

Mayor Michael Giordano's State of the Borough Address
January 8, 2018
North Plainfield, New Jersey

Happy New Year and welcome to North Plainfield's first Borough Council meeting of the year. I'd like to wish the Borough Council and everybody a happy, healthy and prosperous 2018.

I hope all of you continue to take pride in the progress we've made as a community and get a sense of what local government, working hard, and working together, can accomplish for everyone's benefit.

I'm proud to say that redevelopment activity, investment, and progress in North Plainfield continued to be strong in 2017 and I believe this trend will continue through the New Year. The planning and investments we continue to make position North Plainfield as a great place to live, work and do business.

Highlights of this past year include the opening of several key businesses in the Borough including AAA, Goodwill, Petco and Cookie Cutters. Now under construction are the Metro Storage Facility and Quick Chek. And expected soon to be under construction is a WAWA Convenience Store and gasoline station.

These developments serve to strengthen the Route 22 Corridor as a place to do business, shop and dine. All of them bring jobs to our community and add to the convenience of living in North Plainfield.

The Borough has also completed a number of road and sewer projects, constructed a new Downtown parking lot, installed an emergency generator at the Vermeule Community Center and began work on interior improvements to the Memorial Library.

Recreation Department

Our Recreation Department touches the lives of many of our residents, particularly our younger ones, and in 2017 they had many achievements:

1. We expanded our summer camp registration program by adding two additional plans. Residents had the option of four different service

plans to select from to suit their personal needs. By offering the additional plans, our enrollment increased by about 20%.

2. We continued to focus on clinics for all sports programs from grades K through 5.

3. In July, the department purchased the Jr. Canucks football program. In 2018 our plan is to make significant changes such as changing leagues, purchasing new uniforms, offering clinics and continuing to rebuild the structure of the program.

4. With expansion of our programs, additional equipment storage space was needed and we purchased a 40 foot container to provide an additional storage option.

5. A special purchase of a parent/handicap child combination swing will be installed in Vermeule Park in the Spring of 2018. Also coming to this park in the Spring will be outdoor all-weather exercise apparatus.

6. Community Day was expanded to provide more events than ever. We offered free blow ups, face painting and two concerts capped off with a beautiful fireworks display. The Lions Club Eye-mobile was on hand to give our residents free eye exams. Greenbrook Road was closed to allow table vendors to sell their products. We expect to expand Community Day even more in 2018.

7. With the help of corporate sponsors, we had a summer filled with free concerts, free outdoor movies and a free magic show for our residents. In 2018 we look to expand our summer entertainment.

8. Additional Christmas lights and blow ups were purchased to enhance our Community Center Holiday display. Santa started his journey on a firetruck from the recreation office down Greenbrook Road to the Community Center. We will ask him to expand his journey in 2018.

Fire/EMS Department

This past year was another busy and successful one for the Fire/EMS Department, responding to 3,439 Fire and EMS incidents.

We continued to build on our emergency medical services program, which includes EMS coverage in the Township of Green Brook. Last year was the second full year of shared EMS services with them and it was just as

positive as the previous year. In 2017 we purchased a new ambulance to replace one that was totaled in an accident, and we also acquired a relatively new one from Green Brook to further bolster the shared services agreement with them. Regarding EMS revenue, 2017 was our highest year ever - in total, we took in \$463,970.

We also re-established the staff Captain position to strengthen and support the administrative EMS staff responsibilities, as well as the training program for the department. This was done without hiring or adding any additional personnel to the current roster. Other administrative accomplishments included the first full year of a transition to a new on-line incident reporting system and fire inspection program. Both programs have greatly helped streamline our incident report writing and fire inspection reports; which in turn, provides better customer service to the public and local business owners.

Lastly, one major fire of significance worth mentioning was at the old Villa Maria property where several of the large attached buildings were destroyed.

Police Department

In 2017, the Police Department interfaced with our youth through several key programs. We continued our successful Summer Teen Evening Program (STEP), graduated our third successful Youth Police Academy for children in the 5th through 8th grades, continued the DARE program which graduated 255 students, and our Gang Resistance Education And Training (G.R.E.A.T) program was well received with the 7th graders. National Night Out was the biggest so far with over 650 residents in attendance.

Patrol officers responded to and deployed Narcan 17 times saving victims of drug overdoses. They have joined with Prosecutor Robertson and Robert Wood Johnson Somerset Hospital to introduce the overdose victim into a program hopefully getting the help they need to get clean and live a productive life.

The Police Department continued its participation in both “Project Medicine Drop” and “Operation Take Back” to make it convenient for area residents to dispose of their unwanted or expired prescription

medications. This program reduces the chance that those items end up on the street or in their children's hands.

