

## State of the Borough of Raritan

Distinguished Guests, Families and Friends.

As I stated in my State of the Borough comments in January, 2016, the voters cast their ballots for a change and a new direction in Raritan. Over the past year. I was blessed to work with a very productive Borough Council in forging ahead with “the peoples’ business” and truly putting “Raritan First!” I am happy to report that our financial condition is sound, our credit rating is very good, our assessed to true value is 96% for tax purposes and our tax collection rate is excellent.

Raritan truly is a great community with great potential. This was evident when I personally observed Borough Employees, the business community and the many civic-minded residents working together to renew and improve our town.

Prior to listing notable events of 2016, I want to first mention a very special award recognizing our Raritan Historic and Cultural committee. The Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Commission selected this group to receive an award for their Historic Tour of Raritan informative booklets. I congratulate them for their good work for our community and thank them for preserving our rich history.

The year began with our Special Projects legal counsel, Difrancesco/Bateman, providing important background to me and my colleagues about Raritan’s earlier OPRA lawsuit. The Governing Body analyzed and debated before it decided it was time to cut our losses and put an end to this litigation.

Then came the big snowstorm in January 2016 that slowed down all of Somerset County. I congratulate our Public Work Department for again rising to the challenge of a significant snowstorm. Members of private sector also graciously assisted in a meaningful way. Three residents - John Paternoster, Fred Sinagra and Dave Esposito - worked ‘shoulder-to-shoulder’ with our Public Works men to clear our downtown. These business men donated their time AND their much-needed equipment from their respective companies to help Raritan. That is what I call “Service to your Community”. Thank you!

It seemed that as soon as the snow was cleared, JMF Properties came to the Governing Body and Planning Board with a proposal to invest tens of millions of dollars in our community. Wow! Redevelopment of this area will provide a major economic boost to Raritan so we can address our much-needed emergency services and recreational facilities.

I'd like to pause for a moment to make clear that the work of our Governing Body involves the coordination and cooperation of Somerset County and the State of New Jersey, members of our many Boards and Special Committees as well as consultants. Please keep this in mind as we together revisit some of the important initiatives and events of 2016:

- 1) [Establishment of Raritan River Park](#). Councilmen Giraldi and Sibilia contacted me, as Mayor elect at the end of 2015, to join them at the Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders. We requested their consideration to preserve the river waterfront in Raritan for the enjoyment and use by all Somerset County residents. Throughout 2016, we continued our efforts to make this a reality.
- 2) [Raritan Renew](#) – The entire Governing Body recognize the need to renew certain properties throughout our community. Five sites are working their way through the renewal process. The Route 202/Second Avenue and 401 Tillman Street are successful efforts. While the so-called United Dying site, 413 Raritan Ave and 13 Anderson Street sites are progressing and we expect complete resolution in 2017. We will be focusing on additional sites in 2017 as we continue to improve our community.
- 3) [The return of the Washington School property to Raritan](#). Many years ago, the children of Bridgewater and Raritan were educated in schools located in Raritan. Time has progressed and the townships have grown substantially. Washington School became surplus property in the 1980s and, at that time, the school district transferred ownership to Somerset County. Over thirty years later, Somerset County no longer requires the facility/property and are returning it back to Raritan. The Governing Body plans to maintain this property in public use.
- 4) [The realignment and extension of the First Avenue/202 jug handle](#). There were multiple meetings with the NJDOT in Ewing to discuss extending the First Avenue/202 jug handle further to the north. We've made substantial progress and are now jointly focused on realigning the jug handle. I want to especially thank Senator Doherty and Al Gaburo for making the time to join me at these meetings. I also want to acknowledge the professionalism and openness of the NJDOT staff and its consultants to our request.
- 5) [The adjustment of First Avenue traffic flow](#). I want to thank Somerset County and especially their traffic engineering professionals who continue to collaborate with Raritan to address traffic signal timing along First Ave. This fine-tuning effort continues as we seek to keep traffic moving on First Ave.
- 6) [Security enhancements during the 2016 Basilone Parade](#). For me, this was very "eye opening look" at our law enforcement. I am thankful for the fast thinking judgement of our Raritan Police Department who responded to a security threat targeting the Marines and Marine related events. The Department requested additional resources to better

secure the parade route. Our Somerset County Sheriff Department lead by Sheriff Frank Provenzano provided huge support in concert with our Somerset County Prosecutor's Office lead by Mike Robertson. Their efforts in supporting Raritan Police made our community safe and the Parade was a great success. At this time, I want to acknowledge and thank Freeholder-Director Pat Walsh and her colleagues for the design and construction of Veterans Park – across from the Basilone Statue – that is scheduled for completion in 2017.

- 7) [Improvements in Raritan's housing-related ordinances](#). Mid-year a committee of citizens, landlords and members of Council was formed to evaluate our housing inspection program and housing related ordinances. Denise Carra chairs this prolific committee that is enhancing enforcement authority and increasing fines for problem landlords, owners and lenders. The committee also recommended a Noise Ordinance that the Governing Body adopted. Many thanks to people involved in this process including Rich Wenner, our Borough Attorney, for crafting these multiple new Ordinances. The committee's work will continue in 2017.
- 8) [The restart of the historic preservation work at the Firehouse on Anderson Street after many years](#). Special thanks to the Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Commission for supporting this work and we are working diligently to implement these improvements to this historic building.
- 9) [Development of plans to construct Senior Citizen housing](#). The Governing Body in conjunction with the Planning Board have designated a tract of land for Senior housing. We are hoping for a neighborhood fit of between 10 and 20 units appropriate for senior citizens. It's a great location and I want to congratulate the Planning Board and Governing Body on such progressive action

On behalf of the Governing Body, I thank the many individuals who came forward to serve on Raritan's Boards and Committees. With the support of our residents, employees, professionals and colleagues at all levels of government, Raritan is poised in 2017 to further enhance its recreational, economic and quality of life.

I sincerely thank you for the opportunity to serve as Mayor and I wish you a Healthy, Safe and Prosperous New Year. May God continue to bless Raritan and our great country.

January 2, 2017