

## **2019 State of the Township Address**

Council members, residents, honored guests, volunteers, 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. Serving you as Mayor is a tremendous honor, a privilege for which I am continually grateful. Tonight I wish to reassure you the state of the Township is strong, and our future is bright. My administration continues to lead with the vision we set just seven short years ago, achieving a quality of life in Bridgewater that is the exemplar for other communities. Within the administration, with the assistance of our volunteer boards and committees, we have built a strong team that continues to work for our residents, maintaining strong ties at the County, State and Federal levels, with our partners in surrounding communities, and with the private sector to achieve our goals. The health of a community depends upon many codependent factors, each requiring careful planning and attention to achieve continued success. For us, a strong local economy provides fiscal flexibility and resident benefits. Benefits like enabling us to achieve the lowest municipal tax rate in Somerset county, like offsetting our resident school tax burden by tens of millions of dollars, while at the same time we preserved hundreds of acres of additional open space, while we repaired record miles of roads, we expanded resident services and, combined with sound fiscal management, we will introduce a budget with a tax decrease. Since day one, we have had a plan.

Since day one we have been working our plan and since day one our plan has been and continues working for Bridgewater, working for you!

This evening, I would like to share, as examples of our strong foundation, a few of the milestones we've achieved in 2018 and speak briefly about some of the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

### **Economic Prosperity**

Our Township's economic base is vibrant, varied and continues to flourish: our highly educated work force has a range of not just job opportunities, but good jobs to choose from. The range of businesses choosing Bridgewater as their home, from multi-national Fortune 500 leaders to small start-ups and local retail establishments, makes our commercial base the leader in the region.

Bridgewater's diversified and growing economic base is the engine that keeps our residents engaged, compensated, and our community in demand. Our economy is a web of elements: the strengths of each element working harmoniously, providing us with good jobs, great retail choices, and fiscal flexibility from a sustainable and enviable tax base. For the next few minutes, I'd like to review a few key economic sectors.

Life Science is at the heart of Bridgewater's economic engine. We've worked hard to achieve, and we have benefited from substantial growth in the Life Sciences industry, with big investments from Nestlé, Sanofi, and Insmid in the past year. Investments in Bridgewater from these global firms keep us growing

and in turn keeps our Township an attractive destination for other industries. Corporate support services like Bravo! Group Services, a minority, woman-owned business which this year relocated their headquarters to previously vacant offices on Rt22, have increasingly sought to make Bridgewater their home.

Strong growth in the corporate sector has also increased the demand for hotel rooms. The AC Hotel will finish construction of its new location at the Somerset Corporate Center this year. They were especially keen to invest in Bridgewater, as we represent a gateway market where six highways converge with a variety of commercial and industrial elements that suggest success to hotel enterprises.

Similarly, our retail sector, whose diversity of high quality options we directly enjoy, also continues to grow. This growth was led in 2018 by the addition of Chimney Rock Crossing East and West. The sentence from the brochure seeking retail partners for this site sums up just how attractive Bridgewater is: *“All roads connect a well educated, affluent and mobile work force to the region’s multiple commercial and corporate office complexes. Strong residential demographics in the region are reinforced by a 366,000 daytime population.”* Clearly we are a very attractive retail destination.

Competitors for the retail sector are not resting. The Commons Mall continues to evolve and strengthen their position as one of the most prosperous retail locations in the northeast. We met with the new owners of the mall, Brookfield

Properties. They are excited about the acquisition and look toward the mall's continued success with new and innovative offerings.

Small businesses make up a very significant part of our community especially as they, too, continue to reinvest in their success. In 2018 we celebrated expansions and renovations by Somerville Lumber and PERI, as well as, the Jewish Community Center with their recently completed fitness center.

Industries supporting our residents' changing life needs are being added. Two new assisted living facilities broke ground and will offer state-of-the-art living and medical services to residents looking to age in place. The Sunrise Senior Living Group will open this year. The Delaney is slated to open in 2020.

