

# NEWS

TOWNSHIP OF WOODBRIDGE



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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
January 29, 2019

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## Mayor John E. McCormac Issues Annual 2019 ~ "State-of-the-Township" ~ 2019



Thank you very much.

As usual, I would like to start the annual address by thanking the Woodbridge Chamber of Commerce for hosting this event and for all you do for the businesses in Woodbridge Township.

Since so much of our success depends on our business relationships with all of you here - and on your investment in our Township - this is a perfect venue to talk about The State of Woodbridge Township which is so directly linked to The State of Our Local Economy.

Thanks especially to The Board of Directors and Chairman Bob Durso along with Executive Director Karen Barnes and Membership Director Nancy Drumm.

When businesses see our close relationship with the Chamber it gives them a good feeling about investing in Woodbridge and expanding in Woodbridge.

Another attribute which businesses look to before investing in a town and which residents look to before moving to a town is the stability of the local government.

People will do painstaking research before deciding where to move their business or their residence, and they always pose many of the same questions and concerns: Is the local government efficient and effective?

Do the Mayor and Council get along, or are there weekly stories of Mayors and Councilpersons arguing and, in some cases, literally fighting?

Do they communicate about issues and reach a consensus or do they grandstand at public meetings and play to cameras?

Do they vote based on personalities and not based on the merits of an ordinance or resolution? Do they think of themselves or their constituents?

We are so incredibly fortunate in Woodbridge to have a Township Council that shares the vision of our Township administration. Each has their own area of expertise, their own area of concern, their own area of passion, yet they all work and support not only us as an Administration but each other in their endeavors.

We all get along. We all like each other. We all go out for pizza at Strawberry's after a Council meeting. We try to get out of Escape Rooms together – and by the way we as the Elected Official team have a better Escape record than the Township Director team.

We have been to each other's houses and we know each other's spouses and kids.

All of this interaction and communication gives comfort to our residents who read the papers and social media and see what living in towns around us is like. And, all of this gives comfort to the CEO deciding where to open his or her next plant or office or store or the parents looking for the right place to buy their first home. This all gives Woodbridge a terrific reputation as a great place to work and live, to raise a family and to grow old.

It seems that every year, I look to the Township Council at the end of this address - but this year they are up front. Council President Cory Spillar, Council Vice President Lizbeth DeJesus, Nancy Drumm, Howie Bauer, Viru Patel, Debbie Meehan, Kyle Anderson, Brian Small and Greg Ficarra – thank you for all that you do to work with us in the Administration every single day. You are individually and collectively as important to the success of Woodbridge Township as anyone!!!

Still another attribute that gives people and businesses a good impression of Woodbridge Township is the quality and professionalism of our senior management team and the Department and Division Directors. Seeing them in action at a Tuesday night Council meeting gives people a good feeling that they all are very talented and extremely qualified at their jobs.

Our Business Administrator John Bennett just completed his first year in the job and the reviews have been terrific. John brought a 40 year resume of experience at all levels of government to Woodbridge last year and he has been an outstanding Chief Operating Officer for our Township.

Caroline Ehrlich is behind everything that happens in Woodbridge, not just as the Chief of Staff but as the head of our Redevelopment Agency. You will hear a lot today about what happened in 2018 and what will happen in 2019 and Caroline has a hand in each and every issue and each and every project.

John Mitch continues to be a stabilizing force and valuable advisor and liaison to our Municipal Council. His lifetime as a Woodbridge resident, former Councilman and Business Administrator and current Municipal Clerk brings terrific insights to our team.

John Hagerty gets our message out and helps make our events successful and helps make sure our residents know of the tremendous programs and services offered in Woodbridge Township.

Many governmental leaders succeed simply by delivering basic services in a professional and timely fashion. An old adage says "pick up my garbage and plow my streets and I will be happy." Well if that is truly the case then residents of Woodbridge are not only happy – they are ecstatic.

