

## Mayor's Annual Message

### *Prefatory Remarks*

First of all, I'd like to again thank Reverend Ellen Kohn-Perry of St Paul's for her thoughtful and inspiring words this evening. I'm sure I speak for all of Chatham Borough in expressing my gratitude for her eloquent call that this Governing Body be instilled with the requisite wisdom and judgment for advancing the well-being of our community in the coming year.

At these Reorganization Meetings, I always like to reflect on the public virtues that help foster and shape both good *government* and good *governance*. As I've stated in previous years, I understand these virtues to include such modes of excellence as the following:

- the *wisdom* to govern amid the conflicting interests and issues that, in any community defined by a diversity of priorities and viewpoints, can and will arise;
- the *commitment* to secure the welfare and needs of our community and its residents;
- the *desire* to ensure that justice and rectitude prevail in our decisions and actions;
- the *determination* to work together in harmony, even (or especially) where there is honest disagreement among us; and
- the *goal* of establishing that which is beneficial and proper for the community as a whole.

As I see it, these ideals represent a prescription for good, effective, and judicious governance, a goal I pray the entire Governing Body will aspire to in the coming year.

That this is a vital aim is attested to by the great 19<sup>th</sup> century statesman Henry Clay, when he observed that "government is a trust, and the officers of the government are its trustees; and both the trust and trustees are created for the *benefit* of the people." In the present instance, the beneficiaries are, in every sense, the residents of this great Borough.

Next, I wish to again congratulate our returning Council Members Karen Koronkiewicz and Irene Treloar. I know I speak for the entire Governing Body in saying that we look forward to working with you once again, both in 2023 and beyond, on behalf of the residents of this wonderful community of ours.

Karen and Irene, you are each about to become tremendously busy again. But, of course, you already know that. Welcome back!

I'd also like to thank our scouts for serving as this proceeding's color guard, and also for leading us in the pledge of allegiance. From Troop 8: Aidan Harte, Tony Ling, Matteus Brockmeyer, Mason Sachs, and Graham Colluci. From Troop 280: Sasha Crabtree, Leah Deaton, Molly Erb, Dominique Farrell, Gabrielle Kaplan, Julia Kirsch, Eva Quinteros, Luna Teutli, and Caroline Crimmins.

Having our local scouts present the flag and conduct the pledge of allegiance is a cherished tradition here in Chatham Borough. I think the number of scouts participating tonight is a compelling testament to just how popular this tradition is, and, indeed, how robust our local

scouting organizations are. Moreover, tonight is the first time since 2020 we've been able to do this presentation *fully* in-person. This is a most fitting restoration, and I thank each and every one of our scouts for being here this evening to make that happen.

I'd now like to express my profound gratitude to all of the volunteers who make Chatham Borough the very special community that it is: our Fire Fighters; our Emergency Squad personnel; the members of our various municipal Boards, Commissions, and Advisory Committees; our library volunteers; our school volunteers; and our sports and recreation volunteers.

We are grateful beyond words for your dedication and hard work in 2022. And we are immensely thankful for your willingness to step up to the plate again in 2023. It is your steadfast and untiring dedication to this community that enables Chatham Borough to provide the vast array of high-quality services and activities that it does. Through your efforts, you *personify* the marvelous community that we aspire to be. You help make this the amazingly responsive and caring municipality that it is. For this reason, from the bottom of our hearts, we thank you all.

Last but by no means least, I'd also like to thank our tremendous team of Chatham Borough employees for their remarkable dedication and effort during 2022. I frequently point out that local government is where the "rubber hits the road" in our nation's multitiered system of governance. Here in the Borough, delivery of our most basic and essential services is a huge responsibility, one that directly and immediately affects the lives of our nearly 9000 residents on a daily basis. That applies to everything from providing for safe drinking water, a properly functioning sewage system, regular trash and recycling pickups, and well-maintained municipal streets, to maintaining a fully effective police force and a highly professional municipal administration. You, the employees of Chatham Borough, embrace this task completely and with enthusiasm year in and year out. For this, we, the residents of Chatham Borough, from the bottom of our hearts, thank you as well.