## **FISCAL**

When paired with the responsibility to be fiscally prudent, the economic strength of our commercial base is a key element in maintaining a low residential tax rate. Living the value of fiscal prudence is embodied in the first goal supporting our vision – to remain in the lowest quartile of municipal taxes in the county. Last year I proposed, and the Council adopted a municipal budget that called for a zero tax increase. This budget plan enabled us to achieve the lowest municipal tax rate in Somerset County. This year I will present a spending plan to the Council in February that permits a tax decrease. While the details of the spending plan will be released in February, it is safe to say that the strength of the corporate base plays a vital role in

maintaining our solid fiscal position. This position was reaffirmed in 2018 by Standard and Poor's rating agency at AA+, when we permanently financed outstanding notes at a fiscally advantageous rate.

In addition to the strong fiscal actions of my team, the Shop Bridgewater program continues to save our residents money on their property taxes. This year, the program returned over \$45,000 to over 1,700 participants who shopped at the 53 registered businesses throughout Bridgewater and the surrounding area. It is easy to sign up and set yourself on the path to savings. Either visit the Township website or stop in the Finance Office for details.

## **Land Use**

Our second goal, vigilance in land use, forces focus on the look, feel and utility of our Township including open space preservation and the maintenance and use of our parks and recreation sites. In 2018 the Planning Board heard 19 applications and the Board of Adjustment heard 15 applications. These boards offer residents the opportunity to be heard on any application that may affect them. Many residents have participated, ensuring their voice is heard and through the Boards, their concerns can be addressed to the greatest extent possible. I would like to thank the dedicated volunteers on these boards - members, who faithfully and knowledgeably act on behalf of their fellow residents throughout the year. Although the hours may be long, and the

materials tedious, these individuals all serve with a passion for making the Township the best it can be. A special thanks is due the current Council Planning Board representative, Howard Norgalis. Councilman Norgalis dedicated countless hours working through the yet-to-be completed Center of Excellence application, including work on a sub-committee to delve deeper into the application's complexities. His dedication and desire to have each element understood and clarified is greatly appreciated by all the Planning Board members. Often this effort goes unnoticed by the public and I would like to recognize him for his special effort.

Our efforts to preserve open space continued in 2018 with the acquisition of the Wemple property off Foothill Road. This site will forever be protected from development and eventually opened for resident enjoyment.

The Camp Cromwell site utilization continues to progress as we work on phase one of opening the site to residents. Phase one includes creation of a nature trail, application for a grant to construct an all access hardscape trail, demolition of structures no longer of use, and preservation of buildings for future use. This 110-acre site presents the Township with unique recreation opportunities and I look forward to its continued progress by the Park and Recreation Boards in 2019.

The preservation of our history took big strides forward with the approval of the local referendum allowing use of open space funds for historical preservation.

I would like to thank outgoing Council President Christine Rose for her tireless advocacy for historical preservation and for her efforts assisting the Mayor's resident ad hoc historic preservation committee. This group will reconvene in 2019 and continue their efforts to catalogue the historic sites throughout the Township and establish a plan for keeping our history alive through educational programs.

### **Infrastructure**

Improving and maintaining our vital infrastructure, the third of our annual goals, remains a critical concern as Township roads, sewer system, stormwater collection and energy grid continue to age. In 2018, we paved, rebuilt or resurfaced over 18.7 miles of Township roads. According to the engineering staff this is the most miles resurfaced in one year in recent memory. Major roads throughout the Township such as Country Club, Meadow, Newman's, Garretson, Leghorn, and others were all resurfaced. There are still many neighborhood roads that require attention and we remain steadfast in addressing them. We will also continue to invest in maintaining and improving the sanitary sewer and storm water collection systems throughout the Township.

In 2018, we again partnered with New Jersey American Water, to resurface entire roadways as they replace water distribution lines. This past year we completely resurfaced Colonial Way, Dogwood Rd and are working on the

completion of Elm Road. NJAW also invested \$65 million to upgrade and provide flood protection at one of its largest water treatment plants located on Polhemus Lane further insuring the viability of our water supply during storm events.

