



## BOROUGH OF DUNELLEN

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### Message from the Mayor **Jason F. Cilento** **January 2022**

I would like to begin my first Message from the Mayor for 2022 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 congratulate and welcome Teresa Alberton and Joseph Paltjon to the Dunellen Borough Council, as well as extend thanks to former Council Members April Burke and Richard Pinder for their time and service on the Borough Council. Congratulations to Council Member Trina Rios for being appointed Dunellen's 2022 Council President. In addition, congratulations to Dunellen resident Diana Starace who has been recognized as Dunellen's 2021 Citizen Volunteer of the Year for her many years as a volunteer for several Dunellen organizations, as well as a congratulations to former Dunellen mayor John Gibney who has been awarded Dunellen's 2021 Lifetime Achievement Award for his years of service to the Dunellen community as a councilperson, mayor and long-time volunteer.

This past year presented us with another year of working through the challenges of COVID-19, but together, we faced them in a direct and forthright manner. We continue to provide the best policies possible for the public welfare and health of our Borough employees, residents and businesses. Dunellen is fortunate to have superb emergency services, who continue to confront the high risk of COVID-19 every day. The Borough, in coordination with the Dunellen Office of Emergency Management, Dunellen Parks and Recreation Department, and the Middlesex County Department of Health, hosted multiple mobile COVID-19 vaccine and testing sites throughout the year to help prevent further spread and the Borough extended its efforts to promote businesses in our downtown district to expand their business beyond their four walls and out into their parking lots and onto the sidewalks. These efforts allowed for businesses to continue operations in a safer manner and helped the Borough increase its vaccination percentages. I am proud of our community which during a world pandemic, the ruins of Hurricane Ida, and the catastrophe of our Fire House, 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 2021, 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 improvements, park improvements, enhancement of quality of life through ordinance updates, and the continued revitalization of our downtown. We were able to accomplish these tasks and more.

Here is what the Mayor and Borough Council were able to realize in 2021:

- Road improvement projects including the pavements of South Madison Avenue, South Avenue, High Street, Lehigh Street, Madison Avenue (between North Avenue and South Avenue), and Grove Street (between Prospect Avenue and South Avenue). These roads were paved either by NJDOT Municipal Aid grant funds or through partnership with Middlesex County's mill and pave program;
- The completion of the South Madison Avenue culvert project by Middlesex County;
- The Borough of Dunellen was awarded in 2021 a grant in the amount of \$556,530.00 from NJDOT's Municipal Aid for fiscal year 2022 for improvements to Kline Place;
- Basketball court improvements at Morecraft and Gavornik Parks;
- Adoption of Ordinance 2021-23, Restoration to Streets and Sidewalks under Chapter 256-9, which enhances the Borough's control over the paving and restoration process of its streets when utilities or private contractors must conduct work on them;
- Amendments to the Dunellen Redevelopment Plan which addressed;
  - Fractional numbers of inclusionary units (affordable housing) should a project not produce a whole number. A payment in lieu trust fund would be created based on a formula to make up for the fractional numbers. Funds would be later used on affordable housing units in other projects when fractional numbers need to be made whole.
  - Addressed density and the number of units for development projects based on building height (three stories) and different sizes of 1-bedroom, 2-bedroom, and 3-bedroom units.
  - It also addressed parking requirements for development projects, requiring them to have adequate parking for their residential and commercial tenants. It sets up a payment in lieu of parking which would establish a trust fund for future parking projects in downtown Dunellen, as well as providing for electronic vehicle parking stations.
- Dunellen was added to the New Jersey Motion Picture and Television Commission catalog, promoting the Borough to the film and television industry.
- Adoption of quality-of-life ordinances, including;
  - an ordinance controlling electronic smoking devices and banning their sale within five hundred feet of schools and parks;
  - an ordinance prohibiting residents and businesses from disposing household or business trash or rubbish in public receptacles, as well as waterways of any kind;
  - an ordinance requiring property owners to remove snow and ice from corners within 24 hours of end of a snowfall and requiring them to remove snow or ice from abutting sidewalks on or around fire hydrants; and
  - an ordinance to prevent the delivery of unsolicited handbills and circulars to properties in Dunellen and creating a process to report these unwanted solicitations;
- Continued communications and transparency through the use of regular and timely updates to the Borough website ([www.dunellen-nj.gov](http://www.dunellen-nj.gov)), monthly e-newsletter *Next Stop! Dunellen!*, quarterly printed newspaper *The Dunellen Report*, monthly *Messages from the Mayor*, video updates with Mayor Cilento, and now quarterly Mayoral Town Halls on important topics such as the legalization of cannabis in New Jersey and Understanding

Redevelopment in Dunellen; and continued transparency on the Borough's budget through public PowerPoint presentations of the budget and an infographic explaining the budget and Borough's goals;

- Dunellen celebrated and honored Dunellen native and 2-time Olympian and 2x gold medalist and world record holder for 400-meter hurdles, Sydney McLaughlin, with a watch party and track naming ceremony, which drew hundreds to Columbia Park;
- Hiring of two new police officers for the Dunellen Police Department;
- Creation of the Dunellen Diversity & Inclusion Committee to celebrate Dunellen's multi-cultural diversity;
- Dunellen Office of Emergency Management updating their Emergency Operations Plans, receiving \$10,000.00 grant from the Emergency Management Agency Assistance grant program; and the creation of a 15-member Community Emergency Response Team (CERT);
- Continued revitalization of downtown Dunellen, welcoming new businesses, builders and investors; and
- \$1.2 million in permit fees from the Dunellen Station development project which is rapidly being constructed and anticipates welcoming new residents in summer 2022.

As you can see, the Borough continues to make progress. But work still must go on and the stage is being set for 2022. These are some of our priorities for Dunellen during 2022 and beyond:

- Continue the revitalization of downtown Dunellen;
  - Several mixed-use projects that have been approved are anticipated to begin construction, while others are expected to be introduced to the Borough Council and Dunellen Planning Board; and
  - Maintain a commerce friendly mentality to attract and retain new businesses, investors and builders to downtown Dunellen in order to create more ratables;
- Enhance economic development in downtown Dunellen by amending the Dunellen Redevelopment Plan to allow for breweries, wineries and distilleries;
- Finalization of the Dunellen Sign Ordinance to create a more cohesive look for Dunellen's business district;
- Anticipate that Dunellen will conduct a Master Plan Re-Examination;
- Continue to explore ways to save money through shared service agreements;
- Continue to review and amend outdated ordinances to enhance the quality of life in Dunellen; and
- Continue our relationship with Middlesex County for their mill and pave program, as well as the use of NJDOT Municipal Aid grant funds to pave more roads in Dunellen.

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 fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "C".

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