



**Chatham Township Committee  
2018 Mayor's Address  
Mayor Curt Ritter  
January 18, 2018**

Good evening I want begin by thanking the Committee again for their unanimous support in electing me for a third 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 also want to take this opportunity to again congratulate Mike Kelly, Tayfun Selen, and Karen Swartz on their election wins this past November. While many towns across New Jersey saw the political make-up of their governing bodies flip to Democrat, it was rewarding to see the support at the polls from our residents who recognized the success, hard work, and collaborative efforts of our Republican Committee. It is no surprise that our efforts continue to be rewarded with Chatham Township having the distinct honor of being ranked one of the best places to live in New Jersey and continues to be one of the most desirable places to live in the United States.

As is customary for this annual address, I want to briefly recap some of the Committee's key accomplishments from 2017 and highlight some areas of focus for 2018. By all accounts 2017 was another successful year for the Chatham Township Committee.

**Public Safety a Top Priority**

In 2017, 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.

In a testament to the fine work of our Police Department, under the leadership of Chief Steven Hennelly, Chatham Township continues to be ranked one of the safest towns in New Jersey and the United States.

Our various public safety initiatives, including our community policing efforts, National Night Out events, Medicine Drop Box, and Neighborhood Watch program continue to contribute to this success. This past year we also welcomed

two new patrolmen, Connor Manning and Christopher Schulz, and saw the promotion of Scott Herchick to Sergeant.

This year we completed the Woodland Road Pathway project ensuring increased pedestrian safety and we are hopeful that the Lafayette sidewalk project will finally begin this year. Going forward, we will continue to evaluate ways to further increase pedestrian safety through the repair or establishment of new signage, sidewalks, lighting, and crosswalks. We will also 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.

Our support of the Police Department is unwavering as public safety remains paramount to our roles on this Committee. Ensuring our Police have the tools they need to protect our residents will remain a priority.

### **Promoting Public Health**

Public health was also a focus this past year as we hosted several public forums in an effort to bring greater awareness to important public health issues facing our community. We hosted community forums to shine the light on suicide awareness and prevention, opioid abuse, the Zika virus, and Lyme disease.

Our efforts to increase awareness of mental health issues and suicide prevention were augmented through our second annual Chatham Township Out of the Darkness Walk. The event, which supports the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, was supported by Congressman Frelinghuysen, Sheriff Gannon, and former Governor Codey. As a result of the efforts of the Walk Committee, including Chatham Borough Council President Len Resto and Detective Anthony LoPorto, we raised more than \$75,000 among more than 350 participants from Chatham Township and surrounding communities. This brought our two year fundraising total to more than \$150,000.

In addition, our effort to designate Chatham Township a Stigma-Free community was further evidence of our efforts to raise awareness of mental illness. Today people are talking about suicide prevention and we are creating an environment where residents with mental illness feel supported by their community.

The opioid epidemic continued to impact New Jersey this past year, with more than 1,900 opioid-related deaths. Unfortunately, Chatham Township has not been immune. In an effort to highlight the devastating impact heroin and prescription opiates can have on families and communities we hosted a community forum in conjunction with the Morris County Prosecutor's Office.

Looking toward 2018, we will continue to make public safety and health a top priority.

Our efforts to fight the war on drugs will continue. I will propose that the Committee review and consider legislation to prohibit the sale of marijuana should Governor Murphy be successful in fulfilling his ill-conceived campaign promise to legalize the sale and use of marijuana in New Jersey. We will also look to host additional community forums on important public health issues facing our community including vaping among our youth.

If Governor Murphy is successful with another ill-conceived campaign promise to halt the black bear hunt in New Jersey, the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife has reported that this move could double the bear population by 2022 and we will see the black bear population rebound to unacceptable levels.

In light of this, we will continue to work with the New Jersey Department of Fish and Wildlife and our Police Department to further educate our residents on black bear safety and we will seek the assistance and support of our residents to do their part to make Chatham Township a less attractive place for the black bear.

It has been some years since Chatham Township has been severely impacted by a major hurricane or winter storm. Despite this, we will also continue to look at revitalizing our Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) and will seek volunteers who can assist our first responders and the Office of Emergency Management in their efforts should the need ever arise. We will also look to develop a mobile app for residents that they can use as a resource to prepare themselves in advance of and during major natural disasters.

### **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 to pass a municipal tax rate that was in line with our rate in 2007. Few, if any municipalities in New Jersey can tout this significant accomplishment.

This past year residents were afforded the opportunity to prepay their taxes for the first two quarters of 2018 reflecting our municipal administration's ongoing efforts to be proactive in meeting the needs of our residents. In addition, our decision to switch to the State Health Benefits Dental Plan for Township employees will save the Township approximately \$25,000 per year.

As it relates to our annual budget and audit report, our auditors continued to praise the Township for its fiscal prudence and transparency. They also commented that the Township's tax collection rate is 99.07%, which is a phenomenal rate. We will continue to work with our auditors 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 2018, 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 2018 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 fight the Pilgrim Pipeline we remained active participants of the Municipal Pipeline Group, a group of municipalities who are collectively fighting the proposed pipeline. We also passed Ordinance 2017-20, a watershed protection ordinance that prohibits oil transmission pipelines within the Great Swamp Watershed, which represents approximately 75% of the Township. This requirement would also prohibit the installation of a pipeline in the majority of the PSE&G right-of-way. In addition, to further reinforce the Committee's commitment to protecting this watershed, the ordinance also restricts the installation of above and underground storage tanks for the storage of petroleum and hazardous substances. This was a significant piece of legislation that is designed to protect our environment, protect our community, and protect our residents.

