

*MAYOR CAROLYN DEMPSEY'S MESSAGE TO THE RESIDENTS OF
CHATHAM BOROUGH*

Thank you everyone. I am honored and humbled to be speaking with you for the first time as your mayor. There are so many people to thank who have helped me get to tonight-- friends, supporters, my family. I'm truly grateful. I want to give a special shout out to my family--my husband, Brian and children Sam, Calder and Austen, and even my brothers and sisters in law who are here tonight from PA! And our poor middle guy starts back with his college classes tomorrow and will be getting on a flight at the crack of dawn tomorrow. Thank you, honey, for staying to watch Mom get sworn in!

Speaking of my family, it was nearly 6 years ago when I first ran for Borough Council, and we had 3 children in the school district. Now we have one college grad about to start his first job in NYC, a college sophomore and senior in high school. Somehow, they have all grown up and my husband and I look exactly the same--remarkable! I thank you all for coming on this journey with me to serve our town.

Marking another significant passage of time, I think it is notable that the last female mayor elected in the Borough was first elected in 1987, the year I was graduating from High School. I don't have to tell you that was a long time ago! And actually, I am the first female Democratic mayor ever in the Borough. Growing up, it was very important for me to see women in leadership roles – including my mom, a doctor, the first female physician to graduate from her college and the only female who graduated in her medical school class. I hope I can provide similar inspiration to young women in our community today (and to young men!).

When I initially ran for office in 2018, one of the major themes of the campaign was the importance of embracing kindness and empathy as leaders. This was at a time when national politics was especially contentious and toxic, a situation that unfortunately continues. Our primary job on the local level is to deliver exceptional services and value for your tax dollars, but the tone we set matters. I hope we have been successful to date in embracing our community's diversity and differences as strengths, not weaknesses, while delivering on that primary job. In writing this speech I looked back at that first candidate's statement from 2018 and I was very gratified to see that we largely accomplished the goals we set at that time. As mayor, I will endeavor to continue to set a positive tone, and to welcome input and feedback from all residents, even if we can't always agree on everything.

I am so proud to be working with such a talented and diverse group of neighbors to help lead Chatham during these times with the potential for excitement as well as challenges.

I thank Brian Hargrove, Justin Strickland, and Kate Hay's willingness to step up and serve in the community. Thank you also to Karen Koronkiewicz, Irene Treloar, and Jocelyn Mathiasen for their continued service. Being on the Council is hard work – and I believe our community is lucky to have such strong leadership with officials of such diverse backgrounds and experiences.

On that note, thanks to great administration, staff and leadership (including that of our outgoing elected officials) last year was one an incredibly productive one. I won't make you sit through the list of everything, but I will highlight a few key items. We implemented the results of the town-wide revaluation, a hugely complex endeavor that involved a large amount of staff time. We completed a study of our fire department's apparatus needs with analysis by an expert consultant, and have given the Fire Department the go-ahead to move forward with the procurement of a new combination rescue-pumper. Chief Glogolich is taking the lead on that project. And what's been on everyone's mind and in the Chatham Community forum: our new garbage collection program, which is significantly less costly and safer than the previous program and whose implementation received state-wide recognition for Innovation in Governance at the NJ League of Municipalities in November, began successfully this past week.

We also began a major, state mandated program to replace all lead water lines. Although, I should note that we test the water as mandated by the DEP and have not found any issues with lead in our water. We opened the Stanley Center as a community resource. And, we continued to improve the Borough's efficiency through expanded use of online tools, with the eventual goal of going paperless for the majority of our transactions.

The biggest challenges that we face as a town and as a council relate to redevelopment and affordable housing. We have learned a lot over the past five years about these issues, and recognize that an open, transparent process is critical to ensure that we reach the best outcomes for our residents. While the Borough cannot and should not try to evade our responsibilities, we will work hard to keep residents informed and involved as we develop strategies to meet the next round of affordable housing obligations, which at this point will take effect in 2025.

Also due in 2025 is an update of the Borough's master plan, which has not seen a complete revision since 1995. A more comprehensive update of this plan will allow us to take a broad look at our community from a variety of perspectives, including traffic, open space, recreation, walkability, and the need for services, and that work – including many opportunities for public input - will start this year as well. Also this year, the Borough's Sustainable Jersey certification is up for renewal, which is a large undertaking involving our Environmental Commission, Green Team, and staff. Finally, we also would like to get the Stanley Center more fully programmed to maximize its usefulness to the community.

Transparency in government is critical to maintaining your trust, and we will continue our efforts to make sure residents are informed and have a chance to participate and interact with us. This year for the first time, we will hold departmental budget hearings as part of our regular council meetings, so that the public can see how the department budgets come together and can weigh in earlier in the budget process.

If you ever have concerns or questions, you can always contact us through the Borough web site, and we will be posting office hours soon. If those hours do not work for you, we can schedule something separately. I also urge you to sign up for the Borough's constant contact and for emergency alerts if you have not already done so. And if you love looking for answers on social media, look to our Borough FB page or contact us or our administration directly to make sure you are getting up to date and accurate information. I hope to meet some of you when we hold informal mayor's coffees where we'll invite various department heads to join us to discuss key community issues. I'd also like to revive the "mayor's roundtable" discussions with various community groups, including local faith leaders, to get input on our community's needs and how we can be of help.

It can be dangerous for elected leaders to make promises, but I'd like to make a few of those to you now. I promise to listen. I'll listen to you when you have a concern and I will listen to the counsel of my fellow elected officials and borough professionals before making decisions. I promise that I won't always have the answer, but I will do my best to find the answer for you, as will our council members and administration. And I promise that even if we don't agree on that answer I will respect you and your humanity with all your talents, brilliance, hopes, dreams and imperfections, just as I hope you will honor that same humanity in me, and in all of us. After all, we are all neighbors, and we all want the best for our town now and in the future. It's why we have all volunteered and been elected to sit up here and be the ones delegated to make some of those decisions. Finally, I plan to never stop learning and to take this job entrusted to me very seriously, and to take myself less-so. It is an honor and a privilege.

Again, thank you all and I look forward to a productive and positive 2024.

Sincerely,
Carolyn Dempsey
Mayor, Borough of Chatham
Sworn in January 8, 2024