

2017 State of the Township Address

Council members, residents, honored guests, staff, friends and family; let me begin by wishing you all a healthy and prosperous New Year. Thank you for joining us this evening at our Township's annual reorganization meeting, an event, one of many, happening throughout the country, reaffirming that we are truly a government of the people for the people. As I speak with residents throughout the Township I continue to be impressed with the level of knowledge, commitment and passion they display in their efforts to better our community. Together, we maintain the vision we set at the start of my administration, achieving a quality of life in Bridgewater that is the exemplar of other communities. Within the administration, our boards and committees, we have built a strong team that works for our residents, while working closely with our partners in surrounding communities, at the County, State and Federal levels, and with the private sector to achieve our goals. This evening I want to take a few moments to assure you the state of our Township is sound and our future bright, to share a few of the successes we've had in 2016 and speak briefly about some of the challenges and opportunities which lie ahead.

Economy

The Township economy remains vibrant as both the commercial and residential sectors have exhibited growth in value. As geopolitical events shape both opportunities and concerns, the Township remains well positioned for further

growth. We remain recognized as a leader in the Life Sciences industry, both locally and nationally. Last year I had the opportunity to advocate for the industry and our community on Capitol Hill representing the New Jersey Mayor's Committee for Life Sciences. Representing NJ mayors and partnering with We Work for Health, a non-profit agency, I spent two days in Washington DC, meeting with many of the members of NJ's congressional delegation, discussing ways the Federal government can be both helpful and innovative in attracting and retaining Life Science businesses in New Jersey. The Life Science Industry occupies millions of square feet of office and research space in Bridgewater, provides high paying jobs to a broad portion of our population and is directly and indirectly responsible for a significant portion of our local economy.

Businesses continue to choose Bridgewater. From speaking with industry leaders throughout the year, we know these businesses are choosing Bridgewater because of our location, highly educated populace, and the ability to be near both competitors and customers alike. A great example is the recent relocation of Linde Americas to Bridgewater. Linde, one of the world's largest gases and engineering companies, had been located in New Providence for the past 70 years. In choosing Bridgewater as the place to meet their need for updated office space, Linde relocated its North and South American headquarters bringing approximately 450 employees to modern and technologically advanced space in the Somerset Corporate Center. Linde is a major supplier of the pharmaceutical industry. Critical in their decision was

the ability to be near customers, access to a wide talent pool in a centrally located community desired by employees. Bridgewater had it all! We welcome them to our Township and wish them much success as they play an important role in our increasingly diversified commercial base.

The Center of Excellence made major strides in 2016, gaining the redevelopment designation from the Council for the front 66 acres of the 110 acre site. This cleared the way for attracting leading and new Life Science and Pharmaceutical companies that value co-location with a mix of residential, office, hotel, and retail uses. Once completed, the site promises become the model for redeveloping aging corporate campuses to meet the more sophisticated and technologically advanced needs of today's commercial enterprises and their employees. We look forward to the submission of documents to the Planning Board for public input and review in 2017.

We continue to see strong interest in retail and health services. New businesses have begun construction or opened in 2016 including the Chimney Rock retail development, approximately 218,000 square feet of retail space which will see the opening this year of the Township's first Whole Foods. Also on the site will be Nordstrom Rack, Sacks Off 5th, The Container Store, Habit Burger and Chipotle. Expansion of existing businesses and applications for new development in this area are likely to continue as a result of infrastructure improvements to the Chimney Rock Interchange.

Hampton Inn, on 22 West, will open the first new hotel in Bridgewater in many years. The merger of Somerset Hospital into the Robert Wood Johnson Medical Unit has spurred a growth in doctor's practices, surgical centers and competing health service providers. Hunterdon Healthcare has renovated space in the former Bank of America building on Rt. 22 where they see patients for Endocrine health, physical therapy, heart and vascular, and urology.

The Commons Mall continues to be a market leader by adding new retail and dining choices for the community. The American Redstone Grill recently opened its restaurant in front of Lord and Taylor, offering a third stand-alone restaurant to this location while the Lifestyle Center also continues to evolve to serve its clients' needs.

