

State of the Borough Message

Good evening and Happy 2008 to all Chatham Borough residents. I think 2008 is going to be a great year in the history of the Borough as we embark on a time of continuation and expansion of our successes, while we improve some programs and eliminate others. But it's also going to be a challenging year when it comes to the budget, as we try to maintain services while keeping taxes as low as possible. The Borough Government activities for 2007 will be reported by Borough Administrator Bob Falzarano in his Annual Report to the Council. Tonight the subject is plans for 2008.

I have a few initiatives to announce tonight, and I would like to start on a green note. We want to encourage residents to replace their standard light bulbs with more energy-efficient ones, such as this one, which is a green initiative of the CleanPower Community Partnership Campaign, a state-sponsored campaign to promote replacement of energy-wasting incandescent light bulbs with energy efficient bulbs. Also, the Borough will join the New Jersey Municipal League Mayors' Green Future Community Initiative, a program to help communities to become greener, and this will eventually lead to new energy-smart policies and financial savings for the Borough. We will also explore the possibility of having a Green Fair, which some nearby communities have had, to educate residents on green policies. And soon, I intend to appoint community volunteers to a new Green Initiative Advisory Committee and seek their advice and approval for other viable green initiatives as they arise.

The Borough's policy of upgrading certain streets and drainage each year continues. In 2008 the streets to be upgraded are Elmwood Avenue Phase I, Burgess Street, South Passaic Avenue, and Chandler Road, and we expect these four road improvement projects to be completed during the year under the capable guidance of our new Borough Engineer, Vince DeNave. Vince is also planning other street upgrades for future years.

Toward the end of last year, a partnership of Borough residents and merchants began exploring the possibility of establishing a Main Street Business Improvement District or some other voluntary way for merchants to help improve our downtown. This program has my strong support. The Borough will apply for a no-obligation study grant of \$10,000 from the State of New Jersey, which would help us with the evaluation of potential marketing strategies. Ultimately, the choice will be up to the business and commercial community how this partnership evolves and exactly what strategies are chosen to improve our downtown. I hope to establish a more responsive working relationship with State government and, in spite of the austere State financial climate, I believe the Borough will obtain financial and other advantages from the State, such as these study grants. We will also pursue joint projects and expense saving proposals with surrounding communities and Morris County.

The Open Space Committee is being converted into a committee made up solely of the entire council and mayor. This will allow the council members to more carefully consider any open space opportunities that arise and make possible changes in how the Open Space funds are generated and used in accordance with the non-binding public question

on the 2007 ballot. Space adjacent to Memorial Park will be investigated, for example, and residents will be consulted on possible acquisitions and new initiatives, such as historic preservation, since the ballot question allows us to now use Open Space funds for this purpose. I have asked the members of the Historic Preservation Commission to research how other towns preserve their historic buildings and present a report to the council before the end of this year outlining our options for preserving both our historic residential and commercial buildings.

This year, the council will also consider recreation initiatives, including playing fields on the former Exxon property in Madison for our joint recreation program with Chatham Township. Working with Mayor Kevin Tubbs of the Township, I am personally pursuing approval from the State to install artificial turf at Shunpike Field, which then, possibly could be lighted. We will also discuss closing the inadequate Borough pool if a viable shared service with another town can be established. The possibility of costing out recreation salary and operating expenses to remove those expenditures from the general budget was under consideration last year. We will soon make a decision on this matter. If these expenses are included in recreation fees instead of the general budget, I have asked that we pursue scholarships for those with financial difficulties so that everyone who wants to play sports will be able to play in our recreation program.

As to the budget: Inflationary pressures remain on the Borough. Consider the increased prices of heating oil, gasoline, electricity, also insurance costs, and mandated increases in salaries and benefits-- they all negatively affect the Borough budget. Additionally, the PBA and DPW contracts expire in 2008 and the Borough will be negotiating both these contracts. Despite these pressures, our objective is to keep the tax levy rate for the 2008 Borough Budget within the new 4% levy cap and the appropriations within the old 3.5% spending cap. This is the first year the Borough has had two caps, and the new financial rules promulgated by Trenton have never been so onerous. Plans are already in place to restructure municipal services by combining job functions. I have also initiated a Mayor's review and approval process for Borough purchase vouchers to add an additional prudent close look at expenditures.

On sewer projects: We have started the upgrade of the Jackson Avenue pumping station, which will be finished in 2008. Additionally, funds must be expended for upgrades of the Parrot Mill and Riverview pump stations. I have concerns about the infrastructure at the Chatham-Madison Joint Meeting Plant, which will be investigated soon and may be costly to fix. Details will be discussed as soon as possible.

From now on, the credentials of Borough professionals are being reviewed annually to help ensure that the Borough does due diligence for all operations and projects. Ordinances will be introduced soon for good government practices in the Borough on Open Appointments, Pay-to-Play reforms, Developer Disclosures, and other measures to ensure civic responsibility and high ethical standards for the Borough now and in the future. Making these mandates written policy will be a legacy for Chatham Borough.

A new committee, the 2008 9 /11 Memorial Committee, has been appointed with the goal of having a memorial ready for dedication this year. The dedication will be on Sunday, September 7, 2008, to signify the 7 years since 9 /11. The dedication will take place at 9:11 AM. This heretofore difficult task must have a high priority and be coordinated carefully with the affected families and if they want to join us, residents of the Township.

Our new Farmers' Market has been so popular and successful that its Advisory Committee is being formalized in order to ensure the continuation of this new venture. Some Borough residents have given me "wish lists" for new Borough initiatives, including a leash-free dog park. This will be investigated by a new ad hoc committee, and I have high hopes that this will become a reality.

The Mayor and Council will keep their ears and eyes open to all residents' needs and requests. As Mayor, I will keep open door public office hours on Saturdays from 11:00 AM until 3:00 PM for residents to tell me how I'm doing and make suggestions. Anyone wishing to volunteer for a committee or board, especially our new Green Initiative Advisory Committee, can come by the office for information and/or to apply. And, also as promised, the Mayor's new cell phone number (973) 417-2964 will remain available for residents' non-emergency needs or comments.

Chatham Borough is a truly wonderful community because of its residents, who volunteer for committees and boards, the fire department, the emergency squad, fairs and festivals, as recreation program coaches, and many other activities. Their work keeps taxes lower for everyone in town. These folks, your Mayor and Council included I should add, serve the community with no remuneration, in true public service. Our volunteers deserve the recognition of the Mayor and Council, and we should applaud their unselfish deeds in a meaningful way. So, to congratulate and encourage these fine examples of good citizenship, we plan to launch a Volunteers' Dinner in the spring, which we hope will be an annual event, and also choose a Volunteer of the Year. I also intend to acknowledge the good work of the many dedicated Chatham Borough municipal staff members and encourage them to provide enhanced levels of service to residents.

Most of these initiatives were discussed during the campaign, and I pledge to work hard to make them a reality. I look forward to working with Bob Falzarano, the Borough administrator, and the hard-working members of the Borough's staff to make them a reality.

In conclusion, I believe this community's best days are ahead; as we cherish the past, manage change and look to a better future in this unique place we call our hometown, Chatham Borough.