

Reorganization Day Speech
Mayor Jason F. Cilento
January 1, 2020

Good afternoon everyone. I wish to extend to you and yours a Happy and Healthy New Year! We are blessed to live and do business in Dunellen and I am honored and grateful to be able to serve you as Dunellen's 22nd Mayor. I look forward to working with the other members of the Borough Council: Kenneth Bayer, Jessica Dunne, April Burke and Stacy Narvesen, and I wish to welcome new Councilpersons Trina Rios and Daniel Cole Sigmon. I think it is important we recognize that with the swearing-in of Trina Rios, the Council is now not only a majority female, but the Council is now more diverse with Trina being the first Hispanic representative elected to the Borough Council, to my knowledge. Congratulations to the both of you and I wish you both all the success in your service to Dunellen. Also, congratulations to the newly appointed Council President, NAME, I know you will serve the position with integrity and honor.

Before I begin my remarks, I would like to recognize the outstanding contribution of former Mayor Robert J. Seader. Bob Seader served as mayor for 22 years and left an indelible mark on all aspects of our community. His devoted leadership and his unflagging concern for the welfare of our residents are high standards of public service and models for all elected officials. We also will miss the financial expertise of former Councilman Joseph Petracca who served on the Council for 15 years. I consider both gentlemen mentors, but most importantly, I consider them friends. We will miss them both.

With every closing chapter in the story of a community there is an opportunity to begin a new narrative. As we set our sights on the future of Dunellen, I am excited to work with all of you to

accomplish the many tasks before us. There are many challenges facing our Borough: road and sewer improvements, the revitalization of our downtown, supporting our school district as it seeks to make district wide enhancements, investigating further areas of shared services and keeping taxes as low as possible while maintaining quality of services. The Council and I can accomplish these goals by working together and making sure that at the core of each decision-making role, the best interests of the residents of Dunellen are at the center, and I have faith that the Dunellen Borough Council can get the job done.

As a Councilperson, my philosophy has been to emphasize communication and transparency with Dunellen's residents and business owners. I will continue this as Mayor by making use of more media such as our borough website, social media and the Next Stop! Dunellen e-newsletter, as well as 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 9th year of publication. Through these outlets, I will continue to update residents of what is going on at Borough Hall and what capital projects, events, and redevelopment projects the Mayor and Borough Council are working on.

I would now like to share with you a vision for Dunellen that I believe will support our revitalization efforts and stay true to our small-town values. These are some of my priorities as Mayor for Dunellen over 2020 and beyond:

First, it is vitally important that Dunellen continues the revitalization of our downtown and keeps a commerce-friendly mentality to attract and retain new businesses, while also supporting our current businesses. The development of our downtown will only further assist in stimulating the local economy and create new revenue streams for the borough to make the improvements we need for various capital projects. In the coming

months and years, we must work together to create a shared vision with all stakeholders at the table for how we see the development of our downtown. A vibrant and walkable downtown will create a central business district in which residents and visitors will want to shop, dine and play. With the push for the direct one-seat ride into NYC along the Raritan Valley Line and the advocacy for the funding of the Gateway Tunnel, a factor that can only increase property values and attract more businesses and residents to the area, it is critical that we make further progress in the area of our downtown revitalization.

Second, we should always strive to improve communication with residents and business owners through regular and timely updates on the borough website, with enewsletters, and as I previously stated, by bringing the Borough of Dunellen on to social media and the video-recording of borough council meetings via our municipal website. These platforms will assist us in better communicating to Dunellen's diverse community; a factor we should all recognize and celebrate. To further enhance transparency and communication, I believe it vital that we plan to present our budgets through more visual forms such as PowerPoint and infographics which will better explain our budget to the public. Finally, residents are eager to contribute to their town and to better enable this I have recently enhanced the volunteer sign-up system with its own link on our website Home Page. This fully digitized mechanism for volunteering will systemize the process and it is very user-friendly. Many of those who have already used the sign-up are here with us today and have been sworn into their duly appointed board, commission or committee. Thank you all for stepping up to the plate to volunteer for Dunellen. I hope this will encourage more members of our community to do the same.

Third, as Mayor, I am looking forward to investigating shared service opportunities with surrounding communities and

Middlesex County, presenting capital projects and economic development opportunities to the borough council, as well as researching more grant opportunities for the borough in the areas of road improvements, park enhancements and downtown beautification projects and organizational structure within our municipal government to enhance daily operations.

Fourth, I plan to bring to the Borough Council in the coming weeks a Mayor's Traffic & Pedestrian Safety Task Force. The purpose of this task force will be to advise the Mayor and Council about a safer pedestrian environment and to encourage walkability in Dunellen. The task force will work with the Dunellen Police, residents, the School District and businesses to research and recommend if the Complete Streets program through the New Jersey Department of Transportation is a viable option for seeking funds to enhance pedestrian safety in Dunellen.

