

MAYOR THOMAS LANKEY— 2017 STATE OF THE TOWNSHIP

Good evening. Welcome to the 26th Annual State of Edison Township.

It is my pleasure as Mayor of Edison to continue our tradition of giving residents and business leaders an in-depth look at the status of Edison Township and look ahead at our community's future.

I want to thank the Edison Chamber of Commerce for organizing this event and to thank the many sponsors who made tonight possible.

Allow me to thank the business owners and community leaders, municipal employees and residents here tonight, and the viewers watching at home on TV. Your continuing interest, input and participation are important to Edison Township's growth and success.

I have continually said that nothing gets accomplished without a team, working together and striving to make the situation, which in this case is Edison Township, the best that is possible.

Let me take a moment to acknowledge some key people in the audience.

Congressman Frank Pallone

Assemblyman Robert Karabinchak

Freeholder Charles Tomaro

School Board Members

Edison Township Council

Council President Michael Lombardi

Council Vice President Alvaro Gomez

Council Member Joseph Coyle

Council Member Robert Diehl

Council Member Ajay Patil

Council Member Sapana Shah

Council Member Leonard Sendelsky

My Administration

Business Administrator Maureen Ruane

Director of Law William Northgrave

Administrator of Policy & Strategic Initiatives Melissa Perilstein

Mary Leight-McAvoy

Dana Ligato-Grego
Lori Williams & Deborah Donald

Edison Management Team

Director of Engineering Mark Kataryniak

Director of Health Jay Elliot

Assistant Public Works Director Anthony Russomanno

Police Chief Tom Bryan

Fire Chief Brian Latham

OEM Coordinator, Capt. Andy Toth

Library Director Judith Mansbach

Township Clerk Cheryl Russomanno

Purchasing Agent Laura Popick

Human Resource Manager June Brescher

Tonight — I am proud to declare that the State of Edison Township is safe, strong and a vibrant community.

This is the result of strategic planning, teamwork and a focus on customer service; working together as a team, with dedicated professionals to achieve the common goal of improving our community.

Edison Township is committed to:

- Ensuring public safety
- Maintaining our roadways and infrastructure
- Collecting trash and recyclables
- Offering recreational opportunities to our community.
- Prioritizing and providing supportive services and activities for our seniors

Edison Township – my Administration and our Township Council – pride ourselves on delivering high-quality services to our residents. We recognize and work hard to provide these services. Our greatest challenge is to provide these services in an efficient, cost effective and positive manner.

We have had many successes – large and small.

This team approach has translated into Edison Township being an affordable choice for young families and new homeowners; and a desirable destination for business start-ups and companies seeking to expand. Edison is in the bottom third of towns in Middlesex County when it comes to effective municipal tax rate.

We are experiencing a renaissance: More local jobs are coming to town and our local economy is stronger now than it was just a year ago.

One indicator can be found on the pages of CNN's Money Magazine: In 2016, Edison Township ranked Number 19 on its list of Best Places to Live in America. Money Magazine determines its cities by utilizing the following criteria:

- an affordable tax rate
- broad scope of our high-quality services
- low unemployment rate and
- excellent public schools system.

Now I would like to turn your attention to Edison Township's services and accomplishments.

EDISON TOWN HALL

My Administration has taken a series of prudent steps in Edison Town Hall since 2014 to increase financial efficiencies in each municipal department. Municipal finances are the foundation for everything we do.

We continue to make careful changes designed to maximize Edison's revenue and to further improve cash-flow management across the board.

Technology upgrades and new financial software has improved Town Hall's ability to track and manage our money; efficiently collect property taxes, sewer utility taxes, fees and penalties; and to make revenue projections with greater accuracy.

Based on research and advice from Ken DeRoberts and the Government Strategy Group, last year Edison transitioned its banking services to Provident Bank – a change that has generated \$700,000 in budget savings and earned additional interest income.

The result of our efforts: Edison Township is on a sound financial path for a stable future. On January 31st, Moody's issued Edison Township an excellent credit rating of MIG1 and Aa2, which are the highest and third highest ratings in each category, citing our stable tax base and strong financial position.

Let me turn your attention to Edison Township's broad range of services and initiatives.

