

# INTRODUCTION:

**Good Afternoon & Happy New Year to:**

- The Residents of the Township of Union;
- Members of the Clergy;
- Elected officials; Congressman Donald Payne, Senator Joseph Cryan
- Friends and family; those here and those watching this re-organization meeting from home.

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge my phenomenal parents, Dr Guy & Suzette Delisfort, and my very supportive husband & son, George and Ahmael.

**Wow! ...Just wow!** I cannot believe how fast the year has gone by! It seems like JUST yesterday that I stood before you and presented this Committee's vision for 2019. I am proud to report that, together, we accomplished much of that vision.

I especially want to recognize and thank the members of the Township Committee, my partners in moving Union forward: Deputy Mayor Joseph Florio, Clifton People, Jr., Suzette Cavadas and Manuel Figueiredo. I am incredibly humbled by your vote of confidence in me...AND I welcome the opportunity to serve another year as your Mayor.

It is my honor to be here today to celebrate our progress and reaffirm our commitments to our residents, to our Township and to each other.

As President Kennedy stated, *“Things do not happen. Things are made to happen.”*

Accordingly, I want to acknowledge the many people who work so hard each and every day to *make* our Town a better place to live, work and play. Let me first commend our Township Administration, Department Directors and staff. They work diligently to ensure that our government services are inclusive, efficient, and customer service oriented for the residents of this Township.

At our last meeting of 2019, we said goodbye to longtime Township Administrator Ron Manzella and thanked him for his many contributions to the Township. Today, I am pleased to introduce the incoming Township Administrator, Donald Trivisano, who has been our Assistant Township Administrator and our new Assistant Township Administrator William Reyes Jr. These individuals are responsible for running the day-to-day operations of the Township and executing the vision of this Committee.

I would also like to acknowledge **our** community partners & volunteers who contribute to the vibrancy of the Township. While too many to name, we succeed in large part because of our local Business owners, Nonprofit agencies, faith-based organizations, investors/developers, and civic leaders -- we appreciate your commitment to the enhancement of our Township.

## YEAR-IN-REVIEW:

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*“Every new beginning comes from some other beginning’s end” ~ Seneca*

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As we close-out 2019 and prepare for the New Year, this quote from Roman Philosopher, Seneca resonates with me.

On New Year’s Day, we reflect on the past and establish goals for the upcoming year. **2019** was a year of continued progress, accomplishment and transformation. I am proud to report that we met the following goals:

- Expanded and enriched opportunities for public engagement.
- Launched a new inclusive effort to invite more citizens to participate on Committees, Boards & Associations.
- Formed a *Union Teen Advisory Council* to capture the much-needed input of our young adults.
- Embarked upon a comprehensive *Master Planning* process; and
- Continued collaboration and partnership with the Board of Education.

Within the realm of *Inclusivity & Public Engagement*, we successfully established communication, collaboration and partnerships that included:

- The Master Plan process which afforded **residents an opportunity** to articulate their vision for the future. It has been a great pleasure to meet many residents, answer their

questions, assuage concerns, share in the common vision for our Township and to dispel incorrect preconceived notions.

- We continued the township tradition of celebrating diversity through flag raising ceremonies for ALL of the communities that make up our great Township.
- The Teen Advisory Committee.
- Our Americans With Disabilities Committee continues to fundraise, raise awareness, and advocate for, a more accessible and inclusive experience for our Special Needs Community. On that note, I especially want to thank the members of the Committee for their passion and enthusiasm throughout the years and I'd like to personally welcome Elsie Mackey for her willingness to Chair this Committee. We look forward to her leadership!
- LGBTQ+ Community. The Township hosted its *Inaugural Pride Month Flag raising ceremony* in June, celebrating the diversity of our community.
- Parking Advisory Committee. As promised, we formed this Committee, made up of residents and professionals, and look forward to the Committee's recommendations.
- Seniors. What can I say?!? Seniors rock! Our partners in the Senior Dept., like Mr. Basil and Allen Collins continue to coordinate a plethora of programs for our senior community.

2019 was again a year for impressive *Infrastructure Improvements*.