No town in the State of New Jersey has a Public Works Department quite like Woodbridge and no town has a DPW leader like Dennis Henry. Our trash and recycling systems are doubly green – saving our taxpayers money while helping the environment. We caught up to a backlog of unpaved roads though we still invest millions every year in milling and paving the worst streets. Our parks are second to none and our stewardship of school buildings and grounds and fields have made us the envy of other school districts all over the State.

When it snows, most Mayors go into panic mode. Here in Woodbridge we just watch our teams do their typical amazing job after every storm. In the 1990s every single Department and Division had to send employees over to the Mayor's office to answer or return calls with complaints about snow removal. Now we get ten compliments for every complaint and all complaints are handled promptly to turn them into compliments. There is nothing like stopping at Knot Just Bagels on the way to work and hearing a dozen people say thanks for the great job on snow removal. Would the members of our Department of Public Works please stand and be recognized.

The other part of the adage about garbage and snow says “and send a police officer right away if I need one.” With our statistics showing that Woodbridge is safer than ever, our residents do not need police officers frequently – but when they do it is nice to know that someone responding to a call is from a police force that is nationally recognized for its policies, practices and procedures.

Independent observers from all over the country visit us every three years and all come away with the same conclusion – that the Woodbridge Police Department is one of the best in the State if not the country. We are increasing our force by an additional 10 officers this year bringing our total to 210. Would Police Director Bob Hubner, Deputy Director Joe Nisky and Chief Law Enforcement Officer Scott Kuzma and any members of the force please stand.

Our Township Recreation Department has quietly been increasing over the years to where it now has more employees than Public Works or Public Safety, though most are part-timers.

Our Woodbridge Community Center continues to be the crown jewel of Woodbridge – a venue that people marvel at whenever they visit. We all get a great sense of pride when an elected official from another town visits us and says... “I wish we could have one of these.” The WCC has morphed into something more than just sports. Whether it is the mah-jongg group or the Woodbridge Senior Billiards Club or the school choir concerts or the Halloween movie or the Trunk or Treat or Santa Claus handing out presents, it has truly become a Community Center for many different uses during the year.

Our purchase of The Club at Woodbridge offers our residents an upscale version of the Community Center and our membership numbers are up significantly in the four months we have owned it. Summer camp opportunities for our children will be unparalleled anywhere as kids will have twice the opportunities on top of our already successful outdoor day camps and sports camps. When we add another ice rink to The Club, hopefully within a year, we can attract tournaments and competitions from preschoolers to advanced adults.

These events have a phenomenal impact on our hotels, our restaurants, our shopping centers and even our delis and gas stations when a thousand people visit Woodbridge over a weekend which will happen dozens of times every year.

We continue our commitment to our youth sports leagues with an annual financial commitment and we are moving toward enhancing our recreational leagues which often get neglected as travel leagues get more attention. We need to care just as much about the kid with average or below average ability who is just out to have fun with his friends and get in some exercise. After all, someone has to stick up for the kids like me who were always the last pick no matter what the sport. But everyone wanted me on their team for the spelling bee.

Our Recreation Department is led by Vito Cimilluca with Brian Molnar as his Deputy and The Club is run by John Cook along with a great cast of employees. Would anyone who works for Recreation please stand.

Our Planning Department under the direction of Marta Lefsky continues to impress residents and builders every day and our Woodbridge Economic Development Corporation – WEDCO - has become a true force under Marta's leadership. We set new records every year for economic activity in Woodbridge and Marta is frequently referred to as my left arm with Caroline being my right arm. The Mayor gives the speeches and gets in the papers and on television and radio but Marta and Caroline do all the detail work in between the ever-increasing number of groundbreaking's and ribbon-cuttings.

But beyond what the public gets from the media – it is the attention to details that is equally important in economic development. When it's easy to get a meeting to pitch a project and easy to get in and out of a Board hearing and easy to get a permit and easy to get an inspection – it really matters to businesses – and in Woodbridge it's thanks to Tom Kelly of the Building Department and his staff.

