

2006 State of the County Address
County Executive Adam J. Bello
Monroe County, NY
June 4, 2026
Seneca Park Zoo

Good afternoon and thank you for joining me for the 2026 State of the County.

First, thank you to the Monroe County Sheriff's Office Honor Guard for once again posting our Nation's Colors, John Culhane, for sharing his remarkable talent with us singing the national anthem, and to Reverend Julius "JD" Jackson from Pittsford United Church for that moving Invocation.

To Monroe County Parks Director Patrick Meredith, Zoo Director Bob Lee and his team, and Seneca Park Zoo Society President Pamela Reed Sanchez, thank you for hosting us here today at the beautiful Seneca Park Zoo.

I also want to recognize my family here today - my wife Meghan and my parents Jim and Gail. I'm so grateful for all of your support, your encouragement, and your sacrifice.

Today, we gather at a place that reflects so much of what County government is all about. The Seneca Park Zoo welcomes over 500,000 people every year, making it one of the most visited tourist destinations in our region.

But the zoo is more than a destination, it's a place where families put their cell phones away for a couple hours and create memories that will last a lifetime. Where children learn, grow, and interact with species from different parts of the planet. Where conservation, education, and public investment come together to serve our community. And most importantly, it's a place built not for profit, but for the people who visit.

In many ways, that is the story of Monroe County government.

County government isn't about bureaucracy. It's about making life safer, healthier, and more affordable for the people who live here. It's about ensuring our taxpayers see real value from their investment and know their government is working for them, not the other way around.

We are there in the moments people don't always see, but feel every day.

We are the licensed clinicians who respond to individuals in crisis.

We are the public health nurse protecting families from disease and helping children get a healthy start to life.

We are the Economic Development Specialist helping a small business or start-up secure.

We are the Equipment Operator working a 12-hour shift at the Frederick Douglass Greater Rochester International Airport during a winter snow storm.

We are the Sheriff's Deputy patrolling your streets and neighborhood to keep your family safe.

We are services for seniors, support for veterans, addiction recovery programs, housing assistance for families in need, workforce development, emergency response and planning, critical infrastructure, and so much more.

Simply put, County government touches nearly every aspect of our community. And when it works the way it should - people have more opportunity, more stability, and more hope for the future.

That responsibility drives the work we do every day. I believe County government should be responsive, innovative, and accountable. I believe our roughly 750,000 residents deserve services that are efficient and effective. And I believe every family, regardless of zip code or background, deserves an opportunity to succeed.

That mission has guided the work of County government in every corner of our community over the last six years. My administration has made strategic investments to strengthen public safety and public health, modernize critical infrastructure, improve economic opportunities, and deliver critical services more effectively.

The work we celebrate today and the accomplishments of my administration are possible because of strong partnerships at every level of government. Here in Monroe County, we are fortunate to have leaders who understand that our residents benefit when we work together.

To Congressman Joe Morelle, Senator Chuck Schumer, and Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, thank you for championing Monroe County in Washington and for delivering resources that are transforming neighborhoods.

To Governor Kathy Hochul, and our local New York State Legislature delegation, thank you for recognizing the effectiveness of my administration and the importance of County government. Together, we are investing in projects like the \$300 million Rochester-Monroe County Transformation Initiative and the Child Care Pilot Program that will help move our community forward.

I'm also grateful for the collaboration and partnership we share here at home. To Sheriff Todd Baxter, District Attorney Brian Green, County Clerk Jamie Romeo, Legislature President Yversha Roman, Majority Leader Michael Yudelson, Republican Leader Sean McCabe, and the entire Monroe County Legislature thank you for your service to the 750,000 residents who call Monroe County home.

The partnership doesn't end there. Now, more than ever before, Monroe County and the City of Rochester have forged a relationship that has become a model of what we can accomplish when collaboration replaces division. Mayor Malik Evans and I are working side-by-side every day to tackle challenges, create opportunity, and deliver better outcomes throughout Rochester. Thank you, Mayor Evans, for your leadership and friendship.

Finally, to the nearly 4,000 Monroe County employees - led by Deputy County Executive Amy Grower, Assistant County Executives Adrienne Green and Anthony Plonczynski-Figueroa, and all of our department heads and leadership teams - you are the people who turn County government into action.

Delivering critical services is one of my top priorities, but so is standing up for the residents of Monroe County.

At last year's State of the County address, I made a promise to all of you that County government would rise above the division and chaos that the Trump administration was creating.

Over the last year, my administration has honored that commitment by taking decisive action to protect the people of Monroe County from harmful federal budget cuts. While the Trump administration created instability, we focused on safeguarding critical services, defending vulnerable residents, and ensuring families could still access the support they depend on every day.

It started when I joined my partners in government, Congressman Joe Morelle and Mayor Malik Evans, to convene a group of community leaders - before federal cuts even took effect - to ensure we were tracking the status of grant funding, services, and other federally supported programs.

So when millions of dollars in federal grant funding that communities like ours rely on every day was threatened, we took action. We joined a federal lawsuit to challenge those reckless and harmful decisions.

At stake was nearly \$3 million in HUD funding that supports housing rehabilitation, affordable housing development, and neighborhood revitalization efforts; \$6 million in

workforce development funding administered through our partners at RochesterWorks; and \$8 million in critical infrastructure improvements at the Airport.