Our commitment to improving the quality and lifespan of our infrastructure assets has never been stronger. **WHY???** Because

- We have rising property values throughout the Township
- We've expanded economic investment in all corners **AND**
- We continue to be a desirable community where people want to remain and relocate.

In 2018, the Township Committee embarked on a **town-wide comprehensive road reconstruction program** that was **expanded** in 2019 and will **continue** to be robust in 2020.

Infrastructure is not just limited to roads, and in 2019 we saw the design, renovation and reconstruction of:

- Veterans Memorial Park which included new landscaping, lighting, walkways, and new honor roll plaques; and
- Sgt Herbert Davis Jr Park- where the Basketball Courts were resurfaced, new bleachers were added and a rubberized surface and curbing was installed at the playground area.

And we are extremely proud of the improvements made to beautify Springfield Avenue, which included pedestrian scale lighting; festive holiday lights and decorations; street furniture and trash receptacles.

In addition to the improvements along Springfield Ave, allow me to boast about the Gateway Plaza at the intersection of Springfield and Millburn Avenue because *this is such a source of pride* for the Vauxhall Community and the Township Committee.

Much hard work was undertaken to make way for a neighborhood plaza that enhances the pedestrian experience, triggers increased patronage to nearby businesses **AND** provides a welcomed passive recreation area for our community.

### **Revitalization & Redevelopment;**

2019 was a remarkable year for our **Redevelopment efforts.**

As a Professional Planner, I can't resist the opportunity to tout the benefits of redevelopment such as: Blight elimination, tax base expansion, strategic planning for population shifts, increased property values and job retention & creation.

The fact is redevelopment contributes prominently to our tax base. It keeps our taxes low. It allows us to expand recreation programs and community initiatives available to ALL of our residents. Redevelopment projects contribute both short term and permanent jobs to our community; jobs that are earmarked for our residents. Our commitment towards Economic revitalization has never been stronger. It is undisputed, that "A rising tide lifts ALL boats." The accomplishments of the last several years are all around us.

- We saw the demolition of the old CC Mugs and Rimmele Florist sites on Stuyvesant Ave. and we look forward to this mixed-use new construction in 2020.
- THE *Garden State Motel* – I am proud to announce that the Garden State Motel has officially closed. The blighted property will be demolished and reconstructed in 2020 and be

the new home to an accessory Retail use, Wawa and the Fairfield Suites, by Marriot .{Hold for applause}

- *The Money Store* (**For those of you who don't know which property this is, this is the large office building that has laid dormant for the better part of the last fifteen years at the intersection of Spruce and Morris Avenue**)- I am also pleased to announce that in mid-November, Children's Specialized Hospital purchased the Money Store. This gateway project is **a wonderful addition** to the Township and we are honored to have this venerable institution as part of the Union family.
- *Weinstein Scrap Metal Site* -If you ever noticed a big truck block traffic while having a bite at the Huck Finn Diner, you know which property this is and what an eyesore it is. This new construction commercial project will appear before our Planning Board this month.
- The *American Landmark Developers* new construction Project will continue to transform and modernize the Center. This 3-Phased project was born from our desire to increase foot traffic in the Center, make the shopping experience more aesthetically pleasing; change the physical fabric of our downtown and enhance the socio-economic conditions of Union Center. To date, I am proud to announce that Phase 1 of this project is complete and opening in February 2020.
- *Titan Union*, formerly known as The Connect One Bank property in the Center, is well underway. The interior of this adaptive reuse project has been demolished. Upon completion, it will include a community space, residential

and commercial uses AND an arts and culture component directly situated at the heart of the most important intersection in Union-Our downtown .

- *1206 Stuyvesant Ave*- This is the mixed -use project being developed over Brooklyn Pizza. It includes existing ground level retail and 24 dwelling units. For those of you who've recently walked through the Center, you can attest that the steel decking construction is underway.
- *1181 Morris Avenue* by Lehigh Ave, is a mixed use project and is in its preliminary stages of development;
- *And how impressive is Vermella Union?!* This 4- Phased mixed-use project which was voted as one of the Top 10 Most Amazing Projects in NJ by NJ.com sounds phenomenal on paper, but if you visit the site...now that Phase I is complete and Phase 2 has just begun... it's even more impressive!

