

REORGANIZATION MEETING SPEECH
MAYOR ROBERT J. SEADER
1 JANUARY 2017

"The Year in Review and a Look to the Future"

I thank you all for joining us today, this first day of a new year, and, I predict, the first day in what will prove to be a great year for the Borough of Dunellen.

2016 was an eventful year for Dunellen and I am sure that 2017 will be even more noteworthy. I tell you this because change is coming to Dunellen that will affect the future of our town and benefit all of us who live and work here.

First, I would like to congratulate Joseph Petracca on his re-election to another term as Councilman. Joe's mastery of all things financial helps keep our annual budgets lean and our spending frugal. I also congratulate Jason Cilento on his election to a third term as a Councilman. Jason has brought energy and enthusiasm to the Council, the Management Organization, and the Recreation Commission. We are all glad to see both Joe and Jason back for another three years and I look forward to working with them, and the entire Dunellen Borough Council to ensure that Dunellen is a safe, inviting, and prosperous place to work, live, and raise our families.

In 2016, we were saddened by the passing of former Mayor Larry Anzovino. Larry served as Dunellen's mayor for 26 years. He devoted his full energy to the task of helping our residents. He will be missed.

2016 began with a double whammy for Dunellen. First, we suffered through a tremendous snow storm that was so bad that New Jersey declared a state of emergency and kept the men from our Department of Public Works on the roads plowing the snow for days at a time.

Then, in a totally unexpected fashion, and with no prior communication, the New Jersey Department of Taxation notified the borough that they were considering whether to order Dunellen to undertake a property revaluation. The Governor's Office and people from Taxation held a public hearing where they refused to answer any questions from the hundreds of Dunellen residents gathered in the High School Auditorium. Then they ordered us to conduct a revaluation and imposed a strict time-line. Instead of protesting the order and filing an appeal, the Borough Council considered that a revaluation of properties might prove to be a very good thing for Dunellen by setting a new bottom line for all properties and thus promoting principles of fairness for all our residents and owners. So we immediately started work on the project and as of this day we have completed a new version of our tax map (the old one is over 35 years old and there have been many changes since last compiled) and we are now preparing a Request for

Proposals to hire a company to do the actual door-to-door evaluations. We are ahead of schedule and hope to have all this completed by early 2019.

Last May, the sewer line beneath the 800 block of North Washington Avenue collapsed under the weight of heavy truck traffic. The road was closed for over a month while repairs were made. This event was an unpleasant reminder that much of our infrastructure, which includes sewer pipes, water pipes, roadways, culverts, and the walls shoring up our brooks, is over 100 years old and in constant need of rehabilitation. This is the main reason we created the Dunellen Sewer Utility four years ago: so that we could find new and better ways of paying for needed sewer and pumping station improvements. A good example of how we are monitoring and upgrading our infrastructure is the Rail Road Culvert Project that will rebuild the pipe that carries the Bonygut Brook under the train tracks off South Avenue. The new and wider pipe is designed to make the water flow quicker out of town. After this project and a few other culvert projects on South Avenue, South Madison Avenue, and Pulaski Street scheduled for the next few years, we will be notifying FEMA that it is time to come back to Dunellen and revise the flawed flood maps imposed on our town in 2010.

As you are all aware, the Borough Council has been working with the owners of the old Art Color industrial complex to create an attractive mixed use development in the 19 acres just off South Washington Avenue. We are nearing an

Agreement to build 130 townhouses and 252 luxury apartments, 58 of which will be designated as Affordable Housing. There will also be a train-station style retail center facing South Washington Avenue. If all goes as planned, then you might all see construction as soon as 2019.

And speaking of Affordable Housing, through the very hard work of our Municipal Attorney, John Bruder, and the planners at our engineers, CME Associates, Dunellen is the very first town in Middlesex County to receive approval of a plan to satisfy the order from the New Jersey Supreme Court to develop a blueprint to provide affordable housing in each of our state's 565 municipalities. Our prompt attention to this was not only the right thing to do, but it has saved us potentially hundreds of hours of time and countless thousands of dollars in legal fees.