These are not abstract numbers. They were investments in housing, jobs, economic opportunity, and transportation infrastructure that touch nearly every corner of our community.

We stood up for our residents, challenged these harmful actions in court, and we protected the resources our community depends on.

Unfortunately, these essential investments are not the only programs under assault.

Across the country, we are seeing policies that make it harder for working families, seniors, veterans, and vulnerable residents to access the support they rely on. Changes to SNAP have placed thousands of Monroe County residents at risk of losing help they need to put food on the table.

These decisions create new barriers for people who are already struggling with rising costs and economic uncertainty.

But when these changes were handed down, Monroe County did not sit on the sidelines.

We acted quickly to ensure residents had the information, guidance, and support they need. Through our Department of Human Services and community partners, we launched a countywide effort to help impacted residents understand the new rules, protect their benefits, and access available resources.

Under the leadership of Commissioner Thalia Wright, Deputy Commissioner Denise Read, Director Randy Scott, and the entire DHS team, nights, weekends, and countless hours were spent making sure families in our community did not have to face these challenges alone.

We also worked with our community partners - including Lauren Gustin and her team at TogetherNow - to develop practical tools and resources that help residents maintain their eligibility and connect with job and volunteer opportunities.

Because when policies in Washington create obstacles for Monroe County families, our responsibility is clear: we do everything we can to help our residents overcome them.

We also recognized that helping residents navigate these new rules was only part of the solution. With more families struggling with food insecurity, we knew we had to strengthen the emergency food network that so many people rely on every day.

Thanks to over \$800,000 in American Rescue Plan Funding that we made available to Foodlink, they are able to purchase food for food banks throughout the county.

In total, Foodlink will purchase and distribute over 564,000 pounds of food for families in need. This converts to more than 470,000 meals for seniors, veterans, children, and families in our community.

Food is the most basic of all needs, and for many of us, it is something we are fortunate enough not to have to worry about. But not all Monroe County families are that fortunate. Thank you, Julia Tedesco, Mitch Gruber, Terra Keller, and the entire team at Foodlink for stepping up when Monroe County families need it most.

While organizations like Foodlink continue to meet the urgent need across our community, my administration remains committed to building a future where every family has the support and resources they need.

Public Safety:

Residents not only deserve to have food, housing, and opportunity, they deserve to be safe in their homes and neighborhoods too. That is why public safety remains at the core of everything we do.

Every investment we make, every service we provide, and every opportunity we create depends on the security and well-being of the people we serve.

Guided by that commitment, six months ago, in partnership with Sheriff Baxter and his team, we opened the Regional Investigative Operations Center — a \$7.3 million, state-of-the-art real-time crime center.

This investment is not only helping law enforcement solve crimes more quickly — it is helping prevent them from occurring in the first place.

As we face growing threats from individuals who seek to harm others, and in multi-jurisdictional crimes, the RIOC brings law enforcement agencies together under one roof to prevent, disrupt, and solve these crimes more effectively and efficiently.

And the impact is already evident.

This year alone, the RIOC has assisted in more than 500 cases. That includes supporting Sheriff Deputy road patrols in over 300 investigations — many involving active, real-time incidents where every second mattered.

Through rapid intelligence gathering, coordination, and analysis, the RIOC has helped locate and safely return missing individuals to their families and has played a critical role in removing dangerous criminals from our streets.

One of the clearest examples of that work happened just last week during a homicide investigation at an apartment complex in Perinton. At 1:45 in the morning on May 27 — while most of our county was asleep — a man was found dead by a gunshot wound.

As Chief Deputy Michael Fowler said during a press conference the following day, by the time most residents were waking up and preparing for work, investigators already had the suspect's identity, location, vehicle description, and the full support of the RIOC working in coordination to bring that investigation to a successful resolution.

In less than 24 hours, a dangerous suspect with previous felony convictions in several other states was safely taken into custody — without further harm to the public or our deputies.

That is what modern law enforcement looks like. That is what collaboration, technology, and dedicated professionals can accomplish when they work together with urgency and commitment to public safety.

The RIOC is helping us achieve some of our most important goals: safer neighborhoods, faster emergency response times, and stronger trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve. Thank you Sheriff Baxter, Undersheriff Brown, and Chief Deputy Fowler for your partnership and efforts in making the RIOC a reality.

I also want to recognize the deputies, analysts, and command staff whose dedication brings the RIOC to life every day. Your professionalism, expertise, and commitment are the reason this investment has returned results.

The RIOC demonstrates what is possible when we pair innovation with collaboration.

Public safety requires earning trust, strengthening accountability, and ensuring that the people who serve our community have the tools they need to do their jobs safely and effectively.

This year, we took an important step forward by implementing body-worn cameras for all Monroe County probation officers while they are in the field.

Probation officers face many of the same risks and unpredictable challenges as their law enforcement counterparts. Equipping them with body-worn cameras adds a critical layer of protection, improves accountability, enhances the way we serve the public, and strengthens trust within our community.

The work of our probation officers extends far beyond supervision and compliance. Their commitment has helped make possible one of the most impactful initiatives in Monroe County's juvenile justice system: the JEDS Program.

This nationally recognized program has fundamentally transformed how we respond to young people entering the justice system—intervening earlier, connecting youth with services faster, and creating pathways toward long-term success.

