



# State of New York County of Broome Government Offices

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Executive's Office

Jason T. Garnar, Broome County Executive

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## **2019 State of the County Address**

Good evening, everyone. Thank you for being here tonight. This is my third State of the County Address. I enjoy it more and more every single year, looking back on what we've accomplished so far, and what's even more exciting, sharing with you about my big plans for this year.

Tonight, we are here at the Ansko Lofts in the city of Binghamton. You heard Matt talk about his vision for this project and how everything came together. I remember when I first met Matt. It wasn't even two years ago. He came to my office and said he wanted to buy this building. We owned it, the county. He wanted to make something of it. I remember talking with my staff after that meeting that day, about the energy Matt has, how professional he was and how serious he was about this project as someone with a proven track record of taking old factory buildings and bringing new life to them. He saw an opportunity in Broome County and he went after it. The rest is history. We are just months away from the grand opening of the Ansko Lofts. This redevelopment of a facility with a ton of history is incredible. This project is attracting young professionals to this area and this is where people want to be.

If you don't believe me just ask Kathryn Fletcher, her husband Paul. After the birth of their daughter, they looked for a place to move. They wanted something similar to the luxury student apartment complexes, but without the students. They even started to look outside of Broome County, but when they saw the Ansko Lofts, they were so impressed they stopped looking elsewhere and will soon be signing a lease to live at the Ansko Lofts, right here in Broome County! They are living proof of why it is so important to repurpose these old empty buildings.

This is happening across the county like at 1 North Page in the Town of Union, West Endicott, another county-owned building taken by foreclosure. I used to say it's one of the biggest eyesores in Broome County, but guess what? It's gone. I know Legislator Greg Baldwin waited a long time for this to happen, and at the end of last year, we all watched that building come down. The demolition of 1 North Page is paving the way for something new. National Pipe and Plastics is building a brand-new office space and providing parking and green space for the West Endicott Park. It's a win-win for the community.

Over in Johnson City, the new Century Sunrise apartment complex opened last fall, bringing over 100 affordable housing units. Also opening this spring, 50 front Street. This is the result of a partnership between Broome County, the Broome County Landbank, and Newman Development. And just yesterday, another big demolition started. The old Endicott Inn is coming down. What was once a blighted building attracting all sorts of crime will become a major anchor on Endicott's historic Washington Avenue

Justin Marchuska is here tonight. That is his project. This is the start of real change you will see in Endicott. For years, people have been talking about revitalizing Washington Ave. Broome

County is partnering to take action, and I can't wait to see what the Avenue will look like in the next few years. Just these five projects alone renovated or demolished over half a million square feet of blight and generated over \$100 million in new investment. All these projects including just about everything else we do in Broome County are all prime examples of the Power of Partnerships.

You've heard me say it before. The Power of Partnerships. Things happen because of partnerships. The county, the municipalities, the state, business owners, developers, the local communities all coming together, rolling up our sleeves, working together and partnering to get things done. All you have to do is take a look at what's happening in Washington DC to see what happens when people can't work together. Government shut-downs, trillions of dollars of debt, and a real belief by most people in this country that Washington is absolutely broken and incapable of compromise and of moving this country forward. But none of that is happening in Broome County. We've made so much progress over the last few years and none of that would have been possible without a team approach.

Our local economy is improving, and our county finances are stronger. We're developing responsible budgets, working to grow our fund balance, also proposing a budget that included a tax cut for the first time in 14 years. We're getting financial reports in the hands of Legislators, being open and transparent on what's coming in and going out. We launched the Buy in Broome campaign with the help of the Chamber of Commerce, encouraging people to buy big, buy small, just buy in Broome County. The result? We've seen a huge increase in sales tax revenues. The unemployment rate has been cut in half over the past eight years. We still have a lot of work to do, but we're light years ahead of where we were just two short years ago.

But we need to do more. I've said it before, one of the biggest challenges facing us is how do we fill the open jobs in Broome County. There are 4,000 open jobs. Owners of companies tell me they may have to shut down an entire division if they don't get enough people in to fill their open jobs. I am committed to working with our partners to make sure that doesn't happen.

Operation Clean Sweep, a brand-new county job program, is about ready to kick-off. Our new Job Coach is John Mitchell. He is a veteran, retired as a Senior Master Sergeant in the Air Force, who spent many years working for Lockheed Martin. Sergeant Mitchell started earlier this month and he's on a new and very important mission to help people who are out of work get the real-life job skills and job experience they need to get a full-time job.

This year, we are expanding our Opportunity Impact Program. It was a pilot program last year created by our Workforce Director Sara Liu and it was a huge success. It's a partnership with SUNY Broome and several of our local companies. It's simple, involving a six-week training program and if you graduate, you are guaranteed a job. Twenty-one people graduated last year. This year, our goal is to have 100 graduates! That's 100 new people driving trucks, working on a manufacturing line, and most importantly providing for their families.

We partnered with the Chamber of Commerce to create a brand new Welcome Wagon program. We are working together to show off the best of Broome County to those who are considering taking a job here. We are in the fight of our lives to attract the best and brightest to work here

and we are putting a full court press on attracting those young professionals right to our community.

