



BOROUGH OF DUNELLEN

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Message by the Mayor Jason F. Cilento October 2020

Every Voice Counts: Developing a Shared Community Vision for Downtown Dunellen

In my January 1st address as your newly sworn-in Mayor, I discussed the importance of continuing the Borough's efforts toward the revitalization of our downtown. The Borough is striving to build an environment which attracts new businesses and investments and supports our vital established business community. In addition to continued efforts to welcome relationships with potential new tenants for storefront vacancies, this summer the Borough waived outdoor dining permit fees for restaurants; we went door to door to chat with many business owners about strategies to help; and, we published the *Next Stop! Dunellen* monthly newsletter, highlighting businesses, upcoming events, and local initiatives.

Feedback from our community members reflects the desire for an improved downtown experience for shopping, dining, running errands or just taking a stroll along North Avenue. Frequently requested improvements are streetscape elements, pedestrian friendly design, beautification, and safer crosswalks. Our downtown, especially the area surrounding the train station, is and always will be one of Dunellen's biggest assets to residents, visitors, businesses and developers due to its location in the heart of the community and its easy access to public transportation. The push for a direct one-seat ride into NYC along the Raritan Valley Line and the Gateway Tunnel project would positively affect Dunellen's property values and also attract more businesses and residents to Dunellen. The housing market in our area is also improving, with properties selling consistently higher than initial asking price.

All of these factors strengthen our conviction that now is the time to formulize a plan for how best to improve our downtown and support our local business community, especially in these changing times with the COVID-19 pandemic. What we propose is a community vision plan for Dunellen's downtown. My philosophy has always been to tackle these initiatives from the bottom up – this means gaining your input, your opinions, and your contribution. The Borough Council and I invite you to have a seat at the table and to share what you want your downtown experience to look and feel like. The Borough of Dunellen has engaged DMR Architects, a professional planning firm, to facilitate this process of creating the community's vision plan through interactive public engagement. DMR Architects is a top NJ urban design firm that is dedicated to progressive, innovative and sustainable redevelopment planning.

DMR Architects will work on community visioning with stakeholders – residents, the business community, Borough officials and property owners – through public engagement opportunities such as: community workshops to engage in a public dialogue; a community survey – including visual preferences; and public displays.

Once this public engagement is completed, our community's concept for the downtown will then be paired with the *2019 Dunellen Transit Hub Study* recommendations, which focused on creating safer circulation patterns and activating the spaces in the area surrounding the train station. All of this information will be used to amend our existing *Redevelopment Plan's* design standards and development guidelines in addition to the zoning ordinance, making sure everything reflects our community's image for the downtown. It will place the Borough in a position of strength when working with interested developers and builders. Our hope is that these efforts will create a downtown area that feels more inviting, stimulates the local economy, increases revenues and property values throughout the Borough, and will do so in a way that accurately reflects our community's collective desire for our future.

Please look for more information on these community visioning sessions in the coming weeks on our borough website at www.dunellen-nj.gov. Together, we can create a shared vision for Dunellen's future and a stronger downtown. #DunellenStrong

Thank you for your time in this matter.

Yours very truly,

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

Jason F. Cilento, Mayor
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