

# NEWS

TOWNSHIP OF WOODBRIDGE



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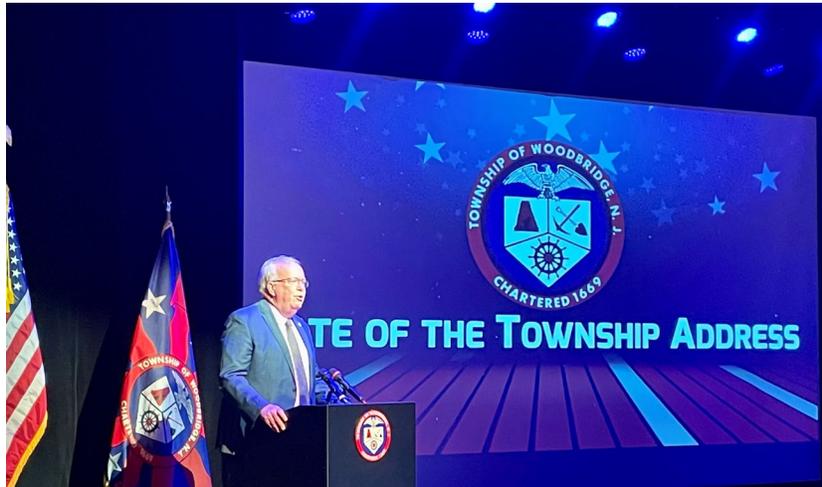
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## Mayor John E. McCormac 2022 ~ "State-of-the-Township" ~ 2022



Woodbridge, NJ: It is once again our pleasure to present the annual State of the Township address to all of the residents and businesses of Woodbridge.

We delivered last year's address remotely and hoped it would be the only time we did that, but circumstances surrounding COVID-19 have once again forced us into a recorded message rather than a live one.

Let us begin this address like last year's with a moment of silence for the dozens of Woodbridge residents who passed away last year during this awful pandemic. Please keep them and their families in your thoughts and prayers.

We always start by thanking the Chamber of Commerce and Executive Director Karen Barnes for the terrific cooperation between the Chamber and Township as we both work toward creating a terrific environment for the business community here in Woodbridge.

As you will see from the rest of this address, together we have clearly achieved that goal and will continue to work on it throughout 2022.

Thank you also to Angie Tsirkas of Northfield Bank for your leadership of the Chamber last year and congratulations to Manny Xidias of Bigger Fish Marketing on your election as Board Chairman this year.

A person who was a large part of the Chamber's success and an even larger part of the Township's success is no longer with us though and our collective jobs have gotten demonstrably harder with the passing of First Ward Councilwoman Nancy Drumm earlier this month.

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Nancy loved the Chamber, but I am happy to say that nothing made her happier than her family followed by her time as a Councilwoman in Woodbridge. She was a wonderful daughter, wife, mother and grandmother and when she talked about her family, especially her granddaughter Sophie and grandson Hughie, her eyes lit up.

She was just re-elected to her third term in November, winning a general and a primary election without even campaigning because of her illness. She did not even have to show up because everybody in the First Ward knew her and loved her.

Nancy was a fixture at Chamber events and she never missed a ribbon cutting or groundbreaking ceremony in all of Woodbridge - which is why her loss will be felt by thousands of people outside of the First Ward. As soon as she met a new business owner she told them about the Chamber and why they should join and she gave them an application right away. There is no truth to the rumor that she carried the large ribbon-cutting scissors just in case they didn't join.

Nancy's passion was helping people and she did that with an everlasting smile on her face. She was a non-stop emailing and texting machine when her constituents had an issue and she promoted events for every community, church and youth group in the First Ward. She was the glue of the Township Council and a friend to all of us.

We saw on God's Facebook page that Nancy has already started a Chamber of Angels in heaven and naturally she is the Membership Director. She is standing right now next to St. Peter at the Pearly Gates handing out her business cards and telling people to email or text her if they have any problems.

Would that scenario really surprise any of you???

We will all miss Nancy and we ask you to stay in your seats at the conclusion of this address to view a memorial tribute to her. Sorry, but between COVID-19 and Nancy's passing, it just did not seem right to be filming a comedy skit this year.

We were proud last year to be a part of the ceremony that renamed the Port Reading Saints football field in honor of former Mayor Joe DeMarino and the ceremony that named the Menlo Park Terrace fire substation in honor of former Mayor Phil Cerria. It was a pleasure to recognize them for their public service. At the appropriate time we will name a building in Woodbridge in Nancy's honor in recognition of her community service.

