

# 2026 Chautauqua County State of the County Address

## Slide 1: Intro

Hello, and welcome to the 2026 Chautauqua County State of the County Address.

It is a privilege to stand before you and deliver a message of strength, resilience, and accomplishments of our county. As County Executive, I am deeply committed to working alongside our residents, businesses, and community partners to seize new opportunities for Chautauqua County.

Over the past year, we have made **real measurable** progress and today, I will highlight what we have accomplished, and lay out a clear vision for building a stronger, more prosperous future.

## Slide 2: Growing Chautauqua County

As Chautauqua County continues to grow the momentum that we've built together is creating real opportunities. Under my leadership ... we have remained focused on what matters most: ... maintaining financial stability ... driving economic development ... improving infrastructure ... promoting sustainable growth ... and enhancing efficiency and responsiveness in County government. That commitment has allowed us to enhance the services we provide ... delivering greater value while carefully managing rising costs.

Our shared goal is to build a County that is both stable today and positioned for lasting success in the future.

### Slide 3: State of the Economy

In Chautauqua County, the economy is not just improving-it is getting stronger. I will highlight the progress we have made and lay out our ambitious plan for the future that includes strategic investments in our infrastructure ... meaningful support for our local businesses ... an increased commitment to strengthening our housing stock ... and ambitiously growing our tourism industry.

### Slide 4: County Investments/Infrastructure

It is clear that investing in our local infrastructure is crucial to the economic growth of Chautauqua County. These projects are not isolated-they are part of a comprehensive strategy to strengthen our economy, support our communities, and achieve long-term success.

Our continued investment in shovel-ready sites at the Mason Industrial Park and the I-90 Veterans Memorial Commerce Park are essential to attracting new businesses. This year, the CCIDA secured FastNY grant funding for pre-development work at the long-vacant, 657-acre Eagle Bay site in Sheridan. This potential industrial park could become the largest shovel-ready site in New York State. With marketing already underway and the Mason and Ripley sites nearing completion, our capacity to draw new development will only continue to grow.

### Slide 5: DPF Highway Projects

We are also making substantial investments in our transportation network. This year, we will treat and maintain more than 660 miles of county roads, complete six culvert and bridge rehabilitations, undertake two bridge replacements, and replace two culverts. In total, more than \$13 million will be invested in our roadways.

## Slide 6: Highspeed Broadband

We have also prioritized investing in the expansion of highspeed broadband. In 2025, Chautauqua County received an allocation of over \$29 million in ConnectALL BEAD Grant funding, which is anticipated to bring high-speed broadband to more than 3,500 new locations across Chautauqua County. Additionally, DFT Communications is making significant progress on their broadband expansion project that was funded through County ARPA funding and private investment made by DFT. The project supports fiber deployment to a further 385 addresses in Dunkirk and Sheridan.

## Slide 7: South & Center Chautauqua Lake Sewer District

In addition, the South & Center Chautauqua Lake Sewer District's Westside Sewer Extension Phase II project is nearing completion. Earlier this year, we announced that funding has been secured for Phase III ... the final phase of this decades-long effort to complete public sewer service around Chautauqua Lake. This final phase will extend infrastructure from Point Chautauqua to Midway State Park, closing the last gap and fully connecting the lake's south and north basins with municipal sewer.

This is a historic milestone one that will improve water quality ... strengthen property values ... support economic development ... and protect the long-term health of our lake communities. When complete, this project will stand as a generational investment in infrastructure, and lasting environmental stewardship, for one of our most treasured natural resources... Chautauqua Lake.

## Slide 8: CCIDA

In 2025, the CCIDA Board approved or assisted nine projects that will generate more than \$84.7 million in new investment. These investments are projected to create 639 jobs and retain an additional 243 positions here in Chautauqua County. The work the CCIDA undertook in 2025 has carried into 2026, and they have already secured more investment this year than in all of last year. Over the past five years, CCIDA-supported projects have created 3,975 permanent and temporary jobs and helped retain 5,854 existing positions... supporting a total of 9,829 jobs countywide. And during that same period, the CCIDA has played a central role in advancing projects that together will generate approximately two billion dollars in investment within our county.

## Slide 9: Chautauqua County Business Investments

Key projects included, but are not limited to, a \$41.4 million Maplevale Farms relocation and expansion project in the Town of Mina... a \$19.3 million renovation of the C.E. Welch Building in the Village of Westfield for market-rate housing... and an investment of \$2.5 million at the Tri-County Country Club for reconstruction and expansion efforts following a devastating fire.