The Chamber has also been a big help with the airport. We all want to see the airport succeed. We've got good momentum going and we are building on that. We have hired a new marketing firm that specializes in airport marketing, we started a FLY BING program with our businesses, and we just announced that for the first time since 2010, we saw an increase in passenger traffic at the airport from 2017 to 2018. This year, I am exploring all our options, so we can help the airport become more efficient and expand on the growth we are seeing.

We live in a great community and we are going to do everything possible to make it better. We're making it better for our veterans too with a one stop shop for veterans' services. We are buying the old Vestal Hills Country Club in the Town of Binghamton and putting all veterans' programs and services under one roof. All veterans' programs and services will be under one roof. I want to thank the Legislature for unanimously approving the purchase of this property. I know this project is something we all can get behind. We're renovating the building and moving in our Broome County Veterans Services Department. Our Director Brian Vojtisek and his staff will be working out of the new location, connecting our Broome County veterans to their benefits.

Southern Tier Veterans Support Group will have something they've always wanted and needed, an office. Ben Margolis, the President of the Southern Tier Veterans Support Group told me, 'This is exactly what veterans need.'

Clear Path for Veterans of the Southern Tier will be bringing in more of its services and programs to Broome County including Peer to Peer Support, Canteens, and their dogs to veterans training program. We have bought a van and donated it for Clear Path, so they can help bring people to the new facility.

One of our partners will be Cornell Cooperative Extension of Broome County with their Vets in Agriculture program, nutrition education, and gardening workshops. Our Office of Employment and Training will be holding jobs workshops there. Legislator O'Brien has even mentioned working with our veterans to create murals. We'll be meeting with veterans on a regular basis to get their input on what they want to see done for this facility, in fact, our first meeting will be in early March.

Our veterans deserve to have a facility that shows that we care, a place they feel comfortable, welcomed, safe and taken care of. This will be it. It will be a model for communities around New York State and be the gold standard on how a community should take care of its veterans. The Town of Binghamton has been very supportive of this project, and I especially want to thank Supervisor Elizabeth Rounds for all her support.

I enjoy working with our municipalities. Getting out into the communities, talking with our town and village leaders and our residents. When we work together as municipal leaders, we make things happen. Together, we are making a lot of things happen across Broome County.

In 2017, we embarked on a major shared services plan, working with our municipalities to save money. We were the first county to submit a shared services plan to the state. Last year, we started to see the benefits, savings to the county through our new prescription drug plan. County caseworkers at Binghamton, Maine-Endwell and Whitney Point are working hard every day to help our kids and providing significant taxpayer dollar savings.

The state offered a match on our first-year savings and we are going after it. Just three days ago we became the first county to officially apply for this state money when I signed an application for over \$3 million in first year savings for Broome County. That's millions back to Broome County. Money that we can use to lower taxes, stabilize our fund balance, and invest in infrastructure.

Speaking of shared services, we finally started an initiative that's been talked about for 20 years, Central Arraignment. Sheriff Harder says it's been a long time coming. This is saving money and time, working with our municipalities, the courts, and law enforcement. We began the second phase of the central arraignment process earlier this month, creating an efficient arraignment process that will keep police officers out of the courtroom and back where they want to be, on patrol, protecting their communities.

Also, for this year, the county's largest public safety initiative in decades, an initiative that will save lives in every part of Broome County. We are finally upgrading our out of date Public Safety Radio system. Some of the equipment we are using is from the 1970s. This is a public safety issue. Some of our first responders can't even communicate with each other. This upgrade will benefit thousands of first responders, and 55 different agencies including police officers, firefighters, EMS, DPW, schools, and hospitals Every single person in Broome County will be safer once the new system comes online. I want to thank our State representatives, Senator Akshar and Assembly members Lupardo and Crouch for their strong support in moving this project forward. Thank you, Legislator Mark Whalen and Legislator Scott Baker, for being involved from the beginning, and using your real-life experiences as first responders to move this project forward. Also, a big thank you to our Office of Emergency Services Director Mike Ponticello, Neal Haight, Jeff Buckler, Ray Serowik, Mike Ballard and our entire first responder community for supporting this project and getting it off the drawing board. Ensuring public safety is a top priority and we must do everything we can to support the heroes who serve our community every day.

My new small community grant fund has been a big hit with our towns and villages. We were able to use these grants to leverage big important projects. In Deposit, we invested \$20,000 in demolishing a large blighted chimney to make way for a new community park. In the Town of Maine, we invested \$60,000 in a natural gas extension project which will supply cheaper energy to over 100 homeowners and dozens of local businesses. Jim Tokos is here tonight, the Town of Maine Supervisor. He and the Board have been waiting years to be able to move this forward. I'm glad we could help. In the Town of Binghamton \$20,000 was awarded to fix the drainage issues at Jackson Park. We invested \$40,000 in a new consolidated ambulance service, Eastern Broome Emergency Services. In their first year they responded to more than 1,000 calls, saving countless lives.