That is the Woodbridge experience – cutting through the red tape to save time and money and make it easier and less expensive to do business here in town than anywhere else. We continue to be aggressive with abandoned houses by charging banks, mortgage companies and absentee landlords a fee for the work we have to do with these properties. But our work is paying off, as our actions have forced them to clean-up the houses and yards and get them listed and sold and back into productive use.

It goes without saying that the homeowners living on single family residential streets deserve to have properties near them maintained like they maintain their own property... it's all about 'Quality-of-Life.'

So many other employees in our various Departments and Divisions touch the lives of our residents in so many ways every day.

If you visited the Library or the Barron Arts Center or watched something on TV-35 – you have seen the professionalism of our staff and our programs and services.

Director Dennis Green has advanced the professionalism and work of our Health Department. If you have visited our Animal Shelter or our Health Fairs or one of our free health screenings or pet vaccinations – you have seen the dedication of our nurses and environmental inspectors and shelter workers.

If you have been to Town Hall to pay taxes or to get a license from the Township Clerk or pick up a permit from Engineering – you have likely had a pleasant experience dealing with your local government. And, if you visited or called the Mayor's office you were met with a friendly voice that followed up on your questions or concerns. It goes without saying that our rank and file employees are the backbone of our organization – whether they work in a patrol car, behind a desk, or out in the field. 2018 was a memorable and quite a busy year in Woodbridge Township and, once again, we thank everyone for keeping up with the fanatic pace.

This past year was quite productive in town. We turned the Iselin American Legion building into the amazing Five Branches Senior Center while allowing the Veterans to have a large space for their meetings. And, speaking of Veterans, we have a special thanks to John Eberhardt and the Veteran's Alliance for all he does with the Young Marines and ROTC programs for our middle school and high school youth. John... you are literally changing kids' lives.

We expanded our very successful Senior Transportation program – STOW - with more vehicles and drivers. In fact, STOW now takes our Seniors for shopping at Wegmans, ShopRite, Walmart and Woodbridge Center Mall. And we go to the Main Library, the WCC and The Club and to our Summer concerts, fireworks and special events. There is nothing like the feeling listening to Eleanor McDonagh of Oxford Road in Colonia telling me she has not been out of the house for over 10 years but now she is a regular at our Monday night concerts because of the free bussing. Thank you to Shirley Genty and Diane Mantagas for making STOW "the best bus service in town."

Our Multi-Service Program on Aging continues to help the homebound seniors in our population and those too frail to come out of the house. No town around us offers the extent of services to these seniors as Woodbridge.

Our Addiction Services & Peer Recovery Coach program - under the leadership and direction of Dr. Bonnie Nolan - stands as the model in the State of New Jersey. We now provide addiction response, intervention and social services and programs to seven other municipalities – Edison, Perth Amboy, South Amboy, Sayreville, Old Bridge, Carteret and New Brunswick – as they struggle to deal with the opioid epidemic.

In 2018, our Peer Recovery coaches responded to more than 280 calls for service and provided intervention and follow-up treatment to 109 patients. We are very pleased to report that 87 patients successfully completed intervention... which calculates to a 79 percent success rate – all in the first year of our model program. And, those are more than numbers... Bonnie's team literally helped save the lives of those 87 patients... that is a tremendous and **REAL** life-saving program. And, our efforts have not gone unnoticed. Tom Hudaish of The Nicholas Hudaish Foundation is here today to present a check for \$17,000 to Bonnie and the Division of Addiction Services. People see what we do and they want to help us help those in need.

In 2018 we closed on the purchase of 86 Green Street – a long awaited transaction – and that building will be the future home of The Woodbridge History Museum. The roof was replaced and the building is secured for the winter and additional work has already started. We hope to open at least a portion of the building this year – we're sending a special thank you to Historian and former Councilwoman Brenda Velasco, along with Frank and Audrey LaPenta and Dan D'Arcy for their assistance.

