



## BOROUGH OF DUNELLEN

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Message from the Mayor  
Jason F. Cilento  
January 2021

I would like to begin my first Message from the Mayor for 2021 by wishing you and your families a Happy and Healthy New Year! We are so blessed to live and do business in Dunellen. I would like to recognize former Council President Kenneth Bayer and his assistance to Dunellen over the last 12 years. Ken was a dedicated public servant and our Borough is better off because of his service. I would also like to congratulate Council Member Jessica Dunne on the start of her second term, and I would like to welcome Tremayne Reid to the Dunellen Borough Council.

This past year presented us with challenges, but together, we faced them in a direct and forthright manner. Dunellen is blessed to have superb emergency services, who confronted the high risk of COVID-19 every day. Each member of our emergency services went well beyond and above what was expected of them and that is precisely why they were collectively honored this year as Citizen of the Year. We are all truly indebted to them and we thank them for their service.

We could not foresee the coming of COVID-19 and its devastating impact on all our lives; but, through prompt and concerted action, I believe we were able to decrease the blow it had on human life and businesses in our town. Dunellen's governing body worked assertively to develop policies that protected residents and Borough staff, while making sure to deliver government safely in this new pandemic-fraught world. Public meetings were held virtually so that we were able to continue to make your government accessible to residents, and communication was increased through social media to maintain a high level of information flowing to citizens. I am beyond proud of our community who during a world pandemic came together and proved what the Miracle Mile is all about - volunteering and lending a helping hand to a neighbor in need.

As we close the chapter on 2020, we recognize the challenges we faced, but also wish to celebrate our accomplishments. In my reorganization speech last January, I noted several tasks that lay before us: road and sewer improvements, investigating further areas of shared services, improving communications, and the continued revitalization of our downtown. It was imperative that we set forth on this agenda to secure the well-being of Dunellen. To some, this list appeared to be quite ambitious for a new administration, but we knew tough, reasonable decisions had to be made and fair, new policies had to be implemented in order to bring the Borough into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and make our government more approachable. I believe we accomplished that.

Here is what the Mayor and Borough Council were able to realize in 2020:

Economically improve our Sewer and Road Improvements:

- Developed a program with PARSA, the Plainfield Area Regional Sewerage Authority that addressed the immediate need to video and assess sewer lines for repair prior to paving roads. In doing so, we applied for a \$20,000.00 Community Development Block Grant to pay for this. Our hope is that this plan will prevent double work from occurring, in the long run financially protecting the Borough;
- South Madison Avenue designed to be a Complete Street Model roadway to improve pedestrian and traffic safety;
- The Borough was awarded a grant in the amount of \$504,550.00 from the NJDOT Municipal Aid FY2021 for improvements to Lincoln Avenue. These funds are in addition to the Borough's NJDOT Municipal Aid FY2020 successful application for Lincoln Avenue which amounted to \$525,000.00.

Shared Services:

- Shared services agreement with Middlesex County for their tax map pilot program free of charge to the Borough. This program will allow for efficiencies in our Construction Office and Tax Assessor's Office, as well as presenting cost-savings for the Borough;
- Shared services with Middlesex County with the mill and pave program. This program will allow the Borough to pave more streets over a shorter period at a lower cost to the Borough;
- Borough of Dunellen and the Dunellen School District reached an accord on a Shared Services Agreement that will provide an efficient and cost-saving mechanism for overseeing, maintaining, and repairing buildings and recreation facilities that are jointly used by both agencies.

Improving Communications:

- Borough improved our website with regular and timely updates;
- Published the Borough of Dunellen, NJ official Facebook page
- Dunellen Downtown Management Organization has succeeded in enhancing their monthly e-newsletters, *Next Stop! Dunellen*, and we continue to use traditional forms in print such as About Our Town's *Community News* and Dunellen's quarterly newspaper, *The Dunellen Report*, which is now entering its 10th year of publication;
- Brought the Borough Council Meetings to video and voice recording through the use of virtual meetings and we plan to further develop this approach this coming year;
- Monthly "Messages from the Mayor," updating residents on what is going on at Borough Hall and what capital projects, events, and redevelopment projects the Mayor and Borough Council are working on;
- Budget presentations through more visual forms such as PowerPoint and infographics which would explain the municipality's budgets and goals;

## Revitalization of Downtown:

- As Dunellen continues the revitalization of our downtown, we will promote a commerce-friendly mentality to attract and retain new businesses;
- The transformation of the old Art Color complex into the Dunellen Stations project will gather steam this year as we begin to see permits pulled and construction set to commence in 2021;
- In 2020, we began the community vision plan process, assisted by DMR Architects, our Municipal Planner. The purpose of the survey was to better understand the community's preferences as we continue to encourage the redevelopment of Dunellen's downtown.

As you can see, we were able to make great progress for the Borough in 2020, even during a pandemic. But work still must go on and the stage is being set for 2021. These are some of our priorities for Dunellen during 2021 and beyond:

Dunellen will continue to focus on the revitalization of our downtown. As earlier noted, structures should soon be going up at Dunellen Stations and at 528 North Avenue. Dunellen is becoming a place for builders to invest and other projects are in the works for individual mixed retail-residential buildings on North Avenue. I am looking forward to bringing these projects to the Borough Council this year and working with the Planning Board as they progress through the application process. In addition, we will be working with DMR Architects to amend our redevelopment plan and zoning ordinance to reflect the community vision plan survey results.

In the area of IT services, the Borough will be hiring a full-service Information Technology Consulting company to completely revamp our computers and internet capabilities. Our IT infrastructure is aged-and we are upgrading and modernizing hardware, software, Internet connections and internal wiring. We are also planning to install cameras in the Council Chambers for improved and sophisticated streaming of Council and other public meetings.

We are constantly exploring ways to save money and streamline municipal services through innovative shared services with other municipalities and agencies. This includes seeking ways to find cost-savings in our healthcare expenses this year.

Some major infrastructure improvement projects in 2021 will include: working with Middlesex County on the rebuilding of the South Madison Avenue culvert, milling and paving of several streets on the South side of town, proposing the rebuilding of the Fire House curb at the embankment, advancing the Culvert rebuild under the NJ Transit tracks to alleviate flooding and move us closer to applying to FEMA to redraw the flood maps, planning Morecraft Park improvements from redeveloper's contributions we anticipate receiving in 2021, and working with Parks and Recreation for Gavornick Park enhancements to the basketball court and the slide on the playground set.

I expect to work closely with the Council and department heads to develop a long-term capital improvement plan. As revenues are realized from the Dunellen Stations projects, it is our hope to use them to assist in alleviating tax burdens and begin beautification projects around town. I will also work with the Maurer House Restoration Committee to fully realize the concept plan to

make the home a public space for recreational and borough use, as well as space for the Dunellen Historical Society.

I am honored to have the opportunity to serve the community that helped raise me and my family. Dunellen is a place where neighbors, friends and families come together to accomplish great things, ventures that uniquely define us as a community. We care about making this Borough a great place to live, work, and raise a family, and that is what makes our square mile the “miracle mile!”

Thank you for your time today. I look forward to working with you, all of you! Happy New Year.

Yours very truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jason F. Cilento". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial 'J' and 'C'.

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