## Slide 10: Choose CHQ and Live CHQ

In 2025, the Choose CHQ and Live CHQ marketing initiatives gained strong momentum, attracting over 110,000 website visitors, 90% of which were from outside Chautauqua County. The campaign expanded nationally through the distribution of “Viewpoint with Dennis Quaid”, which is a public television segment that was distributed to 127 television stations and has become a valuable employee recruitment tool

for local employers. In 2026, we will continue to actively promote Chautauqua County as a great place to live, work, and invest.

#### Slide 11: NRG Powerplant

In order to ensure our communities, have the energy required to power a 21st century economy, Chautauqua County worked with the City of Dunkirk to undertake Phase II of the NRG Reuse Initiative. The County also worked with the City to respond to a New York Power Authority RFI proposal regarding community interest in hosting a nuclear energy project. We will continue to “push” NRG to take action toward repurposing the facility in order to bring it back into productive use.

#### Slide 12: GRP

What we’re doing is working. According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, over the most recent five-year period, Chautauqua County’s GDP grew by an impressive 29 percent, making us the ninth fastest-growing county economy in New York State.

#### Slide 13: Median Household Income

Household prosperity is rising as well: median household income increased from \$46,820 in 2019 to \$58,351 in 2024, a 25 percent gain. In the most recent year recorded, we ranked as the eighth best county in the state for year over year per capita income growth.

#### Slide 14: Poverty Rates

We are also seeing steady social progress, with countywide poverty rates falling from 19.4 percent in 2014 to 17.4 percent in 2024. There is still

work ahead, but the trajectory is clear. By continuing to collaborate with partners across the county and investing in our strengths, we will continue attracting new businesses, new jobs, new housing, and new workers to Chautauqua County. We are seeing our efforts pay off, the key metrics used to measure the health of our economy are moving in a positive direction.

## 15: Housing Investments

Across New York State, and here in Chautauqua County, the need for housing that is safe, modern, and affordable has never been greater. That is why I have made it a priority to work closely with developers and community partners to expand our local housing inventory.

Over the past year, Chautauqua County has made meaningful progress. Construction has begun in Silver Creek on a 54-unit affordable housing project for seniors. In Jamestown, the Gateway Lofts project, will bring 110 new units. In Dunkirk, the Bank Building on Central Avenue has reopened with new housing opportunities. Chautauqua County, also secured \$1 million in infrastructure funding for the 78-unit ..

Homesteads at Dunkirk Landing, and the former C.E. Welch Building in Westfield.

Altogether, when completed these projects will create more than 400 housing units across Chautauqua County. This is more than progress... it is a commitment to ensuring that every resident has a place they can call home.

## 16: Tourism / Airport

Chautauqua County has continued to focus on growing our tourism industry. We are looking to expand our new tourism trolleys with CHQ Transit, and we continue to push for Commercial Air Service to our

Jamestown Airport. We have submitted an Essential Air Service application to the FAA and Department of Transportation. We have secured grant funding for upgrades at the Jamestown Airport Terminal, and brought in a new restaurant “Archies” that provides great food and great views.

#### 17: Tourism / Events

In 2025, we allocated 3% occupancy tax funds to key projects in Chautauqua County, including the Fredonia Farm Festival, the Westfield Grape and Wine Festival, the Silver Creek Festival of Grapes, Rock the Lake, and the Chautauqua County History Expo.

#### 18: Tourism / Chautauqua Lake

We also invested in vital initiatives like the Chautauqua Lake Symposium that brings together scientists, and stakeholders to present updated research and management plans for Chautauqua Lake.

In 2025, the Chautauqua Lake & Watershed Management Alliance took major steps to strengthen, coordination and **leadership** across the lake community. Our new restructuring brings every lakeside municipality to the table, alongside key in-lake and watershed partners. To further elevate our efforts, the Alliance has engaged AJ Reyes of GEI Consulting as our Lake Manager Consultant. AJ and the GEI team bring a proven track record of successful inland lake research and management across numerous projects. That experience — and the strategies that have transformed other lakes — will now be applied right here in Chautauqua County to support the long-term health and vitality of Chautauqua Lake.

The level of cooperation and collaboration among stakeholders in recent months has been truly encouraging. Our lake partners will implement an

Adaptive Management strategy in 2026. Through this new approach, we can target priority areas more effectively, maximize permitted treatments, and ensure that the lake remains accessible and usable throughout the year.

In addition, we have seen important progress at the state level. To adapt to changing weather and growing conditions, the New York State DEC has expanded permitted treatment areas and extended application windows.