You've heard me talk about JEDS often, and for good reason. Before JEDS, it could take weeks for a young person to receive services and intervention. Today, we are engaging arrested youth within 24 hours — connecting them immediately with support, accountability, and resources when it matters most.

Since its launch in 2023, we've enrolled more than 1,000 young people in the JEDS program.

And the results speak for themselves. In 2025, 78% of youth who participated in JEDS were successfully diverted and had their cases closed and juvenile delinquency arrests fell 27 percent from 2023 to 2025. Overall, Monroe County's diversion rate — including youth not eligible for JEDS — is nine percentage points higher than the New York State average.

As JEDS continues to demonstrate the power of early intervention, we have expanded that work through another groundbreaking initiative: the Youth Police Initiative, or YPI.

Through YPI, law enforcement officers from across Monroe County volunteer to mentor and support at-risk youth and young people under probation supervision, building trust and strengthening relationships between youth and law enforcement.

The impact is already changing lives. One powerful example is Yeniel Otero, a former juvenile on probation who graduated from the program last year, and Rochester Police Lieutenant Bing Reaves Jr., who became his mentor through YPI. Today, I want you to hear their story firsthand.

Programs like YPI show what is possible when public safety is built on mentorship, opportunity, and human connection.

Thank you, Yeniel, Lieutenant Reaves, and every law enforcement officer and probation team member who makes this program possible.

This summer, we will take a group of JEDS and YPI graduates to my alma mater, Binghamton University, for a three-day college campus experience — a first-of-its-kind opportunity in Monroe County juvenile justice.

Our goal is not simply to help young people avoid trouble today. It is to help them build a future filled with opportunity, achievement, and purpose — and to ensure that once they leave the system, they stay out for good.

Another strategy we are using to achieve this is through a partnership with Cure Violence Global, an internationally-recognized violence prevention agency.

Cure provides an evidence-based, professional training model for community violence interrupters and outreach workers in our area to equip them with the tools they need to help make our community safer.

After 7 training sessions and 9 more to come this year, 20 local organizations have sent more than 120 employees to receive violence-interrupter training.

That means 120+ people working towards bringing more peace to our area.

At the heart of it, public safety means protecting our most vulnerable residents. That includes ensuring that every child can travel to and from school safely each day.

When we protect children at the bus stop, we protect the heart of our community.

Safety at the bus stop should never depend on luck — it should be guaranteed.

To address this challenge, we partnered with Bus Patrol to implement our School Bus Safety Program, equipping school buses with stop-arm cameras that help catch and deter drivers who illegally pass stopped school buses.

Without this technology, far too many dangerous drivers would never be held accountable for putting our children at risk.

Take a look at some of the violations these cameras have captured just over the last year.

These are not minor mistakes. These are dangerous and reckless decisions that put children's lives at risk.

The law is simple: when the red lights are flashing and the stop arm is extended — stop. Be patient. Protect our children.

These cameras do more than record violations — they help prevent tragedies.

Since the program began, more than 18,000 citations have been issued in participating districts, including East Irondequoit, Greece, Webster, Hilton, and Spencerport.

This year, we expanded the program by adding the Brighton, Pittsford, and West Irondequoit Central School Districts.

I am grateful to every district participating in this effort to protect our children and improve safety across Monroe County.

But our responsibility does not end when a child steps off the school bus.

Creating safer roads means protecting everyone who uses them. From children heading to school and parents commuting to work, to seniors crossing the street and cyclists sharing the road.

Ensuring our roads and sidewalks are safe and accessible for everyone has always been a priority. Yet before my administration, there was no comprehensive countywide strategy to guide that work.

Recognizing that need, in 2023 we adopted Monroe County's first-ever Active Transportation Plan — a comprehensive roadmap to improve non-motorized transportation infrastructure and create a safer, more connected county for all residents.

In 2024, we launched the first-in-the-state Community Traffic Safety Team, along with a public reporting page and phone number where residents can share traffic safety concerns directly with the County.

This team brings together partners from every level of government, law enforcement, nonprofit and faith-based organizations, neighborhood associations, and the public to address traffic safety challenges across Monroe County collaboratively.

While we have already made meaningful progress, our responsibility does not end with today's challenges.

We must look beyond the immediate needs of the moment and ensure future generations inherit a transportation system that is safer and smarter.

Today, I am proud to announce the next major step in that effort—one that will shape the future of transportation safety in Monroe County for years to come.

Monroe County will join a small group of local governments willing to undertake this level of long-term planning and commitment by becoming only the second county in New York State to develop and implement a countywide Vision Zero Initiative.

Vision Zero is often viewed as a roadmap for cities — including the City of Rochester as we've seen under Mayor Evans' leadership- but rarely does a *county* take on this level of long-term planning and commitment.

We will work hand in hand with organizations like Reconnect Rochester — thank you Cody Donahue, Mary Staropoli, Dr. Scott MacRae and the entire team for your advocacy — and other community partners across our region to address our most pressing traffic safety challenges and develop long-term, sustainable solutions.

As New York Times bestselling author John Naisbitt once said: "Strategic planning is worthless — unless there is first a strategic vision."

Vision Zero represents exactly that: a collaborative, data-driven approach to eliminate traffic fatalities and improve pedestrian safety across Monroe County.

