

## **2016 State of the Borough Address**

Thank you to the residents of this great borough for joining us today as we celebrate the annual reorganization of the governing body. Thank you to Lt. Governor Kim Guadagno and Governor Donald DiFrancesco for joining us as you have for the last several years. Today, we take an opportunity to reflect on last years' accomplishments and challenges and those that lie ahead.

Over the last three years, many of us on the governing body and throughout borough hall have had an opportunity to get to know Councilman C.J. Diana, both on a professional and personal level. Today, we thank Councilman Diana for his service to the residents of South Plainfield and wish him and his family much success in the future.

We also congratulate Councilman Robert Bengivenga on his election to a fourth term on the borough council. Ten years ago, I began my journey of public service as your running mate. You have earned my respect and the respect of the residents and voters of the borough through your hard work and determination as a Councilman over the last ten years.

Today, we welcome a new face to the governing body. Congratulations Councilman Joseph Wolak on your election. The opportunity to serve your fellow residents is a great honor that comes with great responsibility. Your strong family values, work ethic and volunteer spirit will serve the residents well. I look forward to working with you and the entire Council to move South Plainfield's interests forward.

Throughout 2015, we built on our multi year plan to stabilize municipal taxes, control spending, maintain a beneficial mix of

residential and commercial development and continued capital investment in our borough. Led by Councilman Rusnak, Chief Financial Officer Glenn Cullen and the administration and finance committee, the borough adopted a 2015 budget that held municipal taxes below the 2009 rate. The borough's overall tax rate once again remained the second lowest in Middlesex County. Additionally, municipal spending and borrowing remained tightly controlled.

South Plainfield's economic climate continued to build on the successes of the last several years. The continued recovery gained momentum as evidenced by a nearly \$5 million dollar increase in our ratable base lead by a robust commercial development market and increased residential housing. This marks the first increase in the borough's ratable base in the last five years. Once again, the financial community recognized the successful efforts of this governing body's plan to ensure a strong financial foundation by reaffirming the borough's Aa2 bond rating. In their report, Moody's noted the "rating reflects the borough's large tax base and healthy finances." In addition to our efforts, I would like to recognize and congratulate our borough department heads for their continued commitment to strong financial management.

In 2014, we broke ground on new library expansion project and this January we anticipate a soft opening of the new library with a grand re-opening expected this March. Thank you to the entire staff of the library and to past and present members of the Library Board of Trustees for all of your hard work and dedication. This new library will be a tremendous asset for all South Plainfield residents to enjoy for years to come.

It is imperative that we continue to invest in areas that can help us ensure that residential services can be delivered in the

most efficient, flexible and resident focused manner possible. In 2015, we made capital investments in vehicles and machinery designed to provide year round benefit to our residents. In addition, the purchase of a Department of Public Works street sweeper will enable the department to maintain residential and main roadways with greater coverage than in years past. The formula is simple. Let us find the best way to deliver essential services and seek ways to implement them that result in cost savings, enhanced benefits or better results.

Our Recreation Department continues to experience impressive growth in resident participation and new programs. Our travel basketball program continued it's expansion and the Summer Parks program had over 420 registrants. In 2015, the Recreation Commission honored Calvin Gross as the latest recreation program volunteer to earn the Cappy Award. Our Community Pool opened 2015 with a highly acclaimed slide that won recognition across state lines.

Our Senior Center continues to build upon the impressive accomplishments over the last several years. Membership is continuing to grow, up double digits over 2014. Popular programs such as Zumba Gold, Yoga, Book Club, Billiards and many trips have been well received by our residents. The Cultural Arts Commission continues to provide South Plainfield residents with a suite of annual programs designed to educate and provide entertainment to all. Thank you to the entire commission for your tireless efforts.

Our Mayor's Wellness program also built on the successes of the last several years. In 2015, we continued to offer a spring and fall Health & Safety Fair in partnership with JFK Medical Center and St. Peters. A special thank you to the Mayor's Wellness Committee who helps to make all of this possible.

