Good evening. Welcome to the 29th Annual State of Edison Township.

It is my honor to giving our residents and business leaders an overview of the status of Edison Township and my vision for our community’s future.

I want to thank the Edison Chamber of Commerce for organizing tonight’s 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 TV viewers at home. Your continued interest and collaboration are critical to Edison’s continued success.

I would like to acknowledge some special guests in our audience:

State Sen. Patrick Diegnan
Assemblyman Robert Karabinchak
Assemblywoman Nancy Pinkin
Freeholder Charles Tomaro
Edison Township Council
Council President Joyce Ship-Freeman
Council Vice President Sam Joshi
Council Member Richard Brescher
Council Member Joseph Coyle
Council Member Robert Diehl
Council Member Alvaro Gomez
Council Member Ajay Patil

Edison Board of Education Members

The Edison Administrative Team
Business Administrator Maureen Ruane
Director of Law William Northgrave
Administrator of Policy & Strategic Initiatives Melissa Perilstein
Special Assistant Mahesh Baghia
Mary Leight-McAvoy, Lori Williams and Courtney Dill

Edison’s Management Team
Director of Edison Water Utility Bob Smith
Finance Consultant Ken DeRoberts
Engineering Consultant Carl O’Brien & Andy Hipolit
Director of Health Jay Elliot
Acting Recreation Director Joyce Fircha
Police Chief Tom Bryan
Fire Chief Brian Latham
Deputy Fire Chief Andy Toth
Township Clerk Cheryl Russomanno
Acting Library Director Timur Davis
Construction Code Official John Soltesz
Tax Collector Lina Vallejo
Tax Assessor JoAnn Jimenez
Human Resource Manager June Brescher
Purchasing Agent Laura Vesce
Municipal Court Administrator Kelly Sommer
Animal Shelter Manager Rebecca Snyder

Since 2014, my Administration’s overlying goal has been to repair and replace Edison’s aging infrastructure. We strive to provide the highest level of service in the most cost efficient way possible.

Our focus has been to ensure Edison Township conducts business in an efficient and constituent focused way.

I am proud to say, we continue to expand the township’s ratable base through smart growth. This growth along with leveraging technologies to create cost efficiencies and updating policies and processes, allow us to sustain our improvements and stabilize our tax rate. Edison currently has the 5th best effective tax rate in Middlesex County.
OUR STATE OF TOWNSHIP

My Administration will continue to focus on building a sustainable and prosperous future for the Edison community.

Our goals continue to be ambitious, but attainable with teamwork.
To attain them, it will require cooperation, collaboration and compromise.

Tonight, I declare the “State of Edison Township” is exciting, evolving and adapting

Edison’s evolution is exemplified in the election and subsequent appointment of our first woman of color Council President, Joyce Ship-Freeman. I am proud of this council in recognizing her leadership abilities, perspective and commitment to this community to assist in creating a brighter future for Edison.

Teamwork is the most important component to help a community meet its needs and goals. Cooperation, collaboration and compromise is essential to moving forward.
All the stakeholders must share the common goal of making a community better.

I want to thank our State and County Officials for all the support you provided in 2019 and ask for you to double down in 2020.

- To the Chamber of Commerce, please continue to promote economic growth through sustainable development in Edison by attracting new corporate and commercial investors to our community.

- To Edison’s existing business community, please continue your essential job-creation efforts and let us know how we can help. Providing local jobs ensures that Edison’s economy evolves to meet the needs of its residents.

- To the Board of Education, we pledge to work with you and ask you to please work with us to continue to provide the best education in NJ while also ensuring the safety of our students.

- To all of our municipal employees, Please embrace a customer service approach in assisting all of our residents and businesses. Business as usual is not the answer. Let’s streamline our processes and create a model for others to follow.
Finally, to the council, let’s remember what caused us to run for public office. Let’s focus on getting the right things done for the residents and not sound bites.

We had proposed leasing the water distribution system but we heard and respected our residents desire to re-establish the Edison Water Utility. I can proudly say that my administration, under the leadership of Maureen Ruane, our Business Administrator, was able to achieve what everyone said was impossible, create a water utility in 6 months from virtually nothing. You and your operations committee can be used as a model for others. I applaud and want to recognize tonight your accomplishment. I would also like to thank the members of the water advisory committee for providing perspective and suggestions as we began the creation of the water utility. Those members were: Melissa Perilstein, Joe Baumann, Alvaro Gomez, Ajay Patil, Bob Diehl, Keith Hahn, Anthony DeAmorin, Tarendra Lakhankar, Biral Patel

Also, I would like to welcome and acknowledge the Director of the Water and Sewer Utility, Bob Smith and thank him for joining our team. He brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise in this area. He has and is developing his water and sewer department to meet the needs of the community, He has assembled a high quality team within the department and I would like to welcome them also.
ACHIEVEMENTS

I want to thank our state delegation for funding a study to revamp the intersection of Route 287 and 27. This has been a long process, but we have started to move towards fixing this problem. Thank you Pat, Rob & Nancy.

