

## **2017 State of the Borough Address**

Thank you to the residents of this great borough for joining us today as we reorganize our local government, reflect on the challenges and accomplishments of 2016 and look forward to a new year. A special thank you to the many residents who will take the oath of office and serve on one of the borough's many boards and agencies.

Earlier we honored three Councilmen who completed their elected service to the residents of South Plainfield last year. After nine successful years serving the residents of South Plainfield, we thank Councilman Rusnak for his efforts with the borough budget and the library expansion. We also thank Councilman Barletta for his service and contributions to our Department of Public Works and Economic Development over the last several years. And we honor Councilman Richkus for his contributions throughout our recreation programs and public celebrations. With different styles, each Councilman has contributed their talents to serve our residents and improve the borough. Thank you for your time and effort over the years.

Today, we welcome Councilmen Dean and Vesce to the governing body. The opportunity to serve your fellow residents is a great honor that comes with great responsibility. The formula for success is quite simple, let the best interests of our community be your guiding principle and you will serve our residents well. I look forward to working with you and the entire Council to move South Plainfield's interests forward.

Throughout 2016, we built on our multi year plan to stabilize municipal taxes, control spending, maintain a beneficial mix of residential and commercial development and continued capital investment in our borough. The borough's financial position continued to strengthen in 2016 with a fifth consecutive year of growth in municipal surplus and a growing ratable base. Through the efforts of Chief Financial Officer Glenn Cullen, Councilman Rusnak and the governing body, the borough adopted a 2016 budget that held municipal taxes at essentially the 2009 rate. The borough's overall tax rate was the third lowest in Middlesex County. Additionally, municipal spending and borrowing remained tightly controlled.

Once again, the financial community recognized the successful efforts of this governing body's plan to ensure a strong financial foundation by reaffirming the borough's Aa2 bond rating. In addition to our efforts, I would like to recognize and congratulate our borough department heads for their continued commitment to strong financial management.

This past March, we officially opened the new South Plainfield Library. Total Circulation increased 52%, new patrons increased 180%, and total programs held increased 140% and program attendance increased 118%. The improvements touch all areas from adult to children's programs, quiet study areas, staff area enhancements and patron convenience. Thank you to the entire staff of the library and to past and present members of the Library Board of Trustees for all of your hard work and dedication. This new library is as expected a tremendous asset for all South Plainfield residents to enjoy for years to come.

It is no surprise that we must continue to invest in areas that can help us ensure that residential services can be delivered in the most efficient, flexible and resident focused manner possible. In 2016, we continued our capital investments in vehicles and machinery

designed to provide year round benefit to our residents. Our new Department of Public Works street sweeper has enabled the department to maintain residential and main roadways with greater coverage than in years past. And throughout the year, the department continued to ensure that popular and vital programs such as the bulk pickup program and infrastructure maintenance remained strong. The formula is simple. Let us find the best way to deliver essential services and seek ways to implement them that result in cost savings, enhanced benefits or better results.

Our Recreation Department led by Kevin Hughes continues to experience impressive growth in resident participation and new programs. The first phase of the redesigned Willow Park was completed and included play structures, swings and benches. Our travel basketball program continued to expand from an initial three teams to nine. The Summer Parks program continued to see strong demand with over 400 participants. The PAL basketball court received a new gym floor, new bleachers and remodeled bathrooms, courtesy of our Department of Public Works.

Our Senior Center led by Tree Olano continues to build upon the impressive accomplishments over the last several years. Membership grew for the fifth consecutive year. In House Medical Information programs spanned from Healthy Eating to Medication Management and included popular programs such as eye screenings and Cyber Security. Programs such as Zumba Gold, Yoga, Book Club, Billiards and many trips have been well received by our residents.

Our Cultural Arts Commission continues to provide South Plainfield residents with a suite of annual programs designed to educate and provide entertainment to all. Popular programs include the annual Talent Show, Shakespeare and Line Dancing. Thank you to the entire commission for your tireless efforts.