Vision Zero brings together all of our road safety initiatives we are advancing across Monroe County — our Traffic Safety Team, our Active Transportation Plan, Stop DWI initiatives, School Bus Safety, and more — while creating new goals and priorities to make Vision Zero a reality.

For far too long, many of our transportation safety challenges have been addressed through incremental fixes and short-term solutions.

Vision Zero challenges us to think bigger, plan further ahead, and act with greater urgency.

Whether we are reducing traffic fatalities, preventing violent crime, supporting young people before they enter the justice system, or confronting the opioid epidemic, we are guided by the same fundamental mission: protecting lives and expanding opportunity for every resident of Monroe County.

That commitment to protecting life and improving quality of life is what brings me to our next priority: public health.

In my administration, public safety and public health go hand in hand. No where is that more clear than in our fight against the opioid crisis that is impacting countless families in every corner of Monroe County.

Every overdose death is a tragedy and every life saved matters.

When I became County Executive I made a commitment to confront this crisis head-on and utilize the resources of County government to treat the overdose epidemic with compassion, urgency, and action.

In addition to creating the IMPACT team, Monroe County Addiction Services has launched the “Call to Action” campaign aimed at improving public awareness of naloxone availability, reducing stigma around Substance Use Disorder, and promoting the Monroe County Opioid Hotline as a resource for help and treatment.

This public awareness campaign has been so successful that it earned a Bronze Telly Award in the Public Service PSA category.

And my administration saved Monroe County’s only 24/7 drop-in center by investing opioid settlement dollars into Delphi Rise.

The IMPACT Team’s efforts have made a difference and saved lives.

In the 2024 Medical Examiner’s Overdose Death report - the most recent released - Monroe County saw a 43 percent decrease in overdose deaths year over year - falling from 512 deaths in 2023 to 292 deaths in 2024. That is the lowest number of overdose deaths in our community since 2020 and significantly outpaces the national decline.

Preliminary data for our area from the CDC and National Center for Health Statistics shows the trend of decreasing overdose deaths continuing into 2025.

But we know this work is not done yet because any life lost is one too many. We will continue to invest our opioid settlement dollars wisely to combat addiction and help individuals and families suffering from substance use disorder.

Earlier this year, I made a firm commitment to prioritizing the health of families in Monroe County.

We are lucky to have nationally-recognized hospital systems, but improving access to the care that they provide is a critical step toward better health outcomes for our residents.

The Expanded Access to Child Health- is a partnership built with URMC that, since it began at the start of this school year, resulted in over 2,200 health care visits with students in the Rochester City School District who likely would not have received health care otherwise.

All 39 RCSD schools are taking part in the program.

These visits address a wide variety of health issues from routine sick visits to more chronic health issues like asthma.

Importantly, the visits can also evaluate behavioral, developmental, and mental health concerns. We are bringing complete care- for the whole individual- directly into the community.

I am thrilled to announce that after legislative approval next week, this successful partnership will continue into next school year.

We know that supporting healthy pregnancies, strong postnatal support, and early childhood interventions establish a foundation of well-being.

That strong foundation benefits families and the entire community.

We have dedicated \$4.6 million in ARPA funding for maternal health initiatives that aim to reduce racial and economic disparities in prenatal and postpartum care.

In doing so, our goal is to expand access to critical services and strengthen long-term support for our mothers and families.

I remember the early months of becoming a new parent. The days can be long, challenging, and isolating.

Without a solid network of health care resources, and family and community support, parenthood can quickly feel overwhelming.

This initiative brings partners together who will provide the strong foundation new parents need, including telehealth calls and home visits, prenatal and postnatal care.

Thank you to the United Way, the Mt. Hope Family Center, the URMC, Rochester Regional Health, and Anthony Jordan Health Center for not only sharing our goals, but having the experience and expertise to get this crucial work done.

To further advance this work, Monroe County and the City of Rochester have committed Anti-Poverty funding to launch the NEST Program, an innovative maternal health pilot initiative operated by Healthy Baby Network.

The program will serve up to 200 pregnant women in high-need communities and provide direct financial support for up to two years, along with comprehensive wraparound services including case management, prenatal and parenting education, and health and developmental support.

And later this month, in partnership with the City of Rochester, the Urban League, Action for a Better Community, and Catholic Charities Family and Community Services, we will launch another Anti-Poverty initiative: Steps to Success.

The program is focused on helping families achieve measurable gains across five key pillars of upward mobility - family stability, well-being, financial management, education and training, and employment and career advancement.

Because when families have access to opportunity, they are better positioned to build brighter futures for themselves and their children.

Along with taking care of our families, we continue to do everything we can to take care of those who have defended our great nation. With almost 30,000 veterans, Monroe County is home to one of the largest veteran populations in the state.

Over the last 12 months, the Monroe County Veterans Service Agency has recovered retroactive payments totaling nearly \$10 million and has filed over 3,000 claims for VA benefits. Thank you to Director Nick Stefanovic and the entire VSA team for all you do for our local veterans.

Creating pathways out of poverty requires more than support services alone. It requires opportunity.

Opportunity to gain new skills. Opportunity to earn a family-sustaining wage. And opportunity to build a future with greater stability and independence.

My administration continues to invest in workforce development programs and services that connect residents to training, education, and careers in high-demand industries.

By helping people prepare for the jobs of today and tomorrow, we are strengthening our workforce, supporting local employers, and creating a stronger economy for everyone.

