

**Good Afternoon and Happy New Year,**

**Before we proceed forward to 2023, I would like to showcase some 2022 borough highlights. First and foremost, I would like to thank our Borough Administrator, Rob Ferragina, Borough Clerk Michelle Clark, Building and HR Department Elizabeth Merkel, DPW Director Jim Phillips and his team, Marty Hawley and the Water Department, Harbor Master Lou Fligor and his team, and Chief of Police Scott Reinhart and the police officers that are always keeping our small town safe. These individuals, and so many others, make the day-to-day magic happen for this wonderful and historic small town.**

**In 2022, we**

- Accomplished closing out the PBA, MEA, and MSA collective bargaining agreements,**
- Secured a shared services agreement with the Borough of Highlands for Hackensack Meridian ambulance services during 2022 weekdays.**
- New LED bulbs were installed in the Victorian Lights in front of Borough Hall and Veterans Park.**
- The JCP&L center median lights on Memorial Parkway were repaired and turned back on, after several years in the dark.**
- The borough removed the remnants of the Center Avenue gazebo, planted new grass seed, and plans to install a new gazebo at that site in 2023.**
- The Holly Tree Lot gate was reconfigured after input from DPW, The Parking Committee, and Seastreak.**
- The Habitat for Humanity House at 21 Leonard finally closed and our new neighbors are now proud Atlantic Highlands residents.**
- With input and collaboration from various departments as well as the Technology Committee we have a new borough website.**

- With input and collaboration from the Technology Committee we invested in the purchase of an AM radio for emergency communications. This will be operational in 2023.
- DPW extended yard hours for leaves and brush drop-off to now include November and December weekends, as requested by residents.
- Beautiful illuminated holiday snowflakes were purchased and adorn First Avenue.
- Beautiful holiday wreaths were purchased and hung at the MT-50 Stone Bridge and LED decorative lights were installed on the bridge pillars.
- All borough parking spaces in all borough lots as well as the harbor gazebo and harbor buildings received a fresh coat of paint.
- The borough's DPW garage received a fresh coat of paint as well as energy efficient LED lights, allowing for a brighter and safer work environment.
- The faded Bayshore Trail signs were replaced with new ones.
- The Borough invested in a new Sanitation truck.
- The borough also invested in a Travel Lift Hoist for the Harbor Marina and made other upgrades to the Harbor.
- We communicated and collaborated with the utility companies resulting in the removal of unused and non functioning utility polls that litter our business district. This will continue in 2023.
- We communicated and collaborated with county officials who made long awaited repairs to the MT-50 Stone Bridge and replaced the light under that bridge. They also replaced most of the wood planks on the Bay Avenue and Center Avenue bridges as well as restriped the center lines on First Avenue and Ocean Boulevard.
- We processed several federal appropriation funding request applications which has led to 2.1 million dollars being allocated to the harbor bulkhead repair moving forward. Thank you to Congressman Frank Pallone and his team.

- The borough's Green Team worked diligently to accrue additional points leading to the boroughs recertification of Bronze status for several years while inching closer to Silver status.
- The borough held its first Wellness Fair for Borough employees, funded through a HIF grant awarded to the borough.
- The Shade Tree Commission has replaced several dead trees within the borough with new vibrant trees.
- All of these updates, and many more, have been implemented within budget. These are only a snippet of the wonderful things creating a better community for Atlantic Highlands.

This year, 2023,

- The borough will have designated streets paved,
- The wall on Upper Prospect will be replaced in 2023 / 2024 and may possibly be funded through a FEMA grant, if awarded to the borough.
- We will be collaborating with the county to further improve, maintain, and repair county assets within the borough and also our relationship with JCP&L will continue to be strengthened.

- The county, moving forward, has also committed to

~Repairing the concrete wall on Ocean Boulevard near Highland Avenue.

~Reconstructing the Ocean Boulevard bridge and other upgrades.

\* Thank you to County Commissioner Director Tom Arnone and his team.

- We will continue our shared services with the Borough of Highlands thus using Hackensack Meridian for ambulatory calls in 2023 between 6am to 5pm while our Atlantic Highlands First Aid is continually improving exponentially under the leadership of Lance Hubeny.
- The borough engineer is working diligently on the CDBG funding to have the ADA Restroom Facility at the Center Avenue Park installed. He is also working on upgrades to various other parks in the borough for 2023 completion.

- The borough received an additional \$219,320 in NJDOT FY23 Municipal Aid for improvements to East Garfield and Grant Avenue.

But out of all the improvements to the town, the one I most value is having the residents living in a safe community where traditional values, respect for our fellow neighbors, and civility take center stage. That is how I remember this town and that is how I want this town to continue moving forward; Neighbors helping neighbors without worrying about political affiliation or socio-economic status. I would like to use an example to help with what I am speaking about: When I was a teen we didn't care what brand of jeans, shirts, or shoes we had on or what label was on those items. We now live in an economic climate where advertising and branding takes center stage. Years ago the youth of the United States were introduced to Jordache, Calvin Klein, Nike and many other labels that you can think of. Before this awakening, many of us young adults of the early Eighties felt equal. After the influx of branding and marketing you knew that some people had more and some had less. Once again this is occurring in our nation and our community except it includes political labels. Let us drop the importance of labels in Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey (including the rest of the nation). I encourage us all to open our hearts and minds and start to listen to all ideas and opinions. We do not need to always agree, however, an open heart and an open mind can achieve a lot. Take the slogans from some of our bumper stickers like "COEXIST", "BE KIND" and "KEEP ON TRUCKING" and let's put them to use!

I believe that we, the council and myself, can start right now. The way we conduct ourselves on the dais reflects on how the public will respond. The public will mirror our actions. If we display anger, irrationality, and mudslinging at each other we will have to accept the same from the public. We are elected officials and we all at the dais need to be an example to our fellow citizens.

I can only hope that this may be the start of something that has been lacking in parts of our nation. Let's have the Borough of Atlantic Highlands be the positive example. Where people can come together block by block. We may not see eye to eye on different points of view but we can open a dialogue and know that we are all still residents of Atlantic Highlands, a beautiful small, quaint town that is the Jewel of the Jersey Shore.

