

MAYOR'S ADDRESS  
January 1, 2021

Dear Fellow Residents,

As I do each New Year's Day, I would like to review some of the events and accomplishments that took place in our town during the past year and to announce some of the plans we have for 2021. First, I'd like to again welcome back Debbie Andriani and Bill Bucher to the Council and congratulate them on their recent election victory. Both Debbie and Bill are experienced members of the Council and work hard throughout the year for our residents. They are involved in many of our town's internal and external operations. I am sure I can count on them to continue to serve Totowa well in the future.

I don't have to tell anyone that 2020 was a year that we have not experienced before and unlike any other. From the first days of the pandemic, decisions needed to be made daily and there was no roadmap with how to deal with the situation at hand. Our police officers, first aid squad members, fire fighters, office staff, DPW and all of our employees had to find new ways to get their jobs done. With our Council members and department heads leading the way, creative solutions were born to deal with and work through the pandemic. A special note of thanks to our town nurse, Darlene Walsh, who had been and continues to work diligently during the pandemic. And we all learned how to zoom.

I also want to single out our First Aid Squad members, who are all volunteers. During the height of the pandemic and during its second wave, these first responders worked tirelessly to serve our residents while holding down their regular jobs. As volunteers, they were on the front lines and witnessed first hand what the virus was capable of, and yet, responded to the needs of our community with professionalism and empathy. They are deserving of your support. During the lockdown and the period that followed, when things looked bleak, I also saw the best of our community come out. I heard stories of neighbors offering assistance and checking up on each other. Our library staff reached out to senior citizens to lend a helping hand. Local businesses and residents generously donated much needed protective gear to our police department, firefighters, and first aid squad members, especially in the early months when supplies were limited.

With respect to the Fire Department, in 2020, a new, state of the art ladder truck was delivered and will serve our community for many years. And even though the large fire truck parade had to be cancelled, the Totowa and Woodland Park fire departments collaborated and had parades in both towns in December. The toy drive that was held surpassed last year's total. I thank all of our volunteer firefighters for their dedication and service to our community.

Our police department also underwent a leadership change. Robert Coyle, who served as Totowa's police chief for 23 years, retired on March 1. Bob had been with the police department since 1979 and we commend his leadership of the department for all those years. We hope he is enjoying retirement with his wife Vicky. Carmen Veneziano was

sworn in as our new police chief and had the task of dealing with a pandemic and lockdown a couple of weeks after his promotion. Carmen had led our detective bureau and is doing an outstanding job during these unprecedented times. The Council and I look forward to working with him for years to come.

With respect to our infrastructure, PSEG has continued to proactively replace older gas lines in our town in 2020. This is being done to try to avoid some of the gas problems that occurred during Hurricane Irene and Superstorm Sandy. The roads in our town where PSEG had been digging and have been repaved this year by them or with a grant from the Department of Transportation include Raphael Road, Greene Ave, Claremont Ave, Sutton Ave, Highview Ave., St. James Place, Cherba Place, Mitchell Ave., Young Ave., Peterson Road, and Rosengren Ave. Roads to be repaved in 2021 through either a grant from the DOT or by PSEG include Bogert Street, Stewart Terrace, Meadow Drive, Knollwood Drive, Pamela Drive, Carr Place, Roseda Drive, Glen Terrace, Rutherford Court, Artillery Park Road, Knox Terrace, Colonial Court and anywhere else that PSEG replaced gas lines. With grants from the Department of Transportation, we repaved Jefferson Place, portions of Winifred Drive and Washington Place, and Adams Drive. In addition, in 2020, utilizing our own funds, we repaved Haven Ave., William Place and Roseland Ave. In 2021, we will also be paving Dey Hill Trail, Craig Court, and Commerce Way. This long list will improve many of our roads by making them smooth again.