The eight weeks of December of 2020 and January of 2021 were the worst in Woodbridge for new cases of Coronavirus until the last eight weeks, which have seen higher numbers of new cases though they were far less severe.

We once again have experienced cancellations, postponements and alterations of our routines and our events and we are still Zooming and conference calling where we used to be in person. Schools went remote again though for only a week.

During 2021, we had the opportunity to see our Woodbridge Health Department at its finest. While all other towns in Middlesex County joined with the County Health Department, Woodbridge stayed separate, which gave us more control and freedom to do what is best for our residents and the pandemic certainly justified that decision.

Once vaccinations became available, our Health Department rose to the occasion. To date we have administered more than 6,000 doses of Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines in first shots, second shots and boosters.

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Having our own Health Center enabled us to serve all residents five years of age and up in over 120 different clinics. Our Township nurses, combined with a contingent of school nurses, worked thousands of hours administering shots to what in many cases were reluctant and skeptical patients.

The process was very well organized and people moved in and out and from station to station effortlessly. Every single clinic was followed by calls and emails to us from people who got their shots and wanted to thank us for making it so easy. Doctors, administrative staff, Police Officers and Emergency Management employees joined the nurses to make the experience seamless and friendly.

Perhaps their greatest challenge and effort came in dealing with the five to 11 year-olds who came in for shots and were greeted by our entire staff dressed as Super Heroes, which of course they are in more ways than one. The children were given popcorn and cotton candy and friendly smiles and both kids and parents loved it but not the doctors who now face regular questions when kids come to their offices like "Hey, where's your costume?" and "Where's my popcorn?"

Our thanks go out also to all other Township residents in the health care field who have spent nearly the last two years putting themselves at risk to help others.

Our Police Department finished 2021 with their eighth successful report from the Committee for the Accreditation of Law Enforcement Agencies. Every three years professionals in the law enforcement field from all over America converge on Woodbridge for an exhaustive month long analysis of every policy, practice and procedure that our Department follows.

Last year we received the usual glowing report from these officials who say Woodbridge is among the best Police Departments they have ever seen across the country. We are thrilled to be among the first Departments in the State to hire a Police Officer under the Alternate Route program that the State of New Jersey made available to towns to help achieve diversity in the ranks of our officers.

Our force is well represented by White officers and our percentage of Hispanic officers matches our population but we are woefully under-represented by Blacks and Asians. We are committed to improving in this area and as we strive to increase our number of Police Officers we will try to assure that the racial makeup of the new recruits matches the diversity of our town.

We also became one of the first Police Departments in the State of New Jersey to adopt the Safe Place program for our public buildings and our local businesses. When they see a Safe Place sign our young residents in the LGBTQ+ community know they can stop in and be welcomed and helped by people who care. We also now have all Police Officers equipped with body cameras in accordance with State of New Jersey guidelines.

Our Police Officers, like their first responder counterparts in our independent Fire Departments and First Aid Squads, still face serious risks because of COVID-19 every day. We should never forget the job they do and they should all know how much we appreciate their effort and their performance.

Our Emergency Management team continues to shine with unfortunately no shortage of activity in our great Township. When Tropical Storm Ida hit, they worked alongside our first responders to save people from their homes and put them up in our Community Center for food and shelter which was run by our Community Emergency Response Team. CERT, by the way, logged almost 1,200 volunteer hours last year.

When a fire ravaged an apartment building a few months ago, Police Officers and Firefighters and a local Good Samaritan got everybody out of harm's way in a remarkable rescue effort.

When a six-week-old infant stopped breathing, our Police Officers gave CPR and saved a life.

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When a pit bull was at large after attacking a young man with special needs, our Police Officers responded and kept others safe.

When someone was clinging to a fence in high waters during IDA, a Police Officer and EMTs from Colonia First Aid Squad swam through the raging waters to rescue the person likely minutes before he would have been swept away.

We are never prouder as public officials than when we honor our everyday heroes with Proclamations before Council meetings in front of their family and friends and often with the people they helped and saved sitting in the front row and smiling.

Our Department of Public Works crews consistently continue the culture of terrific public service in Woodbridge with the performance of their everyday duties plus their excellence when called upon in emergencies and we consistently provide them the vehicles and equipment they need to do their job.

Our regular trash collection is outstanding and residents receive one free special pickup annually and we started cleaning the blue and green containers.

