

Dear neighbors and community,

It has been a busy summer in the district for everyone here in the office. In this newsletter I highlight just a handful of the community events and some of the meetings that I thought you would all appreciate reading. In each section I took the liberty to include additional relevant contextual information that I thought would add depth of understanding and appreciation for the topic including state and federal actions that influence the reality here in our communities. My hope with each of these newsletters, particularly those focused in the district, bring us each a little closer together and strengthen our sense of community.

# Around the District

[Village Grove Ribbon Cutting](#) - [Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services](#) (INHS)



Earlier this summer, we joined Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services (INHS) to celebrate the grand opening of the [Village Grove Apartments](#), a Crescent Way subdivision that takes a big step forward in addressing housing needs in Trumansburg. This 46-units affordable housing development in Trumansburg is INHS's greenest project to date, achieving both [Passive House Certification](#) and [NetZero status](#). Most newly built energy-efficient rental or homeowner housing is far out of the price range for low and many middle-income families. In contrast, Village Grove offers a mix of unit sizes and income levels, serving families and individuals with incomes ranging from 30% to 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI).

One thing that has struck me lately, as I've walked through affordable housing developments, is that these percentages really don't mean anything emotionally. Put into meaningful numbers, in Tompkins county, 30% AMI translates to an average annual income of \$25,300 for an individual or approximately \$36,100 for a 2 to 4-person household. These incomes match those paid to food service, basic caregiving, and other essential entry-level roles here in Tompkins and Cortland counties. 50% AMI begins to touch mid-range careers: paraprofessionals like teacher aides or junior administrative staff. 60% AMI aligns more with skilled or technical positions like early-career healthcare aides, technical support, fire fighters, and entry-level professional jobs. 80% of AMI for a single-person household is approximately \$61,800 per year and about \$84,850 annually for a 4-person household. Jobs earning around 80% AMI in Tompkins and Cortland counties include accountants & auditors, web developers, tax preparers, teachers, early-profession law enforcement, and some mid-level administrative professionals. I found one job posting in our district for a Director of Finance that fell in this income level. Translation - wages have not kept up with cost of living" here or really anywhere in the US and the cost of building continues to rise such that often the only way to build something affordable and quality is with a government subsidy. The reality of today is that when we say affordable housing we simply mean workforce housing.

After years traveling the state and the world studying affordable housing and public housing models I'm even that much more impressed with the quality that INHS builds and the communities they foster. Case in point, this project also creates a long-term home for the [Trumansburg Community Nursery School](#) at the center of the neighborhood, providing accessible early childhood education. Village Grove is more than just housing, it's a community.

[Special Olympics Summer Games](#)





If you ask any successful competitive athlete what makes a successful athlete they probably won't start with how big their muscles are or how coordinated they are. They will highlight characteristics like discipline, consistency, adaptability, resilience and mental toughness. They will definitely talk about work ethic and ability to emotionally self regulate over raw talent. They will also highlight the need to be coachable and someone who digs deep and engages with their support system. This year's New York State Special Olympics Summer Games once again was overflowing with every single one of these characteristics and as always fans and volunteers walked away inspired and motivated. Over 1,200 athletes and coaches competed in seven sports, including Track & Field, Basketball, Bowling, Powerlifting, Swimming, Tennis, and Volleyball. Events were held across multiple venues including Ithaca College, Ithaca High School, Cornell University, and Midway Lane. The weekend unfolded with Friday's fitness stations and opening ceremony, full-day competitions on Saturday, inclusive health screenings in the evening, and a closing victory celebration.

There were countless highlights from the games that fired up the crowds watching. Powerlifter Ryan Ruvola from Vestal, who lifted 408 pounds, walked away from the weekend with four gold medals and a rockstar set of teammates cheering him on. Anne



Norby, who gave the opening ceremony speech, competed in the 50-meter butterfly, the 100-meter, and the 500-meter freestyle relay. Her past performances led her to the 2022 USA Games where she won multiple medals and most importantly brought back her heart of gold to continuously uplift the state Olympic crowd. A huge thank you to the 350 volunteers who played a vital role in making the event possible, ensuring that every competition, meal, and celebration ran smoothly, continuing the tradition of community support that defines the Games. While this year was Ithaca's fourth and final year as host, Utica will carry the torch forward through 2028, not a far trip to travel for a lot of inspiration.