The South Plainfield Recycling Department, Environmental Commission and Green Team also had a successful 2015. High on their list of accomplishments is the vacating of paper streets at the Highland Woods Environmental Education Center. Our Borough Clerk's office continued to enhance the daily operation of our local government. The department implemented a new section of the Municipal Code Book for Police Traffic issues that will enhance the patrol operations of the police department.

We welcomed new businesses including Mavis Tire, Advance Auto Parts, Tuesday Morning, Acme Markets and Skyzone. The expansion of Skyzone alone to South Plainfield has resulted in over 150 new jobs available to local residents. Corporate expansion remains robust with Royal Coffee New York approved for a second location by the Planning Board and Restaurant Depot operating out of their new location on New Durham Avenue.

The Office of Emergency Management continues to play a vital role in ensuring our borough and schools are prepared for any disaster. We welcomed Chief James Parker as our new Emergency Management Coordinator. Additionally, we welcomed Captain's Siedenberg, Koep and Lt. Born as Deputy Coordinators. Last year, our OEM and Community Emergency Response Team partnered with other local municipalities and the State Police to ensure a successful Barlca's Golf tournament at Plainfield Country Club.

Our EMS department responded to 790 resident calls, logged over 18,000 volunteer hours, and expanded training for all 29 riding members. South Plainfield EMS remains one of the few volunteer EMS agencies that does not bill residents for services

rendered. Our Fire Department responded to 904 calls and continued to maintain a focus on training and fire fighter readiness with various training sessions including forcible entry, roof ventilation and Thermal Imaging Camera training. Thank you to our resident firefighters who volunteer their time and talent to serve our community.

Our Police Department welcomed four new officers in 2015, and continued to leverage the K9 unit to keep South Plainfield safe. South Plainfield's finest were responsible for the April arrest of two individuals responsible for seven bank robberies in Middlesex and Union Counties. On behalf of the entire South Plainfield community, thank you for all that you do, each and everyday.

As we begin 2016, we remain focused on delivering essential residential services while ensuring South Plainfield remains one of the most affordable communities in the state. Our challenge remains to craft a municipal budget that funds the critical areas of investment needed to move our borough forward while maintaining a keen focus on property taxes.

2016 will see further development and private investment along the Durham Avenue corridor into the borough. The expansion of Quick Check will further enhance this gateway into town. We will continue to market South Plainfield as a premier destination for businesses of all varieties and sizes by leveraging our Business & Economic Development Advisory Group. News businesses expected to open in 2016 include an All Star Sports Complex that will be located on the site of the former Arm R Lite Company. In addition, we expect a late spring opening of Shop Rite in the Golden Acres shopping center. ShopRite alone will bring more than three hundred new jobs to the borough when they open their doors. Last but

not least, the borough Economic Development Committee led by Councilman White will seek the formation of a Downtown Redevelopment Exploratory Committee to formally begin the process of enhancing South Plainfield's downtown.

We expect to make further progress on legacy issues with the opening of the completion of the bid specification for the Hollywood Avenue project and the creation of an internal task force to seek the necessary funding to see the project through to completion. While we have made great progress with this initiative, the most challenging months and years still lie ahead. I look forward to working with our Council and borough Engineers to continue to move this project forward.

2016 also marks a significant milestone in the history of South Plainfield. On March 12, our borough will celebrate 90 years. Preparations are already underway for a year long celebration that will include a Town History Day as well as many other educational seminars and displays of town history. I encourage the entire community to embrace our history and contribute where you can. Details will soon be announced by the South Plainfield Historical Society along with the formation of a committee consisting of many borough agencies and groups.

2016 will also mark the 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks on our country. I ask the Council to begin preparations for a town-wide remembrance to include our borough civic and volunteer organizations as we did five years ago.

As I begin my sixth year as Mayor, I remain excited about our future. South Plainfield is a model for how government can work effectively and efficiently. We are a desired destination for both families and businesses alike. We can't take our

successes for granted or believe that tomorrow will come without challenges and sacrifices. We have the ingredients for success – an active and giving community, talented employees, dedicated volunteers and responsive officials. I look forward to working with the Council, borough employees and our residents to ensure our collective success. Best wishes for a happy, healthy and prosperous 2016.