GREATER ACCESSIBILITY

To make Edison Town Hall more accessible than ever to our residents, visitors and our business community, we recently launched a new, easy-to-navigate Municipal Website. The website was redesigned to ensure multiple language translation, and to be more easily navigated by our residents.

It enables users' to access applications and forms for municipal services; to notify the Township about neighborhood concerns; and to pay their property taxes and sewer bills online.

Our Municipal Website is also "mobile friendly" thanks to a new Edison "phone app" that is compatible with iPhones, Apple and Android Smart Phones.

For people who actually visit Town Hall – in person, rather than a "virtual visit" online – we have tried to make the Edison Municipal Complex more welcoming with a beautiful mural donated by the Edison Arts Society under the leadership of Gloria Dittman, as well as our art gallery located on the third floor which featuring new artists every few months.

We have and will continue our collaboration with the Edison's Arts Society to enhance the cultural experience of our residents.

Today, Edison Township employs a more qualified and more diverse workforce that better reflects our community's ethnic and cultural populations. We embrace diversity.

We continue to partner with the N.J. Institute for Disabilities Programs to provide more employment opportunities for people with disabilities through our "Snack Shack" café in the Municipal Complex lobby which is in its third consecutive year of operation.

We have also established a partnership with our school district to provide training opportunities to our special needs students.

DIVISION OF PUBLIC SAFETY

I have said it many times – and I will say it again tonight: Public safety is government's Number One priority. Our families and visitors must feel safe in their homes and secure in our neighborhoods and shopping areas.

EDISON POLICE DEPARTMENT

My Administration works closely with Police Chief Tom Bryan and the Police Command Staff to strengthen public safety, to leverage crime-fighting technology, and to raise the level of professionalism and accountability within our Police Department.

A few years ago, together with the Edison Township Council, we enacted rigorous hiring procedures for new recruits and we implemented a strict code of conduct for all Police Officers.

Since 2014 – Edison has hired 45 professional Police Officers – many of them academy-trained and many with previous law enforcement experience.

Our Police Department's compliment of uniformed officers is now at 185.

Meanwhile, Edison's overall crime rate saw a 10-percent decrease this year.

Greater emphasis is being placed on Community Policing through initiatives like our "Civilian" and "junior" Police Academies; "Coffee with a Cop;" and our Neighborhood and Business-Watch Programs. Our new Bicycle Patrol is giving Police Officers more opportunities for personal interaction with our residents.

In a few weeks, Edison will equip all uniformed Police Officers with Body-Worn Cameras and provide new, state-of-the-art digital recording equipment on the dashboards of each patrol vehicle.

These new technologies are a vital law enforcement tool. They enhance evidence-gathering and prosecutions, provide better oversight and training, and raise public confidence in the dedicated men and women who protect our community.

EDISON FIRE DEPARTMENT

Working closely with Fire Chief Brian Latham and his Command Staff, Edison has hired 16 career firefighters since 2014 and last year we added a fourth Deputy Fire Marshal, bringing our Fire Department's total compliment to 137.

Additional manpower in our Fire Prevention Bureau has enabled Fire Marshals to conduct 2,900 inspections and expand the fire prevention program. My Administration has invested nearly \$4.5 million in new and essential fire vehicles and firefighting apparatus over the past few years.

Most recently, Edison acquired six new trucks and will soon accept delivery of a new Heavy Rescue Truck.

EDISON HEALTH DEPARTMENT

When it comes to safeguarding our quality-of-life and ensuring a clean community, our health department is at the forefront of this effort. Our township council enacted an ordinance to require registration and inspection of vacant properties.

As a result, our health department now provides faster responses to quality-of-life complaints and is better prepared to conduct surveillance and inspections at vacant and poorly maintained properties.

EDISON RECREATION

Public participation continues to increase in our recreation department's host of annual special events. Two new events were added to the events calendar this year and hosted at the hallmark location in Edison, The Tower which I will mention in more detail in a bit. We continue with our traditions of the Fall Family Spectacular and Fourth of July Concert and fireworks to name just a few.