Construction began on the Red Oak Senior Housing Project in Port Reading which, when open later this year, will be the new home for the Senior residents from Stern Towers in downtown Woodbridge. When the downtown redevelopment is complete, what was the oldest Senior housing building in town will have been transformed into a new, modern transit village a block from the train station... and, the Stern Tower Seniors will have amenities they never dreamed of in the brand new Red Oak building.

And the future Red Oak is not the only project that is transforming the old into new!!! The 70 year old awful looking apartment buildings on Bunns Lane are continuing to be replaced by brand new apartments that look terrific.

The Jacobs Landing Project - named after Colonel Frank Jacobs, a former Woodbridge resident and Vietnam War Medal-of-Honor recipient – just received the last phase of financing and Bunns Lane will soon be a name in our past – literally because we will rename it Veterans Lane.

We continue to build-up the areas of town damaged by Superstorm Sandy with the help of Rutgers University and the Land Conservancy Group. We are committed to building green infrastructure like rain gardens to help with our floodwater management program. And, we are proud to announce the attainment of a high grade under the Community Rating System from the Federal Emergency Management Agency which will save our residents thousands and thousands of dollars in flood insurance premiums every year. Special thanks go out to our Municipal Engineer Mike Gelin and our Certified Flood Plain Manager Tom Flynn for their dedicated efforts to help our residents save money.

Our largest transit village housing project – Station Village in Avenel next to the NJT train station – is renting out just as quickly as units are being constructed. The attraction of the train is proving our point that people want to live in a transit-oriented development.

Our own Avenel Performing Arts Center is being built and is only a few short months from opening alongside our very own Curtains Bar and Restaurant and additional upscale retail space. Emmy Award winning Producer Anthony Wilkinson is busy filling the 2019 calendar with top-notch entertainment and our Restaurant Manager Chris Waltman is putting together a top-flight menu that will be as good as any restaurant in town.

The area around Avenel Station Village and the Avenel Performing Arts Center is seeing much attention with improvements at the Avenel Pharmacy; a new Quick-Chek on Route One South after the very successful Wawa on Route One North; a new retail center next to the Avenel Firehouse; and other developments by investors who see the business potential of 500 high-end apartments next to the NJT Avenel train station with service to New York City and the Jersey Shore.

We have always said that it matters who our Middlesex County Freeholders are. Our very own Freeholder Charlie Kenny and Woodbridge native Freeholder Director Ron Rios helped shepherd a \$6 million grant from the County to make our theater/restaurant a reality.

A major highlight of 2018 was the start of construction of the New Ross Street School and the much-needed renovation of Woodbridge Middle School. A referendum in 2017 passed overwhelmingly thanks to the people in this room and the people watching on TV-35. People recognized that we need to invest not only in school fields and gyms but also in the schools themselves. Before this year is out we will have replaced our oldest elementary school and partially replaced our oldest middle school. Not only did the referendum give us new school construction, but it provided for full-day kindergarten – an amenity desperately needed to make our school district the best around. Coupled with improved technology and enhanced school security, it is no wonder that the voters passed the measure by record numbers.

Another highlight of the past year was our Gala Dinner at the Woodbridge Community Center to kick-off the year-long Sesquicentennial celebration of our 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. John Mitch, Vito Cimilluca, Brian Molnar and Eileen Caggiano amazingly turned our gymnasium into an outstanding cocktail party room and our roller rink into a beautiful concert venue as over 600 people enjoyed a terrific night.

We have and will continue to have events every month leading up to June 1, 2019, including my personal favorite last October – the Woodbridge Historical Bar Crawl. People are still shocked and amazed that the idea to go to 20 family-owned bars by bus throughout our town on a Saturday afternoon was actually not mine. I am totally embarrassed to say that the idea for 'The Crawl' came from John Mitch, who probably only had one vodka and cranberry the whole day.