### *Introduction*

It is a long-standing tradition at Chatham Borough Reorganization Meetings to spend at least a few minutes describing some of our efforts and accomplishments during the previous year, along with a few of our priorities for the coming one. Accordingly, I will do so now.

You will forgive the partial descent into wonkery here. But, as you will see, this is important stuff.

### *Budget and Finance*

I begin with budget and finance. The total municipal operating budget for 2022 was \$16,154,647, of which \$9,870,079 was funded through property taxes. This amounts to \$3,368 for the average assessed home valued at \$800,000 going directly to municipal services, including: police; public works; fire protection; engineering; health; and community services.

Chatham Borough also collects taxes for its schools, the library, Morris County, and open space preservation. The municipal portion of this 2022 collection amounted to just 19% of your total tax bill.

In 2022, the Borough approved a budget for capital improvements amounting to \$1,477,500 for the current fund, and \$243,500 for our water utility. These allocations ensure that our water and sewer infrastructure, our roads, and our public spaces are all maintained adequately and appropriately.

As a matter of principle, this Governing Body is resolutely committed to budgeting practices that minimize taxes and other fees while ensuring the Borough's long-term fiscal health. For instance, the municipal tax rate saw an increase of less than 2% in 2022. This was achieved despite such considerable headwinds as:

- a 6% increase in state-mandated police pension payments;
- a 12% increase in state-managed general employee pension payments;
- a 22% increase in costs at the sewer plant to pay for major capital improvements; and
- a continued drop-off in parking and court revenues due to the Covid pandemic, particularly during the first half of the year.

Despite these challenges, we still managed to improve the Borough's long-term fiscal health by:

- growing our fund balance;
- developing a detailed long-term plan to fund critical capital improvements;
- and establishing new metrics to assess the Borough's financial health on an ongoing basis.

From a fiscal standpoint, the unprecedented turbulence faced by the Borough during the height of the pandemic from early 2020 through early 2022 improved substantially during the second half of last year. Revenue shortfalls stemming from previous sharp decreases in daily parking permits, court fees, and interest, abated measurably during this period. Given this encouraging trend, we anticipate a return to more normal revenue streams in 2023, which is favorable news indeed.

A final positive note here: Chatham Borough in 2022 was again awarded a solid AAA bond rating.

### *Technology and Public Communication & Services*

A few words now about technology and public communication & services. The effort to streamline Chatham's internal and external processes using digital technologies that improve communications, and cut back on unnecessary paperwork, continued apace in 2022.

Granicus, the Borough's new system for managing Council and Committee agendas, meeting minutes, and video recordings, is now operational. Through this platform, the public has easy online access to agendas and supporting documents in advance of Borough Council meetings.

In the coming year, this capability will be expanded to the Borough's Commissions and Committees, including, most significantly, the Planning and Zoning Boards, for easy public access to relevant site plans, architectural drawings, and other land use application materials.

One key feature of this system is that video and audio recordings of meetings are automatically indexed by agenda items so that, even years into the future, residents may easily search for an item or issue and then watch the video of the relevant discussion without having to scroll through the entire recording.

In addition, the Borough has now moved many of its licensing and permitting processes online by virtue of a second digital platform, Spatial Data Logic (SDL). At present, alarm and pet licenses are fully online, as is parking. Other permitting processes, such as tree removal, road opening, and special events, are to follow in 2023.

Because digital communication involves far more than simply online websites, the Borough continues to broaden its use of social media, email newsletters (via the platform “constant contact”), and reverse-911 emergency messaging as a means of communication with its residents.

Further expansion of this “user friendly” public communication and services framework will be a top priority in the coming year. This is all part of the Borough’s increasing embrace of e-government as a way to achieve higher levels of effectiveness and efficiency in government tasks, improve processes and procedures, increase the quality of public services, and improve the use of information in internal decision-making processes. Moreover, it will render the interactions between our residents and Borough Hall much easier and more convenient.