In 2016, The Mayors Wellness Committee offered a spring and fall Health & Safety Fair in partnership with JFK Medical Center and St. Peters. A special seminar focusing on drug addiction and the heroin epidemic was offered to all residents. In 2017, we look to build on these educational programs. A special thank you to the Mayor's Wellness Committee who helps to make all of this possible.

The South Plainfield Recycling Department, Environmental Commission and Green Team also had a successful 2016. The MyWaste application saw a significant increase in active users. In November, the site experienced 2,448 visits and the application sent out over 1,700 reminders to residents. These numbers represent improved access to information and education compared to individual phone calls and printed materials.

Our Environmental Commission was active throughout 2016. The Green Team joined the newly forming Middlesex County Hub, a network of municipal Green Teams that share information and inspiration. The team published five newspaper articles and participated in several community events.

Our Borough Clerk's office continued to enhance the daily operation of our local government. In 2017, the department will launch a new Planning/Zoning Ordinance book. This will prove to be a valuable electronic source available to the public with search features.

On the Economic Development front, we welcomed new businesses including the much anticipated ShopRite, Little Nicky's, Lobster Pub, All Seasons Sports Academy, and Sprint just to name a few. Our focus continued to be a desire to strengthen and leverage relationships with property management companies, commercial and industrial brokers and existing business owners to actively solicit new businesses and focus on the retention and expansion of our existing base. I extend a special thanks to Councilman White and the Business and Economic Development Committee for their continued efforts.

Our EMS department responded to over 800 resident calls and expanded training for all riding members. Our Fire Department responded to over 1,000 calls and continued to maintain a focus on training and fire fighter readiness with various training sessions throughout the year. Thank you to our resident EMS and firefighters who volunteer their time and talent to serve our community. Our Police Department welcomed four new officers in 2016, and continued to leverage the K9 unit to keep South Plainfield safe. The department implemented e ticketing and upgraded their report writing CAD system.

In 2017 our goal is to remain focused on delivering essential residential services while ensuring South Plainfield remains one of the most affordable communities in the state. Our challenge remains to introduce a municipal budget that funds the critical areas of investment needed to move our borough forward while maintaining a keen focus on property taxes.

With the geotechnical work completed for the Hollywood Avenue project, we will move forward with the seeking of State and Federal funds to complete additional design work and ultimately the funding of the multi million-dollar project. I look forward to working with our Council and borough Engineers to continue to move this project forward.

2017 initiatives include the re-introduction of the Special Problems Unit within the police department. This unit will have several responsibilities including community policing and traffic concerns. The Building Department is examining a complete computer system update to maximize efficiency and improve the resident and business owner experience. In addition, the department is looking at expanded evening hours and additional resident seminars. Our Department of Public Works will receive a new Fuel Management System and the implementation of a formal and computerized fleet management system.

New businesses expected to open in 2017 include Raymour and Flanagan and Ocean State Job Lot, which will be located at the Middlesex Mall and an extended stay hotel that will take the place of a vacant restaurant. Business expansions are underway with White Castle, Taco Bell, and Nanak Food Distributors. The borough Economic Development Committee led by Councilman White will continue the work of the Downtown Redevelopment Exploratory Committee.

Our Green Team is looking to renew the Borough's Bronze certification. Expansion plans for the Recycling center include new signage, security cameras, additional collection items, finalization of the E-waste contract and a new educational campaign. Senior Center goals for 2017 include a newsletter, new software applications and facility improvements.

I am proud of our accomplishments and remain excited about our future. South Plainfield continues to be a model for how government can work effectively and efficiently. We are a desired destination for individuals, families and businesses alike. To ensure that our future remains bright, we can't take our successes for granted or believe that tomorrow will come

without challenges and sacrifices. We have the ingredients for success – an active and giving community, talented employees, dedicated volunteers and responsive officials. I look forward to working with the Council, borough employees and our residents to ensure our collective success. Best wishes for a happy, healthy and prosperous 2017.