### **Cortlandville Mobile Stage**



Cortland County, the Town of Cortlandville, and the City of Cortland announced the arrival of their brand-new “Showmobile” mobile stage. Cortlandville had their ribbon cutting and debuted the 14 foot wide and 36 foot long, ADA accessible stage last month after two years of fundraising and planning. It has power hookups, stair access, acoustic wall panels, and a leveling system. The new Showmobile replaces the former 1986 mobile stage, which was permanently retired in 2019 due to safety and maintenance issues.

It was an honor to work with Cortland County, the city of Cortland, and Cortlandville to bring these needed taxpayer dollars back to our district through a Shared Service grant from the New York State Assembly. The stage will provide a professional grade stage making it easier for local organizations, school districts, and municipalities to host high-quality public events. The Showmobile's first event was the Cortland County Independence Day Celebrations at Dwyer Park on July 5th. The [Cortland Youth Bureau](#) will be handling all rental applications. The rental; fee is \$1,500 and includes delivery, set-up, tear-down, and removal. Here is [a link](#) to the rental form for nonprofits interested in using the showmobile for their events.

### East Hill Fire State “Hose Uncoupling Ceremony”



The City of Ithaca Fire Department officially opened the new East Hill Fire Station (Station 2) this summer, located at 965 East State Street. The new \$10 million facility was funded through a mix of city funds and state grants and includes modern training facilities, enhanced safety systems, and energy-efficient upgrades. East Hill Fire Station is part of a broader network of [4 total stations](#) supporting the entire Ithaca area. Fire stations cover calls, including structural fires, medical emergencies, or rescue



operations and will assist each other for larger emergencies or when there are multiple emergencies in one neighborhood needing an influx from multiple stations. Fire stations also provide community education, conduct building inspections, and partner with schools for safety training. These city stations are part of a larger emergency response system across the county that are all supported by the [Tompkins County Department of Emergency Response](#). When you call 911 you are actually speaking with an Emergency Services Dispatcher at the county office who collects all your information to assess all of your needs and make sure the right agencies, like the city of Ithaca Fire Department are dispatched. Click here to see a short video of a [“day in the life”](#) of a dispatcher in the county office.

A big thank you to the city of Ithaca for doing all the heavy lifting and organizing to get this additional station open to ensure full coverage across the city.

### **Women in Business Roundtable**



Photo Credit: Nana Potenza

My office joined the Tompkins Chamber Women in Business Roundtable at [16 Elm Heritage Hotel](#) in Trumansburg, a beautiful 100 year old mansion lovingly restored by current owner Jes Sever. These quarterly gatherings aren't just an opportunity to swap

business cards, they're about building a stronger, more connected network of local women entrepreneurs and nonprofit leaders.

This month's event featured some of the incredible local talent that makes our small business community thrive! [Forest Floor Creatives](#) captured the event and offered headshots, [Jenny Creek Flowers](#) brought gorgeous bouquets, [The Cheese Club](#) had an amazing spread and complementary wine tastings from Swirl (previously Trumansburg Liquor, Trumansburg's longest running businesses at 55 E. Main St.). The event was co-hosted with [Nana Potenza Designs](#).

During the event Nana shared with the group in attendance that it wasn't until 1988, in many states, when women could finally get a business loan without a male-cosigner! Many of the 75 attendees had been alive when that barrier was finally lifted. That history matters. Even today, women entrepreneurs continue to face systemic obstacles, particularly in accessing capital and mentorship. Over the last six years, the share of new businesses started by women in the U.S. increased from 29% to 49% yet, only about 23% of these were employer businesses (rather than sole entrepreneurs). Women-led startups receive only around 2% of venture capital funding. Business founders are routinely held to higher standards than their male counterparts when seeking investments and loans.

Why should we care? Because when women have equal access to capital, mentorship, and opportunity, our entire community benefits - businesses grow, jobs are created and we have more high quality cheese board options. Every one of us can play a role, whether it's mentoring, investing, collaborating or simply choosing to shop from women-owned businesses. Each act of support builds a stronger, more resilient economy for everyone.

