

24th Annual State of the Township Address

Before I welcome everyone I would like to take a moment for us all to remember Janet Baio and the important role she played in this event for many years. Always accommodating and always with a smile. She is missed.

I want to welcome everyone to the 24th Annual State of Edison Township Address. I want to thank the Edison chamber of commerce for putting this event together and also thank the individual businesses and sponsors for their continued support of this event.

Last year we stressed that we were all a team, by we, I meant everyone that was in attendance as well as anyone that would watch or read the presentation. I want to reiterate that, we must work together to make our dream of the best Edison a reality.

I want to take a few minutes tonight to acknowledge some of the elected officials and dignitaries in attendance tonight.

I also want to introduce Edison Council members, Council President Bob Diehl, Council Vice President Sapana Shah, Councilman Alvaro Gomez, Rob Karabinchak, Michael Lombardi, Wayne Mascola, and Dr. Prasad.

We have some members of the board of education here tonight; I want to remind everyone that a very important school bond referendum will be held on March 10 2015. This is a very important issue. I encourage everyone to vote in this special election and to support this bond referendum — in order for us to re-build James Monroe School and return the students to Edison.

We also have some members of the Planning and Zoning Boards here tonight.

I would now like to introduce the staff of the mayor's office, administrators and legal advisors; Dana Ligato-Gregg, Lori Williams, Debra Donald and Mary Leight-Mcavoy, Business Administrator, Maureen Ruane Constituent Liaison Administrator Anthony Russomanno, Administrator of Policy and Strategic Planning Melissa Perilstein and Director of Law, Bill Northgrave.

Some of the department heads in attendance are; Library Director, Judith Mansbach, Purchasing Agent, Laura Popick, Township Clerk, Cheryl Russomanno, Human Resources Manager, June Brescher, Acting CFO and Comptroller Agnes Yang.

I would like to declare that the state of the township is moving forward day by day.

At this time last year — I described a town that was facing a depleted surplus, mounting tax appeals, an aging infrastructure, and a tarnished public image. Our strategy was to take a multi-year approach to finding and implementing solutions.

We started by soliciting public input and holding discussion groups. We sought input from the people who best know our neighborhoods: our Democratic and Republican Committee people

and we asked for suggestions from local Republican leaders — creating a better Edison is not a partisan matter.

It's a matter of pride in our community.

My administration carefully considered the ideas and suggestions that we heard — they were terrific resource.

We believe that the role of a municipal government is to provide the best services possible at a reasonable tax structure. We set out by zero basing our operations and building an efficient township that holds everyone accountable.

Last year, we began creating a sturdy financial foundation for Edison — that meant addressing Edison's fiscal stability. Due to a declining revenue base — we were put in the unenviable position of raising sewer fees and property taxes. Despite those increases, Edison is still near the median of Middlesex County towns in tax rate-per-market value.

I would like to acknowledge Director of Public Works, Jeff Roderman. Under his direction in 2014 we have;

- Resurfaced more of our 300 miles of roadway than in any other year.
- We opened up a recycling center at Minnie Veal in North Edison to join South Edison's Meadow Road location.
- Continue to roll out our single stream recycling containers for co-mingled recycling which makes the process much more efficient.
- With the help of funds from the county, completely renovated our skateboard park which will be re-dedicated on March 28th with a special appearance by internationally known skate board pro and Edison native Mike Valelly.

Throughout 2014 and continuing into 2015, our Engineering Department and Acting Director, Peter Cecko have been busy constructing new and renovating old sidewalks and curbs; replacing antiquated sewer systems; and improving handicap accessibility, drainage and pumping stations.

Police Chief Thomas Bryan and his department formed a neighborhood watch program to enhance public safety. We hired 15 PTC certified officers which was the largest amount in decades and 10 new police auxiliary officers. Our police department was instrumental in providing information that led to the capture and arrest of the group responsible for the home invasions throughout the county.

Fire Chief Brian Latham and his department had a busy year. We hired 4 firefighters to replace retirees and we have performed an analysis of our equipment needs and condition of our fire houses.

I assure you that public safety is a paramount concern of my administration and we will do everything possible to keep the departments staffed at the appropriate levels and to provide the tools that are necessary to perform their duties.

