

The Mayor's Annual Message

Annual Message
2014

Good evening and Happy New Year!

First, I want to thank Tony Britt, the Boy Scouts and Father Bob for their participation in this Reorganization Meeting.

Second, I want to congratulate Council members Collander and Fife on beginning their fourth and second terms, respectively. Both of you have contributed so much, and I'm glad that you will continue to be a part of our team.

I just used the word "team", and I use that word because that's really what we have in Borough government. In 2013, I, the Council, Borough administration, Borough employees and the numerous Borough volunteers worked very closely together on a number of important issues – some of which had been around for years. By working together towards a common goal, we were able to accomplish a lot. I am very proud of the team spirit we have achieved and of what we were able to accomplish in 2013.

In my brief address at last year's reorganization meeting, I said that our goals were to further improve our emergency management procedures, implement traffic and pedestrian safety improvements, study the industrial districts, upgrade our office technology, continue to transition recreation sports to the club model, and continue on the path of being a sustainable community. I am happy to say that we met those goals – and more – in 2013.

Key among those accomplishments were the further improvements we made to our emergency preparedness. We introduced, with the help of the County, our new emergency alert system, AlertChathamBorough, and we have used it to notify residents of a wide range of matters, including, last week, the change in trash and recycling pick-up dates due to the storm. We also distributed an award-winning emergency preparedness guide, outfitted a new emergency management center, and made numerous changes and refinements to emergency procedures.

All of us are glad that we got a break in 2013 and only tested the new procedures in a couple of drills, rather than in reality. But all of us need to – as the Scouts say – BE PREPARED.

Another key accomplishment was the change in our policy on sidewalks, which largely shifted the responsibility for repairing broken sidewalks in the residential areas from the property owners to the Borough. This change was a key step in moving forward with a number of traffic and pedestrian safety improvements that will make our sidewalks and streets safer for pedestrians and drivers.

Along with this change we built new sidewalks on Watchung Avenue and Kings Road and paved some of the informal pathways that residents – and especially school children – use. And we finally got a new pedestrian crossing signal at Coleman and Main – now our challenge is to get people to use it!

We also lengthened the time limits on parking downtown after having considered the pros and cons of this over the past several years.

And we accomplished much more, including introducing, at the initiative of our Chief of Police, a community policing program, renovating the fields at Shepard Kollock Park, continuing our program of microsurfacing streets and repairing sidewalks, brought back and improved our “white lights” program for holiday lighting, expanded our trail clean-up program into a town-wide clean-up that will become a new tradition, and began the process of relocating our community garden to Woodland Park in a joint project with Chatham Township.

We also laid the groundwork for 2014. We took a fresh look at our industrial districts and mapped out new planning principles for those areas that will allow a wider variety of uses and, over the long term, encourage those areas to develop into a new “gateway” into Chatham. In 2014, we will start making the changes to our zoning ordinances to implement these new planning principles.

An incredible amount of work has gone into developing a long range financial plan for the Borough that will facilitate our budgeting. As you know, over the past few years, when we set the budget for the current year, we also took a look at what will happen in the following year. The new long range financial plan – which will be introduced at our next meeting – will provide a comprehensive approach to planning both our capital and operating budgets. The goal: to continue to provide outstanding services and maintain our infrastructure in a financially prudent manner.

The use of shared services has been an important aspect of meeting this goal, but, as we expand shared services -- in 2013 we did this in the area of management information systems and the Construction Office -- we are keenly aware of the need to monitor those services very closely to ensure that Borough residents are receiving the level of services they expect.

We will continue our efforts to improve the look of the town by fixing up post office plaza and Rotary Park, having another townwide clean-up, and continuing to replace trees.

And we will continue to fix our sidewalks, streets and water mains, and pave additional walking paths to make it easier for commuters to get to the train station and for all of us to get around town.

We will celebrate the 100th anniversary of our train station and welcome a new restaurant and bar to that location.

And we will recycle on Fridays instead of Wednesdays, and also have an ongoing program for recycling electronics, expanding from the current twice a year electronic recycling program.

It is important to remember that so much of what we accomplished, and so much of what makes Chatham Borough such a special community, comes about because of volunteers. From **elected officials** to **public safety workers** to **coaches** to **board/committee/commission** members – volunteers continue to weave the fabric of community. The need for volunteers remains great. Some of our community service organizations that plan and fund so many community events are struggling to find new members. And some of our Borough committees – in particular the Joint Recreation Board and the Pool Advisory Committee – have unfilled vacancies. In 2014 I want to address this challenge of maintaining the spirit of volunteerism that is so vital to this community.

I am very proud of what we have accomplished and excited about 2014. We have a top notch team of “tweakers” – people who are constantly looking for ways we can improve on what we do. I know that, in spite of the challenges of too many meetings and our inability to make everyone happy, all of us sitting up here on the dais enjoy what we do. I am confident that we are well equipped to meet the challenges before us in 2014.

And, like in 2013, we will celebrate Halloween on October 31st.

Thank you!