Our convenience center makes it very easy to drop off specialty items for disposal like tires, wood, stumps, paint and metal and our Reuse Center makes one person's trash into another person's treasure and saves recycling costs. We have received over \$400,000 in grants for these efforts and now have expanded our recycling efforts to include Styrofoam, cooking oil and certain plastic bags.

Our road-resurfacing program continues to get millions of dollars per year for brand new streets and our crews are on top of everyday pothole repair and road maintenance. When it snows... and we really wish it wouldn't... our snow plowing efforts are the envy of every town around us. There's nothing like driving along our borders and seeing blacktop in Woodbridge and sheets of ice in neighboring towns.

Our Parks Division employees keep all facilities in top shape and our Sewer crews keep you know what flowing and our Buildings and Grounds employees keep our Township facilities and school buildings clean and safe.

Our Engineering Division has developed an aggressive plan to improve our storm water management system with a multi-million dollar effort to replace and expand pipes and lines throughout Woodbridge to improve water flow.

Our crews clean problem areas prior to major weather events and we are systematically strengthening our stream banks to keep water flowing. We are working with our neighbors in Clark and Rahway on our shared borders where streams run through both towns and we are encouraging the DEP and FEMA to offer buyouts in repetitive flooding areas that were hit hard by Ida though we hope all homeowners find a way to stay in Woodbridge. We also achieved a favorable rating from the Community Rating System that will save our residents in flood zones hundreds of dollars on their flood insurance policies.

All of our Public Works information, including the dates for sanitation and recycling pickups and our free garage and yard sales, are in an outstanding Recycling Calendar that was mailed to all homes in Woodbridge a few weeks ago. It is a terrific resource for our residents.

Our new Department of Senior Services, in service for just about a year, saw two new Senior Centers open in 2021 – Maple Tree Center in Avenel and Oak Tree Center in Iselin. Our seniors now have six different options for exercise, recreation, entertainment and luncheons and our staff has been terrific.

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The Department also oversees the Division on Aging that takes care of populations unknown except to them – our frail, elderly, and homebound senior population. These seniors don't see any Township employee except their Social Worker but that does not stop them from telling us how happy they are through calls and emails.

Senior Services also includes Senior Transportation of Woodbridge – STOW - which brings seniors to our Centers and to medical appointments and shopping which opens them up to opportunities that they otherwise would not experience.

Today, we are releasing our brand new Senior Services booklet which is a 64-page magazine that highlights every single program and service available to seniors from Township, County, State and Federal agencies with contact information so seniors know where to turn to get help.

It highlights all of our Senior Centers and the special activities in each along with our other resources like recreation facilities and libraries. It provides references and contact information for Medicaid, Medicare, Social Security, prescription programs and caregiver referrals.

It also contains valuable information about consumer protection, nutritional advice, energy assistance, veterans programs and services and regular Township offerings like the Farmer's Market, Tooling Around the Township and our annual Senior Summit.

Copies are being mailed to seniors all over Woodbridge Township and it is available on all of our social media outlets. Additional copies can be obtained through the Division on Aging by calling 732-726-6262.

The Township Recreation Department keeps getting busier and busier as we keep expanding their responsibilities with new facilities and new programs.

We opened up two new Youth Centers like the one inside the Evergreen Senior Center for our middle school students to visit after school to study, play games, watch TV and interact with their friends in a relaxing environment. First, it was the Highland Grove Youth Center just down the street from Fords Middle School which has been very well attended. Then in October we opened the Acacia Youth Center in the former Hungarian Club building on Port Reading Avenue which we obtained at no cost when the Hungarian Club of Woodbridge ceased operations and vacated the building.

The lack of busses and bus drivers has delayed our plans somewhat to bring students from Woodbridge, Avenel and Iselin Middle Schools but we are slowly introducing these kids to an amazing facility and our Teen Nights have been incredibly successful.

Three new outdoor basketball courts are in use every day and night and a regulation soccer field in the back of the property will soon offer our students and adults more recreational opportunities.

The American Irish Association of Woodbridge, a recent recipient of the Key-To-The-Township based on their long history of community service in our town, will make the back room of the Center their long sought after home. Their access to the facility will help them continue to raise funds to help veterans and other groups in our Township.

