

Denville State of the Municipality Address 2016

Thank you. I hope everyone had a Happy Holiday Season and I wish you all a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year.

I also wish to extend my sincere congratulations to returning Councilwoman Stephanie Lyden and our newest Council members John Murphy and Nancy Witte as well as to Council President Chris Golinski. I am confident that you will all serve the people of Denville well.

Thank you to the Reverend Edward Carl for joining us today and providing the invocation. Also, thanks to the Denville Volunteer Fire Department for supplying the Color Guard for today's ceremony. It is a special Color Guard as all 4 men were my Eagle Scouts.

Thank you to Steven Ward, Kathy Bowditch, Kara DeLoreto, John Ciardi and Mary Moore for making sure everything was just right for today's event.

Thank you to the citizens of Denville for entrusting our beloved Township into my care. I am truly humbled by your confidence. Most importantly, thank you to my wife Sharon and my entire family for their constant patience, support, understanding and sacrifices you have each made which allows me to serve our community.

The makeup of elected officials is ever changing. For twenty years, Deborah Smith served on our Town Council, breaking Fred Lash's record of 18 years.

On Sunday, Deborah will take the oath of office as a Morris County Freeholder. Deborah will be only the fourth Freeholder from Denville. She is following the footsteps of Former Mayors Walter Lueger, Jack O'Keefe and Gene Feyl. I am confident Deborah will do an outstanding job representing all of us.

At the last Council meeting Council President Golinski recognized Deborah for 20 years of service on our Town Council. I would like to take the opportunity today, to thank Deborah for her 20 years of service to our citizens on the Council and to congratulate Denville's favorite daughter on her election to the Morris County Board of Chosen Freeholders. In recognition of her accomplishments I would like to present to Deborah with the Key to the City.

In order to operate the township properly and to provide for the efficient and effective delivery of public services, it takes the dedicated efforts of 3 groups of people. I would like to thank the entire team of elected and appointed officials for working together collaboratively to ensure the legislative framework is in place.

Secondly, I wish to acknowledge our entire Township staff, led by our Administrator Steven Ward, they perform a very fine, dedicated and professional job every day.

And, the third essential group are the countless volunteers who dedicate their time and efforts to the betterment of our community and allowing us to provide service that we may not be able to otherwise afford.

Over the past four years, much of the Township's attention and efforts has been focused on rebuilding our community after Hurricane Irene. At each of the last four re-organization meetings, I spoke about the Administration's cardinal points and how I was going to seek the most efficient and cost effective manner to accomplish each of the goals that I had established.

I am proud to announce the successful completion of many of the cardinal points I sought to accomplish. Of particular note, the Valley View Fire House which was destroyed during Hurricane Irene has been replaced with a new state-of-the-art facility. Also, the retaining wall holding up North Shore and East Shore Roads in Indian Lake has been rebuilt to ensure both motorist and pedestrian safety and, the Township also held a ribbon cutting ceremony on July 23, 2015 to mark the opening of the long-awaited Field Expansion Project at Veterans' Memorial Field.

During the past four years we have made progress on three other cardinal points; flood mitigation, downtown economic development and continued road and infrastructure maintenance. These points are never ending and will remain the three top cardinal points of this administration.

I would like to speak to these points in more detail and express my gratitude to the Township Council for their support and for funding these important initiatives. First, the Township Engineer and his team prepared a rather comprehensive flood mitigation study, which identified smaller scale and larger scale projects all aimed at protecting our community from flood damage. Based upon the study results, the Township purchased and installed two state of the art flap valves on Den Brook drainage pipes which will greatly improve flood protection in the southern part of the Denville Park neighborhood.

Furthermore, the Township obtained permission from the NJ Department of Environmental Protection for the removal of two of the Morris Canal concrete covered piers from the Rockaway River which had previously contributed to enhanced flooding at the Pocono Road Bridge adjacent to Saint Clare's Hospital due to a bottleneck and damming effect they had on the river.