Additionally, herbicide use has now been approved to protect and sustain vital navigation and commercial corridors. This decisive step will open and maintain critical access routes... from Greenhurst to Celoron, from the Lakewood boat launch to the main channel, and extending to area marinas... targeting approximately 115 acres of the most heavily impacted, hard-to-manage zones. At the same time, our partners are currently increasing efficiencies in operations... by adding additional offloading sites and securing more trucks... this will dramatically increase the speed, capacity, and efficiency of mechanical harvesting.

These combined efforts represent an important milestone towards, restoring lake health, and securing Chautauqua Lake's continued beauty.

## 19: Public Safety / EMS

Chautauqua County is committed to improving community public safety. In 2025 Chautauqua County Emergency Services responded to 8,223 EMS calls.

In our 2026 Chautauqua County budget, funding was secured to expand the Chautauqua County Fly Car ambulance service. This new ambulance will serve the southwestern region of the county, particularly the communities of Clymer, and Sherman, and will help ensure that

residents in these areas have access to timely, life-saving emergency medical care.

## 20: Public Safety / Sheriff

Our Sheriff's Department works tirelessly to keep our communities safe. In 2025 the Sheriff's Department implemented the Chautauqua CARES Program, featuring **five key** initiatives that support both prevention and rehabilitation.

The Re-Entry Hub provides walk-in support for individuals leaving county corrections, offering referrals and up to 90 days of peer support, with referrals increasing significantly in 2025 ... The IGNITE program delivers weekly vocational training and education opportunities, including GED preparation and job certifications for our incarcerated individuals preparing them for life outside the correctional setting.

The newly created **Situation Table** brings together community agencies to intervene in high-risk situations before crises occur, since its inception over 50 high intensity referrals were evaluated thus alleviating timely emergency room visits and looks to reduce recidivism and engagement time by local law enforcement agencies. The CARES Treatment Court Collaboration connects incarcerated individuals to treatment programs, averaging seven direct referrals each month.

Finally, the CARES Jail MAT Program ensures continued support for individuals with substance use needs, both during incarceration and after release.

## 21: Human Services / Safety Net

In 2025, our Human Services divisions remained a critical lifeline for our community, delivering essential programs even during a prolonged

federal government shutdown. Despite disruptions to benefit delivery, our staff worked tirelessly to minimize impacts on residents.

In 2025 we hired staff for the Family Centered Case Management Program and incorporated them into the Temporary Housing unit. This group has been able to provide necessary supports for homeless families assisting them in meeting the requirements of the Temporary Housing program. In total we have assisted 71 families in their transition to permanent housing ... We developed a process to refer Able Bodied Adults without Dependents SNAP recipients to work activities ... in 2026 we will be working to improve the Safety Net Participation Rate to ensure that all Safety Net non-exempt individuals are participating in work activities. These efforts are being done not only to assist those residents in need, but also to limit the impact on the local share cost of our tax levy.

## 22: Human Services / Jail Medical

In 2025, the Chautauqua County Jail Health Team achieved a major milestone by earning national accreditation... becoming the only county of comparable size in New York State to receive this distinction. This accomplishment reflects strong collaboration with the Sheriff's Department, Department of Mental Hygiene and Social Services, as well as the Department of Health, this collaboration highlights our shared commitment to high-quality medical care for our incarcerated individuals.

## 23: Human Services / Youth

We also made meaningful progress in youth prevention. Through opioid settlement funding, we partnered with **Prevention Works** and local school districts to expand the PAX Good Behavior Game ... helping

build healthier behaviors ... Data supports that early intervention in behavioral health leads to future success and positive outcomes. In 2026 we have made a commitment to expand these services, thus positively impacting youth in Chautauqua County.

To better serve high-need populations, we enhanced service coordination by co-locating Mental Hygiene Mobile Crisis staff with Social Services Homeless Services. This restructuring has improved communication, reduced gaps in care, and increased the efficiency of our response. Overall providing better outcomes for those in need.

Looking ahead to 2026, we will collaborate with the Office of Mental Health to introduce Mental Health Navigators in county courts. These navigators will help identify individuals with unmet mental health needs and connect them to appropriate care and services more efficiently.

#### 24: Health Dept. Early Intervention

In 2025 we hosted 46 mobile health clinics, reaching schools and underserved populations in both rural and urban areas, this improves access to vaccines and increase the county's overall vaccination rates.