When complete, these projects represent a total investment in the Township of Union of nearly **\$1 billion dollars!!! Now, that's impressive!**

**Economic development; business retention & attraction in Union Center and beyond** have always been priorities for this Committee. Don't ever let anyone tell you that sound and strategic redevelopment will not work in **OUR** Township! I am proud to announce that these projects have resulted in a minimal impact to

our school system which is consistent with fiscal impact projections and academic studies.

In 2019, this Committee focused a great deal of its efforts on improving the downtown area. Union Center is the epicenter of our community - socially, culturally, & gastronomically.

The diversity of cuisine is merely symbolic of the diversity and inclusiveness that comprises our community. AND, in that vain, I have a special request for all residents and friends. Make a New Year's Resolution to come to our Town and eat at one of the many great restaurants in the Center. If you're looking for

- **Mexican, Try - El Chingon Tex Mex Restaurant**
- **Vegan? -Killer Vegan**
- African?- Garden City; and
- If your taste buds call for Sushi than try Style Sushi .

We are fortunate to have some of the *best restaurants* located in Northern NJ right here in our Downtown!

### **Responsible financial planning.**

Progress usually comes at a high price, but it is a testament to the strong leadership of our Township Officials, specifically their financial leadership. Due to these strong management and conservative fiscal policies, I am proud to announce that *Standard & Poors* reaffirmed the Township's AA+ financial rating. Our pledge to the residents of Union is that these principles will continue in 2020 and beyond.

Finally, I challenge anyone in the State of New Jersey to find a more professional, more responsive and more committed **Public Safety Operation** than ours...The Union of today has seen a sharp reduction in violent crime... In fact our crime rate year over year has dramatically dropped by 2%. Additionally, we've experienced continued decline in petty disorderly incidents and a marked increase in premier emergency response. Our police, fire and ems services rival the very best departments in the State of New Jersey and we are extraordinarily proud of them.

In 2019 we accomplished ALOT!!! and 2020 proves to be even more promising!

## **2020...So, what's next?!?**

1. In keeping with the new decade, Township of Union will initiate the *Decennial 2020 Census Advisory Committee*
2. *Embark upon Arts & Culture Initiatives in Union Center* which will include a Black Box Theater and *Pop-ups* which are a creative temporary ways to reinvigorate underutilized or vacant spaces
3. Complete the *WiFi in the Center Initiative* to foster connectivity in the Township
4. Bolster *Union's Engagement Efforts* and continue our collaboration with the Board of Education, NJ Transit and Kean University.
5. Implement the *Springfield Avenue Façade Improvement Program;*
6. Launch the *Female Leadership Initiative*
7. Complete the *Park Master Plan*
8. Complete the *Springfield Avenue Pedestrian Plaza project*
9. Support the *Union Public Library Renovation Project*

10. Complete the *Master Plan*

## CONCLUSION

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*“It is not in the stars to hold our destiny but in ourselves.” ~ William Shakespeare*

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As a member of the Township Committee, I start the New Year *inspired* by you, the residents of Union. I start the New Year, *resolved* to continue working to improve this Township and the quality of life of all its residents. Finally, I start the New Year *renewed* in the spirit of public service to continue to shepherd this Township towards the greatness it deserves.

We have an exciting year ahead- full of responsible growth, progression and positive change.

I encourage you to keep up with our progress by downloading the Township of Union App, signing up for email updates, visit and like the OFFICIAL Township Facebook page and emergency Code-Red Notifications on UnionTownship.com, and by following us on Social Media **{spell it out} (@TwpUnionNJ)**.

Also, don't forget to tune into "Spotlight on Union," on TV34 to keep up with all of the latest and greatest in news and events around town.

*Our Township* is growing and evolving to meet the needs of our current and future generations. *I implore you to get involved!*

Finally, I thank you for coming today, and I wish all of you a very Happy, Blessed, and Peaceful New Year.

**Thank you.**