Communities today compete for jobs, for investment, for talent, and for growth. Our responsibility is to ensure Monroe County remains a place where businesses want to invest, entrepreneurs want to create, and families want to stay.

Building a skilled workforce is one of the most effective ways we can strengthen our economy and expand opportunity for all residents.

And Monroe Community College has always been a key partner in this work, anticipating workforce trends and building programs to address them.

Employers are facing an urgent need for skilled workers in optics, renewable energy, semiconductor manufacturing, HVAC, and automotive technology.

Over the last ten years, enrollment in the nation's only Associate of Applied Science degree in Optical Systems Technology at MCC has grown more than 3,000%.

Explosive growth in high tech fields coupled with a persistent demand for traditional trades led to the visionary concept of the nearly completed Sydor Optics Advanced Technology Center—or ATC—on the MCC campus.

This bold \$69 million investment is about preparing Monroe County for what comes next by creating pathways for career stability and upward mobility.

By bringing these programs together under one roof, the center will provide more than 500 students annually with hands-on training, industry certifications, and direct pathways into high-demand careers from the high-tech to the essential.

The New York State Department of Labor projects that by 2030 in the Finger Lakes Region:

Automotive mechanic positions will increase by 35 percent, diesel mechanic jobs will increase by 28.7 percent, HVAC occupations are expected to grow by nearly 20 percent, and demand for solar energy technicians is expected to continue rising as that industry expands.

The Advanced Technology Center will address these workforce needs head-on.

The students who walk through those doors will graduate into careers that are stable, essential, and well-paying—careers that allow them to build a life, support a family, and remain here in Monroe County.

Like so many other capital projects supported through my administration, the ATC was made possible thanks to our local building trades.

Working together, we have proven the benefits of strong Project Labor Agreements, which have ensured that local workers are employed in local projects. Our PLAs have also created apprenticeship opportunities, helping to grow our workforce, and getting the job done on time and within budget.

It would also not be possible without the leadership and partnership of MCC President Dr. Deanna Burt-Nanna, who has championed this vision from the very beginning.

Lastly, I want to recognize Governor Kathy Hochul, Vinnie Esposito and Empire State Development, our state delegation, Congressman Joe Morelle, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, and Senator Chuck Schumer for helping secure more than \$34 million in state support and \$3.5 million in federal funding to bring this project to life.

The ATC is helping us prepare people for opportunity.

Our next challenge is making sure those opportunities connect directly to employment.

That is why, even as construction wraps up at the ATC, we are already breaking ground on the next piece of the workforce pipeline.

Later this month, construction will begin on the new RochesterWorks Career Center at MCC's Downtown Campus.

This facility will bring together two of the region's greatest strengths:

MCC, our largest training provider.

And RochesterWorks, our largest workforce development organization.

Together, they will create a more seamless pathway from classroom to career, helping employers connect with skilled workers and helping residents connect with meaningful employment.

Preparing workers for opportunity is only part of the equation.

Through COMIDA's partnership with the U.S. Department of Defense, the Monroe County-Upstate New York APEX Accelerator helps businesses navigate the often-complex world of government contracting through counseling, market research, bid identification, proposal assistance, networking, and post-award support.

The impact has been remarkable.

In the most recent fiscal year, APEX provided direct support to 1,376 businesses and helped participating firms secure more than \$1.3 billion in government contracts.

Since 2020, businesses working with APEX have reported more than 22,500 contract awards totaling \$3.65 billion.

One company benefiting from that support is Circle Optics, located right in downtown Rochester at Sibley Square.

Circle Optics develops advanced 360-degree imaging systems used across defense, aerospace, and autonomous platforms.

Their technology creates a seamless panoramic image without distortion or stitching—a capability that has attracted significant interest from federal agencies.

With support from APEX, Circle Optics has secured more than \$8 million in military contracts and innovation funding in 2025 and 2026, bringing their total to an extraordinary \$17 million since partnering with the Accelerator.

But Circle Optics is not only a success story in government contracting.

It is also a powerful example of what makes Monroe County special.

Its leadership consistently points to the quality of our workforce as one of the primary reasons the company continues to grow here.

In fact, Circle Optics COO Ian Gauger, who is with us today, put it best when he said:

"Talent is Rochester's superpower. The caliber of students and faculty from local institutions continues to shape what is possible. Access to this kind of forward-thinking talent is one of the reasons the company remains committed to building in Rochester."

I could not agree more.

Monroe County's greatest asset has always been the people who choose to live here, work here, invest here, and build here.

Thank you, Ian, for your partnership and for believing in our community.

Of course, not every business begins with a major federal contract. Many start with a single idea, a single entrepreneur, and a need for someone to believe in them.

MCIDC's MicroAdvantage Loan Program continues to help entrepreneurs and small businesses, lending nearly \$5.2 million to 105 local businesses, including 70 local MWBEs.

In today's climate of high inflation and rising interest, these loans have been lifelines for Monroe County's small businesses.

Our support for MWBEs doesn't end there. For many business owners—particularly women- and minority-owned businesses - the challenge isn't winning a contract. It's navigating the process and getting a fair opportunity to compete in the first place.

Monroe County's own MWBE certification program is helping remove those barriers for businesses seeking County contracting opportunities.

Since its launch, the County's MWBE program has certified nearly 1,000 local businesses. In 2025 alone, those firms secured 123 County contracts worth more than \$14 million.