We will continue to monitor the Pilgrim Pipeline efforts, and 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 paved more than five miles of roadway in the Township and continued to foster close relationships with our public utilities. Our Department of Public Works continued to do a phenomenal job in keeping Chatham Township the beautiful place we are all proud to call home. Their work in prepping recreational fields, plowing roads, or filling potholes, should not go unrecognized and on behalf of the Committee I commend Rich and his team for their continued great work.

This past winter we completed the acquisition of additional open space along Southern Boulevard and River Road and expanded trails and public access at our Giralda Farms Preserve and Hillside Trails. As I mentioned earlier, open space will remain an important topic for the Committee this year and we will continue to carefully review our options when it comes to acquiring property to further protect the remaining parcels of land in Chatham Township.

On the parks and recreation front, we will continue to pursue our efforts to formally establish a memorial for our veterans and will conduct a review of our playing fields and playgrounds to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of our residents, young and old.

### **A Hidden Gem: The Colony Pool Club**

A point of pride in Chatham Township continues to be [The Colony Pool Club](http://www.thecolonypoolclub.org). Our multi-year effort to revitalize and improve The Colony Pool Club was reflected with continued year-over-year growth as our efforts to improve the membership experience continues to be well received. As surrounding community and private pool clubs struggle to attract and retain members, I am pleased to report that membership continued to grow as The Colony Pool Club has become the summer destination of choice for area residents. 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 continued to face this past year was the topic of affordable housing. 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 remained a point of discussion in the Committee's Executive Sessions over the past year and was addressed in many public hearings, both at the Township Committee level and at the Planning Board. And while our fair share housing obligation is still not fully known, we are now in a better position to address it following the passage of Ordinance 2017-15.

While the matter of the Dixie Dale development has now moved to the Planning Board, the Township Committee continues to negotiate to determine what our fair share housing obligation will be. 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.

## **Volunteers: The Backbone of our Community**

We remain blessed to have hundreds of volunteers, who contribute thousands of hours each year to our community; whether it's serving as first responders, coaching youth sports, raising funds and awareness for our athletic programs, education and schools, or supporting our seniors, the environment, or serving our local Board of Education or Township Committee. In what has now become an annual event, this past April, we celebrated National Volunteer Month to thank our many volunteers for their hard work on behalf of our community and to help bring greater awareness of their organizations. We will continue this tradition and encourage all residents to consider getting involved in some capacity. On behalf of the entire Committee, I want to express my sincere gratitude to all our volunteers for all that they do for Chatham Township and its residents.

## **Communications with Residents**

We continued to make great strides in advancing our communications efforts with residents. Our Chatham Township Perspectives series of Q&A-style videos with key Township employees, and volunteers continued to highlight the important role these individuals play in our community. In addition, our social media outreach and new website continued to experience heavy traffic and social media followers nearly doubled. We also continued to see an uptick in registrations for ACT NOW! our community and emergency alert initiative.

As communications with our residents remains paramount, I will propose that the Committee consider an online community survey to garner feedback from residents on the services they receive and solicit ideas on how the quality of life for Township residents can be further improved.

There is no monopoly on good ideas and while this Committee has been successful in the past we welcome the thoughts and ideas of all residents as we continue to work together to ensure that Chatham Township remains a great place to live, raise a family, and retire.

## **Identifying a Parking Solution**

This year we will continue to seek solutions to the perennial issue surrounding parking at the Chatham train station. While we have made great strides this past year in working with the private sector to promote alternative parking options and transportation to New York City during the 'Summer of Hell', we will continue to see if there is a private sector solution to remedy the issues Chatham Township residents face when trying to park at the Chatham train station.

## **One Community**

As I mentioned earlier this year, what truly sets Chatham Township apart from other communities and makes it such a desirable and welcoming community are its residents. These are individuals who go the extra mile to help their neighbor, who show pride in their community through volunteerism and the support of local organizations and community groups, who remain open to other points of views, and are always willing to offer a friendly hand when it's needed. This year we will continue to identify opportunities where residents can come together as a community, whether it's family movie nights under the stars at The Colony Pool Club, Giralda Farms Preserve Music & Arts Festival, celebrating cultural diversity events and programs at the Library of the Chathams, or other special events.

## **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, 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 addressing the issues surrounding our affordable housing obligation and our Township Engineer John Ruschke for his work, particularly on our repaving project and the Watershed Protection Ordinance.

Finally, 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 to try to make things better. We are, at times, the political punching bag for disgruntled residents, some of whom may have a legitimate concern regarding a particular municipal issue, other times, and more frequently it seems these days, by those who want to make every issue a partisan issue while maintaining an 'us versus them' attitude. From my perspective this is no way to go through life. I would hope that this year we will see a more cordial environment in these chambers as I and entire Committee work together to Build a Better Chatham. Thank you again for your support.



Curt Ritter  
Mayor, Township of Chatham