On June 1<sup>st</sup> 2019, we will celebrate our actual 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with a fun-filled day at Merrill Park in Iselin featuring an old-time baseball game in the morning followed by five straight concerts: The Tom Chapin Group at Noon. The Nerds at 2:00. The Jazz Lobster Band at 4:00. Wanted DOA Bon Jovi Tribute Band at 6:00. And the Max Weinberg Jukebox Trio at 8:00. There is music for kids, millennials, seniors and everyone in between with food and refreshments available and plenty of fun and games in what promises to be the best day of the year in Woodbridge. And, speaking of our 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary - we took a step-back-in-time to visit some of the significant historical events and figures that forged the future of Woodbridge – the Best Hamlet Hereabouts!!! Let's take a look!!!

Please give a great big Woodbridge Welcome to our historical figures:

Rev. John Woodbridge was played by Eric Griffith of our Planning Department. Marty Genser and James Parker are one-and-the same. John Eberhardt - former Rec. Director, US Navy veteran and head of the Veterans Alliance - portrayed Captain Henrik Kurt Carlsen. General George Washington was portrayed by Kelly Terrell, WHS Theatre Arts & Philosophy Teacher. Amy Krysienski - RSI Bank and Chamber Board member - played dual roles: the WHS Teacher and the Cheers Bartender. And our own Megan Kushpa portrayed a Woodbridge lady of society hanging-out at Cheers with Sean Burns as John Connor Barron. And, last... but certainly not least... Mayor Mac's Excellent Adventure would not have been so Excellent without our Narrator... Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin.

And, that's not all... The WHS student cast of Mayor Mac's Excellent Adventure - along with Principal Glenn Lottmann - are also with us today: Nyah Anderson, Nia Rosato, Nigel Pala, Ryan Vazquez and Principal Lottmann please stand. And, let's not forget Beth Amory and the WHS Choir performing yet another original song dedicated to Woodbridge Township. I'm sad to announce that this may be the last State-of-the-Township for Beth, as she will be retiring later this year.

Mayor Mac's Excellent Adventure would not have been possible without the incredible talent of TV-35 Director Lee Beckerman and the TV-35 crew - Gina Forbes, Joe Fernandez, Emil Brandafi and Samantha Roth.

While we accomplished a lot in 2018, I believe the State-of-our-Township is defined not so much by the past decade - but even more by this year and future years.

We're looking to complete the Hickory Senior Center in Fords as our fourth location for our seniors to gather and dance and eat and meet for bingo and sewing and puzzles and exercise. The site of the former Fords First Aid Squad has already been gutted and work will soon start on the renovations.

We purchased the Fords Women's Club building for parking for the Hickory Center and the ladies of the Club will have dedicated space at specific times for their events and storage space for their tea pots. No Mayor should ever get in the way of High Tea on a Sunday in May with the wonderful ladies of The Fords Women's Club.

We have interest in the former Mount Carmel School site and the home next door to it and have had discussions with the Diocese of Metuchen in the hopes of turning those buildings into another location for the Our House/Hope Autism Solutions partnership like in Cypress Recreation Center under the leadership of Chris Kosty who handles all of our construction projects.

There are dozens of adults over 21 in Woodbridge Township that would benefit by another facility and we as government leaders owe it to our most vulnerable population to help them have the 'Quality-of-Life' they deserve... while giving their parents respite from the daily care requirements they face.

And, speaking of the Cypress Center, we are less than a month away from opening the Café which will be staffed by the Our House residents plus our RISE, STARS and Buddy Ball special needs teenagers and young adults under the leadership of former Councilman Jimmy Carroll. Special thanks to Investors Bank for all that you have done providing recreational opportunities for these students.

Work has already begun to turn the vacant land next to Cypress into a Level Playing Field for soccer, softball and baseball and there will also be a greenhouse thanks to a grant from The Columbia Bank Foundation. We will also build tennis, volleyball, basketball and pickle ball courts on the site this year.

We have always said that it matters who our State Legislators are – and last June our Senator Joe Vitale and our Assemblypersons Yvonne Lopez and especially our very own Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin – delivered a \$1.5 million State grant to help in the construction of the amenities for our special needs population at Cypress.