Now I would like to acknowledge some of the accomplishments of our municipal departments. The transition to our new Dispatch System, hosted by Somerset County, has gone flawlessly. The Police Department has also upgraded to a state of the art computer assisted dispatch system that greatly enhances their investigation effectiveness and Sergeant Doherty and Officer Neirodzik were honored by the State PBA with a life-saving award for rescuing trapped people from a burning structure.

The Dunellen Fire Department did an outstanding job, coming out in all kinds of weathers and participating in many events including the Memorial Day Parade, Veterans Day, the Haunted Trail, and the National Night Out. Likewise, the Dunellen Rescue Squad did a fine job in our moments of need and logged many thousands of volunteer hours.

Under the leadership of Alex Miller, the Recreation Department had a momentous year. He and the Recreation Commission oversaw many popular activities such as the Easter Hunt, the Memorial Day Parade, Summer Camp, the Halloween Parade, and the annual Tree Lighting in Washington Park. The baseball and Basketball Travel Teams won Championships. Finally, one of the highlights of our athletic year, not to mention any year in the history of Dunellen, was the fantastic performance of Dunellen's own Sydney McLaughlin who not only became a Gatorade Athlete of the Year, but reached the semi-finals in the 400 meter hurdles at the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro. Sydney really makes us all very proud.

If you look out our Chamber windows you might see passing by a new vehicle added to the police fleet this last year, or a new dump truck for the Department of Public Works, or the new fire truck pumper for the Fire Department, or the new asphalt hot box for street pothole patching driven by our new DPW Supervisor, Ron Safar; you will definitely see the decorated Christmas

Trees in containers provided by the Downtown Management Organization and 21 new trees planted in our parks by the Dunellen Shade Tree Commission.

As I look around this crowded room, a room that is not only the Council Chambers but also serves as the meeting place of the Planning Board and the Municipal Court, I am grateful to our Municipal Court Judge, Dennis Fackelman, who oversees a smoothly running and productive court, to Terry Crisafulli our Court Administrator, and her Assistant, Lauren Colletti.

I would like to give recognition to our hard working volunteers who serve long hours on the Recreation Commission, which oversees our many athletic and recreational programs; the Shade Tree Commission which plants trees and shrubs in our parks and right-of-ways; the Library Board of Trustees; the Planning Board; the Dunellen Downtown Management Organization which hosts the annual HarvestFest in October; the newly created Dunellen Arts & Culture Commission; the Dunellen Municipal Alliance that helps inform our youth and their parents of the dangers of substance abuse; The Maurer House Committee which devotes innumerable hours to restoring the Maurer House on Mountainview Terrace and sponsors the annual Haunted Trail and Taste of the Towns; and the Parking Authority, which each year gifts the borough \$50,000 to help lessen the burden of property taxes. The people who serve on our boards and commissions labor at often thankless tasks, but they help create policy, serve as emissaries to the public,

often do hard physical labor maintaining vital facilities, and generally ensure that everything runs professionally in their respective departments.

I would also like to recognize the hard work of Scott in the Construction Office and his code officials Mike and Ken; George in Code Enforcement; Ray and Gail in our Tax Collection Office and Rich the Tax Assessor; Jeanne in the Office of Emergency Management; Scott Olsen in Finance, Debbie in Accounts Payable; and Lauren, our Deputy Registrar who helped prepare 54 Marriage Applications last year; and all the other people who, with dedication and good will, serve the residents of the Borough of Dunellen, day in and day out.

Finally, I must thank Karen, Bobby and Kelly Seader—my family. Without their support and understanding, I could not be sharing this day with you.

In conclusion, I predict that 2017 will be one of the most important in the history of Dunellen. The long-elusive goal of downtown Redevelopment is slowly becoming a reality. Contemporary and renovated buildings with new businesses for our residents are replacing old and tired structures. Walking the streets of our downtown, I feel energy in the air, an excitement I haven't perceived in years. Things are moving. Community spirit is on the rise. Wonderful possibilities are coming. I am pleased, grateful, and privileged to share Dunellen's great future with all of you. Thank you and Happy New Year!