Land Use

Among the four goals that guide Township government towards our Vision, Vigilance in Land Use remains a critical function in balancing the growth of the Township with maintaining and improving the quality of life we currently enjoy. In 2016 there were 62 applications for consideration by the Planning Board, Zoning Board or for a site plan waiver. While this level of activity is consistent with previous years, it represents many nights of public hearings, with testimony from professionals and input from residents. Ultimately residents serving on the boards decide whether a project is appropriate for the particular area of the Township in question. For sound decisions, public input is of primary importance. Both the Planning Board and Zoning Board dedicate as

much time as necessary to hear everyone's input on the proposed development. In many instances, this input leads to changes that better insulate neighborhoods, or provide better access or more aesthetically appropriate architecture. This input is valued and often leads to positive changes for both the applicant and the surrounding neighborhood. I would like to thank the residents and professionals serving on the Planning and Zoning Board for their continued dedication.

Vigilance in Land use also encompasses the Township's efforts to preserve open space and provide for active and passive recreation in our parks. In 2016 the Township preserved 10 acres off North Bridge Street that abuts an existing 10 acre open space parcel which may be used in the future for active or passive recreation. The Township continues to partner with the County to preserve land within the Township. I am confident our partnership with the Freeholders will result in additional parcel preservation within Bridgewater. While not all parcels slated for development can be preserved, the volunteer Open Space Advisory Board carefully considers each request and weighs its future value, purchase price and possible utility when making its recommendations for action to the Council. Members of the committee, I thank you for your service.

This year the Park Advisory Board continued its tour of the existing parks, making recommendations for new equipment or maintenance of the grounds. In 2016 they worked with Ingredion, a leading global ingredients solutions company with research and development operations in Bridgewater on a

unique opportunity. Ingedion wanted to conduct a team building exercise that would give back to the local community. Ingedion purchased and then donated \$25,000 worth of playground equipment. Working with the Township park staff, their employees volunteered for an entire day installing the equipment at Harry Ally Park. I wish to thank them for their efforts, very generous donation, and providing a very popular enhancement to the local neighborhood park.

Fiscal

Our fiscal objectives require keeping the municipal tax rate low in comparison with surrounding towns. By maintaining a low municipal tax, we increase our competitive advantage in trying to attract new residents and reduce the property tax burden borne by us all, especially seniors and others on a fixed income.

The management of the budget is a yearlong undertaking with the Administration and the Council working cooperatively to make certain that all funds are directed where they are most needed. My administration is dedicated to implementing best-in-class practices and is always looking to increase efficiency. This year the Finance Department improved the process for monetizing uncollected taxes improving our cash flow. We have also expanded our Shop Bridgewater program to over 30 merchants. This program supports local businesses by offering customers discounted goods and services that are purchased using the Shop Bridgewater Card. The accumulated

discount is returned annually to Bridgewater residents in June by direct application to your property taxes. If you have not already taken advantage of this program, please pick up a free card from the Finance Office to begin saving.

Infrastructure

The maintenance of our roads, storm sewers, sanitary sewer lines and facilities is a major municipality responsibility and improving our infrastructure remains a high priority of our administration. For each of the last five years we have increased the amount of funding in the capital budget that has been allocated for the repair of these critical assets. While we have been able to repair, resurface, and maintain a significant number of roads during this time, the number of roads that are in need of resurfacing continues to grow and we have reached the point where annual maintenance is not keeping up. In 2016, an ad hoc committee of volunteer residents was formed with a mission to determine the state of our roads, evaluate our road improvement program and look at alternative methods for preserving the a road's lifespan. They reviewed and ranked each road in the Township and provided suggestions for areas of increased investment. These recommendations will be used by the Administration to prepare a road improvement program that addresses the needs of the Township over the next five years. I look forward to working with the Council as we create a plan that addresses this growing need. The replacement of our sanitary sewer lines continues in areas of the Township

where we have experienced infiltration and inflow in our aging pipes. In order to stretch our road repair dollars, we have adopted a complete road repair philosophy meaning wherever we have repaired sewer lines, we look to simultaneously repair roads and storm drainage. 2017 will also see the addition of solar panels at the municipal complex. This will complete the solar project through the County Improvement Authority and mean that all of our facilities are now utilizing solar power to help offset demand for electricity from traditional sources and lower municipal energy costs.