We also recently purchased the Springwood Swim Club in Colonia to offer another amenity to our residents and give us our fourth pool joining the two indoor pools at the Club at Woodbridge and Woodbridge Community Center and our outdoor pool at the Highland Grove Swim Club in Fords. If you know anyone 15 and over we are always looking for lifeguards and it is a fantastic opportunity to work summers throughout the rest of high school and all years of college. We plan on major renovations to the grounds to include a spray park and miniature golf course and a new pavilion and more on-side parking and we expect it to open on time before Memorial Day.

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Our Woodbridge Community Center will see some improvements this summer with new outdoor opportunities and The Club at Woodbridge is in the midst of a total makeover.

The Club recently opened the Hockey Den with a room of simulated ice for training and they recently hired the Golf Pro from Colonia Country Club to give lessons. We are upgrading heating and air conditioning and have purchased new weight and cardio equipment and soon we expect to reopen the former Clubhouse Café.

The best project of all though was the opening of the new ice rink which is already selling out. With our rink at the Community Center we can now attract large tournaments which people will drive to from hours away and stay in our hotels and shop in our stores and dine in our restaurants. And, by the way, we have excellent advertising opportunities for Woodbridge businesses to attract these visitors.

On the subject of fitness, we opened three new bicycle stations which were so popular that we ordered seven more to put all around the town. Adult outdoor exercise stations were also put in many of our Township parks.

Our Recreation Department has seen an expansion of duties as a result of our increased focus on recreational youth sports to be run by the Township while local leagues maintain their own travel and all-star teams.

The response from parents has been tremendous and now everyday kids like little Johnnie McCormac when I was their age who are not gifted athletically and who just want to play for fun with their friends have more practices and games and better facilities plus free training programs that were not available just a year ago.

Our Recreation Department is also handling the expansion of our Township marina after our successful purchases of the Pirate's Cove and Captain Hook marinas in late 2020. The Township now has 77 boat slips with plans for a waterfront restaurant, a tiki bar, ice cream shop and fish market to go with an expanded dog park with a walking track surrounding a boat storage area. We will also have a bridge to connect our land across Smith's Creek with Williams Park that is owned by the County. Significant engineering work is being done now on additional dredging of Smith's Creek as well as the reconstruction of bulkheads and pilings on the Pirate's Cove site that fell into tremendous disrepair over the last 20 years. We have \$6 million in State and County funding for the project with the promise of several million dollars more to come.

Recreation also oversees our effort regarding the arts in Woodbridge Township and we proudly opened the new Gallery on Main three months ago. Our Barron Arts Center continues to be a gem with its exhibits and concerts and we recently expanded parking on the site to keep cars off residential streets.

A Recreation highlight of the last two years has been the Holiday Light Parade after the Holiday Stroll down Main Street. Dozens of first responder and other vehicles were lit up for a two hour trip through the main streets of Woodbridge with thousands of people standing outside freezing in the cold for a chance to see this fantastic display.

Of all of the Recreation Department's responsibilities, though, their favorite is probably Mayor Mac's Café inside the Cypress Recreation Center where special needs adults in the school district RISE program run their own restaurant. The young adults from ages 18-21 cook, clean, greet and serve patrons from 11-2 on school days and they absolutely love it. Stop by for lunch or brunch whenever you can.

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In 2021, we were once again the most sustainable municipality in the State of New Jersey. We are the first and so far only town to achieve two brand new Gold Star Awards in Energy and Water and we are working on one for Health. To keep our title we keep moving forward and we are now working on two new electric car charging stations in our downtown and we hope they are successful and lead to more.

Our Township Library system excelled last year with new on-line services and links that helped people stay connected with tremendous resources all through the pandemic. While physical visits to our libraries were limited, our staff used internet capabilities and new applications to bring books, magazines, movies and more to laptops, tablets and phones to educate and entertain people of all ages.

We continued our Peer Recovery Coach program that is now utilized by every town in Middlesex County. Woodbridge bucked the National, State and County trends with less opioid deaths in 2021 than just two years earlier and our shared service efforts continue to lead the State of New Jersey as municipalities all around us consistently ask for our employees to advise theirs and ask for our town to run operations for their towns.

We initiated a rare interlocal agreement where we are the recipient of services with the Perth Amboy YMCA which has made their homeless shelter and its tremendous access to programs and services available to us to help this population in our town.

Our Planning Department continues to see an explosion of new building permits especially as residents used their time home during the pandemic to get work done around their houses. Businesses continue to want to expand in Woodbridge and new businesses are contacting us every day asking about opportunities here.