We plan to open a Boy Scout and Girl Scout camping facility off Omar Avenue on land owned by the Township. And, we will continue our partnership with the Greenway Family Success Center as they look to expand services in Woodbridge Township.

You have seen little bike lane guys painted all over town streets... but the project has just started and will be finished this year. Bike sharing and electric car sharing will be in place shortly. And many of our playgrounds will start to see adult-friendly exercise equipment next to the teeter-totters.

Traffic light improvements, like the very successful Avenel Street/Rahway Avenue light with new turning lanes will be made throughout Woodbridge, including at Lake and Lancaster Avenues and at Delaware and Inman Avenues in Colonia. More murals will be painted on our underpasses to honor our history and our Veterans.

The Rahway Avenue site of the former home of the prison warden is fully framed-out for 100 apartments in what used to be called Cedar Meadows but which will now be called The Greens at Avenel.

We have committed to 25 apartments to be controlled by the State of New Jersey for the Developmentally Disabled population – not unlike the citizens who used to live right across the street in the Woodbridge Developmental Center. And, we hope the other 75 apartments become home to other Township residents with special needs. As parent's age and struggle with decisions about caring for their children with mental and physical challenges we hope the Greens at Avenel will be the home they are looking for. It makes so much sense to bring these populations together in one place to take advantage of professionals offering the care they need.

So much of what we are able to do – including our school projects for turf fields, tennis courts, tracks, gym floors, playgrounds and auditorium seating, as well as the investment in our Township recreational facilities and road and park and other improvements – has been because of our efforts to attract new redevelopment projects, which provide millions of tax dollars.

Even though businesses get a discount on their property taxes from our Payments in Lieu of Tax agreements or PILOT's – they still pay on average over 85% of what they would have otherwise paid in regular property taxes. Without tax discounts, we would have nothing on these parcels but vacant lots and abandoned building eyesores. With discounts, we have the beautiful projects and we have the construction jobs and we have the permanent jobs and we have cleaned-up sites and we have people in town spending money and we have what will soon be over \$30 million per year in revenue to the Township just from these PILOT payments.

Businesses live by the bottom line – and when we can offer that small tax discount it often turns an unprofitable project into a financially feasible one and we get the benefit. Our annual PILOT revenue will soon be more than we get in aid from the State of New Jersey. PILOTs are roundly criticized by people who do not understand them and who like to misstate that a PILOT means no taxes at all. Would we rather have 100 vacant contaminated acres on the Raritan River in Keasbey paying under \$100,000 per year in regular taxes or a Power Plant by CPV that will pay over \$115 million to us over 30 years? Prologis, PSEG, Amazon and Preferred Freezer and other projects are why we can invest in our town and our schools. We will continue this policy because it makes sense and because it works.

Tax incentive programs at the State level are being carefully scrutinized, but our PILOT incentive programs are approved only under strict guidelines and they are monitored by our professionals for compliance and they have truly helped improve our quality of life throughout Woodbridge Township.

In 2019, Arizona Iced Tea will hopefully open its long awaited warehouse and manufacturing facility in Fords. Duke Realty recently purchased nine acres from PQ Chemical and hopes to build a 175,000 square foot warehouse. The Proctor & Gamble facility and a Paddock Street warehouse in Avenel are under new ownership with significant renovations on the planning board. And, Buckeye Pipeline has major plans for its facility in Port Reading that was recently purchased from Hess.

Three sites in town that have had our attention for years might finally be seeing some serious action. The Gentempo property in Keasbey, Pennval Road land in Sewaren and a junkyard on South Inman Avenue and Route 1 are all being evaluated as future warehouse sites.

Our location within the outskirts of the Port of New York and New Jersey makes us ripe for these large warehouse projects which have plenty of interested tenants. And, warehouses are great for our Township. They employ a lot of our residents and, more importantly, they do not burden our school or municipal budgets. Their locations next to major highways mean that their vehicles can typically enter and exit Woodbridge without impacting our local road structure. Plus, they provide the millions of dollars necessary to keep our Township moving forward.