**Tompkins County Annual Celebration and Awards Ceremony:**





My office attended the [Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce's](#) Annual Celebration and Awards Dinner earlier this summer at the Ithaca Downtown Conference Center, an event that brought the business community together to recognize outstanding local businesses and leaders.

Awardees included [Warren Real Estate](#) winning Business of the Year, [Love Living at Home](#) winning Non-Profit of the Year, and [Trade Design Build](#) winning the Entrepreneur of the Year award. [Gladys Brangman](#) was awarded with the [Noel Desch Key Person of the Year](#) and [Rick Manning](#) with the [Howard Cogan Tourism Award](#).

Warren Real Estate, led by President Bryan Warren, has combined seven decades of real estate expertise with a deep civic commitment, closing over \$615 million in sales in 2024 while supporting more than 50 local nonprofits and investing in sustainable energy. Love Living at Home, a member-driven nonprofit dedicated to helping older adults age with dignity and connection in their own homes and community, has provided over 1,200 direct services annually, from transportation to companionship, and has sponsored memberships for those facing financial hardship. It also prioritizes organizing group activities and social programming to create a vibrant social network for all



members. Trade Design Build, a multidisciplinary firm, has redefined client service by integrating architecture, construction, and custom woodwork into one cohesive process, earning a reputation for craftsmanship.

Gladys Brandman, founder and CEO of Business Leaders of Colors, a member-based network of entrepreneurs, small business owners, consultants, and social justice leaders in Ithaca and Tompkins County. It exists to support, connect, and empower historically overlooked and under-represented business owners of “colors.” The organization emphasizes equity, collaboration, and shared growth through resources, relationships, and practical support. Rick Manning, a visionary in community design and tourism, has enhanced both the livability and attractiveness of the region through projects like the Cayuga Waterfront Trail, Stewart Park improvements, and the creation of music and arts programming that blends recreation with cultural vibrancy. Congratulations again to these inspiring community members and to the Chamber for another wonderful event!

