

January 7,2023

Welcome to the 94th Annual Reorganization meeting of the Mayor and Council. The past two years these annual reorganization meetings were held virtually due to the COVID pandemic and the remnants of Hurricane Ida that flooded our town and Borough Hall. Let me just say it is great to be back in person!

I wanted everyone to feel the American spirit with the display of our Nation's flag and Chair of Honor for those prisoners of war or those still missing in action, some 80,000 Americans that are unaccounted for. We are forever indebted to those who gave their lives so that we might be free.

Col. John Dudash was one such resident who lost his life after being shot down over Vietnam in 1967. We will remember his sacrifice with a memorial street sign provided by Rolling Thunder. Col. Dudash was classified as a POW/MIA for over a decade before his remains were discovered. He is laid to rest in Arlington National Cemetery.

We live in a great town with residents who truly care about one another. I am so proud to say I am from Manville. Congratulations to both Ron and Joe, I look forward to working with you and everyone on the council this year.

As our lives got back to normal after the pandemic and the flood, if one is paying attention, our community is on the way back! New residents who have moved in love our walkable community and community spirit. Long-time residents who may be in harm's way of flooding want to stay in town either by elevating their home or taking a buyout, but only want to purchase another home in town. That speaks volumes for Manville's future.

From our Memorial Day Parade to National Night Out and Community Day to Halloween, to letters to soldiers and Santa at our library, to breakfast with Santa, our tree lighting, and the "Grinch from Whoville

and Cindy Lou Who” seemed to pop up everywhere spreading holiday joy, the Manville Arts Council’s Bright Lights contest with homes so beautifully decorated, and at last month’s Wreaths Across America Day to honor our Hometown Heroes, numerous events so well attended by our residents.

We are small-town America at its very best! Manville is back!!

I am optimistic our community, my so beloved hometown, will get the financial and disaster aid we truly deserve this time after suffering the effects of Hurricane Ida’s devastation. I have been very vocal at all levels of government to help our fellow residents and to help make Manville more storm resilient.

As the old saying goes, the squeaky wheel gets the oil. On Monday, I will be in Trenton at the State House attending a news conference to press for better stormwater management regulations, especially with the continued development of apartment buildings and warehouses going on all around us. The current stormwater regulations are simply not good enough!

My op-Ed was recently published in the Courier News, in our monthly newsletter, and on social media that detailed the steps necessary to help Manville and to make it known we can no longer be the “forgotten town” here in Somerset County. The HUD action plan for Hurricane Ida has been recently approved which will allow federal aid to begin to flow to where it is needed most, right here in the Borough of Manville. There is approximately \$400 million allocated to NJ. \$10 million from a different funding source has already been allocated to Manville from the new Swift Current buyout program of FEMA. We need much more, and we need to receive it with a sense of urgency.

I’m told disaster recovery takes a “long time”. And I feel our government can do so much better to help fellow Americans in times of need due to natural flood disasters. It is extremely frustrating, to say the least.

Our business district and our Main Street corridor, which unfortunately floods too, have been in our focus. Several years ago, a “road diet” was proposed to make crossing our Main Street safer. However, this was a federally funded project for a county-owned road with no sense of urgency. The Mayor and Council had a speed study conducted in early 2021 and it indicated the need for a consistent, lower speed limit the entire length. We even adopted a resolution in July of 2021 demanding Somerset County lower sections of the road to 25 MPH.

Too many accidents have occurred over the years, and too many pedestrians have been struck and seriously or fatally injured. I have been very vocal with county officials to make improvements to help keep our residents and those who shop here safe. However, the County ignored the request to lower the speeds until the new road diet project is completed. The good news is construction is finally going to begin this spring to make the roadway safer.

Our south Main Street was designated a rehabilitation zone in 2022 to help attract State aid for Main Street revitalization projects throughout New Jersey. A “Designated Main Street” program is being offered and we plan on applying to this program so that various grant programs can be offered to aid our small business community.

Without an active Chamber of Commerce, we have started an economic development committee to help communicate with business and property owners. We will be launching a new electronic business directory that will be tied into our My Manville smartphone application this spring. A Manville business directory in the palm of one’s hand will be well received. Providing better communication will be the key to our success to improve Main Street.

Several new businesses have moved into town during 2022. We want to aid their success by promoting any new businesses with grand opening ribbon cuttings and business spotlights in our newsletter. We all desire a vibrant Main Street. The completion of the “road diet”

project will most certainly help. However, something must be done to help mitigate flood waters that adversely affect our businesses.

There is some good news to help the situation! A Royce Brook watershed study is underway after a \$250 thousand dollar grant was acquired. Dr. Obropta from Rutgers will be developing plans to help reduce stormwater levels encountered from the Royce Brook. This is much needed with all the recent development in the Royce Brook watershed. We hope to see plans soon and then go after federal infrastructure monies for the construction phase.

There's more good news! We recently received a \$350 thousand-dollar federal grant to create a memorial to our veterans and first responders. The project will help revitalize our south Main Street where an abandoned gas station has become an eyesore. Manville will have a public memorial like what other towns around of have to never forget their sacrifices and the price of freedom.

In closing, I will continue to fight on everyone's behalf this year because I truly believe we will be successful in getting the aid Manville deserves to help keep Manville affordable and such a great place to live. I will see to it that we are no longer the forgotten town!

I would like to thank all our volunteers who serve on our various boards, committees, and our fire and emergency management personnel. Our police force, DPW workers, and Borough staff for all you do throughout the year. I can't forget our librarian Nan and her staff who do such a wonderful job for our community. And my fellow elected officials. Without this massive team effort, on everyone's part, Manville would not be the great place it is to live.

God bless our Borough and God bless the United States of America!

Mayor Richard M. Onderko