Public Service Electric and Gas recently completed its Emergency Operations Center located on Route 22 and received approval last month to install upgrades to their North Bridge Street substation, both further reducing the possibility of an extended Bridgewater outage. Investing in all the major utilities is essential to maintaining our leadership in the region.

### **Essential Services**

Our fourth perennial goal, providing essential services with a resident-first attitude, is the aim of every Township Employee. The past year saw some efforts deserving recognition for exceptional service. The Public Works Department labored tirelessly through the spring and early summer to clear all of the brush and debris left from several particularly difficult late-season snowstorms. These storms caused more collective damage to trees and shrubs throughout the Township than Hurricane Sandy. So much brush was collected from the storm that the yard waste site became overwhelmed requiring alternatives for temporary storage. Many thanks to our partners at Pfizer, for allowing us to store materials at the Cyanamid site parking lots.



The police department experienced numerous retirements in both the supervisor and officer ranks. To all who retired, we thank you for your years of dedicated service and we wish you a long and healthy retirement. For those who were promoted, we trust you will take on your new duties and responsibilities with the same vigor and professionalism as your predecessors and wish you the best of luck in your new roles. Chief Nicaretta addressed the growing scourge of opioid abuse by offering an informational drug awareness program in June and installed a permanent prescription drop-off location in the lobby of the police department. Also of note, the National Night Out in August continues to grow in attendance each year. I want to thank the Chief, the officers and first responders who volunteered their time to strengthen the bond between their organizations and the community they serve.

The Department of Human Services, led by new Director Kristen Schiro, continued to outperform in all areas. The Township received renewed recognition by Sustainable Jersey for its efforts to reduce waste, promote environmental stewardship and sustainability. The Township applied for its first electric charging stations to be located at the municipal complex furthering our efforts promoting alternative fuel vehicles. Meanwhile, our annual Electric Ride showcase held in the fall continues to grow in popularity.

We created a pollinator garden at Hillside School in partnership with their “roots and shoots” program. Pollinators play a crucial role in our ecology and economy. All funds for the garden were provided through a grant from New

Jersey American Water. Our annual May Eco Blast continues to be a huge success. I would like to thank Jim Rokosny and all the members of the Environmental Commission and its affiliated boards for their tireless efforts in making the Eco Blast one of the best sustainability showcases in the State.

Our farmers market held Sunday's at the library throughout the year, has grown in popularity offering fresh, locally grown produce and other wonderful products. If you haven't checked it out already, please do. I am sure just like my wife and I, you will become a regular visitor. This spring we will be conducting a first of its kind canal walk cleanup. Several residents have already expressed enthusiastic support for this event. Stay tuned. We will soon be organizing volunteers to help beautify this hidden gem.

Our Engineering Department has teamed with the Human Services Department to promote and implement the Complete Streets concept on roadways throughout town. To further enhance walkability and biking, I convened an ad hoc committee of residents and staff to survey the town assessing existing and possible pathways. This led us to partner with the Somerset County Planning Department in identifying projects that will increase walkability and safe biking routes. We are hopeful 2019 will bring implementable projects that increase safe pathways throughout the town.

The Mayor's Wellness Program promotes healthy activities in everyday life. The Senior Healthy Mind, Body and Soul program, the Flu Clinic, Yoga in the

Workplace, and, Benefits of Walking seminar are all examples of offerings we hosted. 2019 will continue this practice, adding new and exciting programs to our portfolio.

## **Recognition**

All volunteers on our boards, committees and first responder organizations deserve recognition and thanks. These groups help guide our actions, provide knowledgeable input and shape the direction our programs and services. For those of you with us tonight that are joining a group for the first time, I believe you will find it to be a rewarding and enriching experience; one that you will be able to point to in the future and say that you were able to contribute to something very much worthwhile.