Essential Services

The fourth goal is the provision of essential services in a customer first manner. Simply stated, we will provide the services that government must and we will do so knowing who we work for you, our residents. These services range from police protection, roadway maintenance, building inspections, plan reviews, recreation, senior programs, etc. We continually strive to provide our residents with valued, innovative and interesting programs that foster inclusion and invite participation by all. The Township's calendar is filled with events and recreation programs for all ages year round. To make our services even more accessible, we have established a social media presence on Facebook and Twitter as well as increased the amount of information available on our website. Please look for Township information on these outlets and like us when the information is helpful.

2016 saw some leadership changes among the senior staff. I would like to thank Bob Bogart, Former Township Engineer and Former Police Chief Manny Caravela for their exemplary service to Bridgewater residents. These two gentlemen concluded exceptional careers in public service. They always held themselves to the highest standard when dealing with the public and fellow employees. I learned much from each and I am privileged that they were members of my staff. I wish them well in their future endeavors. In April, Dave Battaglia joined the staff as the Director of Municipal Services and Township Engineer. Dave has made a seamless transition and is already a valuable asset for the town and the staff. The required process for the selection of a new police Chief has been completed and I have provided my recommendation of Captain Al Nicaretta to become the next Chief to the Council. Captain Nicaretta has served Bridgewater residents for 25 years. The Department will be well served under his leadership.

Bridgewater is a vibrant community with a bright future thanks in large part to the quality of our residents and their willingness to get involved. Many of you are here tonight because of your involvement in a standing board or committee. Your involvement makes a tremendous difference and I thank you for saying yes. On occasion I have also asked individuals to provide an extraordinary level of service when a need arises for their knowledge, expertise or skill. The results of their effort may be better decision making, improved services or more efficient work processes that ultimately benefit us all. One such example

was the previously mentioned ad hoc road committee; another is the ad hoc committee to review compliance. For many of us, the process through which you gain approval to improve your property can be viewed as overly bureaucratic and financially burdensome. Last year, with the support of Economic Development advisory Board and input from residents, I tasked Debra Albanese and Tom Genova with reviewing and streamlining the entire process and gave them a goal of making it easier to understand and quicker to complete. They met over the course of the year and interviewed staff, homeowners and professionals. They reviewed files and individual cases to look for areas of improvement. And, they met their goal. Their recommendations will be implemented this year, and where necessary, changes to our building code will be forwarded to the Council for their consideration. In the end, I believe their work will be appreciated by many and our compliance process will be viewed by other towns looking for a best practice to model. I want to thank them for taking up this review and for their diligence in completing the task.

I would also like to take a moment to recognize the volunteer efforts of a very special individual, Dr. Sid Horowitz who recently resigned as a Township volunteer after 38 years of service. For almost 4 decades, Sid volunteered his knowledge, expertise, experience, and talent to the town he called home. He served on the Environmental Commission, was an original member on the Open Space Advisory Committee, and served on many other boards and committees throughout the years. Whenever an Administration asked for his

help, he responded immediately with dedication and commitment. His efforts are enjoyed by us today and will be for generations to come. On behalf of all of residents, the Council, staff and friends I wish him all the best and thank him for his service.

Conclusion

As I look ahead to 2017 I am energized to face the challenges and achieve the successes we have come to expect from Township government. We will work to continue to maintain our competitive edge in attracting new and diverse businesses to the Township. We will look for new and innovative ways to provide government services to our residents in a format that is easy to use and quick to achieve the results they expect. We will continue to improve our infrastructure and look for solutions to address the growing list of roads in need of resurfacing. And, we will continue to manage our most precious resource; our land, in a method that keeps our vision for the Township firmly in mind.

My Administration will stay true to our principles of transparency, inclusiveness, forward thinking, accessibility and resourcefulness that continue to guide us in all of our actions. Monthly Evenings with Dan will continue to provide a relaxed forum for discussion with residents. We will keep our doors and minds open so we may benefit from the knowledge and input on local matters from all who care to share. I look forward to working with the Council, other officials, the private sector and residents to maintain

Bridgewater's position as a leader in the County and the State. Most of all I look forward to serving you, my fellow residents in the year ahead.

Finally, I ask all to remember our servicemen and women who dedicate their lives to the freedoms we enjoy. They sacrifice time away from family and loved ones so that we and our loved ones can be safe.

In the year ahead, may your fortunes be many and your misfortunes few. May God bless you, our community, and may God bless America.

Thank you.

Respectfully,

Daniel J. Hayes. Jr.

Mayor, Bridgewater Township