Last year our health department created a pilot program that expands Early Intervention services for children with special needs ... birth to age three ... This new program was created to provide more physical and occupational therapy services while at the same time reducing waitlists and creating opportunities to offer extra support to their families. Family members join each session's therapeutic activities to learn strategies that support their child's development. Afterward, children participate in supervised play while family members take part in a facilitated support group. Through a partnership with Cornell Cooperative Extension, families also receive a "Cooking with Kids" class focused on healthy food preparation and nutrition. These sessions are offered in the North County at the Chautauqua Children's Gym and

in the South County at JCC in collaboration with the Occupational Therapy Assistant program.

#### 25: Health Dept. Lead

In 2025 we laid the foundation for the establishment of the Lead Rental Registry Program, with a focus on improving coordination with municipal partners and supporting residents and property owners to ensure we reduce community members' exposure to lead. The main focus of our Lead Rental Registry is to limit exposure to our youngest and most vulnerable residents. This program is intended to reduce lead exposure to young children here in Chautauqua County.

#### 26: OFAS

The Chautauqua County Office for Aging Services is implementing a spinoff of GoGoGrandparents a senior based ride services program much like Lyft or Uber, this new programs sole focus is to provide our senior population transportation to medical appointments, covering service gaps in our county.

#### 27: Temporary And Emergency Housing

In 2026 we are looking into potential properties that could be utilized for transitional housing. This effort would reduce the financial burden that our temporary and emergency housing puts on the local share of our county budget, as well as provide better wrap around services to our residents in the temporary assistance program helping them with the support services, they need to be self-sufficient.

## 28: Budget / Sources of Revenue

As shown in the graph, Chautauqua County's 2026 governmental budget totaled \$309.7 million. Of that, 23% comes from property taxes, 19% from state aid, 18% from sales tax, 14% from designated revenues, 13% from federal aid, and just 1% from fund balance.

## 29: Budget / Expense By Committee

So where does that money go? Nearly half... 49%... is invested in human services, supporting our most vulnerable residents. Another 22% goes toward public facilities and infrastructure, including our water and sewer systems, 19% to public safety, with 9% supporting administrative services and 2% for economic development. This reflects a budget focused on essential services and community well-being.

## 30: Budget Overview

Most importantly, this budget delivers real relief for taxpayers. Our county tax rate is \$6.17 per thousand... down \$0.54 from last year. Since I took office, we have reduced the tax rate by \$2.29 ... **our lowest county tax rate since 1982!** Currently, our local economy is gaining **real momentum**. Total assessed property value has climbed to \$12.15 billion... up more than 11% in the past year even though many of our towns have not seen a reassessment in several years ... and high-value home sales above \$1 million are on the rise. That sends a clear message: people believe in Chautauqua County ... and they're choosing to invest in its future.

Sales tax revenue also remained strong, and we continue to project it conservatively to protect our long-term financial stability.

We also continue to support our local municipalities by sharing more than \$40 million in sales tax revenue... that is over 41% of what we collect. This helps reduce pressure on local property taxes and keeps Chautauqua County ranked as the 2nd most affordable county to live in New York State. Not all counties share their sales tax revenue with their local municipalities, and only a handful share a higher percentage than we do.

What's more important is to understand the challenges we face. A significant portion of our budget is controlled by New York State mandates. In fact, counties are required to administer and fund more than 40 state programs often consuming the majority of our budget with little local control. For example, the 2025 increase in just one program, Safety Net, exceeded our entire 2025 tax levy increase, and its costs continue to rise. This coming October, the state is requiring counties to cover an additional 25% of SNAP administrative costs, placing yet another burden on local taxpayers. This new mandate will require the county to provide 75% of the administrative costs of SNAP benefits. New York State is one of only 9 states that places the implementation of the federal program on the local counties, thus shifting the burden from the state directly to our community.

That's why I have taken an active role at the state and national level... serving on the boards of the New York State Association of Counties, the County Executives of America, and the National Association of Counties.... to advocate for fair funding, greater local control, and relief from unfunded mandates.

Because at the end of the day, our job is clear: deliver the services our residents depend on... while protecting taxpayers and fighting for Chautauqua County every step of the way.

31: Efficient, Effective County Government

During my tenure as county executive, I have prioritized making government work smarter and more efficiently for you. To accomplish this, offices have been consolidated, workspaces have been modernized, employees have been cross-trained, and new technology has been adopted. As a result, taxpayers are receiving faster, more responsive service, and workers are more skilled, adaptable, and motivated. It is this kind of government that makes sense in the long run ... efficient, accountable, and focused on results. The goal is to keep improving services, reducing waste, and building a strong, more sustainable future for Chautauqua County.

