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MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR

Jason F. Cilento

January 2023

I wish you and your family a happy and healthy New Year! We are so blessed to live and do business in Dunellen. The Borough of Dunellen rang in the New Year with its annual reorganization meeting on Sunday, January 1, 2023. I would like to congratulate and welcome back Trina G. Rios and Daniel Cole Sigmon for their second three-year terms and welcome Hal VanDermark who will be filling the remainder term for an unexpired seat through the end of the year. Congratulations to Mrs. Rios who was reappointed unanimously as Council President for 2023.

A memorable moment during the reorganization meeting was when all three Council Members were sworn-in by Deputy Minority Leader Assemblywoman Nancy Munoz, who was joined by Assemblywoman Michele Matsikoudis. Both Assemblywomen represent New Jersey Legislative District 21 alongside Senator Jon Bramnick. (Beginning in 2024, the Borough of Dunellen will be represented by Legislative District 21 because of redistricting; the New Jersey Legislative Apportionment Commission adopted the "New Jersey Legislative Districts: 2022-2030" map on February 18, 2022). We were excited that both representatives were able to attend and assist in administering the Oath of Office for Council Members Rios, Sigmon and VanDermark.

Congratulations to Dunellen resident William Wagner who was recognized as Dunellen's Volunteer Citizen of the Year 2022 for having served on the Dunellen Parking Authority for over 11 years and on many other local civic organizations as well. In addition, congratulations to former Dunellen mayor Robert J. Seader who was presented with Dunellen's Lifetime Achievement Award 2022 for his years of service to the community as a council member, mayor and long-time volunteer.



Pictures | (Top) Trina G. Rios with her family and Deputy Minority Leader Assemblywoman Nancy Munoz. Mrs. Rios was unanimously re-appointed Council President for 2023. (Middle) Daniel Cole Sigmon with his family and Deputy Minority Leader Assemblywoman Nancy Munoz. (Bottom) Hal VanDermark, who is filling the remainder term of an unexpired seat, with his family being sworn-in by Deputy Minority Leader Assemblywoman Nancy Munoz.



Pictures | (Top) William Wagner stands with Mayor Jason F. Cilento, as he receives Dunellen's 2022 Volunteer Citizen of the Year Award. (Bottom) Former Dunellen Mayor Robert J. Seader stands with Mayor Jason F. Cilento, as he receives Dunellen's 2022 Lifetime Achievement Award.

During the reorganization meeting, I had the great honor of sharing the *State of the Borough* address which highlighted the Borough's accomplishments in 2022 and outlined the agenda for 2023.

Following is a list of notable accomplishments from last year:

- The Lincoln Avenue road improvement project was successfully completed; \$1,029,550 in total funds from New Jersey Department of Transportation's (NJDOT) Municipal Aide grants for fiscal years 2020 and 2021 covered the entire cost of improvements including new curbs and sidewalks, sewer and storm water systems, dozens of new native street trees, push-button rectangular rapid flashing beacons, ADA compliant crosswalks and more.
- Dunellen's continued partnership with Middlesex County enabled us to save costs through the County mill and pave road improvement program when resurfacing Schwartz Place and sections of First Street and Dunellen Avenue, and installing ADA compliant crosswalks on those streets.
- New Jersey American Water and PSE&G installed 3.4 miles of new utilities and paved the affected streets, which included sections of Fourth Street, Lincoln Avenue, Madison Avenue, North Avenue Extension, Pulaski Street, Third Street, Mountain View Terrace and North Washington Avenue; these improvements were made possible by an amendment to Ordinance 2021-23, *Restorations to Streets and Sidewalks* under Chapter 256-9, which was implemented in September 2021.

- Enhanced striping and signage were applied to all newly paved roads in 2022, as we stand committed to prioritizing safety for all users, reducing risks and reminding drivers of the regulatory speed limit, especially near our schools and downtown businesses.
- The Borough successfully advocated for a change to an existing NJDOT traffic regulation regarding State Highway Route 28; large trucks are now banned from turning off Route 28 at each intersection in Dunellen.
- Since 2020, the Borough of Dunellen has been awarded a total of \$2,161,540 in grants from the NJDOT for several road and transit village projects, some of which have already been completed and others which will be implemented over the next two years. In 2022, the Borough was awarded a Transit Village grant for \$226,000 for wayfinding (signage) along North Avenue and \$619,460 for improvements to Second Street between the Middlesex Borough border and Madison Avenue.
- Downtown Dunellen had \$38 million in investments in residential, mixed-use and façade improvements. Six businesses, including a cake and coffee shop, an Italian restaurant, a lobster dog food truck and others opened in 2022.
- A Short-Term Tax Incentive Program was adopted by the Borough to help smaller property owners within the Redevelopment Area be able to make investments in their properties; the program provides a five-year

tax incentive to relieve property owners of additional taxes owed for increased valuations due to improvements made through the program.