I want to thank our County Freeholders especially Charlie Tomaro for adding to our open space, improving our parks and working with us to make the Edison Community better.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Public safety is the most essential function of municipal government. My administration has and will continue to invest in public safety;

POLICE

The Edison Police Department has invested in Axon technology – under the direction of Police Chief Tom Bryan and his Command Staff this technology allows the agency to protect our officers while providing heightened accountability with the use of body worn cameras and a less lethal use of force option with the Conducted Energy device (stun gun). Also, a new GPS system was installed in all police vehicles
Edison Township administered rigorous promotional exams for sergeants, lieutenants, and captains.

Renovations have been made to both the Sally Port and booking rooms to ensure the safety and security of our police officers. Both initiatives were achieved with the collaboration and cooperation of the Department of Public Works.

The Chief is also in the middle of the hiring process where we received over 505 total applicants, both non-PTC and PTC. Currently, the interview process has been completed for PTC applicants. We continue to ensure that the police department maintains adequate staffing levels to ensure the safety of our community.

FIRE DEPARTMENT

Our Division of Fire has an entire new fleet of vehicles and apparatus.
Our firefighters now answer emergencies with the state-of-the-art vehicles and equipment, to protect our residents.

We also purchased 4 tactical vans for our volunteer departments so they can be better equipped to help.
SCBA or self-contained breathing apparatus was replaced so that our firefighters can be better equipped to respond to residents in need and enhance safety.

Our Fire Department received a $25,000 grant from the Leary Firefighter Foundation for digital fire extinguishing training for use by fire fighters and the public to learn the proper way to use a fire extinguisher. The highlight of receiving this grant was that Rachel Ray came to the firehouse on Rt. 27 to host a luncheon with our fire fighters and actor, Dennis Leary made a surprise visit to eat lunch with our fire fighters.

Investing in Edison’s public safety will continue to be a top priority but this can only be achieved through the cooperation and collaboration with the council,

I am proud to say that our police and fire departments have been trained and supplied with Narcan. Edison also joined Woodbridge in a Narcan program so that we can better address the opioid problem in our communities.

**PUBLIC WORKS DEPT.**

Our Public Works Department refurbished and reconditioned 8 parks and made them handicap accessible. They also purchased new equipment for the sanitation department. 17 school lots were swept and potholes were repaired.
Started an inflow and infiltration program to assess repairs and cost containment for our sewer system. Assisted Metuchen with a flow study for a new pumping station on the Metuchen Edison border which will make for a more efficient and cost effective sewer program.

RECREATION
Recreation had a busy year with an evaluation of the township fields to determine optimum use. They also started up cricket camps and enhanced our Clara Barton Christmas tree lighting with the addition of a holiday stroll.

ENGINEERING
Our Road Surfacing Program continued during 2019. We resurfaced another 77 roads during the year, bringing our total to 304 roads since 2014. We began a crack/seal maintenance program starting with roads that began in 2014. An exciting addition is the paving management system that has been put online. This will allow residents to check and see when roads in the township are scheduled for resurfacing.

HEALTH
Our Health department had a generator installed at our senior center on Woodbridge Avenue. This will help the operations of the center and also assist if sheltering at the center is
required. The senior center also had HVAC and roof repairs to enhance the conditions.

The department continued to increase health inspections and response to complaints in the community.

**WATER UTILITY**

As I mentioned earlier, Edison re-established the Edison Water Utility where we are fully staffed, have purchased vehicles and some equipment. We are still exploring options on where to house this department but I can say with the upmost confidence that we are fully operational and responding to the needs of our customers.

As you may know, the Township had contracted with American Water Co. since 1996 to operate and manage its water system, which serves a portion of our community.

And, Edison has operated its own municipal sewer utility, serving our entire town.

