

MAYOR'S ADDRESS  
January 1, 2024

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 2024. First, I'd like to welcome back Bill Bucher and Sanders Reynoso to the Council and congratulate them on their recent election victory. Bill was first elected as a Councilman in 2014. He has chaired several committees over the years and presently is the chair of the Public Works committee. Sanders was appointed in April and chairs our Committee on Liaison and Inspection. You heard from each of them earlier. I know that both Bill and Sanders will work hard throughout the year for our residents. They will be involved in many of our town's operations. I rely on their counsel and advice, along with the entire Council and Joe and Kristin, in making decisions for Totowa. I know you can count on them to serve you well. At this time, I do want to acknowledge and thank Debbie Andriani for her many years of selfless service as a Councilwoman and her contributions to our residents, especially in the area of recreation.

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

In 2023, Totowa celebrated its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a Borough, having been founded on March 15, 1898. In June, our Totowa Day townwide celebration drew a record number of residents for our anniversary who were treated with music, many varieties of food, amusements including a zip line, wrestling matches, and a hot dog eating contest; all topped off at the end of the night with a spectacular drone light show. I received many compliments that day from residents. We were fortunate as the Canadian wildfires threatened North Jersey a few days before Totowa Day but luckily the skies cleared in time.

For our anniversary, we expanded the number of summer concerts on our front lawn of the municipal building and brought in a few new performers. The concerts are well received. During the summer months, we held camp for our youth once again and our town pool again enjoyed a record number of members.

In November, we held our annual 5K Turkey Trot with a record number of participants- over 900 in all. The fire truck parade with the Totowa, West Paterson, and Little Falls Fire departments was also held again and the number of trucks in the parade reached over 260, an increase of 50 from 2022. The toys collected by our volunteer firefighters surpassed the prior year totals and were donated to children at St. Joseph's Hospital. We also held our annual tree lighting ceremony with the school choir and musicians. And our trolley carrying residents singing carols could be heard in the streets.

With respect to our infrastructure, we received a grant from the NJ Department of Transportation in 2022 for portions of Winifred Drive, Liberty Ridge Trail, and Centennial Court. For our industrial park, we received a grant for a portion of Maltese Drive, which was in dire need of repair. These roads were all paved this past October. In 2023, we received a grant from the DOT to pave the entire length of Battle Ridge Trail and the unpaved portion of Columbus Avenue. With our own funding, we will also pave Vita Road and Willow Court. Totowa applied for and received a grant from the State of New Jersey to replace all of the trash cans and planters along Union Boulevard. The new planters and receptacles should be installed in 2024. In 2023, we also completed two more parking lots near Memorial School to provide safer parking for parents picking up or dropping off their children.

As for our parks, in 2022, we received a grant from the Passaic County Open Space Fund for the renovation of the Riverview park and that equipment was received and installed in 2023. We received a grant from the Open Space Fund in 2023 for the park at the Totowa pool and are finalizing the purchase of the equipment so that it will be installed in 2024.

We applied for another grant from Passaic County to continue relining our sanitary sewers. Our most recent award is for the entire length of Willard Avenue, which we will begin in 2024. In 2023 we completed the relining of the sewer lines on Lincoln Ave. from Union Boulevard to Totowa Road. These efforts will help alleviate some of the infiltration that enters our sanitary sewer system. We are nearly complete with the

project to replace the pumps and infrastructure at the William Place pump house. This project has taken many years due to supply chain issues causing significant delays in equipment delivery. We are ready to go to bid on the upgrades to the Riverview Drive pump station. We have applied for a grant to help defray some of the costs of this project. These are both expensive undertakings 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. During the most recent soaking rainstorm, the check valves we installed near Lincoln Ave. at the Passaic River several years ago worked as designed and the flooding in that part of town was not as significant as compared to other major water events.

Real estate development continued in Totowa in 2023. We are pleased that developers have confidence in our borough and consider it a desirable location to build. Digital Realty has begun construction of data centers on Union Boulevard just south of Route 46. The additional ratables from this type of project mentioned and other construction taking place should provide ratables and ease the tax burden on our residents.

Totowa continues to be strengthened by the support of our professional staff, our police department, our Department of Public Works, and all of our dedicated employees. We are fortunate and thankful for our volunteers in our town. Our fire fighters and first aid squad members are vital to our community as they give up their time to serve selflessly for you, our residents, in your time of need. There are also volunteers at the PAL and on

our municipal boards who donate their time in the best interest of our community and all of these efforts are truly appreciated by the Council and me.

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. A program that the Council started in 2022- honoring our Totowa veterans along our main streets, is being administered by the Library staff. Its recent renovation has given our Library a fresh look. Under the direction of the Library Board of Trustees and its director, Anne Krauthem, the library has become more than a library- it is a community center.

On the property tax front, in 2023, our total tax rate increased by 6.4%. This was attributable to several factors, including significant unfavorable tax increases from Passaic Valley High School and the County of Passaic. As you have heard me say countless times, we are determined to be fiscally prudent. Just like you, we were not happy with the increases in 2023 and will work to lessen the impact in 2024. In Totowa we have made tough financial decisions before and will continue to make tough choices in order not to place a financial burden on future budgets and future generations. We have now achieved our twelfth 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 2023, 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.

Totowa turned 125 years old and has a rich history of volunteerism, low taxes, and caring neighbors who make a town feel like a community. Looking forward as we begin the next 125 years, our future is a bright one 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.