

## Mayoral Address – January 5, 2019

I would like to welcome everyone again to the 90<sup>th</sup> reorganization meeting for the Borough of Manville. Our **90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration** will be underway this year. We were incorporated as a Borough on April 18<sup>th</sup>, 1929. I'm looking forward to a special year as we celebrate our 90<sup>th</sup> year. I will try to keep my remarks brief. Make no mistake about it. **2018 was another good year for our Borough.** We encountered no major flooding from any named hurricanes. Let's hope this trend continues well into the future as climate change is upon us. Beginning with some of the highlights of 2018: our budget cycle was focused on keeping any tax increase **under a 2% hard cap** and we were successful in doing so even with the execution of a **\$1.5 million-dollar capital program** to replace aging vehicles and equipment even while encountering the loss of ratables from Blue Acres buyouts.

I am proud to report our **budget surpluses** year over year continue to grow and show that **the leadership team** of this Borough is doing an **excellent job** on controlling any unnecessary expenditures. I would like to thank all employees for this attention and especially our Borough Administrator Andrea Wardrop. In 2012 year ending, we had a budget surplus of only \$215,000. In 2017 year ending, the surplus hit \$748,000. An increase of over \$500,000! In 2010 we were at ten million \$10,000,000 in outstanding bond debts. We have been focused on paying down our debt. Year end 2018 our debt level is 5.4 million which includes the \$1.5 million-dollar recent bond offering. Almost a **50% reduction**. This isn't financial magic, these figures are the result of hard work and making tough decisions. Coming from a long career in Corporate finance and producing profit and loss statements, these figures and trends make me extremely happy. So, our **debt level is headed down**, and **budget surpluses are up**. A financial direction we can all approve of for our Borough. This past April, we received **an A1 rating from Moody's Credit Agency**. The Agency attributed the good rating to the Borough's financial management and low debt which reflects the Borough's continued **strong commitment to fiscal responsibility**.

With a new Governor, Governor Phil Murphy, pledging to legalize recreational marijuana within his first 100 days in office, this council acted in a **unanimous, bipartisan** manner to ban the sales of the product anywhere within our Borough by ordinance. I'm proud to say we were the **first town in Somerset County** to do so. We are a two square mile Borough that felt it just doesn't fit within our borders. There are major social issues with promoting a recreational drug as something **positive** for our youth since there are so many **adverse effects** being reported in states that have already legalized. The new edible product line is troubling with high THC contents that will be extremely difficult to keep these products out of the hands of our youth.

Now after one year, legalization of recreational marijuana still hasn't passed into law and **I hope it never passes**. I believe as more evidence and statistics are reported out of other states that have already legalized, most NJ residents will realize the associated tax revenues just are **not** worth it and will not cure the fiscal problems of the state of NJ. And recreational legalization of this drug puts one's personal safety at risk too. Marijuana related traffic deaths are up 151% since the state of Colorado legalized marijuana in 2014. Why take the risk here in NJ, the most densely populated state in our country for a few extra tax dollars? The safety of our residents should be put ahead of any potential tax revenues from legalization.

During 2018, we also had 3 senior police officers retire, Captain Mark Sniscak, Det. Sgt. Ron Gazaway and Sgt. Jeff Petrone and I wish them long and healthy retirements after so many years of keeping us safe here in Manville.

We attained **Tree City USA status** and celebrated our second annual Arbor Day celebration at our library. A Big Thank you – to our Shade Tree Commission. In May, we installed **the Chair of Honor** in our council chambers as a constant reminder to the price of our freedoms we all enjoy no matter what one's political views are – liberal or conservative, Republican, Democrat or Independent. Over 93,000 Americans remain missing in action. Our veterans are very special to us here in Manville. I'll say more on that later.

We held our second annual **National Night Out** event in August for the community to come out and meet and greet our first responders. The event helps foster police and community partnerships. I would like to thank our law enforcement personnel for keeping us all safe and for their commitment to our Borough. We also have the best fire, rescue and OEM volunteers in Somerset County to be proud of. Some have been serving us for over 50 years!

We recently achieved **“bronze level” certification** for the first time ever with **Sustainable Jersey**. Thank you to the Sustainable Manville team for getting us on the map and for the recognition. We were even awarded the “rookie of the year” award for all our efforts by Sustainable Jersey in Atlantic City.