Those results demonstrate what is possible when government creates pathways to opportunity and local businesses have the chance to succeed.

Thank you Chief Diversity Officer David Scott and Supplier Diversity Manager Matthew Burrell for leading this game-changing County program.

Creating opportunities for businesses of all sizes is essential because every successful business strengthens our local economy, creates jobs, and supports working families. The diversity of our local economy is one of our greatest strengths.

But no discussion of economic development and job creation in Monroe County would be complete without highlighting the transformative impact of the fairlife facility in Webster.

By leveraging one of our region's resources—our dairy industry—fairlife is creating a ripple effect that extends from family farms to the manufacturing floor and throughout our local economy.

With a projected \$660 million investment at the outset, fairlife remains the largest project in COMIDA's history by capital investment.

As it nears completion later this year, the impact is already unmistakable.

70 percent of the construction workforce has come from our local skilled trades.

Farmers across our region are benefiting from milk contracts.

And fairlife has already hired more than 350 employees—surpassing the projections included in its original COMIDA application.

And they're not. even. finished. hiring.

fairlife is still actively recruiting for manufacturing positions. In August and September, they will host two job fairs at the Webster Parks and Recreation Center to fill positions in processing, packaging, quality assurance, warehouse operations, and maintenance. These are good paying jobs with strong benefits and sign-on bonuses.

And the best part: you can already find locally produced fairlife products in local stores.

Another Monroe County investment is showing us what the next generation of manufacturing may look like altogether.

French company Reju announced in January that it selected Eastman Business Park as the location for its first U.S. industrial-scale textile regeneration facility.

Reju's technology diverts discarded clothing from the waste stream and transforms it into new textile products with a carbon footprint roughly 50 percent lower than traditional textile manufacturing.

That commitment to sustainability is one reason we are excited to welcome Reju.

The \$390 million project will redevelop a nearly 19-acre site inside Eastman Business Park with a 145,000-square-foot facility and is expected to create more than 70 jobs.

But Reju represents something larger than a single project.

It reflects Monroe County's growing reputation as a destination for innovative, forward-looking companies looking to build the industries of tomorrow.

Fairlife came from Chicago. Reju came from France.

Different companies. Different industries.

Yet both arrived at the same conclusion:

Monroe County is a place worth investing in.

Economic development is about more than attracting companies and creating jobs - it's about creating communities where people can build their futures.

Where a young family can buy a home.

Where a recent graduate can afford to stay.

Where a senior can find housing that meets their needs.

That is why economic development and housing development must go hand in hand.

Since 2020, COMIDA has invested in multifamily housing projects that resulted in 3,000 new or renovated housing units, 60% of which are for people earning up to 80% of area median income.

Through our Department of Human Services, we have also supported rental assistance, housing stability, and other programs that help residents secure and maintain safe housing. In 2025 alone, we provided \$21.7 million in rental assistance and one-time benefits to over 5,700 households. This funding directly helps to keep people in their homes and prevents homelessness.

And new this year, the Monroe County Land Bank is helping us address these challenges from another angle.

The Land Bank reached a major milestone earlier this year with the acquisition of its first three properties in the Towns of Greece and Gates.

Two vacant lots.

One long-neglected property that had cycled through tax foreclosure.

Properties that many had written off.

Today, those sites are being transformed into opportunity.

Working in partnership with Greece and Gates, the Land Bank plans to redevelop these properties into modular-style single-family homes that will create attainable homeownership opportunities while strengthening neighborhood stability.

But we know there is more work to be done.

To better understand these challenges, COMIDA recently completed a Housing Study and Needs Assessment for Monroe County, conducted by the MRB Group.

The study drew on extensive economic data and input from developers, employers, housing advocates, community leaders, and stakeholders.

Its findings confirmed what many already knew firsthand:

Monroe County faces a shortage of housing across multiple price points and housing types.

Meeting that need will require thoughtful collaboration between the public and private sectors.

I want to thank COMIDA's Board of Directors, led by Chair Truman Tolefree, Executive Director Ana Liss, and the entire Economic Development team for their leadership in commissioning this work.

Because of that work, COMIDA has adopted a refreshed approach to housing development.

Under this updated framework, qualifying housing developments may now be eligible for IDA benefits, including PILOT agreements and certain sales tax, use tax, and mortgage recording tax exemptions.

The goal is straightforward:

Increase housing supply. Improve project feasibility in a difficult financial environment. And encourage the development of affordable, workforce, middle-market, senior, supportive, and other qualifying housing opportunities throughout Monroe County.

Supporting responsible housing growth strengthens our ability to attract investment, create jobs, and ensure that residents at every stage of life have access to safe, quality housing.

Housing is about more than the buildings we construct today. It's about the kind of community we are building for tomorrow.

Every housing development, infrastructure improvement, and economic opportunity contributes to a larger question: What kind of Monroe County do we want to leave behind?

Answering that question is exactly what Plan Forward is designed to do.

Plan Forward is Monroe County's first comprehensive plan update since 1979.

Think about that for a moment. When our last comprehensive plan was adopted, I wasn't even born yet, a gallon of gas was less than one dollar, Sony had just introduced the Walkman, and the number one song that year... **<Quick Audio>...** My Sharona by The Knack.

I think we can all agree, a lot has changed since 1979. And while it is technically a planning document, I see it as something much more important than that.

