



**Chatham Township Committee  
2017 Mayor's Address  
Mayor Curt Ritter  
January 5, 2017**

Good evening and welcome to the Chatham Township Committee 2017 reorganization meeting.

I want begin by thanking the Committee for their unanimous support this evening in electing me for a second term as Mayor. I appreciate your confidence and continued support and I look forward to working closely with each of you as we work together to Build a Better Chatham.

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate John Maurer on his election. You've been an active member of the community over the years and we're glad to have you on the Committee.

I also want to thank Kevin Sullivan for his service as Deputy Mayor this past year, and wish to congratulate Karen Swartz on her election as Deputy Mayor. You have shown over the past two years how passionate and committed you are to the residents of Chatham Township; whether it's communicating with our utility providers, supporting our seniors or your considered approach to looking at the issues facing our town. I look forward to working closely with you this next year.

In preparing my remarks for this evening I wanted to briefly recap some of the Committee's key accomplishments from 2016 and highlight some areas of focus for 2017.

By all accounts 2016 was another successful year for the Chatham Township Committee.

**Public Safety and Health Remains a Top Priority**

In 2016, we continued to make great strides on the public safety front as we worked to ensure that Chatham Township remains one of the safest towns in America to live, raise a family, and retire.

This past year we welcomed two new patrolmen, Nicholas Giordano and Brian McGrath, and bid farewell to Sergeant Robert Scheetz, who retired after 29 years of service.

In a testament to the fine work of the men and women of our Police Department, under the leadership of Chief Steven Hennelly, Chatham Township is consistently ranked one of the safest towns in the United States and New Jersey. Our various public safety initiatives, including our 10 Community Policing Districts, the Medicine Drop Box program, and our Neighborhood Watch program have contributed to this success.

As I mentioned in my Mayoral address last year, we allocated funds to ensure that our Police Department remains well equipped and trained to handle the worst of scenarios. Ensuring our Police have the tools they need to protect our residents will remain a priority.

This past year the Committee was also successful in further addressing the safety concerns of residents who walk and bike through town. We submitted grants to extend the sidewalks on Shunpike Road from Pine Street to Falmouth Road, and to establish sidewalks on Southern Boulevard and River Road. This follows our efforts in 2015 to secure a grant to construct new sidewalk on Spring Street and Lafayette Avenue. The Police Department and our Public Safety Committee continues to evaluate ways to further increase pedestrian safety through the establishment of new signage, sidewalks, and crosswalks as needed. This year, we will continue to work with the Board of Education, Safe Routes to School, and other organizations to increase the public's awareness of pedestrian and bicyclist safety. We will also look to launch an inaugural Pedestrian Safety Awareness Week to raise awareness of this important issue that impacts all residents, young and old.

Public health was also a focus this past year as we hosted several public forums in an effort to bring greater awareness to important issues facing our community, though not often openly discussed. I have spoken of the importance of increasing awareness of mental health issues and suicide prevention. This past June, in conjunction with the [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](#) we hosted a Talk Saves Lives [Suicide Awareness and Prevention](#) seminar for residents. And in October, in partnership with the [Jersey Battered Women's Service](#), we hosted a presentation on [Preventing Domestic Violence](#). Videos of these presentations, as well as others, are housed in our video library on the website and are some of our most watched videos. We will continue these public forums and encourage residents to contact us if they have an interest in having us address a particular public safety or health topic.

This September, in support of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, we hosted the first annual Chatham Township [Out of the Darkness Walk](#) at the Chatham High School with former Governor Codey and Congressman Frelinghuysen on hand. We far exceeded our original goal of \$10,000 after we successfully raised more than \$70,000 among more than 500 participants from Chatham Township and surrounding communities. Given the success of this event I'm pleased to announce that we will host our 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Out of the Darkness Walk this September 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Looking toward 2017, we will continue to make public safety and health a top priority.