We now need to invest in a capital improvements plan to address this aging infrastructure. We need to ensure our water and wastewater systems evolve and adapt to the current needs of the community it serves. Through cooperation, collaboration and compromise with the council I know we will achieve this goal. The critical guiding principles on this issue are and will remain:

- Provide improved service to our residential and business customers.
Provide necessary investments for infrastructure improvements

OUR PARTNERSHIPS

Since 2014, my Administration has forged valuable partnerships throughout the Edison community with collaboration and cooperation including:

- The Edison Arts Society — under the direction of Gloria Dittman, the arts society continues to enhance art and culture in its many forms throughout our town.

Besides the rotating art exhibits on the third floor of the Edison Municipal Complex, our Arts Society installed its first captivating new Sculpture at the Sculpture Garden at Lake Pappianni Park.
Also, the Society's gallery has expanded to the second-floor of Town Hall — it’s another reason everyone here tonight and watching at home should be sure to visit the Municipal Complex.

- The Edison Memorial Tower Corp. — which manages our most historic tourism destination — continues its campaign to expand its museum and create space for seminars and historic presentations. Through our collaboration we have been able to secure several grants to assist with them achieving their goals.

- The Edison Housing Authority continues as a valuable partner in our effort to provide a mentorship program for at-risk middle school students. Working together, we provided students with tutoring, counseling, and an introduction to career options in technology and drama. We also received tremendous support from TATA Consultancy, who’s North American Headquarters are located in Edison, which continues to make this program a success.

- The former CARE organization which was founded/created by Dora Ramos, to support at risk immigrant students has evolved into collaboration with the Edison Municipal Alliance and the Board of Education to provide tutoring and social support to this population. If it wasn’t for this collaboration and cooperation the program would have ended when CARE was disbanded.
Edison Sheltered Workshop. They continue to work out of their new home on Ethel Road

Triple C Housing – Expanded services and housing for individuals, families and veterans who are impacted by a disability.

GRANTS
Our Grant writer, Chris Masauskas and the Millenium Strategies Group were successful in getting the township a number of grants this year. Some of these where:

- DOT Grants for Roadways of over $2,000,000
- Recycling grant for $269,000.00
- Green Acres Grant
- Arts Society/Tower/ Fields/Leary Foundation etc.

FINANCIAL
The Township continues its financial efficiency and accountability goal by implementing a new payroll system. We have now moved to a cash based tax appeals process which is more cost effective than a debt based one. We are constantly monitoring and adjusting our timing and projects to take full advantage of aid, grants, and vendor efficiencies. This is all being done as we continue to keep our effective tax rate at the 5th best in Middlesex County.
LOOKING FORWARD

During 2020 we have a very robust list of goals. They are very very ambitious but we will do them in a way that make them attainable and sustainable. They include:

1. Road Resurfacing/68 roads & Parking lots
2. Police/Fire Hiring
3. Parks/ Splash Park
4. Library
5. Infrastructure
6. Open space
7. Schools/Stelton
8. Water/sewer home
9. Fields
10. Beautification
11. Opioid Problem
12. Community Center/Hartz/Ray Catena
13. Grants
CLOSING COMMENTS

In closing — let me remind you that my State of the Township Address is merely a synopsis’ of Edison Town Hall’s many recent achievements. To ensure Edison Township’s bright and sustainable future we must evolve and adapt policies to reflect the needs of the community. Timing is crucial to get this done in the best possible means. Cooperation, collaboration and compromise are critical to our success.

Bruce Springsteen said, “I’ve told stories with the E Street Band that were bigger and better than anything I could have done on my own”

There will be challenges and hurdles but with a commitment to cooperation, collaboration and compromise there is nothing that can’t be achieved. There will inevitably be disagreements of how best to get all this done. Working together – we can ensure a sustainable and vibrant future.

We must stay true to ourselves, but also true to each other. We must face these truths with accountability to remain focused on the goals at hand and the final result. We cannot operate by sound bites or the flavor of the day.

I have said that Bruce Springsteen has stated we are sitting with a blank page in front of us. That page daring us to write on it. Well we have seen that the page is more like an Etch a
sketch, always ready to be shaken to re-write the plan in response to some obstacle or ways to make it better.

The one thing that we must always remember is that that clock is continually ticking. We have a finite amount of time to accomplish our mission. We don’t know how much time that is. So even though it is a marathon, not a sprint, we never know when the finish line will arrive. We don’t know when our term will be our last …

“So we’ve got this moment now to live then it’s all just dust and dark”

Let’s heed Bruce’s call to “walk tall or baby don’t walk at all”

Thank you for listening tonight! Thank you for all you have done and will do in the coming year!

Together we can make a difference!

“You gotta stay hungry, well I’m just about starving tonight!”