With a commitment to improving efficiency and effectiveness in government, last year I announced a new strategy aimed at supporting municipal mergers, consolidations, and shared services that will help reduce duplicate services, and save taxpayers money.

We took action in 2025 ... As a result of my office's proposal to the County Legislature, Chautauqua County's Government Reduction Initiative was unanimously approved. While the initial program only supporting full dissolutions or mergers, the new GRI now supports shared services agreements and departmental consolidations. Our program also improved by providing upfront funding, thus removing barriers to help communities move forward confidently, we also expanded eligibility to include special taxing districts.

In contrast to what some have claimed, I committed to using up to \$500,000 of the County's general fund balance for this program in 2026, this was created in a manner similar to the County's Lake Maintenance Fund, and exactly as the GRI originally allocated funding.

Our communities will benefit from the program, which launched in January 2026, and aims to help local governments operate more efficiently, cut costs, and improve services.

It is encouraging to see the projects already being proposed through this initiative -- every project represents a real chance to save money, improve services, and think differently about local government.

### 32: Efficient, Effective County Government / Dog Shelter

First, the Towns of Ripley, Clymer, and Mina are exploring a shared, multi-municipality dog shelter. This project will ensure compliance with new state regulations while reducing costs through collaboration.

### 33: Efficient, Effective County Government / School Merger Study

Second, we are supporting the comprehensive feasibility study for a potential merger of the Clymer, Sherman, and Panama Central School Districts. With rising costs and declining enrollment, this study will evaluate opportunities to expand educational offerings while reducing long-term expenses. School taxes represent the largest burden for our residents, and exploring smart, proactive solutions like shared services and consolidation has the potential to deliver meaningful relief.

### 34: Efficient, Effective County Government / North County

Third, the Towns of Pomfret and Dunkirk, along with the City of Dunkirk and Village of Fredonia, are taking an important first step by analyzing shared services and potential consolidation. This includes reviewing highways and public works ... dog control ... courts ... and code enforcement. Just as importantly, these discussions have opened the door to exploring the possibility of a full municipal consolidation... an effort that, if pursued, could unlock significant state funding and create long-term financial stability for northern Chautauqua County.

Contrary to what some of you may have heard, these efforts are locally driven, which makes them more impactful. The County is not mandating any of these initiatives; they are all voluntary, led and supported by our municipal partners, with the County assisting them to advance **their** projects.

The best progress happens when communities come together, think creatively, and take action ... by ignoring partisan politics and working together for the betterment of their communities.

This initiative is not about the next budget cycle or the next election... it's about shaping the next generation of Chautauqua County. Through these efforts, Chautauqua County will not only achieve real results, but also inspire others to follow in building a more efficient, and sustainable future.

### 35: Conclusion

As we look ahead, the path forward is clear—but it will require **leadership, courage, and a willingness to stand up for what is right for Chautauqua County.**

We have proven that progress is possible. We've cut taxes, to the lowest rate since 1982. We've grown our economy; we currently are the 9<sup>th</sup> fastest growing **county** economy in New York State. We've invested in our communities, where we currently rank 2<sup>nd</sup> state wide in cost of living and 8<sup>th</sup> in year over year per capita income growth. And we've done it all while standing firm against rising costs, unfunded mandates, and challenges beyond our control.

But let me be clear—our work is not done. We must continue to focus on creating sustainable job opportunities to ensure long-term economic growth. Additionally, investing in education and infrastructure will be critical to supporting our communities' development.

We will continue to fight for our taxpayers.

And we will continue to build a county where opportunity is not just promised—but delivered.

Transparency in government is essential to maintaining the trust of our residents and ensuring accountability. By openly sharing information and engaging with the community, we create a collaborative environment where residents feel heard and valued. This commitment to transparency will help us build a county that truly reflects the needs and aspirations of its people.

They deserve safe communities, good-paying jobs, and a future their children can believe in.

And that is exactly what we are building—together.

Let's seize this opportunity. Rather than slowing down, we should push forward. Leaders don't settle, they lead

We are taking bold action that will reshape our economy, and our communities so they that work for our residents. These actions will lay a strong foundation for future generations by ensuring they inherit a community that values safety, education, and prosperity. By prioritizing sustainable development and environmental conservation, we are protecting resources that will be vital for their well-being. Moreover, creating transparency and accountability in government will instill trust and civic engagement, empowering future residents to build on our progress.

There is a great deal to be proud of in this county.

That pride lies in our people and their commitment to unity and progress, ensuring a strong foundation for future success. By leading with purpose and conviction, we will overcome challenges and seize opportunities that will benefit generations to come.

It is our county; it is our future.

Thank you.