### **Ithaca High School Community Market and Community Closet Visit**

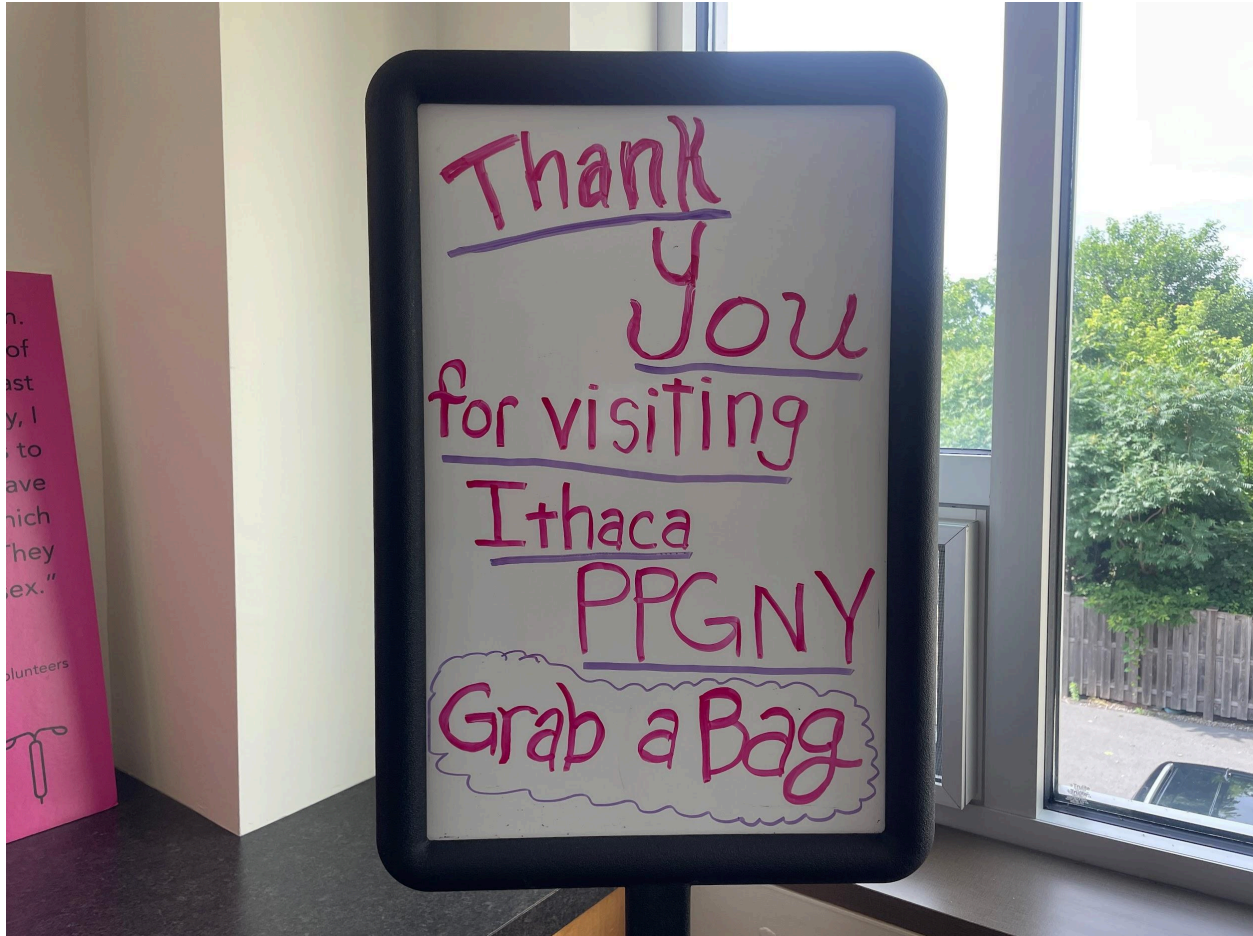


In June I visited the IHS [Community Market](#) & [Community Closet](#), programs run by the high school's wonderful library staff. The Community Market, launched in 2023, is a food resource for anyone at the high school that needs it, offered in a way that recognizes the discomfort and stigma that can come with accepting help. During the school year, students and staff alike can pick up food orders to take home, and check out printed recipes designed around the food items that are available that week. Students and staff place an order form by the end of lunch, and volunteers fulfill and distribute the orders by the end of the school day and not during the day, again to reduce any stigma of receiving food donations. The market operates through a partnership with the [Food Bank of the Southern Tier](#), The [Friendship Donations Network](#) and [ICSD Child Nutrition and Food Services](#). The physical space is set up to look like a mini convenience store to further destigmatize the growing condition of chronic food insecurity faced by so many families. The "store" even includes a section for jewelry, beauty products, toiletries, and feminine hygiene products.

Designed with similar goals in mind, Ithaca High School's Community Closet is a free resource open to any student or adult who needs (or just wants to browse) clothing, shoes, or toiletries. Entering the Community Closet feels like walking into a fun cool thrift store. By making the experience more like shopping and by opening to every student, teacher, and staff, the closet has a comfortable and entirely stigma-free environment. It has become a store on school grounds that students browse regularly on their free time, when they spill something on their clothes, if they need an outfit for an interview or going out that weekend, or even to get a prom dress or fancy outfit for a night out. If you are looking to donate, please see the most requested items on the Community Closet [wish list](#).

## **Planned Parenthood of Greater New York's Ithaca Clinic**





On July 8th my office visited Planned Parenthood of Greater New York's (PPGNY) [Ithaca Health Center](#) located at 620 W. Seneca Street. Like all Planned Parenthood facilities the center provides wellness and preventative care, vaccine services, cancer screenings, and sexual and reproductive healthcare including pregnancy testing and pregnancy planning, gender-affirming care, birth control and emergency contraception, STD testing and treatment, HIV services, and abortion services. Walk-ins for appointments including emergency contraception are welcome and insurance is not required for treatment.