Time after time residents and businesses tell us how easy it is to navigate our system in Woodbridge from initial applications to permits to inspections to Certificates of Occupancy. Our staff is friendly and professional and they go out of their way to expedite the process which ultimately saves money for applicants and offers a much smoother process with much needed certainty.

The Planning Department has a special crew that identifies existing homes that have become abandoned due to the decline in the state and national economy. At our peak, we had 330 homes on a list that we aggressively investigated by contacting lenders and by citing homeowners for allowing these homes to fall into disrepair. That list is now down to only 87 homes. All residents benefit when homes on their streets are brought up to Code by removing unattractive eyesores.

We speak frequently about the need to be diligent with our annual budgets to keep property taxes as low as possible, but we always keep our eyes on the main prize which is property values within Woodbridge Township.

Small annual tax increases pale in comparison to an increase of thousands-of-dollars in the value of your home because your street has nice, well-kept properties. Or because your local park looks great with new playground equipment or because that dilapidated commercial building nearby was razed for a nice new project.

But the real reason why your property values will keep increasing and remain strong is because of our Township schools which are now seeing the final touches from a \$57 million referendum in 2018 and the beginning phases of an \$88 million referendum from March of 2020 - both of which passed overwhelmingly.

Combined with prior ordinances for our athletic fields, tracks, gyms and courts, the school district and the Township have literally invested well over \$150 million into our school infrastructure over a 10-year period

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When all of this work is done, we will have a brand new Ross Street School #11 in Woodbridge and a brand new Avenel School #4/5 and practically brand new schools in Oak Tree Road School #29 in Iselin and Woodbridge Middle School. We will have significantly expanded Schools at Lafayette Estates #25 in Fords and Matthew Jago School #28 in Sewaren. Separate buildings at Lynn Crest School #22 in Colonia and Kennedy Park School #24 in Iselin are now combined to make it easier and safer for students to travel between classes without exiting their buildings into the often nasty elements.

All schools will have enhanced security, improved technology and various projects for air conditioning, electricity, classroom capacity and enhanced athletic facilities both inside and outside of the buildings.

The Township covers the cost of all of this construction and improvements because of our successful economic development efforts which have produced two power plants, dozens of warehouses and several transit village housing projects which pay Payments in Lieu of Taxes to our budget. The Board finances the work and we cover the annual debt service by allocating just 25% of the funding we receive from these PILOTs so that everyday taxpayers do not have to foot the bill for this work.

Many people do not understand how PILOTs work and we consistently explain them at meetings and at events and we even have a detailed description of them on our web site. Many deliberately cast dispersions on the concept in an attempt to provide misinformation and false facts to the general public. Every new business and residential home in Woodbridge pays property taxes – period. Nobody is exempt other than non-profit entities. However, some projects cannot be financially feasible to the redevelopers so we offer tax discounts to those entities to help them cover extraordinary costs such as environmental cleanup. Simply put, without a tax break, our brownfield sites would never be cleaned up and we would not attract new jobs for our residents without the financial incentive of PILOTs.

To continue to set the record straight, the housing complex at the former Stern Senior Towers site paid no taxes in the past but now will pay \$23 million over 30 years. The land at Hess on Main Street with only solar panels paid minimal taxes and now will generate \$48 million over the same period. The strip mall across from Town Hall with several vacant storefronts paid less than two hundred thousand a year and now will pay \$35 million over 30 years and the Avenue and Green project where Quick Chek and Riffy's were will pay just short of that. The 1.2 million square foot warehouse at the former site of the Woodbridge Developmental Center will pay over \$2 million per year in our largest PILOT to date. When added to the \$44 million in profit the Township made selling land for \$51 million that we paid \$7 million for, this project alone will fund the entire 2020 school referendum which was highlighted by this brand new school 4/5 in Avenel.

Unlike regular taxation, there is no limit to the amount of PILOT revenue a town can anticipate. At a time when court fines and hotel taxes and fees from other sources are still depressed because of COVID, our PILOTs provide a constant and steadily increasing source of revenue which helps us maintain a surplus balance of over \$20 million every year and which help us keep the burden on our homeowners as low as possible. A project that pays regular taxation adds to our tax base but does not provide for additional funding for the town, school district, County or fire district to spend because appropriation increases are limited by State law. Anybody who says that PILOTs hurt the schools or fire districts in any way are simply not being truthful. Despite claims to the contrary, transit villages produce minimum numbers of school children as our Station Village project in Avenel proved with only one new student per classroom throughout

our entire school system. Still, Ross Street and Woodbridge Middle School were built with capacity for over 100 students each should the demand materialize.