We **sold Borough owned property** in December next to old Rustic Mall site for residential development and worked on a new redevelopment plan for that area including sections of our Main Street. **The road diet for our Main Street** is in the design phase to help improve pedestrian safety and to slow traffic down. Unfortunately, construction won't begin for another 2 years until designs are finalized. Our Borough website is in the process of an upgrade and redesign to improve navigation and content. The **Manville's News** was published by the Borough every month during 2018 and have been posted on-line. The newspaper continues to be very well received to help

keep everyone informed of our work efforts and town activities. The **transparency** it provides is well worth the efforts on everyone's part who help produce the newspaper. And we launched the **official Borough Facebook page** to leverage social media in keeping our residents informed so please like us on Facebook.

**Looking ahead to 2019, some major goals are:**

- 1.) The council **will adopt a new redevelopment plan for the old Rustic Mall** site. After nearly 20 years, it's time for development to begin.
- 2.) A full review cycle will begin of our work efforts from participating in the **FEMA Community Rating System** to help lower flood insurance premiums further. We currently get a 15% rate discount and are targeting 20 to 25% levels. Our residents living in our flood zones deserve a break on flood insurance costs that have increased significantly year over year.
- 3.) And most importantly keep any **2019 municipal property tax** increase to a minimum to stabilize the municipal tax burden homeowners pay. This year I will ....
- 4.) Also address the municipal revenue loss due to continued Blue Acres buyouts with our representatives in Trenton and Somerset County. We recently adopted a 5-year acquisition plan and updated our 5-year hazard mitigation plans with Somerset county OEM. This is all to make Manville **more storm resilient** and transform our flood plains back to their natural state. Since 1999, we have removed **150 homes** from our tax rolls which equates to a significant loss in tax revenues. Today, we have 12 more homes pending demolition. As homes come down, all remaining residents pick up the additional tax burden and that is simply unfair and unacceptable for the long term.

The **number one issue** in our state is the continuing property tax crisis.

Recently, Trenton solved the school funding issue with providing more aid to underfunded districts like Manville's. Now we need to address getting our fair share of municipal aid for a town like ours, one that is hit hard by flooding.

I tell everyone, we are not a normal town. We simply cannot continue to raise property taxes and ask for more from our residents as we remove homes from our tax rolls. I would like to thank Assemblyman Roy Frieman for our recent meeting last month to discuss a path forward for Manville to help keep Manville affordable and for Manville to get its fair share of municipal funding given the circumstances we face with 800 homes still at significant flood risk today. Senator Kip Bateman and Assemblyman Frieman and Zwicker were instrumental in helping make get more school funding in 2018. Thank you!

It has also been recently reported more people have moved out of NJ than any other state in our nation last year. I'm not surprised. However, there is some good news out of Trenton. Senate President Stephen Sweeney recently stated there is a path forward for NJ that fixes fiscal problems and restores economic growth, **but tax increases are not part of the solution. And I couldn't agree more! Property taxes are too high in NJ and we can surely use some relief here in Manville.**

In closing, putting partisan politics aside, I am of the opinion we had a **very good 2018 in this Borough.** It was a year filled achievements and memorable events. We will continue the progress in **2019** to keep Manville as a community that others are jealous of **starting with our outstanding community spirit.**

Our community spirit was on full display on Saturday, December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018, as our local cemetery participated in our **nation's Wreath's Across America Day** for the first time. We have over 1,200 veterans buried at Sacred Heart Cemetery, some killed in action from WWII and Vietnam. Over 1300 wreaths were laid so that every veteran's grave got one. The outpouring of support for our veterans speaks volumes to the character of this Borough. I would like to thank Father Stan for allowing us to sign up Sacred Heart Cemetery as a Wreath's Across America official participating location. Two to three hundred local residents turned out that day, including our Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts troops, to participate in the mission to **"Remember – Honor – and Teach"**. Everyone left the cemetery feeling extremely proud to be an American by honoring our heroes laid to rest there. A video drone captured the event and can be viewed from our Borough's Facebook page. A special thank you to Manville resident Bob Kita for putting the video together. Check it out. The video captures this historic day for our community. May God bless our veterans.

**I'm optimistic 2019 will be another very good year for our Borough.** Please pray to keep the hurricanes away this upcoming season and thank you for attending today's reorganization meeting. I would like to wish everyone a happy and healthy New Year!

Mayor Richard M. Onderko