The Township received Federal, State and County grants totaling \$3,038,042 which cover 100% of the cost to purchase 11 flood prone homes on Riverside Drive. We ultimately demolished these homes and turned it into "Denville Park Meadow."

We also sought and obtained \$231,000 in a shared grant with Boonton Township and Rockaway Borough which enabled us to dredge the river under the Diamond Spring Road and Pocono Road Bridges as well as to de-snag sections of the Rockaway River.

Over the past 4 years, the members of the Denville Rivers & Streams Committee have proven to be excellent stewards of our rivers. With the sponsorship of Saint Clare's Hospital, the help of hundreds of volunteers and the support of the DPW, the River and Streams Committee coordinated a semi-annual de-snagging of the Rockaway River. In the past couple of years, they have expanded their effort to also clean and de-snag the Denbrook. By removing fallen trees, brush and removing tires and debris from the river we keep the river flowing and healthy. De-snagging the river is an essential task and we must remain diligent in our stewardship of the river.

We have continued reporting our flood mitigation progress to CRS rating program. I am pleased to report that Denville's rating has improved from a 9 to a 6. By having the best CRS rating in Morris County and the 11th best CRS rating in all of New Jersey, our residents who are required to purchase flood insurance will be entitled to an automatic 20% discount on their premiums commencing in May 2016 for a period of three years.

The Township also sought and applied to The Army Corp of Engineering for assistance and funding for a local inland flood control project. In November 2015, the Army Corp of Engineering notified the Township that they have accepted our application and the project is under-review for potential funding. If we are ultimately successful, the Township could receive up to \$7 million dollars in services from the Army Corps of Engineers as well as matching funds from the State to complete one or more of the large-scale flood mitigation projects aimed at protecting our community.

Moving forward, the Township will continue to fund and implement projects that are affordable and achievable, while we continue to aggressively apply for grants that will allow us to make more impactful strides in flood mitigation. None of these measures will stop all flooding if Mother Nature sends extremely heavy rains; however, each measure together will prevent flooding in lesser storms and reduce the level of flooding. The one lesson we learned from Hurricane Irene is that 1 inch of water can make the difference on whether or not a home is lost.

Next, I would like to speak about downtown Denville, which is the focal point of our town, a gathering place for friends, families and neighbors and gives our community much of its identity. Our vibrant and distinguished downtown is the one characteristic that separates Denville from most other Morris County municipalities. This became so evident when it was destroyed by Hurricane Irene and our community came out to support the downtown and local business community. Although the downtown has rebounded and is thriving once again, it is still in need of an upgrade.

During the past three years, Denville received two Federal grants totaling \$821,000 for our Downtown Improvement Project. The required, extensive public bidding process has been accomplished and later this month I will make a recommendation to the Town Council for the award of a contract. The improvement encompasses the

entire length of Broadway, from Diamond Spring Road to McCarter Park where new curbs and decorative lighting fixtures will be installed.

We will be applying for additional grant funding from the federal government in the coming years as competitive grant opportunity become available in order to perform the same improvements on First Avenue, Main Street, Diamond Spring Road and Bloomfield Avenue.

As you have all likely noticed, we began our downtown improvements with replacement of oversized and oddly shaped trees. The new trees, designed for a downtown setting are ornamental Plum and Cherry trees, which came from a recommendation from our ever active Beautification Committee. Also, the outdated and worn benches have been replaced with new benches that will match the decorative period lighting. We believe that our plan will add charm and character to our downtown, which will ensure our local business community is able to remain competitive with area shopping malls and other area downtowns.

New parking regulations went into effect on Second Avenue and our municipal parking lots. The lots have been restriped to define the free long-term parking. The Town Council just adjusted the Bloomfield Avenue Parking lot adding more all day free parking and relocating commuter parking. Finally, with Sustainable Jersey grant funding an electric vehicle charging station was purchased and installed adjacent to the post office in the Church Street Parking lot. The activation and ribbon cutting ceremony for this local "green" initiative will be held within the coming weeks. A downtown Denville parking map which highlights the parking areas including the changes listed above will be included in the Hub Times newsletter which local residents should be receiving in the mail shortly.