- Three interconnected planning initiatives were carried out in 2022 to help guide the Borough's decision-making over the next decade. The first initiative was the Master Plan Re-Examination. Dunellen was one of the first municipalities in the State of New Jersey to include a new requirement for a Master Plan: a Climate Resiliency assessment and subsequent Climate Resiliency Plan. The Borough's two other planning initiatives were grants awarded for technical assistance: NJ TRANSIT's Transit-Friendly Planning Program's *Active Transportation Study* and the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority's *Complete and Green Streets for All policy*, which recommended infrastructure improvements that are designed to incorporate greener and more sustainable practices for the safety and mobility of pedestrians and bicyclists of all ages and mobilities in addition to other modes of transportation in Dunellen.
- An amendment to the Redevelopment Plan established transition areas as "gateways" at Dunellen's eastern and western borders along North Avenue. To provide appropriate population density for the downtown, the transition areas permit residential uses on the ground floor in addition to permitting typical mixed-use development.
- Additional Redevelopment Plan amendments added guidelines for electric vehicle charging stations, pervious pavements, rain gardens and native plants.
- A revamped Sign Ordinance outlines comprehensive signage rules for businesses and buildings.
- There was a new ordinance which permits and encourages wineries and breweries to develop downtown.
- There was a new flood damage control ordinance that regulates water run-off in new developments.
- There was a bond ordinance to pay for stream and brook cleaning to improve water flow and alleviate local flooding.
- There was a bond ordinance for park improvements such as painting and the addition of new lights to the Washington Park Gazebo.
- Dunellen streamlined the process for studios and production companies to do work in the municipality; in fall 2022, the Borough's small town atmosphere became a backdrop for David Duchovny's new project "Bucky Dent" which was filmed at several locations in town.
- The Borough continued to improve communications and transparency through the use of regular and timely printed and digital resources including updates to the Borough website (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 quarterly Mayoral Town Halls on important topics (e.g. Legalization of Cannabis in New Jersey and Understanding Redevelopment in Dunellen), Walks and Talks with Mayor Cilento, a Borough E-Notify system, and public PowerPoint presentations of the budget including infographics explaining the budget and Borough's goals.
- To increase the efficiency and accessibility of government services, the Borough hired three new employees in the Department of Public Works and full-time employees in each of the following office: Construction, Recreation and Tax.
- The Hometown Heroes Banner program grew from 52 to 90 banners displayed in downtown.
- Park improvements included newly paved basketball courts at Morecraft and Gavornik Parks, new benches at both parks and new playground equipment at Morecraft Park; these improvements were made possible through a community benefit donation by the developers of 528 North Avenue, Community Development Block Grants and capital improvement expenditures.
- The Office of Emergency Management Emergency Operations Plans received a \$10,000 grant from the Emergency Management Agency Assistance grant program.



2022 Year in Review – Borough of Dunellen. Graphic Design by Julie Grof, Program Manager for Dunellen, NJ.

Agenda items for 2023 include:

- The Borough will continue to support the revitalization of downtown Dunellen:
 - Several mixed-use projects, which have already received approvals, will be begin construction; and
 - Additional mixed-use construction projects will be introduced to the Borough Council and Dunellen Planning Board.
- Under the guidance of our municipal planners, we will implement several recommendations from the 2022 Master Plan Re-Examination and the interconnected planning initiatives.
- Mayor Cilento will work with the Dunellen Downtown Management Organization to promote the benefits of a Business Improvement District in downtown Dunellen.
- In partnership with Middlesex County, we plan to pave more streets through the County's mill and pave program.
- We will support Middlesex County in their work on the replacement of the Pulaski Street culvert.
- The Borough will utilize NJDOT Municipal Aide Funds to make road improvements to Kline Place.
- With the assistance of National Water Main Cleaning Company, we will continue culvert clean-outs to help with water flow in our streams and brooks.
- The Borough will work to advance the culvert rebuild under the NJ TRANSIT's tracks to alleviate flooding risks.



Pictures | (Top) Mayor Jason F. Cilento sits with Council Members (L to R) Jessica Dunne, Trina G. Rios, Terri Albertson, Daniel Cole Sigmon, Hal VanDermark and Joseph Paltjon. (Bottom) Volunteers for various committees, commissions, boards and authorities are sworn-in by Mayor Jason F. Cilento.

Living and doing business in New Jersey's Miracle Mile is truly a blessing. While facing unprecedented adversities over the past three years such as a pandemic, Hurricane Ida, and the loss of our Firehouse, our community showed up to support one another with generosity, strength, and optimism for the future. We are a community of volunteers and can only be successful if everyone pitches in, and in Dunellen, **they do**. The Dunellen community gives proof to the phrase 'The Miracle Mile!' And, as Mayor, I am encouraged and inspired every day by our collective volunteerism and unwavering dedication to making Dunellen a wonderful place to call home.

For a full copy of Mayor Jason F. Cilento's *State of the Borough Address*, please visit here:

https://cms1files.revize.com/dunellennj/government/mayor_and_council/Re-Org%20Speech%20January%201,%202023.pdf