Tonight I would like to single out a few individuals for special recognition. Their Township service is exemplary. The first individual is John Schmitt. John has decided to step down as chair of the Economic Development Advisory Committee after over 13 years of service. John is the epitome of a gentleman and a scholar. His organization, thoughtfulness and pragmatic approach to any task has provided the Township with benefits that will be enjoyed for decades. John has freely given his time and effort whenever called upon, no matter the size or scope of the project. When the Cyanamid clean-up was entering a critical phase and resident input was necessary, it was John,

alongside former Councilman Bob Albano, who led a group to ensure residents had a voice in any proposed clean-up method. His work on the Economic Development Advisory Committee included the review of the Township Master Plan, numerous proposed developments and studies on vital subjects including zoning and traffic. He worked well with myself and staff, sharing his insight and the opinions of the board and was never shy to point out when a proposed project was unsuitable for the area. I want to personally thank him for his friendship and his years of dedicated service. Bridgewater is in a better place for his efforts. I wish him many years of healthy and enjoyable retirement.

I would also like to recognize Alan Papp for his contributions as chair of the Park Advisory Board. Alan has served on the Park Board for over 8 years, and through his guidance has improved the parks with new equipment, making timely repairs, and increasing overall safety. He is a tireless advocate for the park system and Bridgewater is better off for his contributions. While he has asked to step down from the responsibilities of Chair, I am delighted he will continue on the Board as they work to make our parks the best municipal parks in the State.

Lastly I would like to acknowledge former Director of the Somerset County Parks, Ray Brown. Ray, a Bridgewater resident and friend to the municipality, retired from the County last year. Ray served Bridgewater residents by providing unique and unparalleled recreational services via our County park system, as well as always offering guidance, support, and assistance whenever

asked. I thank him for all he has done for Bridgewater and Somerset County during his long and impactful career.

### **Looking Ahead**

As we look ahead 2019 will present the usual challenges and opportunities. We will continue our strong fiscal management. By maintaining our conservative fiscal discipline in all municipal expenditures we will present a budget that asks for less taxes while still providing the services our residents expect and enjoy. We will remain vigilant on matters of land use: looking for ways to open recently acquired parcels for public enjoyment; stay measured in our approach to applications for development; manage our enviable commercial base to insure long-term economic stability; and, continue to monitor and participate in the USEPA-led cleanup of the former American Cyanamid site. We will further improve our infrastructure: recommending additional roads for improvement; expand our partnership with Somerset County to maximize the roads we can quickly resurface; and, fully examine our aging sanitary sewer system looking for areas to repair and replace aging lines. We will work with our partners in the public utilities on road and utility improvement. We will explore new technologies which may be advantageous financially or environmentally. We will continue to provide essential services in a resident first manner; making sure all departments are fully prepared to deliver exemplary service. We will explore, expand and capitalize upon relationships with other governmental and non-profit agencies to address up to the minute

concerns, increase shared operations and provide the most advanced level of services available. In short, we will maximize our return on investment utilizing each dollar in the municipal budget to the best of our ability.

We will stay true to the principles that have to date guided us so successfully. We will be resourceful and forward thinking. We will challenge the status quo in order to benefit from new perspectives and alternate ideas. We will adapt new technologies to deliver services and information faster befitting the resident public. We will be inclusive; embracing different cultures and ethnicities because it is the right thing to do, doing so delivers better solutions, and, it is demanded if we are to serve all segments of our ever increasingly diverse population. We will continue the celebration of multi-cultural and community events such as Diwali, Chinese New Year, Tree 4 All, Bridgewater Community Day, Arbor Day, Together Teal and many others where we may share our pasts and plan our future. And lastly we will remain transparent and accessible. I serve you. I will continue: holding monthly “Evenings with Dan” forums for open discussion and discourse on topics of interest to you. We will welcome congressional town halls so that we may remain informed and educated about Federal matters. We will conduct public hearings on items of importance such as the American Cyanamid superfund cleanup; and, hold informational seminars on topics affecting our community.

In closing, I ask all to remember our servicemen and women who dedicate their lives to protect and defend the freedoms we enjoy. They sacrifice time away

from their family and loved ones so that we and our loved ones live safely in the blanket of their protection. Their commitment makes this evening possible.

In the year ahead, I pray your fortunes are many and your misfortunes few. May God bless you. May God bless our Bridgewater and may God bless America.

Thank you.

Respectfully at your service,

Daniel J. Hayes, Jr.

Mayor, Bridgewater Township