In August, the Police Department participated in a disaster preparedness drill organized by Public Service Electric and Gas Company (Gas Division) along with the North Plainfield Fire/EMS Department, the North Plainfield Office of Emergency Management, Somerset County Communications and PSE&G Electric Division. Several planning meetings took place in July and August in preparation for this exercise and it was a great success preparing the Borough's Emergency Services to address any major utility emergency.

The Traffic Safety Bureau participated in the "Street Smart Program" to help educate the public about pedestrian safety.

The North Plainfield Police Department is collaborating with Prosecutor Michael Robertson's STOPit mobile reporting app. Our residents can now download the app and report crimes anonymously. They may also have a real time anonymous dialogue with county law enforcement who will pass the information on to North Plainfield police to investigate. You may download it in the iTunes or Google play store and use the access code SOMERSETNJ.

The Body Worn Camera program has been active for over a year now and all indications are the program has been successful. From August 2015 through August 2016, the Department reported seven assaults against police officers. From September 2016 to September 2017, the Department reported six assaults against police officers. A comparison of Internal Affairs complaints against police for the same period shows a decline of 24 percent.

In light of the positive aspects of the BWC trial period, we are continuing and expanding the program. While BWC's are not a cure-all, they are a win-win for both police officers and the public by providing a firsthand look at the dangerous situations officers encounter on a daily basis, improving transparency and building trust. The cameras have a calming effect on both the officers and the persons involved. North Plainfield Police will continue to embrace the latest policing trends to better serve our proud community.

Public Works

This past year we installed a natural gas powered standby generator at the Community Center. This new generator can power the entire building during a power outage and was funded in part by a grant from N.J.O.E.M. and F.E.M.A.

Also, this past year we replaced an aging sanitary sewer on Dahlia Terrace, constructed a new pumping station on Grove Street and began a much-needed roadway/pedestrian safety improvement project on Norwood Avenue. Roadway paving on both of these streets, as well as numerous other streets, will be completed in the spring of 2018.

This year I anticipate the construction of a new fueling facility at the Public Works Yard and further improvements to enhance efficiency of this critical department.

Emergency Preparedness

I would also like to again take this opportunity to encourage all residents, businesses and family members to sign up for our Alert Program which allows you to customize how you prefer to be reached, and the type of notifications you would like to receive, for emergencies, special events, etc. You can choose to be notified by phone, email, and/or text message – the choice is yours. It is essential to provide us with your contact info if you have an unlisted phone number and you wish to be notified about emergency information. Even if you don't live in town but want to be aware of alerts that may affect family members, you may use this service. Instructions on how to sign up can be found on the Borough's Webpage.

Infrastructure Projects and Community Facilities

I'd like to thank the Borough Council for being supportive of initiatives brought forth in our Capital Budgets. I will be presenting additional projects for your consideration in the spring as part of the annual budgetary process.

2018 Annual Budget

We began the process of preparing the 2018 annual budget in November. The budget being proposed will maintain all essential services and be formally presented to the Council next month. As usual, the main upward pressures on the budget are costs that we cannot control. With a new Governor and Administration about to take hold in Trenton we will be actively monitoring factors which will impact our local budget. We will seek opportunities for additional aid and efficiencies in the delivery of our services.

I am proud to announce that once again we received our full complement of State Aid due to achieving the highest possible category once again in the State's annual Best Practices Survey. Further, for the first time in memory, we received no findings or corrective action recommendations in our Annual Audit.

Personnel

I extend my thanks to our team of Directors and Department Heads, and the staff at Borough Hall for their hard work in the past year and their dedication to the Borough and its citizens.

This past year we were able to extend the hours of our administrative assistants in the Police, Fire, and Public Works Departments which enable us to better serve the public.

I welcome to our staff Katherine Miller who is the Administrative Assistant to Borough Administrator David Hollod and myself. Her knowledge and professionalism will serve us well and I encourage all residents to see Katherine first with any Borough problem or issue that they have.

I note with sorrow the loss of one of our most key employees, Gail Cain this past month. Gail was a truly dedicated employee of the Borough and will be missed by all who had the privilege to know her.

I thank all of our volunteers who have served and continue to serve as members of our committees, commissions, and advisory boards. Congratulations are offered to all the newly appointed members who are needed for their fresh ideas and experience.

I look forward to working with the Borough Council, the Board of Education, the Somerset County Freeholders, state agencies, our neighboring communities, community groups, and our many volunteers to continue the progress we have made in North Plainfield. Time and again we have demonstrated the value of strong partnerships with these groups.

If you have any questions, please contact me or any member of our Borough staff at any time. I look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you for being with us today and best wishes to all for a happy, healthy and prosperous 2018!

Michael Giordano, Jr., Mayor