EDISON LIBRARY

Library Director Judy Mansbach launched an exciting initiative last year, called "Maker space," that allows small groups of patrons to undertake creative projects. These project run the gamut from high-tech ones to traditional ones like embroidery and sewing. Participants range in age from 6-years-old to senior citizens exploring new hobbies.

Our Library continues to invest in new technologies and to offer very popular computer classes taught with its mobile computer lab at all three branches. This year, the Library will be getting a new Bookmobile to replace its heavily-used 27-years-old model.

EDISON DIVISION OF PUBLIC WORKS

Anthony Russomanno and our Division of Public Works provide some of Edison Township most essential services.

Few things are more important – or more noticeable – to our residents and businesses than punctual sanitation and recycling pickups, regular road maintenance, street sweeping, and prompt snow removal.

Our hard-working Public Works employees do a tremendous job delivering a broad scope of services.

My Administration has invested \$5.8 million in new equipment and technology over the past three years.

Last year, we added 10 plow trucks and salt spreaders. Edison is now better prepared to respond to winter storms and other weather-related emergencies.

Along with our new Municipal Website – Edison also launched a downloadable “Recycling Coach App” for cell phones that puts the latest details about sanitation, recycling and special waste collections at people’s fingertips.

The “Recycling Coach App” sends out alerts if services must be interrupted for bad weather or other public emergencies.

Another technology which we have leveraged within public works is placing a GPS system in all township operated vehicles which allows us to track usage, mileage and other information to ensure vehicle and employee efficiencies.

A new initiative this year being undertaken by Public Works is to evaluate Edison’s parks for utilization and maintenance and how passive recreation can be incorporated into the network.

I am very proud of our newest park, The Metuchen-Edison Dog Park, which was a wonderful collaboration with Middlesex County and the Borough of Metuchen – a fine example of how neighboring towns can work together and share resources to provide new services to residents and their four legged friends.

The new Dog Park also represents a local environmental victory. Edison and Metuchen reclaimed a superfund site that is now safe for public enjoyment.

Edison is now examining ways to maximize our parkland and increase our Open Space inventory. We are taking a proactive approach, engaging the Land Conservancy of New Jersey to help assess our

parks and Open Space inventory to provide Edison with guidance for future land acquisitions.

EDISON ENGINEERING & OUR INFRASTRUCTURE

My Administration – and particularly Township Engineer Mark Kataryniak – place a premium on maintaining and improving Edison’s infrastructure.

Last year, our Roadway Resurfacing Initiative resulted in 64 neighborhood streets and well-traveled arteries being paved. Our Engineering Department is making the necessary preparations for Edison to repave another 58 streets starting this spring. More roads have been resurfaced than in any other era in recent history. We will continue to move forward on our commitment to repair or resurface all roads within the township.

Edison has refurbished 16,000 linear feet of sanitary sewer lines and rehabilitated three pump stations, necessary work that will reduce potential road flooding during major storms.

Infrastructure improvements are a critical investment in our community’s future. They are a crucial component to making Edison marketable to new home owners and businesses.

In fact, everything I have discussed tonight — strengthening Town Hall’s financial foundation; advancements to our Police and Fire Departments; and to our Public Works — are all important investments in the future of our community.

They create “selling points” designed to give Edison Township greater “curb appeal” for new commercial and corporate investors. Those investors – large and small – are taking more notice of the work we are good doing.

One way to measure new interest in our community is to look at the number of permits Edison Township issued last year. For example, our Construction Code Office led by John Soltesz issued:

- 5,436 permits representing 1.9 million square feet of new construction
- 573 new Certificates of Occupancy
- And 5,110 Certificates of Approval.

Our Engineering Office processed 212 new site improvement permits and 198 new tree permits, while our Zoning Office processed 536 new zoning permits.

Partnerships with Community

EDISON ARTS SOCIETY

As mentioned earlier, thanks to the generosity of the Edison Arts Society; the fundraising efforts of its President Gloria Dittman; and the talents of renowned local artist, Fernando Silva – visitors to the Edison Municipal Complex are now greeted at the Main Entrance by two distinctive, hand-crafted murals that honor Thomas Edison and the people and businesses who have contributed to Edison's growth and prosperity.