I would now like to share with you some major infrastructure projects coming in 2020: the Dunellen Stations development in the old Art Color complex is almost done with demolition and the new sewer pipes will be installed. Building could begin soon after; we will be repaving Grove Street and making important upgrades to the sanitary sewer system in that area and adjacent to Gertrude Terrace; we will be paving South Madison Avenue in Summer 2020; we have received a grant to repave Lincoln Avenue; and the new turf field and running track in Columbia Park will be completed, as well as a new playground. Beyond 2020, the Borough of Dunellen will be working on amending the FEMA Flood Map through municipal and Middlesex County culvert projects and working with the Green Brook Flood Control Commission and the US Army Corps of Engineers on addressing flooding caused by the Green Brook.

In order to accomplish this ambitious set of goals, I pledge to you all that I will work with all members of the Borough Council, in

a non-partisan manner, with only the best interests of all our residents as my guiding light.

I would like to take the time during this address to thank the borough's administration and staff, and our various boards, commissions and committees.

I would like to recognize William Robins, our Municipal Clerk and Borough Administrator, who has been helpful in my transition from Councilman to Mayor. I also note the significant contribution made by Debra Weaver. Debbie oversees payroll and Accounts Payable and does a magnificent job. As Administrative Assistant, Lauren Staats is in charge of Vital Statistics and animal licensing, and countless other tasks. To the gentleman to my left, our borough attorney John Bruder, thank you for your counsel and thank you for always providing us with sound legal advice.

Scott Olsen is our Chief Financial Officer. He works with our team in the Tax Office, Patricia Dougherty, Tax Collector, and Gail Woerner, Tax Office Clerk. Thank you to Judge Katherine Howes for swearing us in today, and to your staff, Terry Crisafulli, Municipal Court Administrator and her Deputy, Lauren Colletti. Ron Safar, our Department of Public Works Supervisor, oversees a very hard-working department and I thank him for keeping things moving around town. And a big thank you to Scott Luthman and Rich Gianchiglia in the Construction Office.

To Alex Miller and the Recreation Commission, thank you for expanding our youth programs over the past several years and for overseeing our parks. To all of our other volunteer agencies such as the Parking Authority, Planning Board, Dunellen Downtown Management Organization, Dunellen Arts and Culture Commission, the Maurer House Committee, Shade Tree Commission, the Dunellen Public Library Board, and the Dunellen Senior Club, I would like to thank you all for your service to the

Borough of Dunellen through your participation as a member of a board, commission or committee. Dunellen's success is truly measured by the countless volunteers that serve our community.

We are fortunate to have what I feel is the best emergency services in all of Central New Jersey. Thank you to Chief Daniel Smith and his police department for serving and protecting our borough, as well as Debbie Ritchie, Police Department's administrative assistant. We have a department that is under the leadership of a great Chief and his Lieutenant, Chris Beenders, and I look forward to working with both of you to continue keeping our community safe. To Chief Jeremy Lowder of the Dunellen Fire Dept and Chief Jeff Best of the Dunellen Rescue Squad, I thank you both for your service and your members' service. Your volunteerism is greatly appreciated. We all recognize the great risk each of our emergency services takes when going out on a call. I know I can speak for myself and the borough council when I say you have our support. Please keep safe out there.

Finally, I would like to recognize and thank my family, many of whom are here this afternoon, for their unwavering support:

I extend my gratitude and love to my fiancée, Lindsay Braverman, whom I admire and appreciate for pushing me each and every day to be a better person;

To my mother and father, who inspired me to follow whatever path it was I wanted to take in life, and to whom I will be forever grateful for choosing to live and raise their family in Dunellen;

To my siblings, Brian and Amanda, and their families for their encouragement throughout the years;

To my aunts, uncles and cousins, who have always offered their help in any way;

To Lindsay's parents, Susan and Steve Braverman, for their continued support and for bringing the most beautiful and talented woman into the world;

To my late paternal grandparents, June and Andy Cilento, who were always there for our family;

And, finally, to Jean Free, my maternal grandmother, who I am so honored and blessed to have here today.

My family and I are missing a great presence in the room today, but the spirit of my maternal grandfather, Arthur Free, lives on. It is his cabbie hat that I placed under the Bible today while being sworn-in because my Pop-Pop, or Artie, as many knew him, inspired me to get involved in local politics. He always taught me that if I had something to say or saw something I felt needed changing, I should stand up and do something about it. I am eternally grateful for his wisdom that I carry forward with me today and I hope to make him proud in this new role.

With all of this being said, and I know, I can be long-winded, I promise I'll work on that, I recognize the responsibility that has been bestowed upon me by our community. 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, create 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.