Naturally there will be cars travelling our roads from these projects, but any impact must account for the traffic that was generated before the buildings were built. Nearly 200 cars per day came to our downtown to park at the Quick Chek site during rush hour and now that lot has apartments filled mostly with train commuters who will not travel during rush hours.

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Our cooperation with the school district is a joint effort that is simply unmatched anywhere in the State of New Jersey. Our relationship is as strong as ever between the Mayor and Superintendent, between the Township Council and elected Board of Education, and between each of our administrative senior staffs and among our rank-and-file employees and we will continue these strong relationships into the future.

We have mentioned the most public and obvious of our Township Departments and Divisions, but many are equally important though they toil out of the limelight.

People don't interact with the Municipal Court unless they have a ticket and don't speak with the Municipal Clerk's office unless they need a license or permit and don't talk to the Mayor's office staff unless they have a question or concern. They don't see a person when they mail tax and sewer payments in and they watch TV-35 but don't see the crew behind the videos. The phones and web sites are used constantly but nobody sees our Information Technology Division and we have employees in Finance, Purchasing and Personnel that never appear publicly. People read our newsletters and press releases and get valuable information from our web site and social media pages but never meet the people who provide the content in our Communications office. And, by the way, our Township web page is getting a new look for 2022 so stay tuned for the launch later this spring.

All of these employees and many others work incredibly hard for the residents and businesses of Woodbridge and when we say we get 10 compliments for every complaint we are simply not exaggerating.

When towns around us and even the State were closing offices we kept everything open and rotated employees and followed all proper health guidelines like social distancing and mask wearing and continued to serve our residents without a complaint from our rank and file workers.

We cannot be the Best Town Around unless we have the Best Employees Around and we certainly do. We did not mention dozens of people by name like usual but you all know who you are and how much we appreciate you. Thank you to each and every one of you.

As we head into 2022, we will continue our focus on economic development which leads to new jobs for our residents and revenues for our budgets. Main Street in Woodbridge is poised for a fantastic year as new luxury apartment complexes start to open up along with the retail stores and restaurants on street level.

We always said that these housing projects would bring more activity and none were even open yet when Mike Strickland of Port Reading signed a lease on the former bank building on Main Street to bring Strickland's Steak House to the heart of town. He owns the West Shore Inn - which was voted Best Steakhouse on Staten Island - and his plans for our downtown are amazing.

Siwa Thai Restaurant also opened along with the Holy Cow ice cream store. Sharon McAuliffe started renovations on her building on Main Street to bring back the iconic Knot Just Bagels. Shinko Japanese Steakhouse is about to open next to Vito Mazza and the owner of the corner building on Route 35 is about to start a full facelift of that building.

The most famous project though, will be the Eric LeGrand Coffee House which is a couple of months from opening at Avenue and Green where Quick Check was. Work has started and the plans are beautiful but you don't have to wait because you can get LeGrand coffee on line.

These Avenue and Green apartments are renting very quickly and will be filled up soon. We have said over and over that the luxury apartments would speed up the enhancement of our downtown on Main Street and it is happening right before our eyes.

Our Woodbridge train station is the focal point of this development and people want to live in Woodbridge because of that accessibility to Jersey City and New York City plus the Jersey shore.

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People also want to work and shop and dine in Woodbridge and the train gets them there. Just ask Dillon Music whose international customers come by plane to Newark Airport and then train to Woodbridge with a two-block walk to his shop.

Another very large multi-million dollar corporation is about to announce the opening of an office on Main Street which is really amazing since the business started in a Township incubator program ten years ago.

The State of New Jersey committed \$9 million toward the intersection improvements at Route 9 and Main Street and for the new traffic light at the intersection of Main Street and the Wegman's shopping complex. The County of Middlesex, which owns Main Street, will be our partner in the project.

The Avenel train station has jump started similar development there. The Station Village complex on Avenel Street and our very own Curtains Restaurant and Avenel Performing Arts Center have spurred new and restaurants like Jersey Pizza Boys, Feed Ya Soul, Barros BBQ and renovated businesses like Rocco's and Sorrento's pizzerias.