EDISON MEMORIAL TOWER

The historical gem of our community, The Edison Tower recently went through an extensive renovation and this past year we have partnered with the Tower Commission to host two new community events that we hope will begin traditions in our community. The Tower of Terror, a Halloween event and the first annual Christmas tree lighting were inaugural events this past year. We will continue to collaborate with Kathleen Carlucci and the Tower Commission to promote the hallmark symbol of our community, The Edison Tower.

HIDDEN HEROES

We have just recently declared Edison Township, a Hidden Heroes City. We are the second city in New Jersey to pledge our support to spouses, parents, family members and friends who are caring for wounded, ill, and injured service members. We are committed to helping identify local military caregivers and organize community resources to support them. We are currently working with Austin Courtney and our own local Hidden Heroes, Annemarie Salavatore-Pacciano and Staff Sergeant Gary Pacciano to make good on our pledge. We have committed to recognizing military caregivers at all of our township events honoring our military. Our Memorial Day Parade will kick off our recognition of some local hidden heroes! Mark your calendars for the Memorial Day parade on Sunday, May 28th at 2:00PM on Amboy Ave.

Township Initiatives

REDEVELOPEMENT

A visible sign of our economic growth and redevelopment is simply to take a drive through Edison. We have welcomed substantial new investments from FedEx Ground, Seagis Gateway, Topgolf, C&A Worldwide, Aldi Grocery, Superfresh, Wawa, Jersey Mikes and many others. Zinburger and Starbucks are soon to be the newest additions to our Route 1 Landscape along with CARMAX.

These investments have translated into nearly 3,000 new, full-and part-time jobs. Many more, if you consider the temporary construction jobs. These investments are helping to strengthen our local economy and increase our ratable base.

We have actively pursued redevelopment opportunities throughout our town. Amboy Avenue, Camp Kilmer and Raritan Center Parkway are only some of the redevelopment projects we have begun and anticipate that they will make wonderful additions to Edison's business community.

Partnering with Middlesex County on Tax Maps:

Recognizing how important our ratable base is for operations and services, I am pleased to announce that we will be partnering with the County of Middlesex ("the greatest county in the land") to provide tax mapping for the entire Township.

Through this partnership, the Township will save approximately \$600,000 in what would otherwise have been duplicate efforts. I want to recognize and applaud Freeholder Director Ron Rios, and our own freeholder, newly sworn Deputy Director, Charlie Tomaro and the entire freeholder board, along with business Administrator John Pulomena for their leadership in effecting this tremendous savings for the township.

It is expected that once the system is up and running there will be additional savings and efficiencies between Edison and the county using the system and being established through this partnership.

NEW COMMUNITY CENTER

I am pleased to announce that we have embarked on the planning phase of building a new community center. In fact we have just sent out an RFP to design this facility which is sorely needed. We have also been working with the Edison Sheltered workshop to find a new home within the Township for it to provide its services.

This new community center will reflect the current and future needs of the residents. You will be hearing more about this initiative in the near future.

CONCLUSION

For the many reasons outlined here tonight, I can say with confidence: The State of Edison Township is safer, stronger and a vibrant community; we are experiencing a renaissance within our township. Edison Town Hall is more accessible and responsive to its residents and the business community.

Edison Township's financial foundation is stable. We will still continue to seek innovative ways to conserve resources, find greater efficiencies, generate new revenue, and save tax dollars.

We will continue to invest in municipal services to ensure the highest standard of delivery to the residents.

Teamwork between my Administration, the Council, our municipal department heads, hard-working employees, community leaders and business owners, and residents is the catalyst to continuing moving Edison Township forward and sustaining it in the future.

When we began on January 1, 2014, we discussed formulating a strategic plan that would address our failing infrastructure, public safety, professionalism and township services. We have built the foundation and embarked on these commitments. For these things to work long term, they must be systematically planned and implemented.

I am extremely proud of the progress we have all made together as a team to move forward in this endeavor. It has been said, "You can't start a fire without a spark." We have provided that spark and the fire is burning.

We must build on that fire and not stop until Edison is the best place that it can be. A town that we can all be proud of and one that our children and grand children to choose to stay in to raise their families.

Let's take our dream of a model Edison and make it real. No retreat, no surrender!

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