

May 2017 Update

I am proud to announce that our Borough Administrator, Ms. Andrea Bierwirth, in addition to helping balance the 2017 municipal budget, has also passed the difficult CFM exam and is now a “Certified Floodplain Manager (CFM)” in the state of NJ. This is the first time we have a Borough employee with the certification to help properly manage our flood plains.

Recently, Andrea successfully helped a resident file a “LOMA” – a letter of map amendment – to help get a homeowner’s flood insurance policy lowered based upon the flood elevation of the home. That will provide a significant savings as flood insurance rates increase.

Andrea’s achievement will also provide points in the FEMA Community Rating System in which the Borough participates to help lower flood insurance premiums for all residents paying for NFIP policies. Today the policy discount is set at 15% and we have set goals to get to the 25% discount level.

Congratulations Andrea!

#ManvilleProud

[Read more about CFM certification....](#)

The Association of State Floodplain Managers has established a national program for certifying floodplain managers. This program recognizes continuing education and professional development that enhances the knowledge and performance of local, state, federal and private-sector floodplain management professionals.

The role of the nation's floodplain managers is expanding due to increases in disaster losses, the emphasis on mitigation to alleviate the cycle of damage-rebuild-damage, and a recognized need for professionals to adequately address these issues. This certification program will lay the foundation for ensuring that highly qualified individuals are available to meet the challenge of breaking the damage cycle and stopping its negative drain on the nation's human, financial and natural resources.

April 2017 Update

Earlier this year the NJ Senate unanimously voted to create a special bipartisan committee to examine the state's school funding system and to make recommended reforms. The eight-

member Select Committee on School Funding Fairness will hold public hearings throughout the state. Senate President Sweeney is the chair of the committee.

I was invited to speak at a public hearing on Monday, April 17th held at the municipal complex in Parsippany, NJ. This was an invitation as a direct result of attending the Mayors' Legislative Day held in Trenton on Wednesday February 8th and speaking out on the school funding issue and how it adversely affects our school district and property tax bills.

I stated the facts that we receive less in school aid today than we received back in 2010, even with enrollment up over 100 students. We only received \$328 dollars more in aid for the 2017-18 school year than our previous year's total aid amount. It is evident that the current school funding formula is not functioning as intended.

The school funding law of 2008 was altered to include provisions that have prevented districts with increased student enrollment from receiving fair compensation at the same time other school systems are overcompensated with so-called "hold harmless" aid that gives them money for students they don't have. In addition, the existing formula accounts for a town's value and this component seems to be completely ignored also.

My question that remains unanswered is "how does a town like Manville become the 8th most underfunded school district in our State with over 500 districts"? I recently received a call from Assemblyman Andrew Zwicker who represents our town in Trenton. He has offered to help with the analysis of the existing aid formula and I look forward to meeting with him in the weeks ahead. In my opinion, there is enough school aid to go around, it is simply not being distributed in a fair manner.

It seems NJ property taxes are a hot topic in this year's Governor's race too. It is easy to raise taxes and much more difficult to lower them and still provide the same level of essential services. The Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders has introduced a 2017 budget that will raise county property taxes by \$5 dollars annually on a \$430,006 average assessed home. Lower assessed homes in Manville will pay even less.

Our local 2017 municipal budget introduced in March is basically a "balanced budget" with the same amount to be raised by taxation as the year before, \$8,909,276. There will however be a slight increase in the municipal tax rate due to the 5 million dollar loss of assessed value from homes participating in the Blue Acres buyout program during 2016.

In closing, Memorial Day is approaching. I'm looking forward to our Memorial Day parade this year and taking the time to remember our military personnel who paid the ultimate sacrifice for the freedoms we enjoy today. Until next month, Mayor Richard M. Onderko

March 2017 Update

One of your governing body's greatest responsibilities is approving and regularly monitoring the municipal budget. The 2017 calendar year budget cycle is well underway with budget adoption planned for some time in April. With the on-going property tax crisis in New Jersey, we must vigilantly focus on the "long-term" economic welfare of our community and we have already begun to do so.

Keeping Manville affordable with the challenges we face is a top priority of your Mayor and Council. With an on-going 2014 Blue Acres buyout program removing ratables from our tax rolls, we obviously have to look for ways to save. We have entered into numerous shared services agreements and put spending restrictions in place to help increase our general account balance "carry over amount" every year since 2013. Our town debt currently outstanding is \$7.2 million which has been paid down the past few years.

Each year obligations to fund employee State pensions, health insurance costs, and debt service payments increase. The challenge is to offset those increases with cost savings to stabilize our municipal tax rate. Municipal tax increases have been \$8 in 2016 and \$24 dollars in 2015 on an average assessed home. We are targeting another low increase for 2017 as we work to balance the municipal budget. Our budget is approximately one-third of the overall annual tax bill.