It is a blueprint for the next generation of Monroe County.

A blueprint grounded in community engagement informed by data and shaped by the voices of the people who live here.

Most importantly, it is a blueprint built around a simple belief:

Growth should be intentional.

Thoughtful.

And guided by the needs of our residents.

The purpose of Plan Forward is not to create a document that sits on a shelf.

It is not to check a box.

Its purpose is to create a practical framework for decision-making—one that can guide County government and our municipal partners for years to come.

Its recommendations address long-term land use, transportation, environmental stewardship, housing, economic development, and workforce readiness.

In other words, it asks us to think not just about today's Monroe County, but about the Monroe County we want our children and grandchildren to inherit.

Plan Forward has included one of the most extensive public engagement efforts in County history.

More than 50 community meetings.

Hundreds of stakeholder comments.

All of that feedback has helped shape the final draft, which remains available for public review through June 18.

I encourage everyone to take part in that process.

Read the plan.

Share your thoughts.

Because the strongest plans are not created by government alone.

Plan Forward is one way we are preparing Monroe County for the future.

The Monroe County Climate Action Plan is another.

We have a responsibility to ensure that future generations inherit a community that is sustainable, resilient, and prepared for the challenges ahead.

Phase I of our Climate Action Plan focused on County government itself—reducing emissions through improvements to our fleet, facilities, purchasing practices, and operations.

Phase II expands that focus outward into our community.

Its purpose is to help residents, businesses, organizations, and municipalities identify practical ways to adopt more sustainable practices.

But we know one of the best ways to teach is not simply to talk about change.

It is to demonstrate it.

That is why we launched the School District Food Waste Diversion Pilot Program.

The program provides matching grants to school districts seeking to start or expand food waste diversion initiatives.

The results exceeded expectations.

In just the first half of the school year—participating districts diverted more than 85,000 pounds of food waste from landfills through food scrap recycling programs.

Students learning firsthand how their actions can positively impact the environment.

Honestly, when I first heard those numbers, I had a hard time believing them myself.

So I decided I needed to see it firsthand.

I want to thank Brighton, West Irondequoit, Fairport, and Penfield for stepping forward and participating.

Your leadership is helping create lasting environmental benefits while providing meaningful educational opportunities for students.

The success of the school district pilot inspired another idea.

If students can lead meaningful change in their schools, why can't local governments do the same.

That question led to the creation of the Community Climate Action Fund.

This new grant program provides up to \$10,000 in matching funds to municipalities seeking to launch or expand projects aligned with Climate Action Plan goals.

We designed this program to empower local leaders to identify the solutions that best fit their communities.

Because sustainability is not one-size-fits-all.

And we also recognize that some of the best solutions emerge through collaboration.

That is why municipalities submitting joint applications may qualify for enhanced matching funds of up to \$15,000 per community.

I want to recognize Legislators Susan Hughes-Smith and John Baynes for their partnership and advocacy. Their commitment to community-driven climate initiatives helped bring these programs to life.

Planning for the future matters.

Preparing for environmental challenges matters.

Investing in housing and workforce development matters.

But government also has a responsibility to make investments that improve our quality of life today, not just in the years ahead.

Sometimes that means tackling big challenges.

And sometimes it means creating great places for families to gather, play, and enjoy the community they call home.

That belief is reflected in the investments we are making throughout the Monroe County Parks system, which turns 100 years old later this year.

These may seem like small things compared to the economic development projects we've discussed today.

But for the families who use them, they matter.

They give us a reason to put down our phones, step away from our screens, and reconnect with one another.

Let's be honest—screen time is no longer just a problem for kids.

Many of us spend our days moving from computers to phones to televisions.

We're constantly connected.

And yet, sometimes we feel more disconnected than ever.

That is why our parks are so important.

They provide something increasingly rare: a place to simply be present, to spend time with family, to connect with nature, to connect with each other.

This year, I'm proud to say that Monroe County has made a renewed commitment to recreation, play, and outdoor experiences.

Because play is not a luxury.

Playgrounds breathe new life into parks and provide families with something increasingly valuable: a safe, accessible, and free place for children to learn, explore, and grow.

Thanks to the leadership of our Parks Department, led by Pat Meredith and Bob Kiley, and County Legislature President Yversha Roman, two new playgrounds will open this year.

Right here at Seneca Park, and across the river at Greece Canal Park, two new playgrounds will welcome families before the end of this summer.

They'll feature spaces that are more inclusive and accessible for all children thanks to funding from the Department of Health's Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs program.

They'll provide peace of mind and opportunities that might not otherwise exist.

And while it is not part of the County Parks system, another exciting project recently opened in Greece.

Using County ARPA funding, Carter Park in the Town of Greece now features a newly renovated playground that exceeds accessibility standards and incorporates sensory-focused design features that allow children of all abilities to play together.

As we continue building a Monroe County that is accessible and inclusive for all, we are also preparing to celebrate the shared history, values, and experiences that bring us together as Americans and as Monroe County residents.

2026 marks the 250th anniversary of the United States of America.

Here in Monroe County, we view America 250 not simply as a celebration of our nation's history, but as an opportunity to reflect on our own place within that story.

Our Indigenous heritage.

Our leadership in abolition and civil rights.

Our contributions to science, to innovation, and to the arts.

