

2019 Mayor's Speech

Sunday, January 6, 2019

Good Morning and Happy New Year to everyone! I want to first start off by thanking the people of Middletown for their confidence and for their trust this past November. It has truly been the honor of my life to serve this amazing town and I look forward to the next three years.

I am incredibly grateful to my colleagues for entrusting me to serve as Mayor for 2019 and I want to thank all of them for their dedication and commitment to Middletown. I have learned from all of you and those lessons have made me not only a better public servant but a better person. Thank you for this honor and I know this team will continue to build on the progress that we and the Township Committee's before us have made. I also want to extend a special thank you to our Mayor in 2018, Kevin Settembrino and thank our Deputy Mayor Tony Fiore for his leadership and willingness to continue to serve in that capacity.

On behalf of the Township Committee, I want to thank all the dignitaries who have joined us – my great friend and our forever statesman Senator Joe Kyrillos. I want to thank our Sheriff Shaun Golden, Congressman Chris Smith, our Freeholders, Director Tom Arnone, Deputy Director Pat Impreveduto, Lillian Bury, Gerry Scharfenberger and our newest Freeholder Sue Kiley. Our representation in Trenton, Senator Declan O'Scanlon, Assemblywoman Serena DiMaso and Assemblywoman Amy Handlin. We also want to thank our County Clerk, Christine Hanlon and our Surrogate Rosemarie Peters. Finally, I want to acknowledge our former Mayors who have joined us, Peter Carton and Frank Self. Thank you all for being loyal friends to Middletown and for your unwavering support.

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Before I speak about 2019, I want to first note some of the accomplishments that occurred in 2018. Most important to note, for the second consecutive year, the Township Committee provided a budget with zero percent municipal tax increases. We saw implementation of a town-wide garbage and recycling collection which has provided the majority of our residents with a savings all-the-while increasing services and created greater lines of communication with the dozens of small businesses across town with our Small Business Spotlight.

For 2019, as most of you already know the Township Committee has embarked through a public-private partnership a plan to construct a new, state-of-the-art, energy efficient Town Hall, which will provide our residents with a one-stop-shop for all their needs. A lot has changed in the 60 years since this building was constructed and our new facility will honor the rich history of the surrounding neighborhood while providing the desperately needed upgrades for all of our employees and residents. The new Town Hall will also provide Middletown with the opportunity to grow and enter into new shared service agreements with the County and surrounding towns.

Our commitment to continuing the fiscal discipline you have come to expect and surrounding towns have admired will be the top priority of this governing body as it has in the past. As I mentioned, we have been fortunate to have had two consecutive years of zero percent municipal tax increases and even with uncertainty coming from Trenton regarding minimum wage and other unfunded mandates, Middletown will always look through the lens of the taxpayer.

Late last year, we established the Community Assistance Network in an effort to collaborate and provide residents fallen on hard times with a clearinghouse of local public assistance and social

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service programs. Government isn't always the answer and this network connects our residents with resources they sometimes are unaware of. This morning, this network takes shape and we are fortunate as a town to have an abundance of qualified and compassionate individuals willing to commit their time and expertise to this body.

Through our incredible police department, Middletown has once again been rated one of the safest towns not just in New Jersey but in the country. This is a true testament to our men and women in blue – I want to acknowledge and thank our Police Chief Craig Weber as well as our Deputy Chiefs Stefanski and Dollinger.

I want to thank our all volunteer Fire Department and their devoted Fire Chiefs, all of whom I have had the great fortune of working with so closely this past year. I must extend a sincere thank you to the department's 2018 Chief, Ryan Clarke. Chief - we cannot thank you enough for your many years of service to the department and contributions to this town. They won't be soon forgotten. I want to congratulate our 2019 Chief Steve Schweizer and I know we will continue to work in collaboration with you and the entire department.

To all of our Emergency Services Personnel- thank you for your service and I know I can speak for the entire Township Committee when I say that a day doesn't go by without the five of us up here praying for your safe return home each day and every day.

In an effort to provide greater access to Town Hall, this year we will be launching a "Mobile Town Hall" to provide residents with the opportunity to meet and speak with our department

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heads and staff to ask for help and voice any concerns. We understand it is sometimes difficult to make a meeting so we have decided to bring those who can help directly to you.

None of this would be possible without our administration. It is a group of professional and dedicated individuals who I am honored to work with, from our Township Administrator Tony Mercantante, our clerk Heidi Brunt, our CFO Colleen Lapp, our assistant administrator Jim Van Nest, our engineer and head of public works Ted Maloney, the person that keeps the Committee on track and whom I have relied heavily on Maureen Raisch and finally our Public Information Officers, Tara Berson and Jessi Ticino for all they do helping to keep the public informed.

Before I close, I obviously need to take the minute to thank the people closest to me – the people who have been there through both the successes but more importantly, the failures - my parents, Scott and Colleen. They have provided myself and my brothers and sister with a better life than they could have ever dreamed and I know I will never be able to thank them enough for that.

To my wife, Alannah – your love is unparalleled and I would not have been able to do this without it.

Finally, to the people of Middletown – my hand is extended to any resident with an idea, a question, a comment and most importantly with a concern. As Mayor you will always be met with an open mind and an open heart.

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This town is 42 square miles made up of more than 67,000 people from all walks of life – we won't agree on everything but we are all united – united in the desire to keep Middletown a community of people looking to make their town, their neighborhood and their country a better place.

This is my home – it's our home – and every decision we make as members of the governing body has and forever will come from our drive to keep Middletown the great place it is and has always been.

Success does not and will not come easy but the people gathered here in this room are apart of it and when we are surrounded by such dedicated employees, volunteers and residents there is no reason not to be excited and optimistic about our future!