### *Environmental Matters*

Chatham Borough continues to be a leader in environmental protection and sustainability. In 2021, we recertified our Silver Level status with Sustainable Jersey, a distinction shared by just 64 of New Jersey’s 564 municipalities. The Borough is now working towards Gold Star certification in Energy, a status which only two other NJ communities have thus far attained. Our Earth Day and Sustainability Fair activities continue to grow with each passing year. In 2022, the latter featured a native pollinator plant sale, a multi-town yard sale that raised over \$1,200 for the Great Swamp, and a highly popular Electric Vehicle car show.

I am proud to say that we have here in Chatham Borough one of the most dedicated, energetic, creative, and resourceful Environmental Commissions in the State. Evidence for this can be found in the increasingly popular Sustainability Fair just referenced, where, this past September, seventeen different organizations offering innovative ideas on how to live more sustainably participated and were well-received by the public.

Further evidence of the Commission’s dynamism is its 2022 rollout of the Borough’s “How Green Are You?” campaign. Designed to recognize Chatham businesses that are implementing sustainable business practices, this program posts the names of those businesses on a “Green Business Registry” that can be found on the Borough website. Of course, the campaign’s foremost intention is to promote adoption of sustainable practices in the first place by our local businesses. As part of this, those businesses that qualify for the “Green Business Registry” listing

are awarded distinctive window clings. The idea here is that this may prove attractive to those shoppers and patrons who prefer to support “green credentialed” commercial establishments. A clever win-win program indeed.

### *Recreation*

The Borough’s ongoing effort to upgrade Garden Park continued in 2022, with the installation of two fully resurfaced basketball courts. The upgrade to these courts has been nothing less than transformative, creating a top-flight outdoor basketball venue suitable for use by the Chatham Basketball Club and other organized programs – in addition to standard recreational use by our residents. In September, a ribbon-cutting ceremony was held in which the courts were officially named after long-time Chatham basketball coach and volunteer Phil Perrone, with a monument erected in his honor. These will henceforth be known as the “Coach Phil Perrone Basketball Courts”.

Other recent improvements to Garden Park have included refurbishment of three of its six tennis courts, a paved walking pathway, a concrete respite area, and several Chatham kiosks providing information on the area’s historic significance. In 2023, we anticipate refurbishing the three remaining tennis courts. In addition, the Borough intends to install a large canopy over the respite area and improve the park’s landscaping.

When it comes to sports and recreation, our aim is to keep Chatham Borough healthy, happy and fit. This applies to both children and adults alike!

### *Stanley Center*

As many of you know, the former Stanley Congregational Church was officially donated to the Borough in 2020. We believe this to be a tremendous potential asset to the community.

Over the past year, the Department of Public Works has been hard at work making repairs and updates to the building to render it more suitable for public use, while an advisory committee of Council Members and residents has continued to develop a strategy for repurposing the structure as a community center.

The facility has already provided the setting for one highly successful bluegrass concert and two weddings. We anticipate full public use commencing sometime later this year.

### *Economic Development Advisory Committee*

The Economic Development Advisory Committee (EDAC) was established in 2020 to promote the revitalization of the local economy and attract businesses to Chatham. Among other things, the committee works in conjunction with the Startup/Moveup Morris campaign, an initiative of the Morris County Chamber of Commerce, to draw technology and innovation firms to the Borough.

Through much of 2020 and 2021, the EDAC found itself with a new mission, namely to help Chatham businesses weather the severe financial challenges brought on by the Covid pandemic

and stay afloat. The assistance provided by the committee was wide-ranging, from producing and broadcasting videos featuring local businesses (some of which can still be viewed on our public access TV station) to helping those same businesses acquire emergency funding under state and federal assistance programs. In fact, a good number of webinars outlining available small business grants were conducted by the committee, some featuring officials from the Federal Government's Small Business Administration and the state's New Jersey Economic Development Authority. One even included a Federal Assistance Programs update and Q&A by Congresswoman Mikie Sherrill.