On a smaller scale, the coming year will see new development taking place at the Syms site; at the former Pathmark site in Hopelawn; on Route 1 North in Avenel at the Avenel and Americana motels; across Route 1 at the City Motel; at the Forge on Route 9 North; at the Jewelry Exchange in Woodbridge Center and at Bayshore Recycling in Keasbey. And, speaking of Woodbridge Center, General Manager Amy Bellisano is excited about new developments there... but she won't let me spill the beans until all the i's are dotted and all the T's are crossed.

New housing development will commence at the Riffy's site and at the Stern Tower site and will continue at The Grande in Iselin and at Falcon in Port Reading. Other projects are on the drawing board and downtown Woodbridge will see a major revitalization in coming years.

There are legitimate concerns by our neighbors with developing our downtown and we understand them and we are dealing with them. People living nearby have a right to express their thoughts about this development and we have a responsibility to communicate with them and share our vision for Main Street.

Over 20 years ago, lawn signs appeared on residential streets in Woodbridge proper saying **HOMETOWN NOT DOWNTOWN**... again out of a completely understandable concern about the local neighborhood. Now, I think those signs should read: **DOWNTOWN NOT GHOST TOWN**... because if we do not bring people to Main Street to live and work and dine and shop and use our trains and recreational facilities then we will fail. There is a reason that every town around us is doing it – it is the sensible and right thing to do.

There is a concern about traffic, but all of the studies report that vehicles per unit from a transit village project are significantly less than multi-family units elsewhere in town. Recognizing that additional residents do bring additional cars, we enacted Ordinances which banned trucks on Main Street and Green Street – actions that have dramatically improved traffic flow.

And, speaking of Main Street... we just received word that the New Jersey Department of Transportation will invest \$1.3 million for engineering services and up to \$12 million for improvements at the intersection of Main Street and Route 9. This is a priority project and will be a huge asset to our downtown as it eases the congestion on both ends of Main Street.

We will work with our residents who sincerely care about Woodbridge but not with the politically motivated critics who are against everything we do. If we did nothing, they would cry out to take action. We are taking action, so they cry out for the status quo.

We will continue to move our downtown plans forward despite this politically motivated display of negativity by people who hide behind social media and play for cameras. Nothing we do can be acceptable to them even though they have no vision themselves other than to be contrary to us.

And this year, we will once again work to improve the physical infrastructure of our schools.

The Township is about to close on the purchase of over 50 acres of land where the Woodbridge Developmental Center once stood. And, we are in the midst of a process to select a redeveloper who shares our vision for that site. We have had conversations with the Board of Education and we are looking to donate a portion of that land to the Board to construct a new School 4/5 on the front of the site on Rahway Avenue. Built in 1912, School 4/5 remains the oldest school building in the District and is no longer conducive to today's modern learning environment.

Avenel School 4/5 students will soon have a brand new school with brand new fields instead of just an asphalt parking lot with a Jungle Gym. The school and the property will expand in size and opportunities for labs and music and art can provide another amazing learning environment in Woodbridge. This is part of the dramatic extreme makeover of the Avenel section of town.

Other school projects to be considered include a plan for School 14 in Fords which has issues with the physical infrastructure and School 22 in Colonia which is still separated into multiple buildings where children have to go outside and brave the elements just to change classrooms. School security and technology are always under consideration for new investment.

Just like the Township will pay for the Ross Street/Woodbridge Middle school projects with PILOT monies from economic development projects, we can pay for the new school projects with PILOT monies from development on the Avenel site plus others.

A referendum in March of 2020 will provide a large State Aid boost to us and will be another slam dunk decision for voters as we use warehouse project money to continue to invest in our schools with no property tax impact on our residents - just like in 2017.

All of this work is only possible when the Township Administration and the Board of Education leadership share a common goal. Better schools in Woodbridge mean a better Township of Woodbridge. Another old adage says "a community is known by the schools it keeps." Woodbridge is known throughout New Jersey for our cooperation between the Township and school district to make our schools the best they can possibly be.