Upon taking office, our roads had fallen into a state of disrepair most noticeable was the collapsed catch basins. When I took office 4 years ago we had 81 catch basins in need of repair. Thanks to a great effort from our DPW, each of the past four years, we closed the year at virtual zero level and new catch basins have been installed on the streets that are paved.

We also took a new approach to our road paving selection process. This entailed the creation of long-term road maintenance plan and prospective roads rated and ranked utilizing generally accepted scientific engineering principals. We have also purchased the equipment to lay down crack sealant and will seal coat roads as necessary to extend their useful life and in the future reduce the budgetary road paving impact.

Another road maintenance milestone was that the Township Council adopted an ordinance limiting a utility company's ability to open up a newly resurfaced roadway. In emergency situations road are permitted to be opened, once the emergency situation is addressed the utility company must be repave the road. The Township has also partnered with NJ Natural Gas in order to perform full-width instead of simply trench paving when they are installing new or replacing gas lines in a community.

Many of you will note that most of the roads in Lake Arrowhead were paved last year as part of this private-public partnership.

Thanks to the Paths and Trails Committee, 2015 saw the completion of the handicapped accessible walkway around the main portion of the pond at Muriel Hepner Park. The Township was able to install park benches along the path thanks to a generous donation from the Shoppes at Union Hill. In addition to the path and benches, the Township resurfaced the front portion of the parking lot and installed new handicapped accessible picnic tables.

Our final accomplishment of 2015 was the purchasing of the former Board of Education Office which was the third Union Hill School house. The School House hosted town meetings 102 years ago when Denville and Union Hill separated from Rockaway to become Denville. The Town Council allocated the funding out of the dedicated Open Space and Recreation Trust Fund and will be partnering with the Denville Historical Society to oversee its restoration in the coming years.

The Denville Municipal Building was built with an eye towards the future and ensuring adequate space for potential growth as local government changes over time. The economic realities over the past nine years, has resulted in a net reduction in town hall staff, which has created a notable amount of unoccupied office space.

It is my goal to maximize the potential of the building and benefit the taxpayers of the Township. As you may know, the Board of Education has been leasing office space for its staff in an industrial complex on Ford Road. We have reopened discussion with the new Denville School Superintendent, Steven Forte to potentially create a permanent home for all or part of the Board of Education staff here within Town Hall. This would be a win/win situation for all concerned, including the Township, the Board and the citizens who pay the taxes to both Denville entities. I am very happy that the Board of Education has hired an architect to review the feasibility of moving into the Municipal Building. Once the architect completes his work, we should know within a few months if such a move is feasible. If not, we will pursue the possibility of renting the unoccupied space to a local non-profit organization.

During the last two years, the neighborhood around The Morris County Vocational High School performed multiple fund raisers to replace the playground on Fox Hill Road. Remarkably, this small neighborhood group was successful in raising well over \$10,000. I will be asking the Town Council to fund the balance of the cost to construct the playground out of our dedicated Open Space Trust Fund. With the assistance of the Township, the neighborhood will be installing the playground in the style of an Amish barn raising this coming spring or summer once NJ Department of Education approval is granted for the design.

Staying with the playground theme, it has been over 20 years since the community has come together to fund raise and community build the playground at Gardner Field. The existing playground is coming close to reaching its life expectancy. In the past months, the Recreation Committee has begun the process of surveying the

community, designing a playground based upon the community's comments and will be forming a committee to build a new Gardner Field Playground.

In 2015, the Township began a County-ordered property tax reevaluation of all the properties in Denville. Each property owner has received notice of the new value of their property. Property owners have until January 31, 2016 to question the new value of their property. They can do that by calling the Tax Assessor's office or the contact information contained on the property value card that was recently mailed to them.