Route One in Avenel has seen remarkable progress with the Orthopaedic offices of Dr. Kenneth Swan plus White Oak Dental & Orthodontics with more to come. The former Bud's Hut site will now house Bubbakoo's Burritos and Smoothie King in buildings that were built on spec knowing it was only a matter of time before tenants were signed. A national hotel chain called Cambria is replacing the City Motel and the decrepit bar in front of it as one by one the unsightly structures are eliminated making Route One vibrant again.

We are working hard to replace a junkyard off S. Inman Avenue with another warehouse which will eliminate another eyesore from our landscape.

We are adding downtown shopper and diner parking with the purchase of one lot and agreement to purchase another on New Brunswick Avenue in downtown Fords.

We have an agreement with the First Presbyterian Church of Iselin to expand their parking lot with more spaces for downtown Oak Tree Road and Green Street.

Middlesex County is focusing on both of those County roads along with Inman Avenue in Colonia for more improvements and we are working on re-opening the Henry Inman Library branch in Colonia which was severely damaged during IDA.

This year we expect to push hard for our Woodbridge Waterfront project in Keasbey where dozens of acres of land were cleaned-up though it is likely that the project will take us into 2023. It will include restored wetlands with fishing, boating and hiking opportunities with a public natural habitat featuring hundreds of species of wildlife. Federal Business Centers has been a terrific partner with us on this project.

We are cleaning up two sites on Port Reading Avenue to allow for more parking which will take cars off residential streets. We are also working to provide additional affordable senior housing in downtown Fords and elsewhere.

All Township housing projects allocate 15% of their apartments to affordable housing tenants which in many cases are our children entering the work force after graduating high school or college until they are settled in their employment.

We are still hoping to follow up on the very successful Our House program at the Cypress Recreation Center in Port Reading with another at the site of the Mount Carmel Church community building on Route 35. That program has been simply amazing as two dozen special needs adults have a daily place to go to learn life skills, enjoy recreational opportunities and train for jobs that they are transported to. Our waiting list for new placements proves the need for an additional facility.

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Speaking of Cypress, another property we received for free in a donation from the Hess Corporation, we are planning the second phase of that project on the other side of Port Reading Avenue which will have a new soccer field, two new street hockey courts, a spray park and other amenities. This project as a whole will allow nearby freight trains to proceed straight into rail yards instead of idling behind homes in Port Reading and Sewaren.

Cypress One has been incredibly successful with a level playing turf field for our special needs students to play softball, baseball and soccer with a track, volleyball courts and pickle ball courts. The craze of pickle ball is sweeping the area and we are constantly asked to build more courts. We have a location in mind and are working out details for a 10 court complex in town which we hope to announce soon.

We are working on a curb and sidewalk program whereby the Township will procure contractors through a competitive bidding process to save homeowners the trouble of doing so and to get better pricing than can be obtained individually. Because contractors are doing multiple projects there would be a group performance bond so homeowners would not have to provide one individually saving additional funds.

We are also working on providing a continuum of care facility in Woodbridge in a site that will be announced soon. This will include independent living, assisted living and a small memory care component. The complex will include many amenities for health care, recreation and dining and represents the future of senior living where our residents can age in place in a spectacular environment.

We recognized very early during the pandemic that food shortages would be a critical issue for our residents. We Feed Woodbridge supported our 11 food pantries which went from serving 600 families to 1,400 during Covid.

With the help of so many people the We Feed Woodbridge program collected \$333,000 in cash donations and nearly 50,000 pounds of food since the pandemic started. Our Have a Heart Food Drive – which just got underway this year - added nearly \$100,000 and 32,000 pounds of food last year. People in Woodbridge Township are so incredibly generous when it comes to helping others.

In another joint effort with our Board of Education, we are designing improvements to our Public Works building to accommodate their mechanic operation since their lease is only month-to-month in their facility and we can once again save taxpayer dollars by sharing our operations.

This building will also have solar panels to power the facility and excess power will stay in stored batteries to be used on-site in the future in a unique approval from the State Board of Public Utilities. Soon the building will house three state-of-the-art fully electric sanitation vehicles through additional grant funding.

We are also collaborating on major security improvements to both school and municipal buildings in another cost-saving joint venture that will make all facilities safer.

In a truly unique service we are planning on using a grant from a redeveloper to purchase a Mobile Health Unit which will be a 24-foot vehicle stocked with all the appropriate supplies and equipment to travel around town and bring health care access to those who otherwise would have none.

We expect to visit schools, senior centers, senior housing projects and attend parades, concerts, and other Township events to really help our underprivileged community get access to proper health care. This is another of the services we provide that truly make Woodbridge Township stand out among our peers.