Now that the worst of the public health and economic emergency is behind us, the EDAC is poised to return in 2023 to its original mandate of assisting and promoting local businesses, and, in the process, supporting and bolstering Chatham's downtown economy.

In 2022, committee members spent a good part of the year interviewing local business owners to determine their specific needs, particularly as they pertain to facilitating the process of establishing new businesses in Chatham and making life easier for existing ones. In 2023, the Borough hopes to act on many of its findings.

In addition, the coming year should see the creation of a new Chatham Business webpage apprising entrepreneurs and enterprise owners of the many benefits of setting up shop in the Borough.

In this vein, I'm happy to report that Main Street has experienced something of a renaissance during these past few years, with a slew of new businesses and eateries appearing in our downtown. This, despite the challenges presented by the ongoing Covid pandemic. In 2023, the Borough intends to implement strategies for bolstering this most favorable development.

One such plan is to work closely with the newly revived Chatham Chamber of Commerce in its efforts to advance the interests of our local business community. To that end, we shall tonight appoint one of our Council members (Frank Truilo) as the first Borough Council liaison to this essential body.

The business of downtown Chatham is, in a word, business. A healthy and thriving Main St, Commerce St, and River Rd go a long way towards sustaining and bolstering residential property values. Moreover, a flourishing downtown contributes immensely to the high quality of life of this community, a characteristic feature of Chatham Borough that is the envy of so many municipalities across the state. Accordingly, we will continue to do all we can in 2023 to advance this all-important imperative of promoting Chatham's downtown economy.

### *The Coronavirus Pandemic*

At last year's Reorganization Meeting I reported that 2021 had been "one hell of a year." Well, 2022 has been orders of magnitude better in just about every conceivable respect.

In fact, the past year has seen a return to near pre-pandemic normalcy in the Borough, a development I've described elsewhere as a characteristic feature of Chatham public life in 2022.

In 2021, the Borough resumed in-person Council meetings and reopened Borough Hall to the public. In 2022, we reinstated in-person Board, Commission, and Advisory Committee meetings as well. More enjoyable still has been the return of our most cherished annual Borough events to their traditional, in-person, formats.

In April, for instance, a fully in-person municipal open house was convened for the first time since 2019 as part of New Jersey Government Week. In June, thousands of residents and visitors enjoyed outdoor festivities at the Borough's first regular Fishawack Festival in three years. The 2022 Fourth of July parade returned to its traditional Main Street route, and was capped by a spectacular evening fireworks display, all courtesy of the Chatham Borough Volunteer Fire Department Association. In September, the Environmental Commission and Green Team held the most successful Sustainability Fair yet, replete with the ever-popular Electric Vehicle Expo, at the railway station.

While we remain both watchful and vigilant with respect to the still ongoing global pandemic, our expectation – and hope – is that this trend towards a more manageable, less insidious, *endemic* condition on these shores will continue in 2023 and beyond.

### *Moving Forward In 2023*

Of course, everything I've just described simply scratches the surface of all that we accomplished in 2022 or hope to achieve in 2023. Our Borough employees are hard at work every day, ensuring that Chatham Borough continues to be one of the most desirable NJ communities in which to live. From the Department of Public Works to Finance & Purchasing to Community Services to our General Administration, we continue to strive for both improvement and excellence in all municipal matters. This is true of the Governing Body and our many volunteers as well. The goal we all share is a similarly successful 2023 for Chatham Borough and its residents.

So, in closing, I want to wish you all a very happy, healthy, and prosperous New Year. And I'd like to assure you that this Governing Body will continue to do all that it can to preserve Chatham Borough's status as the single best municipality in which to live in the great state of New Jersey.

Thank you,

Thaddeus J. Kobylarz  
Mayor of the Borough of Chatham