I hope you'll join me to celebrate this historic milestone together.

With support from COMIDA and our partners at Visit Rochester, we will host a free America 250 Celebration on July 12 at ESL Ballpark, featuring everything people love about Rochester festivals—food, music, games, and fireworks.

A special thank you to Naomi Silver for her partnership in this event.

And while America celebrates its 250th birthday, Monroe County has a milestone of its own approaching.

Later this fall, we will announce a year-long series of programming and events curated to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Monroe County parks system.

That legacy deserves to be celebrated because we are stewards of places that belong not just to us, but to future generations and those who came before us.

While I don't want to give it all away here, I'm too excited not to share one of our highlights.

The original Children's Pavilion - designed by Frederick Law Olmstead - was dedicated in 1890 and overlooked Highland Park for 73 years until deterioration in the mid-20th century led to its demolition.

From what I can tell, every County Manager and County Executive - including me, several years ago - has promised to rebuild this landmark.

Yesterday, I received a call from Governor Hochul who let me know that New York State is going to fill the funding gap and we're going to finally get this project done to kick off our Parks Centennial celebration.

I cannot thank Governor Hochul, Assemblymember Harry Bronson, and the Highland Park Conservancy enough for their advocacy and support to get this project over the goal line.

And that brings me to the Seneca Park Zoo.

The investments we've made in parks, recreation, and community spaces all stem from a simple belief:

People choose where to live not only because of where they work.

They choose where to live because of the quality of life they can enjoy there.

And when we talk about quality of life in Monroe County, the list of extraordinary institutions is long, but the Zoo belongs near the very top of that list.

Few institutions tell Monroe County's story more completely than the Seneca Park Zoo.

Established in 1894, the Zoo predates many of our region's most beloved cultural institutions.

For more than 130 years, the Zoo has been a place that families have come to learn, explore, and experience the wonder of the natural world.

For many local children, a trip to Seneca Park Zoo is a defining childhood memory.

Just before today's event began, nearly 1,000 elementary school students boarded buses outside after spending the day here.

The sense of wonder that comes from standing face-to-face with an animal, observing a habitat, or discovering something entirely new cannot be replicated through a screen.

The Zoo creates those moments.

That is why we are committed to investing in this extraordinary institution.

My vision is not simply to preserve the Zoo.

My vision is to transform it.

And that vision is finally coming to life.

After 18 months of research, planning, securing the best experts, and touring other zoos, I can confidently and proudly say that what we are about to create here will rival some of the nation's best zoos.

We are poised to give our residents, our animals, and our visitors a world-class experience.

This is a bold vision, but it's built on a foundation of fiscal responsibility. We are doing it the right way: responsibly, within our means, and within our budget.

The new Tropics building and entry area will create an immersive destination unlike anything currently available in our region.

The new facility will include a 23,000-square-foot indoor Tropics experience, more than 5,000 square feet of outdoor habitat space, new event and educational facilities, and remarkable new attractions.

From waterfalls and integrated aquariums to an orangutan training wall and shark touch tank, the experience will be unlike anything the Zoo has offered before.

The Tropics will bring us terrestrial species like the orangutan, lemur, ground boa, and python, among others.

Our komodo dragon exhibit will be the *only one* in the United States to feature underwater viewing of these remarkable reptiles, the largest living species of lizards in the world.

The aquatic species list includes Amazon freshwater fish, mudskipper, giant Pacific octopus, and of course the sharks- Hassett's bamboo shark and a coral cat shark!

I want to thank our Department of Environmental Services team - Mike Garland, Sean Murphy, and Jon Hinman - and our Parks Department team- Pat Meredith, Bob Kiley, and Bob Lee, and Pamela Reed Sanchez from the Zoo Society- for their leadership in this project.

I'd also like to recognize Chris Muskopf and Adam Mitchell from our design partner, CambridgeSeven. I'm happy they could both join us today.

The project is nearing final design and construction is expected to begin later this year.

We look forward to welcoming visitors to the Tropics in 2029.

But this project is about more than a building.

It is about ensuring that the children who visit today—and the children who will visit decades from now—continue to be inspired to explore, appreciate, and protect the natural world.

Throughout today's address, we have talked about economic development, workforce development, housing, sustainability, parks, recreation, and conservation.

At first glance, those may seem like separate priorities.

But they are all connected by a single goal.

Ensuring that Monroe County remains a place where people can build a career.

Raise a family.

Enjoy an exceptional quality of life.

And confidently envision a future.

The progress we have made together demonstrates that we are moving in the right direction.

I am grateful to everyone who has helped move Monroe County forward—from our municipal leaders and community partners, to our business community, educators, nonprofit organizations, labor leaders, and residents.

If we continue to invest in people, strengthen partnerships, and embrace opportunity with the same determination that has always defined this community, I have no doubt that Monroe County's best days remain ahead.

Thank you for joining us today.

Thank you to our gracious hosts at the Seneca Park Zoo.

And before you leave, I encourage you to spend a little more time here—away from the screens, surrounded by coworkers and friends, experiencing the wonder that has made this place special for more than 130 years.

Thank you.

Media Contacts:**Steve Barz, Director of Communications**SteveBarz@MonroeCounty.gov

(585) 753-1064

Kara Osipovitch, Deputy Director of CommunicationsKaraOsipovitch@monroecounty.gov

(585) 753-1081