With regard to funding our schools, the existing formula for determining the amount of State aid received by a school district is clearly not functioning as intended. The Borough's overall "town value" has decreased significantly and the existing school formula is supposed to take that factor into account when determining the "local cost share" of the school's budget. The School Funding Reform Act (SFRA) implemented in 2008 seems to ignore that factor helping make Manville the 8th most underfunded school district in our State. The aid calculation for the 2017-2018 school year only increased by \$328 dollars in total! We receive less in State aid today than we received back in 2010 and our enrollment is up over 100 students.

In closing, the school funding issue is still being discussed in Trenton. I have made the leadership in our State's legislature aware of the economic challenges we face here in Manville. One proposal on the table would give Manville \$1 million dollars more in school aid each year for the next 5 years. This would nearly double the amount of State aid we currently receive, help

to provide a quality education for our students, and most importantly, help stabilize our property taxes since school funding is over 50% of your tax bill.

The next 100 days are critical starting from when Governor Christie introduced the State's budget in late February. A new school funding fairness formula needs to be implemented which will give more aid to Manville's underfunded school district for the 2017-2018 school year.

Until next month, Mayor Richard M. Onderko

February 2017 Update

In the past couple of weeks, I have had the opportunity to attend several important meetings looking out for the best interests of our Borough. I would like to give everyone a brief update on what was discussed and communicate the importance of each meeting.

I attended the New Jersey Association of Floodplain Managers' (NJAFM) meeting held on January 24th in Trenton to address the impacts of a new federal administration and what outcome it will have on our Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Interesting questions were raised: Will President Obama's Executive Order 13690 dated January 30th, 2015, establishing the Federal Flood Risk Management Standard and influencing Federal investment in projects be repealed outright? What regulatory processes exist that lengthen rollback? Will the new Administration strengthen funding requests for flood mitigation and infrastructure?

I remain hopeful that projects can be undertaken to help lower flood water levels in our Borough. I refuse to accept nothing can or will be done to help us. The very next day I attended the reorganization meeting of our regional, multi-town flood Commission, the Raritan & Millstone Flood Control Commission. I spoke passionately to the Commission about considering smaller projects and to work with New Jersey's Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) to make progress. It has been over 60 years without any flood mitigation efforts in Manville after two hurricanes hit NJ in August of 1955 and major flooding occurred.

In the weeks ahead, I will be inviting representatives of NJDEP to Manville. I believe it is important for them to see first-hand the adverse effects flooding has had on our neighborhoods and discuss ideas for projects and a path forward in 2017. I remain hopeful President Trump, who wants to put "America first", will put more funding toward flood mitigation to help us eliminate the constant flooding threat we face.

I recently attended a Conference of Mayors' meeting in Trenton held on January 26th to specifically address the school funding formula. The meeting was sponsored by the New Jersey League of Municipalities. I had the opportunity to address the panel, which included Senate President Sweeney and Assembly Speaker Prieto, to ask how can Manville's school district be one of the most underfunded districts in our State after the loss of rateables due to Blue Acre buyouts and the reduction in our town's overall value? We receive less in school aid today than we received in 2010 even with enrollment up over 100 students. This is further proof that the existing complex funding formula is simply "unfair" or does not accurately account for economic conditions within our Borough. Fighting for more school aid for Manville is a fight worth taking on in my opinion. Any amount of additional aid, whether it is State or Federal, will help stabilize our property taxes and allow for a quality education to be offered to our students without cutting curriculum and teachers.

I attended the 25th Annual Mayors' Legislative Day in Trenton held on February 8th that covered a wide variety of topics facing New Jersey taxpayers. Discussions evolved around how funds were distributed from the NJ Transportation Trust to providing affordable housing requirements with the recent court ruling on COAH obligations. In addition, the NJDEP commissioner stated that a 2017 priority of the DEP is to help reduce localized flooding. There's no better place to start than right here in the Borough of Manville.

I also recently had a meeting with Somerset County's Office of Emergency Management to discuss various topics of importance concerning our emergency operations plan, in addition, to inquire about available OEM grants. I look forward to helping update the Somerset County hazard mitigation plan this year from a Manville perspective. All municipalities will participate in this work effort and update their own local plans to remain eligible for FEMA grant money.

Providing better communication during times of emergencies is a top priority. The Nixle messaging service is used by our police department and by surrounding towns to communicate more effectively with residents. Simply text our zip code 08835 to 888777 to start receiving mobile phone alerts sent from our police department. You can visit www.nixle.com and sign up for all the notification options available. I find this to be a valuable service being notified of weather events, traffic accidents and road closures in our local area as they occur.