

Message by the Mayor
Jason F. Cilento
March 2020

First, I would like to take note of our volunteer Fire Department and Rescue Squad and call to volunteers to join their perspective organizations. Our men and women show great courage and valor, and we are better off as a community for their service. I implore you as a member of our community to contact the Dunellen Fire Department and/or the Dunellen Rescue Squad and ask how you may get involved. Dunellen has a rich history of volunteerism and it is truly the backbone of our community.

In addition to last month's student athlete highlights, I would like to extend congratulations to another student athlete's accomplishment and that is of Chloe Cassidy who achieved her 1,000 career points in basketball in February. I also extend congratulations to longtime Dunellen High School Athletics Director and head football coach Dave DeNapoli for being honored as the Chester Zdrodowski Educator of the Year at the 49th Bill Denny/Rutgers Football Letterwinners Chapter of the National Football Foundation and College Hall of Fame luncheon. Congratulations to both.

Memorial Day Parade: Dunellen's annual Memorial Day Parade is on Monday, May 25th starting at 10:00 am. The parade's starting point will be located at the American Legion Post 119 on New Market Road. The Dunellen Recreation Department is looking for organizations to walk in the parade and create their own parade floats. For more information, contact Alex Miller, Recreation Director, at amiller@dunellenborough.com.

Meeting with County Freeholder Director Rios: On Thursday, February 6th, the Borough Administrator/Clerk William Robins and I had the pleasure of meeting with Middlesex County Freeholder Director Ronald G. Rios and county officials to discuss recycling concerns, culvert projects to mitigate flooding, shared services, open space and arts & culture grant opportunities, and redevelopment in Dunellen. I also extended gratitude to the county on behalf of Dunellen for their part in the funding of Columbia Park improvements. I believe it was a fruitful conversation and I look forward to partnering with the county to help move Dunellen forward. Should you have concerns with recycling in the future, please contact the Middlesex County Improvement Authority at 1-800-488-MCIA(6242) or Dunellen Borough Hall at (732) 968-3033 ext. 3 to report any issues.

Redevelopment: The Art Color redevelopment project is on schedule with much behind the scenes activity such as the completion of the demolition, the drawing up of the infrastructure plans, and engineering work on the new pumping station and force main.

Columbia Park Improvements: The long-awaited public access to Columbia Park is in sight! It is anticipated that the improvements will be completed by May and a re-grand opening ceremony is scheduled for Saturday, May 16th. This project was begun under the auspices of former Mayor Robert J. Seader when he obtained a grant from Middlesex County to fund half of the improvements. The project is also being completed with shared funding from both the Borough of Dunellen and the Dunellen School District.

What's happening regarding Capital Projects and Infrastructure

improvements: I had an initial meeting with the borough engineers, CME Associates (Consulting & Municipal Engineers Associates), about topics including infrastructure, parks and redevelopment. CME Associates, our auditors, the CFO, Council President Kenneth Bayer, the Borough Administrator and I met over preliminary discussions on the creation of a road/sewer repair program. This program would allow the town to be better positioned for fixing sewers as we work on road improvement projects. We need to understand the total impact financially on the borough and how we can create a long-term plan that doesn't strain the taxpayer, but also seeks to fix aging sewers, roads and sidewalks. In addition, South Madison Avenue, Grove Street and Lincoln Avenue are all planned for repaving.

News on the Streets: A topic of high importance is the Mayor's Traffic and Pedestrian Safety Task Force. I have created the task force so it can study and advise the Mayor and Borough Council about the Complete Streets program and if it is a viable option for seeking funds to enhance pedestrian safety in Dunellen. The task force will also work with other stakeholders such as Keep Middlesex Moving, Slow Down in Our Town Initiative and NJTPA to better educate the public on traffic and pedestrian safety.

News regarding the Raritan Valley Line: The Federal Transit Administration raised the rating for the 100 year old Portal Bridge to medium-high thereby now making it eligible for federal funding. It now awaits President Trump's approval. For those that do not know, the existing Portal Bridge hosts about 450 trains per day traveling between Newark, NJ and Penn Station, NY. It is a major bottleneck and source of delay when the aging mechanical pieces of its operations malfunction. On Wednesday, February 26th, I attended the Raritan Valley Line Mayors Alliance in Bound Brook. At the meeting, Mayors from the four counties along the Raritan

Valley Line (RVL) heard from representatives from Congressman Tom Malinowski's office about the current status of the Portal Bridge and Gateway Tunnel. Representatives from Governor Murphy's office, along with NJ Transit, were in attendance to discuss the feasibility study on the RVL to be completed by June 2020. We also reviewed opportunities to implement a peak one-seat ride and weekend peak one-seat rides.

At the meeting, I questioned representatives from the Governor's office and from NJ Transit about their intentions to make structural enhancements to train stations such as Dunellen. My concern is that as we vigorously advocate for the one-seat ride trains to attract more ridership to the RVL, continue to develop our communities and promote our local economies, we should also be seeking enhancements to our stations in anticipation of those additional riders. Furthermore, I made it clear to all those in attendance that the Dunellen train station is in dire need of being brought up to ADA compliance standards. I informed them that I have been reaching out to the Governor's office and NJ Transit for months. I was assured by NJ Transit that my efforts have not gone unnoticed and that they will be coming to Dunellen's train station in the near future to see how they can place our station into NJ Transit's strategic planning for capital improvements. I am happy to hear that these efforts haven't gone unobserved and I look forward to reporting back to you on this matter.

I will continue to work alongside the Raritan Valley Line Mayors Alliance and the Raritan Valley Rail Coalition, advocating for improved services along the line for our commuters and property owners.

Volunteer Contact Information: The following is contact information to volunteer for the Dunellen Fire Department and/or the Dunellen Rescue Squad:

- Dunellen Fire Department – (732) 968-5653 | www.dunellenfd.com
- Dunellen Rescue Squad – (732) 968-0477 | dunellenrs@gmail.com

Thank you for taking the time to read this month's Message by the Mayor. I look forward to continuing these monthly messages and updating you on the happenings of the Mayor and Council at Borough Hall.

Respectfully, Jason F.
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