my fellow Councilmembers, or staff if you have any questions or concerns. We are here to serve you!

## **Town Finances**

The town's finances are currently in excellent shape. Moody's **again** gave East Hampton its highest bond rating, Triple A (Aaa,) in 2022. Through careful and conservative budgeting, we have met our budgetary targets and stayed below the 2 % tax cap for this past year.

It is important to note that our community has experienced significant growth in year-round residency the last few years, and with this growth, increasing demands for services. The shortage of housing coupled with crippling inflation has further impaired the ability of local businesses, schools, our hospital, and municipalities such as East Hampton Town to hire and retain staff.

The Town Board decided that it was necessary and appropriate to issue a one-time supplemental payment to full-time town employees during the calendar year 2022 and raise annual salaries between 6 and 10% in 2023 in order to remain competitive within our unique job market. These actions were taken outside of the CSEA Union Collective Bargaining Agreement. We appreciate the quality and dedication of our employees and understand that they are the foundation of our ability to provide the necessary services and support for our community. We look forward to negotiating the next CSEA contract, which expires at the end of 2023.

We will also be seeking to fill several positions that will become vacant in 2023 due to retirements. Some of these positions include department heads who have served the town for many, many years and contributed greatly to our community. We thank all these retirees for their service and wish them the very best in their well-deserved retirement.

### **In Closing**

We have worked hard to provide the very best in services to the community, none of which would be possible without our dedicated employees and my fellow Town Board members Kathee Burke-Gonzalez, David Lys, Sylvia Overby, and Cate Rogers. I want to also give a special thank you to my personal staff Joanne Pilgrim and Anne Bell who together with us, keep our local government functioning well.

In looking ahead to our list of priorities for 2023, the Board plans to focus on the initiatives “ALL HANDS-ON HOUSING” and improving water quality by expanding residential and commercial wastewater treatment initiatives. We will continue addressing sea-level rise and coastal erosion through our Coastal Assessment and Resiliency Plan (CARP) and implementing the Town’s Hamlet Plans. We will continue to advance our Energy and Sustainability goals and work to improve efficiency in the delivery of Town services and the dissemination of information.

2022 has been a very productive year, and the Town is on solid footing. I feel honored and blessed to be the Supervisor of a Town that comes together to support those in need, gathers to rebuke hatred, seeks to protect its environment, honors its history, and celebrates its diversity. We can rise to any challenge as long as we respect each other and work together for the common good. Let us work together for a better world and Happier New Year in 2023.

Thank you and stay well!