There three ways to reduce property taxes. The first is to cut cost of operating the town by either efficiencies or by staff reductions. We are constantly looking for and implementing new efficiencies. Our staffing levels are lean and at this point any additional reductions in staff will almost certainly have an impact on services delivered to our residents.

The second is to find new sources of revenue. That can be done by seeking grant money, raising certain user fees and, during the past several years, seeking federal reimbursements from FEMA for all qualifying storm events. I am proud to announce that during the past 4 years the Township has successfully sought and received more than \$4.5 million in grant money and over \$500,000 in FEMA reimbursements.

The third way is to generate new tax payers in our Township. These new "ratable" can cut both ways. It can take away from our natural resources, change our neighborhood, add children to the school system and increase traffic. That is why we need to find ratable that make sense to Denville.

Over the past 4 years and into the future I am committed to seek new rateables that make sense to our community. The Estling Lake Village is a primary example of smart redevelopment. The luxury rental project, which will become Denville's 4th largest tax payer once the PILOT Program is completed, replaced an abandoned factory that was delinquent in their taxes and a magnet for graffiti and vandalism. Furthermore, as part of the agreement with the developer, he agreed to construct at his own expense an emergency access road, which had been a major concern of the area neighborhood for many years.

The Township recently rezoned properties within its industrial zone adjacent to the I-80 interchange off Green Pond Road near Morris Avenue to allow for hotels to be built. Furthermore, as you likely have seen reported, Saint Clare's Hospital was sold to a nationally renowned for-profit corporation in October 2015 and is now subject to property taxes. As you may or may not be aware, the Council on Affordable Housing or COAH has basically been preempted by the NJ Supreme Court. The Courts will now determine each municipality's future affordable housing obligations. The court has received submissions from the Fair Share Housing Center, which has provided recommendations to the Court for frankly outrageous numbers with respect to Denville's future obligations.

In order to fight these outrageous numbers and protect our community, Denville has teamed up with approximately 200 other municipalities and hired an expert to perform scientifically-based calculations that we shall be submitting to the Court as a

counter-proposal within the next two weeks. Regardless of the ultimate obligation placed on Denville by the Court, the timeframe to implement affordable housing zoning changes will be short. Administration will be providing recommendations for the required rezoning of various properties in Denville to the Township Council and the Planning Board likely in the coming weeks.

Although it is not my desire to perform such a large scale rezoning voluntarily, we will comply with the Courts requirements to ensure the character of our community doesn't change while trying to achieve the greatest, most positive result possible. I need to make this very clear, that failure to comply with the courts order will most certainly result in un-defendable builders' remedy lawsuits and developments that will undoubtedly change our community's character.

At the conclusion of my address, I will ask the Council to give advice and consent of the Mayoral and Administrative appointments. The team we have assembled is up to the task of completing these projects I have mentioned always with an eye on doing so in the most cost effective way possible. Our Administrator Steven Ward has continued to show the ability to find savings, increase efficiencies and attract highly qualified employees to Denville. Mike Guarino our CFO has time and time again demonstrated his strong knowledge and conservative approach to municipal financial management. John Egbert has done a suburb job maintaining our sewer, and water systems, parks and roadways and the ability to handle many special projects.

I am pleased to re-appoint our Municipal Attorney John Jansen who will head up our legal team with Paula Debona COAH, Fred Semrau Tax Appeals & Litigation, Matt Giacobbe our Labor Counsel, Cliff Weininger Public Defender and Jim LaSalla Municipal Prosecutor.

This Administration has presented and will continue to present sound budgets to the Town Council, that ensure future long-term stability for the Township while still enabling us to maintain the current high level of municipal services you have come to expect, as well as providing for many of the projects to be effectively implemented and completed. This will continue to make Denville the finest place to live, work, raise a family and retire.

Thank you and may God continue to send his blessings to the people of Denville and may God bless America.

**Thomas Andes
- Mayor**