

## **Public Comment: Balancing County and Town Economic Development with Community Safeguards**

**Presented by: Indu Gupta MD, MPH**, Resident of the Town of DeWitt & DeWitt Town Councilor

Good afternoon, My name is Indu Gupta. I am a physician, former County Health Commissioner, a long-time resident of The Town of DeWitt and now a DeWitt Town Councilor representing the community.

We are here to address a vital question: **How do economic development decisions by the county impact our schools, our neighborhoods, and our local quality of life?**

The short answer is: ***A LOT!***

What are our expectation hopes, concerns, and ideas related to **PILOT agreements**, future development projects, and their impacts on our schools and municipalities?

This is a bit complicated and needs attention to the details to ensure all the i's are dotted and t's are crossed to find the just right balance for all the stakeholders involved- esp the community.

Economic development tools like **PILOT (Payment In Lieu of Taxes)** agreements are designed to be economic engines that jump-start growth by attracting business in NYS- a high tax state. When implemented and monitored well, they can truly transform a community.

filter through it. Furthermore, high-level reports flatten this data into county-wide totals, hiding the direct financial impacts on individual towns.

According to the publicly available report at the New York State Comptroller website, in 2024, Onondaga County had 81 active projects valued at \$1.7 billion, resulting in a total net tax exemption for the companies of \$3.8 million. This is not a small sum.

The pressing question for our taxpayers is this: **Did these tax breaks create enough local jobs and secondary revenue to offset the lost tax dollars needed to fund our daily municipal operations—our schools, police, fire departments, roads, and water lines?**

### **The Golden Opportunity: ShoppingTown Mall Redevelopment**

The Town of DeWitt is open for business. We are proud of our high-tech sector, and we are incredibly excited for the future of the ShoppingTown Mall site.

Like many of my neighbors, I have beautiful memories of that mall. It is just minutes from my house. I remember taking my daughters on the merry-go-round, getting haircuts, taking family portraits that still hang in my home, and visiting the local library branch.

Today, we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to revitalize this long-vacant property and build a vibrant, true Town Center.

We appreciated the County Executive's Town Hall where residents expressed their hopes and concerns. I would ask for the same dialogue as the RFPs proposals are reviewed and considered.

- 3. Active Enforcement of Clawbacks:** Clearly communicate who is monitoring project data and show a commitment to enforcing clawback provisions if a company fails to meet its job retention or creation promises.
- 4. Robust Public Education:** Expand public hearing notices into proactive public education campaigns so residents can meaningfully participate in the process before decisions are finalized.
- 5. Open, Continuous Communication:** Commit to continuous, proactive updates—via direct reports to the DeWitt Town Board and transparent press releases—ensuring town leadership and the community are partners in this growth, not spectators.

I thank you and implore you all to capture this golden opportunity to build a prosperous, healthy, and transparent future for the Town of DeWitt and Onondaga County at large.

Submitted respectfully:

Indu Gupta

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