

MAYOR'S ADDRESS
January 1, 2022

Dear Fellow Residents,

As I do each New Year's Day, I would like to review some of the events and accomplishments that took place in our town during the past year and to announce some of the plans we have for 2022. First, I'd like to welcome Anthony Picarelli and newcomer Patrick Fierro to the Council and congratulate them on their recent election victory. I know that both Anthony and Patrick will work hard throughout the year for our residents. They will be involved in many of our town's operations and I am sure I can count on them to serve Totowa well into the future. At this time, I do want to acknowledge and thank Lisa Palazzo for her three years of service as a Councilwoman and her contributions to our residents.

I would also like to congratulate Rich Schopperth as he begins his third term as Fire Chief. His dedication to our volunteer firefighters should be commended. The Council and I look forward to working with our Chief for the next two years.

Well, it seems like 2021 was just as odd as 2020 was for all of us with the ongoing pandemic. The year started with all of us looking for vaccines. By Spring, most of us were able to get our shots if we so chose to. Our artificial turf was installed and completed in the Spring and was ready for use in April. Unfortunately, we had to cancel Totowa Day and the Memorial Day parade in 2021. However, on the positive side, in

June, we were able to open the municipal building to the public, we had a successful summer camp for our youth, we opened our town pool to a record number of members, and held 11 summer concerts on our lawn in front of the municipal building that were well attended.

Then, at the end of August, our town was hit by Hurricane Ida. The amount of rainfall we received in a short time overwhelmed our sewer system as was seen across New Jersey. Streets looked like rivers and areas of our town that hadn't flooded before suddenly did. Our firefighters worked tirelessly throughout that evening and night, rescuing over 20 people in flooded vehicles while in knee deep water and one individual by boat in the Passaic River. Our First Aid Squad was also on call that night administering to several people. I would like to pause here to thank our volunteers in both the Fire Department and First Aid Squad not only for their efforts during the hurricane but for their efforts throughout the year to our community. Our police department should also be recognized as they were moving nonstop that evening with all of the road closures, abandoned vehicles, and other emergencies they had to deal with. And our DPW staff had to keep the pumps running that night and assisted in the days and weeks after with the clean-up. We saw the best of our community come out with neighbors helping neighbors and our own Councilwoman Andriani and Senator Corrado distributing clean up kits from the Red Cross to affected residents. The library offered food and essential nonfood items to needy residents through the generous donations of Totowa residents. Let's hope we don't have to face one of those storms again any time soon.

During the Fall, we were able to hold our 5K Turkey Trot once again and the number of participants swelled from the prior two years. The fire truck parade with the Totowa and West Paterson Fire departments was also held again and the number of trucks in the parade doubled from two years ago. The toys collected by our volunteer firefighters surpassed the prior year totals and were donated to children in local hospitals.

And speaking of parades, in December, we were fortunate to have a convoy of trucks from Wreaths Across America rumble through our town on Union Boulevard to crowds of supporters who lined the street. We also held our annual tree lighting ceremony in person with the school choir and musicians.

With respect to our infrastructure, PSEG completed the replacement of older gas lines in our town in 2021. This was done to try to avoid some of the gas problems that occurred during Hurricane Irene and Superstorm Sandy. The roads in our town where PSEG had been digging and have been repaved this year by them or by our town with assistance from grants from the Department of Transportation include the entire length of Stewart Terrace, Meadow Drive, Knollwood Drive, Pamela Drive, Carr Place, Roseda Drive, Glen Terrace, Rutherford Court, Artillery Park Road, Knox Terrace, Colonial Court and portions of Columbus Ave. and Bogert Street. With a grant from the Department of Transportation, we repaved Dey Hill Trail, Craig Court, and Commerce Way. And with our own funds, we repaved Crescent Ave., Margaret St. and Bullens Lane. This long list will improve many of our roads by making them smooth again. In 2021, we have

received a grant from the DOT for Hamilton Trail, Stirling Terrace and Fellner Place. We will look to repave all roads in Arlington Estates in addition to those mentioned. We completed the replacement of all of the park equipment at the Bogert Street park and look to do the same for the park by Riverview firehouse with a grant we are applying for.

We applied for another grant from Passaic County to continue relining our sanitary sewers. Our most recent award is for a portion of Lincoln Avenue. These efforts will help alleviate some of the infiltration that enters our sanitary sewer system. We have begun on the project to replace the pumps and infrastructure at the William Place pump house. We are in the engineering planning stage for an upgrade to the Riverview Drive pump station. These are both expensive projects but the upgrades are necessary as the existing systems are quite outdated. We will continue looking at ways to improve our water and sewer system while alleviating flooding to our residents.

Real estate development continued in Totowa in 2021. While we are pleased that developers have confidence in our borough, we also want the development to be done smartly and we must consider the impact on our infrastructure. On the former North Jersey Development Center site on Minnisink Road, the construction of the medical office building is almost complete and should open in phases this year. As part of the agreement with the developer, Minnisink Road and Vreeland Ave. will be widened at the intersection of those roads and traffic lights installed as part of the obligation of the developer.

Digital Realty has begun construction of data centers on Union Boulevard just south of Route 46. The additional ratables from the projects mentioned and other construction taking place should provide ratables and ease the tax burden on our residents.

Our community continues to be strengthened by the support of our professional staff, all of our employees, and, of course, volunteers. In addition to the fire fighters and first aid squad members I previously mentioned, there are also volunteers at the PAL and on our municipal boards who donate their time selflessly in the best interest of our community and all of these efforts are truly appreciated by the Council and me. In particular I would like to acknowledge the efforts of our Board of Recreation and their Director this past year. While I only mentioned a few of the events that the Board sponsored in 2021, there were others as well for the benefit of our children and adults.

Our Totowa Public Library continues to flourish with new and expanded programs offered as well as assistance to our senior citizens and residents in need. Under the direction of the Board and its director, the library has become more than a library- it is a community center. And special recognition goes out to Janet Saunders, who just retired from the Library Board after serving 40 years, with over 30 of them as President. Her time in leading the Board is much appreciated.

On the property tax front, in 2021, our total tax rate decreased by 1.6%. This was attributable to several factors including favorable tax treatment from Passaic County and Passaic Valley High School and an increase in ratables in our town. As you have heard

me say many times, we are determined to be fiscally prudent. In Totowa we have decided to make tough choices and not place a financial burden on future budgets and future generations. The turf field that was installed and the upgrades to the William Place pump station I spoke about are being funded without incurring any debt. We have now achieved our tenth consecutive year without any long-term debt in our municipality, a claim only a handful of municipalities across New Jersey can make. Our core belief is that we should pay currently to meet our obligations where we can and not borrow if possible. By freeing ourselves of debt, we can utilize those funds for much needed improvements to our infrastructure and replacing outdated equipment. In 2021, Totowa continues the distinction of having the lowest tax rate of the 16 municipalities in Passaic County. The Council and I will once again work hard to maintain the lowest tax rate for our residents.

The Council and I will remain active in our community's affairs in 2022. While we have seen a surge in positive cases in our community over the past few weeks, the projections indicate that we should begin seeing a drop in positive cases by mid to end of January. Our future is bright and I am confident that we will continue our improvements to our town as well as our stability here in Totowa. On behalf of our Council members, I would like to wish everyone a healthy and peaceful New Year.

Thank you.