

Thank you, it's wonderful to be here tonight in the Port City of Central New York. Oswego is a fitting place to celebrate the accomplishments of HCR's partners in helping rural communities thrive. Interestingly, I'm told that HCR provided grant funds in 2011 to the city of Oswego to build the beautiful facility we are in now.

I want to take a moment to acknowledge Blair Sebastian, outgoing Executive Director of the Rural Housing Coalition.

I have not had the chance to work with Blair. But I know that he leaves a legacy of 35 years of creative and activist leadership. He's been, and -- given that mission driven people never really retire -- I'm sure he will continue to be, an incredibly effective advocate for rural New York.

On behalf of Governor Cuomo, I congratulate Blair for the legacy he leaves, and everyone in this room for the extraordinary work you've done—expanding the reach and breadth of the RHC from 14 companies in 1980 to 60 companies today.

I'm lucky to have started this job just as Governor Cuomo has made an unprecedented three-year commitment to increase funding to rural housing preservation programs. I'll talk about what we're doing with that money in a moment.

It's a fascinating time to be working in affordable housing in this country. Thanks to the Supreme Court and two activist HUD Secretaries, we're debating issues that go the core of how the country has subsidized housing for the last forty years. The relentless attack on funding by a Republican Congress is forcing government at every level to be more creative.

From the perspective of someone who grew up in NYC and is just learning about rural issues, there does seem in the dialogue to be an implicit assumption that housing is an urban issue. The fact is poverty and disinvestment has taken in many ways a deeper toll on rural areas and we need to adjust our focus accordingly.

To some extent this means making sure we fight for funding.

Unfortunately, for rural areas funding is not a complete solution.

I spent my last two years running storm recovery for the Governor, distributing \$4.5 billion of HUD money to areas hit by Sandy, Irene and Lee. And it didn't take long to realize that even when it comes to leveraging government grants, New York's poorest cities have a huge advantage over its small town and villages.

Every dollar of government money comes with rules and regulations, red tape and requirements. For a town with one part time supervisor and a volunteer planning department, a million dollar housing grant is meaningless.

This is why I'm going to be spending a lot of time grilling my team to make sure we haven't adopted a one size fits all approach to our work.

And this is why the money we invest in your groups is so critical -- Rural Preservation Companies play leadership roles in their communities, stepping in to guide rural development through every stage of the process—from planning through execution. Oftentimes, it's Rural Preservation Companies that fill a gap and

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play the role of planning departments that are common in larger communities.

Last year alone, Rural Preservation Companies were responsible for improving more than 3,600 housing units, including 218 units of new construction—adding to the health of rural economies as well as providing needed housing.

RPCs were awarded 50 percent of HCR’s Access to Home funds—using more than \$400,000 to help adapt housing to meet the needs of people with disabilities.

RPCs accessed 50 percent of RESTORE program funds, to help eliminate hazardous conditions and make homes safer for elderly homeowners.

And more than \$3.6 million in HCR's Affordable Housing Corporation program funds was used by Rural Preservation Companies to create homeownership opportunities for low- and moderate-income families.

In the past fiscal year, RPCs reached out and conducted more than 1,600 foreclosure workshops and more than 4,600 homeownership counseling workshops.

And for every state-funded preservation program dollar appropriated, the RPCs raised \$26 for their communities—for a total of more than \$100 million.

Examples of the impact you have on communities are not hard to find.

I'll just list a few:

Keuka Housing Council in Penn Yan was essential to recovery efforts last May when torrential rains hit the Finger Lakes.

The company provided immediate assistance to families who lost everything in the floodwaters, coordinating with a local college to use student dorms as emergency shelter, and offering shelter in vacant rental units owned by the company.

Keuka Housing Council raised more than \$300,000 from local foundations and private donations to help repair damaged homes that were not eligible for other government assistance. In the end, three families were provided rental assistance for a number of months while they regained their footing. 17 rental units were made

available to flood victims, and grants were provided to 24 businesses and 35 families.

In Elizabethtown the Housing Assistance Program of Essex County helped save the vacant Willsboro Central School building in the heart of the village and re-purpose it as a senior community—the only assisted living facility in the Adirondacks.