2019 will see the return of all of our very successful programs and events from the Bike Tour to our local Community Days to the Martin Luther King Essay Contest and Hispanic Heritage Day to our 5K races. Everyone can find a complete list of all of our events on our many social media sites... the Township web page. Mayor's Facebook. The comprehensive Buy Local APP and the TV-35 bulletin Board.

We will again have over 50 free concerts and we will continue to work with our fire districts and first aid squads and help them with their infrastructure and their vehicle fleets.

We will still have our parades and our Street Fairs and our Paranormal Expo – none of which could happen without two of the best groups of volunteer residents in the history of Woodbridge Township – The Mayor's Advisory Committee and the Mayor's Marines of the Community Emergency Response Team. No major event with a large gathering of residents can happen without the MAC and CERT – it's that simple.

This year we will defend our Sustainable Jersey title and the first ever GOLD award for Energy in the State and we will still have the best fireworks around.

We will again host for the 13<sup>th</sup> time over 1,000 senior athletes from all over New Jersey and the country in the annual Senior Olympics.

We will continue our free annual bulk pick-ups along with our free convenience center for easy drop-offs. And this year, we are even going to start cleaning your garbage and recycling cans. We will still have the Taste of Woodbridge and the Taste of Colonia and we will find homes for dozens of stray animals through our Animal Shelter.

And, we will continue to care about people.

We will raise thousands of dollars and thousands of pounds of food for our Have-a-Heart Food Drive – which is currently underway - courtesy of our corporate sponsors led by Wegmans, ShopRite, RSI Bank, Northfield Bank, the Colonia Business Community, the Corner Newspaper and the Woodbridge Metro Chamber of Commerce.

We will continue to fix-up dozens of homes for Seniors with limited resources through our Tooling Around the Township program – this year, we're 'Tooling' on April 27. If your company is not involved in these programs please see us to learn how you can become involved.

When tragedy strikes, we will continue to help those in need - just like the 20 families from the Hillside Gardens Apartments in Keasbey that each received a check from the Woodbridge Community Charity Fund – families that were instantly displaced when a fire raged through their apartment building right before the holidays. Special thanks to Bahama Breeze for hosting a very nice event.

We will continue to publicize and attend and support the pancake breakfasts and spaghetti dinners at our schools and civic groups for someone who is sick or in distress, or just for an organization that needs to raise money.

We will continue to use the hour before our Council meetings to recognize and honor those who go above and beyond to make a difference in people's lives – from the child who donated their hair to a cancer victim to the senior who collected hundreds of toys for Santa to deliver to needy children.

We will continue to honor the teams that win titles and tournaments and the kids who won the painting, poetry reading and singing contests. We will continue to film our kid's sporting events and the Mom's and Grandmothers who put together the t-shirt quilts we display in Town Hall. The State-of-the-Township continues to be EXCELLENT!!! But it takes more than us in elected office to make that happen. It takes all of you.

It takes the leaders and congregations of all of our churches who run food kitchens and soup pantries and so many helpful community events.

It takes the Elks and the Knights and other community organizations and associations who collect funds and donate to worthy causes.

It takes the VFWs and American Legions and Reinhard Marine Corps League who care for our Veterans, Support-Our-Active-Troops, and recognize and honor our fallen heroes.

It takes our teachers and school aides, guidance counselors, child study teams and school administrators who guide our 13,000 students every day.

It takes our hard-working Board members in Planning, Zoning, Library, Housing, Environment, Wellness or History who give countless volunteer hours annually away from the cameras and newspapers.

We are your leaders and we set the vision for Woodbridge Township and then implement that vision... but a leader is not a leader if no one is following. All of us truly appreciate the support you – here in person and watching on TV-35 - have given us over the years in whatever form you have used to show that support.

If it truly takes a village to raise a child, then it really does take all 100,000 people in Woodbridge Township to truly make us: **THE BEST TOWN AROUND!!!!!!!**

Thank you.

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