We applied for another grant from Passaic County to continue relining our sanitary sewers and were recently notified that it has been awarded to us. Our most recent awards for Boyle Avenue and Lincoln Avenue marked Phases 9 and 10 of our sewer lining efforts. We will also embark on replacing the pumps and infrastructure at the William Place pump house. This will be an expensive project but the upgrades are necessary as the existing system is quite outdated. We will continue looking at ways to improve our water and sewer system while alleviating flooding to our residents.

At the PAL ball field, even though we have been denied grants from the Passaic County Open Space Fund for the past two years, we are installing artificial turf for the football field and the PONY league baseball field. With the poor drainage of the field, our youth did not have the opportunity to use those fields for many days after rainstorms, causing cancellations and having to play as visitors for much of the season. Anyone who has been at the PAL lately has certainly seen the improvements taking place. The field should be ready for use by the Spring.

Real estate development continued in Totowa in 2019. While we are pleased that developers have confidence in our borough, we also want the development to be done smartly and we must consider the impact on our infrastructure. On the former North Jersey Development Center site on Minnisink Road, the JP Morgan Chase data center is just about ready for use. As anyone who has driven by knows, the construction of the medical office building has begun. As part of the agreement with the developer,

Minnisink Road and Vreeland Ave. will be widened at the intersection of those roads and a traffic light installed as part of the obligation of the developer.

The new housing development I spoke about last year on Shepherds Lane is moving quickly and is anticipated to open in 2021. The additional ratables from the projects mentioned and other construction taking place should provide ratables and ease the tax burden on our residents.

Our community continues to be strengthened by the support of our professional staff, employees, and, of course, volunteers. Be they fire fighters, first aid squad members, PAL members, or a member of one of our municipal boards, the time and effort of all of our town's volunteers are truly appreciated by the Council and me. It is what makes our town a community. I would like to acknowledge the efforts of our Board of Recreation this past year during the pandemic. While we decided to keep the pool closed this year and did not have summer camp or Totowa Day, the Board and its director came up with innovative ways to function and bring some fun and enjoyment to our residents. The Birthday Brigade operated from April to June bringing joy to homebound children. Family movie nights were a safe means of having families come together while staying in their cars. Our summer concert series in front of our Municipal Building was our most successful ever, with two of the performances being held on the PAL football field due to popular demand. A classic auto show was held and was sold out. The 5K Turkey Trot was reimagined and held virtually and our annual tree lighting was also held virtually. Many people volunteered to assist in these events to make them all a success. We look

forward to 2021 and the return of some of the traditional programs mixed in with some of the new ones.

In late 2019, we sought to increase our recycling efforts and lower our trash disposal costs by supplying a recycling barrel to each residential unit in Totowa. For anyone who did not yet receive one, there are more barrels remaining and we will be terminating the distribution of barrels on February 28, 2021. So, anyone who has not picked up their barrel yet should do so before then. There is a limit of one per household and these barrels are to be used for recycling and will keep our community a little cleaner on windy recycling days as well as help drive our trash costs lower.

On the property tax front, in 2020, our total tax rate increased by 1.4% and almost entirely attributable to Passaic County. As you have heard me say many times, we are determined to be fiscally prudent. In Totowa we have decided to make tough choices and not place a financial burden on future budgets and future generations. The fire truck we recently purchased, the turf field being installed, and the upgrades to the William Palce pump station I spoke about are being funded without incurring any debt. We have now achieved our ninth consecutive year without any long-term debt in our municipality, a claim only a handful of municipalities across New Jersey can make. Our core belief is that we should pay currently to meet our obligations where we can and not borrow if possible. By freeing ourselves of debt, we can utilize those funds for much needed improvements to our infrastructure and replacing outdated equipment. In 2020, Totowa continues the distinction of having the lowest tax rate of the 16 municipalities in Passaic

County. The Council and I will once again work hard to maintain the lowest tax rate for our residents.

The Council and I will remain active in our community's affairs in 2021. With a vaccine on the way, our future is bright and I am confident that we will continue our improvements to our town as well as our stability here in Totowa. On behalf of our Council members, I would like to wish everyone a healthy and peaceful New Year. Let's hope this one is better than 2020.

Thank you.