Since the 1980s, New Jersey's black bear population has been increasing and expanding its range both southward and eastward from the forested areas of northwestern New Jersey. Within the most densely populated state in the nation, black bears are thriving and there are now confirmed bear sightings in all 21 of New Jersey's counties. This past year more than 630 black bears were harvested statewide and more than 100 were harvested in Morris County alone. We will continue to work with the New Jersey Department of Fish and Wildlife and our Police Department to further educate the public on black bear safety while exploring the possibility of harvesting black bear in select non-residential areas similar to where deer harvesting has been permitted in the past.

We will also continue to look at revitalizing our [Community Emergency Response Team](#) (CERT) and will seek volunteers who can assist the Police and the Office of Emergency Management in their efforts should the need ever arise. I would encourage any member of the community who has an interest in getting involved in this important initiative to contact me at [Mayor@chathamtownship-nj.gov](mailto:Mayor@chathamtownship-nj.gov)

In conjunction with National Preparedness Month we will continue to build upon our efforts to develop a more robust Public Safety Awareness campaign and will look to develop an emergency app that residents can download to their smartphones and mobile devices that they can use as a resource in emergencies.

### **A Focus on Fiscal Discipline**

Looking at our Township finances, the Committee continues to take pride in its efforts to prudently manage expenses while increasing awareness of the budget process so all residents understand how their tax dollars are being spent. While other municipalities speak of increasing taxes, we were pleased, for the second year in a row to cut our local taxes reflecting the lowest local purpose tax rate in more than 10 years! Few, if any municipalities in NJ can tout this

significant [accomplishment](#). Speaking of taxes, this past year, following feedback from residents, we researched and instituted the ability for residents to pay their taxes online via credit card.

In delivering the annual audit report to the Committee last year, our new auditors said the Township should be commended and indicated that our finances were in “phenomenal condition”. This new relationship will continue to ensure Chatham Township remains at the forefront in the utilization of best practices in all matters concerning our budget and finance-related initiatives.

Looking toward 2017, we will continue to maintain a balance of prudent fiscal responsibility while meeting the quality-of-life needs of our residents. Over the next few months we will discuss the 2017 budget and pay careful consideration to the Open Space Tax. We encourage all residents to come to a future Committee meeting, or view a replay online, to better educate themselves on the process and to see how their tax dollars are being prudently spent.

### **Stopping the Pilgrim Pipeline**

In an ongoing effort to stop the Pilgrim Pipeline we passed Resolution 2016-96, which authorized Chatham Township to join the Municipal Pipeline Group, a group of municipalities who are collectively fighting the proposed pipeline. We will continue to work with other communities and speak with one voice in opposition to the proposed pipeline. This continues to be a long fight and one we are committed to fighting over the long haul.

### **Maintaining Chatham Township’s Beauty**

On the public works and utilities front, we welcomed several new employees to the Department of Public Works. The DPW team is responsible for keeping Chatham Township the beautiful place we are all proud to call home; whether it’s prepping recreational fields, plowing roads, or filling potholes, on behalf of the Committee I commend Rich and his team for their continued great work.

This past fall we officially opened the Hillside Trail, another great piece of Open Space that has been preserved and now utilized by residents. In an effort to keep Chatham beautiful, we will continue to carefully review our options when it comes to acquiring property to further protect the open space in Chatham Township.

### **A Point of Pride: The Colony Pool Club**

A point of pride in Chatham Township continues to be [The Colony Pool Club](#). Last year we continued our efforts to improve the membership experience

through increased social activities, including additional movie nights, an adult Luau and Pig Roast, and increased live music on Sunday afternoons. And while other areas pools struggle to attract and retain members, I'm pleased to report that membership increased by more than 7% last summer as The Colony Pool Club has become the summer destination of choice for area residents.

As we seek other ways to improve the member experience we continue to make improvements at the Colony Pool Club including rebuilding the retaining wall. On these cold winter nights, many are already looking forward to summer. Registration will soon be open and we encourage you to consider joining by visiting [www.thecolonypoolclub.org](http://www.thecolonypoolclub.org)

### **Addressing Our Affordable Housing Obligation**

Another important issue the Committee will continue to focus on in 2017 is addressing the Township's affordable housing obligation. By way of background, the New Jersey Supreme Court in a line of cases beginning in 1975 found, as a constitutional requirement, that municipalities cannot use the zoning power to exclude affordable housing from within municipal borders. This is known as the Mount Laurel doctrine and requires all municipalities throughout New Jersey to provide realistic opportunities for affordable housing.