Jay Elliot and his Health Department had a busy year. The first internet café was installed at the Woodbridge Avenue Senior Center to allow the residents access to computers on a daily basis. We also opened up the “Snack Shack”, the first partnership of its kind in the state, between the township and the New Jersey Institute for Disabilities. It provides café type service inside town hall and provides jobs for members of the New Jersey Institute for Disabilities. This was done at no cost to the taxpayers due to donations from our township business owners.

John Soltesz and the code officials caught up on 90% of the backlogged permits from 2010-2013. They have maintained a record of timely inspections for the current year. This is a great help to businesses as well as a revenue generating service to the township. A true win-win situation!

In addition to the many programs and classes offered by Edison Township, Denise Halliwell and the Recreation Department brought back two favorite events enjoyed by the township; the Memorial Day parade and the Fourth of July fireworks celebration. I commend Dana Ligato of my staff for taking the lead in organizing, the Memorial Day parade which boasted more than 50 participants and was one of the best attended parades in recent years. We look forward to an even bigger one this year! Recreation brought back the popular 4th of July Fireworks Festival after many years to Lake Pappaiani, again, with generous donations from our community businesses. Lastly, although the weather did not fully cooperate, the Fall Festival has been returned to its former home on Amboy Avenue. Even the rain couldn't keep attendees away from this well attended event.

To address our declining tax base — we hired a professional planning firm in 2014 to analyze and identify areas throughout town that are ripe for "smart growth" development and re-development.

We believe that local government should be inclusive. That is why we reached out to our community through the media to find dedicated residents with fresh ideas willing to serve on our many advisory boards, committees and commissions. That door is still open — if anyone is interested please contact town hall.

Just like last year — we welcome everyone's ideas and suggestions to help Edison be a better place to live and work. We want to hear from you.

We will be enhancing the computerization and internal fiscal controls to increase accountability in town hall.

Edison will host the PGA and the Barclays event at Plainfield Country Club during the week of August 25th to August 30th.

Shortly, we will be hiring additional police officers from a non-PTC certified list developed from a testing and interview process. This process gives extra points to Edison residents and members of Edison's police auxiliary. We believe that we should provide hope to those that have volunteered their services to help the residents of Edison. We are committed to bring the police department back to the levels of staffing that the residents deserve.

We will soon be working together with Middlesex County and the Borough of Metuchen to construct Edison's first dog park on Whitman Avenue. We are also going to improve our services and facilities at our animal shelter. We have expanded our service area to other towns and we must keep up with the expansion.

We will be updating and enforcing our property maintenance ordinance. We must not allow absentee ownership to neglect the upkeep of these vacant properties. This has a negative impact on the quality of life of our residents.

We are going to continue with our goal of resurfacing the entire town. Phase 2 has us resurfacing 27 additional streets starting in the spring and completing our rollout of the single stream recycling.

The environment is a priority in our 2015 initiatives. We are moving forward on our landfill closure and hopefully we can finally get this closure accomplished. We will move forward on opening an environmental center in the Dismal Swamp and we have identified some contaminated sites that we will be moving forward to clean up and utilize.

I mentioned that we have a planner working on a township-wide holistic approach for economic development. We will analyze business zones and redevelopment areas to find the optimum solutions to Edison's development future. I am happy to announce tonight that I have been meeting with Hartz Mountain over the past ten months regarding the old Ford plant site, and they are ready to move forward in the next couple of months.

Our economy is a top priority for my administration. So, we are going to dust off the sign that has been sitting in the closet for some time, "Edison is open for business" rest assured- we will open our doors – but we will do it in a prudent and well reasoned way.

We have all accomplished a great deal in our first year. Our goals are ambitious for the coming year, but we must continue addressing the town's needs for the future. We must complete the foundation and provide (if you will), a preventative maintenance program moving forward. We must modernize our infrastructure, we must ensure our staffing levels provide the services our residents deserve, and above all, we must enhance our image and provide exceptional customer service. This all must be done while maintaining an affordable tax rate. We have begun this journey, we must continue to press forward, day by day until we achieve success and this we *will* do!

So let me repeat, the state of the township is moving forward day by day.

So please join me in our next step to bring Edison into the 21st century and leave no mistake in anyone's mind that Edison is primed to become the best place to live and work in the state. It truly will become our land of hope and dreams!

Thank you and please get home safely!