The afternoon started with a tour of the facility and culminated in a roundtable discussion with local city officials, state representatives and the local and state leaders of Planned Parenthood. The staff shared the current and projected struggles PPGNY faces both as a result of existing arduous policies and the policies that will be put in place by the federal [HR1 OBBBA reconciliation bill](#) designed to remove all federal funding for any healthcare service provided by a center if they also provide abortion care services. The language was designed to specifically target and defund Planned Parenthood. PPGNY was forced to close 4 centers this past year across New York including closures in Amsterdam, Cobleskill, Goshen, and Staten Island. They are also

permanently closing their Manhattan clinic. The proceeds from the sale of the building will temporarily help financially stabilize their state network of clinics and prioritize underserved communities.

Current struggles that have been hampering PPGNY's ability to provide comprehensive services across the state includes existing [targeted restrictions on abortion providers \(TRAP\) laws](#) meant to make it more difficult for Planned Parenthood offices to open or stay functioning. These regulations require that clinics meet ambulatory surgical center (ASC) standards, including hallways and procedure rooms of specific dimensions, complex ventilation/HVAC systems, and staff-level upgrades, regulations far beyond what is medically needed. This can make renovations so costly that even well-established Planned Parenthood clinics are forced to close.

Along with closures, PPGNY is consolidating its operations to focus on more centrally located health centers and preserve access to essential services like abortion and gender affirming care. The Ithaca office is the only provider in our area. The closest Planned Parenthood providers beyond Ithaca are in Rochester. It is not uncommon for Pennsylvania residents to make frequent visits to the Ithaca facility so closure here would impact residents of multiple states.

The staff of PPGNY explained to us that closures are the direct result of limited financial support and political challenges. This includes rising operating costs, unreliable insurer reimbursements, and the lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. As of right now, at least [20 Planned Parenthood](#) clinics across seven states have closed since the start of 2025 or have announced plans to close soon. These closures are in four states that have legalized abortions and two that have [abortion bans](#). These are all closures that are products of immense financial and political turbulence for the reproductive health sector, as the US continues to face the fallout from the end of Roe v Wade. PPGNY staff stated that the Planned Parenthood network operates 600 clinics in the US, and they projected that 200 cities will close across . Although at first blush it might seem backwards, most closures are expected in states that allow abortions. This is because, in addition to the targeted defunding from the HR1 OBBBA, centers in state that allow abortion have the compounded effect of the financial pressures of existing TRAP laws, the general assumption and complacency resulting from the belief that the clinics are safe because abortion is legal, administrative hurdles for getting insurance reimbursement, and the strain of providing care often to those without insurance.

These will most likely be those clinics that serve a large population of Medicaid recipients due to the targeted Medicaid funding cuts significantly cutting access to essential healthcare services.



Planned Parenthood services provide critical support for communities and, for the time being, they need us to support them so that they can continue to support us. There are several key ways we can support them. The first is [direct support](#). Another option is to support their [action fund](#) that is used for legal and legislative actions to protect our right to care no matter our income, gender, age, or desired reproductive rights. If you find you have time, you can also [volunteer](#). And finally, if planned parenthood has been an important part of the care you or your family has received you can [share your story](#) and inspire others.

# Community Resources

## Summer EBT Resources for New York



No Kid Hungry New York is thrilled to share some new resources with you on Summer EBT. [Summer EBT](#) is a federal program that New York State has opted into that to date is still federally funded and provides eligible children with benefits to help buy groceries during the summer when kids might not have access to school meals. Each eligible child will receive \$120 in Summer EBT food benefits in 2025. This is a **one-time payment** for the entire summer. The program is run by the [NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance \(OTDA\)](#).

You are eligible if your household is at or under 185% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Here is a [link](#) to the healthcare.gov website that lists the FPL for 2024 and 2025. To calculate your percent of the FPL take your household gross annual income and divide by the FPL for 2025 for your household size. Most families are eligible if they are currently receiving SNAP, TANF, or Medicaid. A child is automatically eligible if they meet the federal definition to be considered homeless, or they are a migrant, a runaway, in foster care, or enrolled in an eligible Head Start program will be automatically enrolled. Check here: [www.summerebt.org/states/new-york](http://www.summerebt.org/states/new-york) to see if you are eligible and to sign up. You can also sign up at [summerebt.ny.gov/en-US](http://summerebt.ny.gov/en-US).