We are already lining up acts for our terrific Summer Concert Series and this year we plan to add six jazz shows to our mix of rock-and-roll and country groups from Woodbridge and all over the area.

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Our concert field on Board of Education property behind Woodbridge High School and our Health Center will be named after Joseph R. Lewis, the first Woodbridge police officer in our history to lose his life in the line of duty way back in 1933. Our Woodbridge History Museum has bids out for the interior fit-out and we hope to have that open before the year is out.

So much of our success as a Township is tied to the State of New Jersey and our Legislative delegation of Senator Joe Vitale, Assemblyman and Speaker Craig Coughlin and Assemblywoman Yvonne Lopez have been outstanding in advocating for us. They not only provide us with millions of dollars in annual grant funding for our many projects but they work with us to make sure State legislation has a positive impact on our operations.

Similarly, the Commissioners on our Middlesex County Board are always providing financial assistance to us including last year for our Main Street and Route 9 project and our marina. The County is aggressively marketing itself as a destination location and that can only serve to benefit Woodbridge Township.

We congratulate the leadership of Commissioner Director Ron Rios and the stewardship of our very own Charlie Kenny who always keeps his eye out for things which help his hometown of Woodbridge.

The members of our Township Council have been partners with our administration for many years and their overwhelming re-election victories every two years prove that our residents appreciate the job they are doing. Each advocates for their own Ward or for causes and issues that they are personally passionate about and they work together as a team and help each other out.

Nowhere was this more evident than last year when everyone chipped in to help Councilwoman Nancy Drumm. Although Nancy kept up with emails and calls, the help of her Council colleagues in advancing her agenda was greatly appreciated by her.

Congratulations to Second Ward Councilman Howie Bauer on your ascension to the Council President seat and to fellow Ward Councilpersons Cory Spillar in the Third, Viru Patel in the Fourth and Debbie Meehan in the Fifth on your successful re-elections.

Thank you to Councilman-at-Large Brian Small for your successful year as Council President last year and to your running mates Greg Ficarra, our new Council Vice President, along with Kyle Anderson and Lizbeth DeJesus. Let's do it again.

I mentioned Sharon McAuliffe earlier as the owner of Knot Just Bagels but I now am very pleased to re-introduce her as First Ward Councilwoman Sharon McAuliffe and welcome her to our government team. Sharon needs no introduction to most of you as a long-time resident, businesswoman, Chamber of Commerce member and best friend to our good friend Nancy Drumm.

Sharon has hit the ground running and has visited all of our Directors to learn more about our operations. She has always been a generous donor to our youth and senior and church groups and now she is their advocate as the Councilwoman for Woodbridge proper and Sewaren. We welcome Sharon to our team.

So you have heard many reasons for the success of Woodbridge Township including our employees and our elected officials and the great programs and services they help provide. Perhaps the greatest reason, however, is each of you watching or listening to this address.

You know who you are and you know what you do.

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You are on our Planning, Zoning and Library Boards or our Housing Authority. You are on Committees for the Environment or Wellness or History or the Human Rights Commission. You ride in ambulances or fire trucks or you serve on the Mayor's Advisory Committee.

You are on PTOs or you are officers in the Elks, Knights, VFW, American Legion or other community groups. You work soup kitchens and help out at food pantries. You stay home for 12 hours in a row in case a domestic violence victim needs help.

You are Boy Scout or Girl Scout leaders. You bring boxes and cans of food to our food drives and you donate backpacks for students when school starts and coats when winter starts. You manage, coach or train our student athletes, and you help organize our art exhibits or poetry readings. You help out at street fairs and you walk proudly with your organizations in our parades. You volunteer at our libraries and animal shelter and you paint homes and clean out garages for Tooling Around the Township.

You look forward to Youth Month in April and Senior Month in May and our runs, walks and bike tours all during the year. You read the E-News and visit our web site and you write to us when we do good and make suggestions when we don't. You belong to one of our over 50 houses of worship which is a very important part of your life. You do all this because, like all of us, you love Woodbridge Township. You want our town to succeed because that helps you succeed. You care about our community because you care about your families and want the best for all of them and we do also.

Based on everything you have just heard we are proud to say that the State of Woodbridge Township is outstanding and getting even better because of our employees, our businesses and our residents who combine to make Woodbridge **THE BEST TOWN AROUND.**

Thank you.



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