The resolution of the pending litigation has been a point of discussion in the Committee's Executive Sessions over the past year. And while our fair share housing obligation is not fully known, expert calculations for our prospective affordable housing need for the period from 2015 to 2025 range from a high of 727 to a low of 208 and this range has been and is subject to various adjustments.

Whatever the ultimate number, it should be noted that since 1992 the Township has had an A-H Affordable Housing District where the Police Department, DPW and Skate Park are currently located.

We are now in a better position to address our affordable housing obligation following a proposal from a builder to rezone Dixie Dale Farm to develop luxury townhomes, while also building, operating and managing a 100% percent multi-family rental development at the Skate Park, which we would seek to relocate.

The Committee unanimously passed two resolutions in support of the Planning Board reviewing this matter further. We will continue to keep residents abreast of the latest developments and encourage individuals interested in learning more to view the Affordable Housing link under the Government tab on our website, or to attend a future Planning Board meeting as they discuss this matter further.

## **Expressing our Appreciation for our Volunteers**

As I've mentioned previously, Chatham Township is blessed to have hundreds of volunteers who donate countless hours of their time in support of our community. This past April, in a small effort to recognize their hard work we celebrated [National Volunteer Month](#) to thank them for all that they do and to bring greater awareness of their organizations. We will continue this tradition and encourage all residents to consider getting involved in some capacity.

## **A Commitment to Communications**

We continued to make great strides in advancing our communications efforts with residents. In 2016, we launched Chatham Township Perspectives, a new communications initiative that features a series of Q&A-style videos with key Township employees, and volunteers. These videos offer residents a closer look at the various Departments, Committees and Boards and the individuals who support them to ensure that Chatham Township remains a great place to live, raise a family, and retire. Special thanks go to Tom Salvas our Communications Manager who has produced this series of videos.

After soliciting extensive feedback from residents and local businesses, we launched a newly redesigned website in November. The website, which was built with a responsive design layout to enhance viewing capabilities on mobile and tablet devices, features easier navigation, a more visual layout, and new content and resources. As communications with our residents remains paramount, the new website provides residents information on the important issues in the Township, while providing them easier access to the many services available to them

As always we remind residents that if you want your voice to be heard, or have a suggestion on how we can improve our communications to residents, we invite you to attend one of our Committee meetings or email the Committee at [Committee@chathamtownship-nj.gov](mailto:Committee@chathamtownship-nj.gov).

## **Special Thanks to Our Township Employees**

In conclusion, I would be remiss if I did not thank our all our Township employees, including our Township Administrator Tom Ciccarone and our Clerk Greg LaConte and the entire Township staff for their continued hard work on behalf of our residents.

I also want to express our gratitude to our Township Attorney Albert Cruz for his efforts, particularly as it relates to assisting our efforts on the affordable housing front. I also commend our Township Engineer John Ruschke for being recognized by the New Jersey Society of Municipal Engineers for his work on the sanitary sewers modification project and his continued efforts on behalf of Township residents.

Finally, I just want to thank my nephew and Godson Dylan Ritter for being here this evening to stand in to hold the bible for my swearing in as my family is across town watching Gracie perform in the Lafayette Head Show this evening. Not one to watch replays of the Committee meetings online, or read the minutes, I still want to publicly thank my wife Jen, and children Will, Mollie and Grace for their support these past three years as well the next three. For those of us on this dais, and others before us, the commitment to serve often keeps us away from family and friends, but we do it for the love of our community and a willingness to give back and make things better.

Thank you again for your support. I look forward to working closely with all of our Committee members as we work together to Build a Better Chatham.



Curt Ritter  
Mayor, Township of Chatham  
January 5, 2017

*As prepared.*