Summer EBT is designed to complement other programs such as Free Summer Meals to ensure New York children have access to nutritious food year-round. If you have questions, please visit [otda.ny.gov/programs/summer-ebt/#overview](http://otda.ny.gov/programs/summer-ebt/#overview) or call the Summer EBT Customer Service Helpline at 1-883-452-0096.

### Early Head Start Slots Still Available



Both [CAPCO](#) in Cortland and [TCAction](#) in Tompkins county are still accepting applications for [Early Head Start](#) with a few expanded infant and toddler openings! Children ages 0-3 years and expecting mothers qualify for the program. Early head start aims to promote physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development. These programs assist and support expecting mothers throughout pregnancy and up to three years of age for the child. A family is eligible for Head Start programs if they receive SNAP or TANF, if a family is homeless, or if the child is a foster child. A family is also eligible for the program if they fall within the income guidelines listed below. Currently families with incomes at or below 100% FPL are given priority for the existing slots. If you or a family you know might be eligible and could benefit from this program, here is a [link](#) for enrollment. If you have questions and you live in Tompkins County you can call



TCaction at **(607)-227-3284**. If you live in Cortland County you can reach CAPCO at **(607)-299-4795** or email [heathers@capco.org](mailto:heathers@capco.org) or [trudyh@capco.org](mailto:trudyh@capco.org).

<b>Persons in Family</b>	<b>Poverty Guideline</b>	<b>130%</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>\$15,650</b>	<b>\$20,345</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>\$21,150</b>	<b>\$27,495</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>\$26,650</b>	<b>\$34,645</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>\$32,150</b>	<b>\$41,795</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>\$37,650</b>	<b>\$48,945</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>\$43,150</b>	<b>\$56,095</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>\$48,650</b>	<b>\$63,245</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>\$54,150</b>	<b>\$70,395</b>

**Make Tourism Work for Everybody Survey**

# WE WANT YOUR INPUT

HELP SHAPE THE  
FUTURE OF TOMPKINS  
COUNTY GOVERNMENT  
SERVICE DELIVERY



## CENTER OF GOVERNMENT COMING TO DOWNTOWN ITHACA

Take a quick  
survey to  
share your  
voice!



Visit [tcgov.co/cogsurvey](https://tcgov.co/cogsurvey) or  
scan the QR  
code.

The [Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Planning Board's](#) Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Committee is conducting a survey to expand their understanding of the needs and interests of potential tourists to the county. For anyone from Tompkins County or who has visited, [this short survey](#) is available to help create more inclusive tourism practices. Your input will be invaluable and help make tourism here in Tompkins county more accessible for everyone.

**NYS launches the free associates degrees program**



# SUNY RECONNECT

## **Free Associate Degrees** for Adult Learners at TC3

New York State residents aged 25-55 without a completed college degree program are now eligible for free community college in high-demand programs. All tuition, fees, and books are covered as part of the support funding. State approved programs that lead to careers in education, cybersecurity, nursing, engineering, and green jobs are eligible for the program.

TC3 is a participating college and currently offers associate degree programs in each of these fields. Currently TC3 offers flexible online/hybrid options and opportunities for class credit for work experience (credit for prior learning). For those with children they also have on-campus childcare availability. Learn more at [tc3.edu/freecc](https://tc3.edu/freecc). You can also register for an [information session](#) to learn more.

### **Relevant eligible Programs offered at TC3 include:**

- Chemical Dependency Counseling A.A.S.
- Computer Information Systems A.A.S.
- Computer Science A.S.
- Computer Support Specialist A.A.S.
- Construction & Environmental Technology A.A.S.
- Engineering Science A.S.
- Environmental Studies A.S.
- Nursing A.A.S.
- Teacher Education Transfer – Adolescence A.S.
- Teacher Education Transfer – Childhood A.S.
- Teacher Education Transfer – Early Childhood A.S.
- Sustainable Farming & Food Systems A.A.S.

In good health,



Anna Kelles, Ph.D.

Assemblymember, 125th A.D.

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