Growing up in a small community, I know that rural communities are unique, and we wouldn't want it any other way. Parks, emergency services, and small businesses are very important to towns and villages and Broome County is committed to partnering with our small communities any way we can. An important part of that commitment is making sure we live in a safe and healthy community. That means taking head-on the biggest public health crisis our community has ever faced, the heroin epidemic.

Broome County is now leading the way in fighting the heroin epidemic. We're partnering with all our stakeholders and it's paying off. Fatal overdoses were down 50% in 2018. Thank you to District Attorney Steve Cornwell and the work of his staff on investigating these overdoses and getting the data and sharing it. Helio Health, our brand-new treatment provider, saved the lives of over 1,000 people since they started last spring. The Addiction Center of Broome County is opening a new outpatient satellite location in Endicott this year. Just last week, Family and Children's Counseling Services announced it is offering new addiction counseling and treatment services. In the next few months, UHS will also be offering a brand-new treatment program at the Broome County Jail.

We're leading the way because of people such as Marissa Lamphere, our opioid overdose prevention coordinator, and Maria Fabrizi from Drug Free Communities who's getting into our schools and communities. They're hosting forums and conversations about prevention and recovery. In fact, there's one tomorrow night at Maine-Endwell High School. Legislator Shaw has been a big help in organizing this with Marissa and M-E Superintendent Jason Van Fossen.

Earlier this month, was the opening of Compass Academy. It's at BOCES and is the first educational hybrid recovery high school in the entire state. Broome County helped fund that program through our opioid overdose prevention mini-grants. We also gave grants to Truth Pharm, STAP and the Boys and Girls Club of Western Broome. BOAC's Peer Response team is getting national attention for its boots on the ground approach to get people the help they need.

We're coming together to help people in Broome County and include them. Megan Wise is our BroomeINCLUDES coordinator. I announced BroomeINCLUDES at last year's State of the County. It was created to help people in Broome County with special needs and behavioral health challenges and to help support their families. BroomeINCLUDES already had a major signature event, hosting a special needs hockey tournament for hundreds of kids in Broome County. Tonight, for the first time ever we have an American Sign Language Interpreter. This is just one of the many BroomeINCLUDES initiatives we have planned because it's time we started to think differently about how we can become a more inclusive community.

We're also working together to make safe housing a priority. Over the past two years Broome County has become more active in addressing housing than ever before. We've partnered with the land bank and with various municipalities to demolish or renovate dozens of homes. Two big demolitions last year were in Kirkwood on State Route 11. Supervisor Gordi Kniffen said that project was something they've been waiting on for a long time.

But you don't have to look too hard to see that much more has to be done to improve the quality of housing in our community. We held a public forum just two weeks ago. We heard a lot of

stories about the struggles people have with finding quality housing. Some of the conditions people are living in are horrific. This is unacceptable. Broome County pays about \$12 million dollars every year in rent for DSS recipients. Too often, those rent checks pay for unsafe, dangerous, terrible conditions. Our residents do not deserve that, and our taxpayers do not deserve that.

Mark Schuster and Rebecca Rathmell are with us tonight. I named them as co-chairs of my Safe Housing Task Force. The goal? Bringing our housing experts and communities together with Binghamton, Johnson City and Town of Union to make real lasting change. We need to protect our residents, we need proactive code enforcement, and we need to work together with landlords. All of this will help improve the quality of our housing in Broome County. My Task Force will be handing over recommendations to me in the next month. I am looking forward to reviewing them with Legislator Kaminsky and our Health Department and then taking action to make real change in Broome County to improve housing for our residents.

This year, I am partnering with the Agency on a pilot program to rehab existing housing in Broome County. The Agency continues to be a great partner with Broome County. Executive Director Kevin McLaughlin continues to bring fresh ideas to the table to help in the economic development of Broome County. This new partnership of ours focuses on neighborhoods. First, we'll target Johnson City. We're calling it JumpStart JC. We will be taking a block by block approach, working with property owners in neighborhoods to improve their homes.

Our strategy of revitalizing neighborhoods is paying off. It's seen right in our local housing data. Over the past two years the average sale price is up 6.4% and the number of homes sold is up 7.5%. These are great numbers for our local housing market, but we can do even better in 2019 and we will. That's only because of the Power of Partnerships.

You've heard what can happen and what will happen when we work together. Our towns, villages and city, law enforcement, business leaders, non-profits, democrats and republicans.

Together we're cleaning up our neighborhoods one block at a time. Together we're fighting and winning the heroin epidemic. Together we're helping more people get to work and get jobs. Together we're rebuilding our county's finances. Together we're bringing lifesaving public safety equipment to our first responders. Together we will help veterans. Together each and every day we're making a Broome County a great place for our families to live.

I want to do one more thing. Matt, can you come up here again. Last year, I started the Baby's First Book program. Every baby born in Broome County gets a book. We've given out more than 2,000. Matt, I know your wife is expecting baby #4 in just a few weeks. Here is copy number 2,001 for your new baby.

Thank you everyone for being here tonight. I invite you to join the Paulus Development team and get your first look at the new model units at the AnSCO Lofts. Thank you and God Bless!