



Township of Bernards

1 Collyer Lane, Basking Ridge, NJ 07920
Phone: 908-204-3001; Fax: 908-204-3015; Website: www.bernards.org

Outgoing Mayor Baldassare's Reorganization Meeting Speech 01/03/2023

Good evening, everyone and thank you all very much for making it out tonight. I first want to wish everyone and very Happy New Year and I hope everyone had a wonderful holiday season. I'd like to congratulate Committeewoman Janice Fields on her reelection to the Township Committee for another three-year term. Janice continues to put in a commendable amount of time and effort for the betterment of our residents, and the community is extremely lucky to have her. Welcome back. I want to also thank my colleagues on the dais for all of their hard work and efforts over the past year. And certainly, I want to thank our Township COO, administration and staff for their continued excellence in making sure our town's ongoing mission in taking care of our residents is the highest priority.

Our primary responsibility is the safety of our residents. We need to acknowledge our community as, once again, one of the safest places to live in New Jersey and also the entire United States. This is no accident and I want to graciously thank our police department for all they do on a daily basis to keep our community the safe place that it is. I'd also like to thank our volunteer emergency first responders, as well as Atlantic Health for providing the needed fire and EMS services our residents both deserve and have come to expect.

In 2022, we honored our promise to residents and formulated a responsible and conservative budget. We kept the municipal tax levy low and incurred no debt and we continue to look for ways to maximize efficiency while paring down costs. Despite the challenging budget year, the Township was once again able to deliver responsible government operations to the residents of Bernards. The tax levy for 2022 was 1.98% capping a 6-year sub 2% levy.

For our business community, we extended our Covid-19 ordinance relief to Bernards Township businesses through 2023 due to the continued uncertainty of supply chain issues as well as inflationary pressures. This proves to be a benefit while we continue to underwrite our existing ordinances to see where improvements can be made.

Under Committeewoman Jennifer Asay, we created and implemented the "Fabric of Bernards" initiative which celebrates residents of various backgrounds and cultures to come together and discuss some of the issues that are important to the many diverse people that make up our town in an effort to better understand our citizenry, and continues to fulfill our commitment to celebrating our diversity and respecting all of our residents.



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We have also made some initial strides in our “Understanding Bernards” initiative which allows for greater transparency, additional insight into Township operations, taxes and finances and ensures that our residents better understand municipal government at every level. This also allows the residents to see what is and what is NOT Township responsibility, where that responsibility lies and those accountable for the same. We will be looking forward to having more of these educational initiatives in 2023 and I hope that all of our residents take advantage of these presentations.

We created and implemented new Emergency Management protocol for extreme weather forecasts as well as outreach to those residents in affected areas to better prepare for the worst possibilities. As such, through coordination between our Police and Department of Public Works, Bernards Township has implemented warming centers/charging stations in times of emergency, and will open Town Hall in times of need.

With this, we continue to follow up on last year’s Utility Task Force to better identify problems and concerns and continued to proactively work with our providers on potential solutions for the recurring needs and challenges our community faces with regard to JCP&L, PSE&G, Verizon, Comcast/Optimum and New Jersey American Water Company.

In support of federal, state and local elections, we continued to engage in an unprecedented voter education effort through our Municipal Clerk to provide frequent updates and information on the updated voter guidelines.

We continued successful shared services programs with our Health Department, Municipal Court, Fire Prevention, Engineering and DPW. These programs maximize staff efficiencies for Bernards Township and its partners and offsets operational costs for all.

Dedication to accessibility was furthered this year by providing funding to mitigate accessibility issues identified during our self-assessment, with the major funding of a new elevator project for Town hall. This will provide improved access to Town Hall as well as all Township facilities.

Bernards has once again achieved Sustainable Jersey certification 2022-2025 and has maintained this certification since 2009.



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On the recreational front the following highlights the return to pre pandemic activity.

- Charter Day returned in 2022
- Inspiration Golf Driving Range, at the VA Lyons Medical Center, held their Grand Opening on March 31, 2022
- Pleasant Valley Pool activities and events returned with noodle nights, float night, crafts, games, outdoor yoga
- Hometown Heroes Banner Program expanded its display to include Pleasant Valley Park in addition to the Municipal Complex.
- Full schedule of programs for youth and adults throughout the year
- Summer events included movies, concerts, plays in the park, Family Fun Night and National Night Out

I would like to conclude by telling all of you how very thankful and grateful I am to have been given the opportunity to be your Mayor over the last year. It was my great honor and pleasure to be of service and I'm looking forward to continuing the same under our new Mayor in 2023. We are so very fortunate to call Bernards Township home, a community well-known for a strong and welcoming character with an outstanding quality of life, excellent schools, and public safety. I have no doubt that our future remains bright and that better days are still ahead of us. Thank you and God bless you all.

James Baldassare, Jr.,
Bernards Township Mayor - 2022