



# Township of Bernards

1 Collyer Lane, Basking Ridge, NJ 07920  
Phone: 908-204-3001; Fax: 908-204-3015; Website: [www.bernards.org](http://www.bernards.org)

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## Outgoing Mayor McNally's Reorganization Meeting Speech 01/02/2024

Good evening, Happy New Year, and a warm Bernards Township welcome to all of you. And I would like to extend a special welcome to County Commissioner Sara Sooy, Assemblywoman Michele Matsikoudis, and Congressman Tom Kean.

I'm Andrew McNally, and it was an honor to serve as Mayor of Bernards Township in 2023. Consistent with tradition, and with a new year upon us, we'll be swearing in a new mayor tonight. I'll remain a member of our local government, but it's now time to pass the reins to a new mayor.

Before I leave my role as Mayor, though, I'd like to take stock of the past year, and highlight some of our accomplishments.

**Public safety** was among my highest priorities during 2023. As I mentioned when I first took office as mayor, our region, State, and country face higher rates of crime, compared to just a few short years ago.

That said, Bernards Township is still among the safest communities, not just in New Jersey, but the entire country. In early 2023, we swore in Jon Burger as our new Chief of Police, and Eric Geleta as our new Deputy Chief. Under their leadership, and the exemplary service of all our officers, the Bernards PD has kept our community extraordinarily safe.

Throughout the year, we swore in four new officers, provided our police with up-to-date equipment, and for the first time ever, placed armed law enforcement officers at each and every one of our public schools, to safeguard our children.

Among my priorities for 2023 was the restoration of community policing, and I'm pleased to report that our police department delivered in this regard over the last year. Members of the department held a public safety event here at Town Hall, consistently communicated with the public about ways to avoid crime, and our department brought back regular "Coffee with a Cop" events, allowing residents to meet our officers, ask questions, and learn from them.

I thank our volunteer fire and rescue companies for the outstanding service they provide to our residents. 2023 presented a unique challenge, stemming from the Liberty Corner First Aid Squad voluntarily ending their operations in 2022. I am pleased to report that in 2023, the town successfully and smoothly transitioned to Atlantic Health's ambulance service to replace the service previously provided by Liberty Corner. Additionally, the Township Committee ensured that the Squad's assets would continue to be used for the benefit of Township residents.



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Our town held an unprecedented number of **events** throughout 2023, strengthening bonds among residents in Bernards Township. We greatly expanded our Understanding Bernards and Fabric of Bernards events, educating our residents on how government works, fulfilling our commitment to transparency, and showcasing the rich mosaic of residents that make up our town. Making good on an initiative I committed to when I was sworn in as Mayor, we also held our first annual event featuring non-profit organizations that do excellent work right here in our town. I look forward to this initiative growing and evolving, supporting our hometown non-profits and the populations they serve.

In addition to new events, we hosted many longtime favorites from past years, like Charter Day, the Mayor's Fall Festival, the Field of Honor Veteran's Day event, our 9/11 Remembrance ceremony, summer concerts, plays in the park, and more.

2023 was also a banner year for improving our **infrastructure** in town. We began the resurfacing of our town pool. Responding to popular demand, we installed more playground equipment at Harry Dunham Park, and further restored the walking paths and bocce courts there.

Our public works department removed 100s of dead, hazardous trees throughout town, repaired or rebuilt over 50 drains and catch basins, replaced over 1,000 feet of guardrails, and paved over 31,000 feet of road throughout the township.

Additionally, we reduced traffic by developing a brand new road connecting the Ridge High School parking lot to the Municipal Complex and surrounding streets. What's remarkable was that the road had been the subject of discussion for decades, but never got done—until this past year.

Finally, our sewer authority continues to deliver exceptional service at a reasonable cost. For the sixth year in a row, sewer rates will remain flat in 2024.

All of the accomplishments I listed above have one thing in common—they all cost **money**. When I was sworn in as mayor, I mentioned my concern about an inflationary environment and lingering supply chain issues, from which the Township is not immune. We faced an extraordinarily challenging budget year in 2023, but we still delivered the services our residents have come to expect.

Importantly, we were able to do this, while holding true to our principles to not borrow a single penny to fulfill our obligations. We maintained a municipal tax levy that is the envy of surrounding towns. Throughout 2023, I'm proud to say that, despite major challenges, we kept our promises to you, as taxpayers, and delivered a transparent municipal budget where local government lives within its means, and our municipal taxes remain steadily low compared with peer towns.

Finally, we made a variety of other moves that shored up our fiscal position throughout 2023. We sold a new liquor license, secured over \$3.3 million in grants, and overhauled how we provide benefits to our municipal employees, innovating in a way that will save both taxpayers and employees money. Further, we amended



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our salary ordinance, to ensure that we can continue to attract and retain an extraordinary talented staff. I'd like to thank our CFO Sean McCarthy, and our head of HR Emily Kesselmeier, for their outstanding work in this regard.

All of our accomplishments have something else in common: they are team efforts.

I'd like to **thank** all of our fabulous staff across all of Township government, led by our Administrator, **Pat Monaco**. I further thank our Municipal Clerk, Christy Kieffer, who has kept the gears of government turning throughout the year. I also thank our department heads, Tom Timko, Ryan Wallace, Sean McCarthy, Emily Kesselmeier, Jon Burger, Jen Gander, and Lucy Forgione, and all those serving under them. I finally thank all of our professionals, including John Belardo, our Township Attorney. We are truly blessed to have such outstanding public servants working for our residents.

I am also grateful to the great many volunteers who serve on our boards and commissions. The volunteers who serve in these roles for no compensation whatsoever really help to keep our town running, and you have our sincerest thanks.

I also thank my colleagues who served with me on this committee throughout 2023--Jennifer Asay, Janice Fields, Kate Grochala, Gary Baumann, and Jim Baldassare. Together, we made countless decisions, big and small, some easy, and some difficult. Through it all, I couldn't ask for a better group of people to serve with, and who were always generous with their time, attention, and wisdom regarding the public's business.

I'd also like to extend my gratitude for all those who served on the Bernards Township Committee in years past. Our continued success is built upon the foundation laid by so many dedicated public servants who preceded all of us. Without that vision and stewardship, Bernards Township would not be what it is today.

I'd further like to thank my running mate, Jen Asay, and all of those who assisted us in achieving elected office here in Bernards Township, led by our campaign manager, Paul Humbert. I would not have been able to serve as your mayor for this past year, if I had not first secured the trust of our residents through my election to the Township Committee. Everyone who assisted us in that effort has my deepest gratitude, and I believe that we fulfilled, and will continue to fulfill, our commitments to our residents.

Finally, I'd like to thank my wife, Keri, and my two children, Hannah and Alexander. On countless occasions during 2023, I was dedicating time to our Township that I could have spent with my family. Their sacrifice and help made my public service possible.

I look forward to continuing to serve on this committee under a new mayor. And look forward to serving with Gary and Ana, sworn in tonight as members of this committee. Congratulations to both of you.

Thank you for this opportunity to have served as your Mayor. May God Bless Bernards Township, may God bless America, and may God bless all of you.



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Andrew McNally,  
Bernards Township 2023 Mayor