The company wrote a Community Development Block Grant application on behalf of the Town of Willsboro and now the Champlain Valley Senior Community is providing care and transportation to medical appointments and other services for residents.

This is an impressive record of achievement, and it explains why Governor Cuomo increased funding dramatically in the 2015-16 state budget to near-historic levels.

For the next three years, RPCs will be awarded an average of \$86,825 annually, 30% more than in recent years.

As anyone who works for Governor Cuomo knows, with more money comes higher expectations. So along with new funding for operations, the HCR team of Chris Leo, Jerry Nagy and Tracey Jordan was able to argue for money dedicated solely to capacity building.

Starting in 2016 we will allow RPCs and NPCs to apply for technical assistance funding for new programs and services in your communities.

We're making one million dollars in JP Morgan settlement funds available to increase capacity of the entire preservation company network, adding new companies where needed to meet the needs of communities.

A new Mergers & Collaborations Fund sets aside \$200,000 for both RPCs and NPCs that will allow companies to work better together, create efficiencies, and lower the cost of doing business.

And the Incentive & Innovation Grants set aside \$100,000 to help companies plan into the future and address future needs.

The team is still working on these programs and will be asking for your input.

Before I close, I want to make sure you're all aware of our current funding opportunities.

We are currently accepting applications for funding via HOME, Access to Home, Access to Home for Medicaid, Access to Home for Veterans, RESTORE. And we'll be announcing the availability of over \$27 million in AHC funds in the near future.

On the HOME program, I'd like to quickly note that we have over \$16m available to award this year. The HOME team, under Ann Petersen's leadership, has done fantastic work to make the program less cumbersome. Thank you, Anne.

In addition, HCR's Rural and Urban Community Investment Funds, which Governor Cuomo created in 2013, supports retail, commercial or community facility components of mixed-use

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affordable housing developments in urban and rural communities statewide, as well as preservation of existing affordable multifamily housing in rural New York. Now in year-three, the CIF has grown significantly since its inception. In the first year, \$5.4 million was provided for the program—and this fiscal year, \$17 million is available.

OCR and the Governor's Office of Storm Recovery and the Community Preservation Corporation will soon launch the Small Area Project Affordable Rental Construction Program—or SPARC.

SPARC will make project financing available to qualified housing developers for the construction of affordable multifamily rental properties of eight to 20 units located in areas where housing stock was damaged or lost due to the impact of Superstorm Sandy, Hurricane Irene and/or Tropical Storm Lee.

Finally, we've made a process change that will fast-track shovel ready developments: Unified Funding Early Award Goal for Rural Preservation. We are providing an accelerated application and review process as part of the Unified Funding 2015 funding round.

Successful Early Award applicants must satisfy additional conditions and requirements on top of general Unified Funding requirements. Rural Preservation Projects are among the priorities that make projects eligible for the Early Round. These include applications that propose the rehabilitation of projects currently receiving Rural Rental Assistance Program (RRAP) funds.

I encourage you to check our website for details on the Unified Funding process and to take advantage of these opportunities. For this round of the program, the early awardee grants will be due in October with awards anticipated by the end of the calendar year.

So It will be a busy few years.

Indeed, it's been a busy three months since I took office. When I took over from Daryl Towns in June I told people I thought I would spend most of my first six months on internal management – breaking down bureaucracy and reconnecting the staff to its constituency – people like you.

What I've found is that HCR doesn't really need my help in that respect – it's an agency with a small work force and an enormous impact, one that punches well above its weight year in and year out because the people who run programs like RPC are constantly thinking about how to improve them. In many ways, my job now is to fight for more resources and make sure the world appreciates what we do.

Having said that, no government agency is perfect. In the years to come, I want the leadership of this organization and the many, many RPCs represented here to know that I am always in the market for good ideas. If you succeed, we succeed.

I wish you great success this year and in the future. Please continue to communicate with our Office of Community Renewal and let's build on the solid partnership we've cultivated over the years and work together to make life better for residents throughout New York State.