

Community Update
Reorganization Meeting
Jan. 5, 2021

- Good evening and thank you for joining us tonight for our first meeting of 2021, which is also our annual reorganization meeting. On behalf of the Council and the Township, we hope everyone had a safe and pleasant holiday break and a very Happy New Year.
- I would like to start tonight's meeting by thanking my fellow Council members for voting for me to continue as mayor in 2021. Your support and dedication this past year were instrumental in helping our community weather the hardships that we have all endured.
- Few people are aware of the time and effort members of the Township Council put in to keep our community running smoothly. I want you to know how much I have appreciated what you do every day on behalf of our residents.
- As for me, I pledge to continue to earn your support and trust by working hard to keep the community updated and I will again be looking to the Council for their leadership and counsel during these difficult times.
- Also, congratulations to Fred Hall on his returning this year as deputy mayor. Fred brings a wealth of knowledge and institutional memory from his many years of dedicated service on the Council. I look forward to working with him again this year.
- I especially want to thank Township Manager John Shepherd for his unwavering leadership and support. Under John's steady hand, Roxbury has navigated through this crisis without significant interruption of the vital

township services that we depend on. I will give more detail about the heroic efforts of our township staff in a few minutes.

COVID-19

- By now you have heard just about everyone say that 2020 was a horrible year.
- Unfortunately, I must start the first meeting of the new year by informing you that the rate of COVID-19 spread in our community has not slowed during the holiday season.
- In fact, since our last Council meeting on December 15, the number of confirmed cases has risen to 1,128, up 201 cases. By any measure, that is an unacceptable and disturbing development, and we should all be concerned.
- It is important to remember that in New Jersey, more than 400,000 positive cases have been reported and approximately 16,000 people have died as a result of COVID-19.
- Sadly, in Roxbury, more than 40 people have died since the start of the pandemic. We should never forget that these are real people behind those numbers. They were mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, wives, and husbands. Even one death should be unacceptable, and we should never become numb to the struggles and pain each case represents – especially to the people who were left behind.
- At this time, I would like you to join me in a moment of silence for the lives that were lost and for the families and friends who have been touched by this terrible pandemic last year.
- Thank you.

- I know we are all too familiar with the hardship and anxiety created by the pandemic and the fear and uncertainty that came with months and months of social distancing.
- For many, it has been a very long time since they have been able to visit with family and friends. And for some, the isolation has been unbearable.
- Our federal, state, county and local health care professionals and this Council continue to ask that as we begin 2021, we recommit ourselves to practicing social distancing by wearing masks, staying six feet apart, avoiding large gatherings, washing your hands frequently, and getting tested. These are still the most effective things we can do to stop the spread. We are so close to an end to this awful ordeal. We ask that you not let down your guard now.

Vaccine

- Thankfully, recently released vaccines are the latest tool in our toolbox to stop the spread.
- We urge you to get vaccinated when you are eligible. Vaccinations for COVID-19 began in New Jersey on December 15 for all healthcare workers - paid and unpaid.
- The state's distribution plan defines health care workers as people who are serving in a healthcare setting and have the potential for direct or indirect exposure to patients or infectious materials, regardless of whether they are paid or not.
- You will find links on the township's website that will provide details about the state's vaccination program. We ask that you visit those sites and make yourself aware of how the program works.

- If you still have questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Township's Health Department.
- One final note on the pandemic. Thanks to the efforts of our Chief Financial Officer Lisa Spring and her staff, I am pleased to inform you that Roxbury received \$246,729.96 in federal grant funds for COVID-19 related expenses – the entire amount we requested.
- This is money that can be used to cover the Township's costs related to the pandemic and takes those costs off the backs of Roxbury taxpayers.

Township Accomplishments

- While 2020 presented the Township and our community with many challenges, there were many more examples of the resiliency of Roxbury and its residents.
- Throughout this crisis, community groups, religious organizations, the business community and many, many individual citizens responded to the pandemic not by complaining about social distancing restrictions, mask wearing, cancelled events, and other inconveniences, but by helping the most vulnerable among us.
- The Rotary Club, Interfaith Council, Women's Club, Chamber of Commerce, the newly formed Kiwanis Club, and several school-related student organizations are great examples of groups that stepped up to help.
- We have tried to highlight those acts of kindness, generosity, and selflessness in these community updates.

- Tonight, we would like to focus on the accomplishments of our Township staff who worked throughout the pandemic to keep our essential services running.
- First:
 - **Health Department:** The staff of the department conducted all the contact tracing for COVID-19. Jim Craig, our Public Health Nurse, provided guidance to the Township staff and school district in order for the Township to continue to provide services. As I have previously reported, Jim was the point of the spear in our community's COVID response.
 - **Police Department:** Our police continued to provide public safety services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our officers were continuously exposed to COVID-19 while performing their duties, responding to calls for assistance and helping our residents.
 - **Fire Department:** Our first responders – firefighters and EMS -- all volunteers -- responded to every call, also placing themselves in harm's way by being exposed to COVID-19. Thankfully, no service calls have been linked to any member contracting the virus.
 - **Clerk's Office:** Our Clerk's Office headed by Township Clerk Amy Rhead managed two extraordinary elections during the pandemic – a monumental challenge even without a pandemic.
 - **IT Department:** Our IT department conducted a significant number of Zoom meetings for Council, Planning Board, Zoning Board, and staff—keeping our government open and transparent.

- **Tax Collection:** Our Tax Collection Department continued to operate and provide services during the pandemic by utilizing two shifts and remote workers.
- **Planning Department:** Our Planning Department provided uninterrupted services during the pandemic, issuing a record number of zoning permits in 2020.
- **Construction Department:** The Construction Department continued to provide review and inspection services during the pandemic.
- **Fire Prevention Department:** The Fire Prevention Department provided necessary inspections during the pandemic for real estate transactions, resulting in zero delays in closings.
- **Recreation Department:** The Recreation Department implemented a plan to open the beach at Horseshoe Lake Park in 2020 even with the concerns of the pandemic. They managed through an unprecedented surge in the use of our passive recreation, including trails and paths, keeping them open so residents had an outdoor recreation outlet.
- **Engineering Department:** The Engineering Department continued to provide uninterrupted water and wastewater service to the residents of the Township by utilizing split shifts to ensure the safety of employees.
- **Public Works Department:** The Public Works Department resurfaced a record 8.2 miles of roads in 2020. While we were all working from home, the DPW crews were reporting to work every day.

- **Finance Department:** The Finance Department continued to conduct all financial services for the Township during the pandemic, utilizing remote work-options when necessary. Chief Financial Officer Lisa Spring provided guidance that resulted in Roxbury ending this extraordinary year in the black.
- **Library:** Perhaps no other Township service filled a need created by the pandemic more creatively than our Public Library. Quick to pivot to a digital service, the library provided online access to books, movies, lectures, and other content. These services came at a time when our residents -- especially our seniors and students and their families -- were desperate to find outlets while forced to remain at home.
- **Social Services:** Finally, Roxbury's Social Services Department – its staff and volunteers -- have helped hundreds of people throughout the pandemic. Their efforts -- supplemented by three free food giveaways in town -- helped to raise and distribute, money, food, and other essential items -- often helping people who have never before needed help to make ends meet.
- These were no less than heroic efforts. On behalf of the Council and the community, I thank our township employees and volunteers for your hard work and dedication.

2021 Priorities

- Looking ahead to 2021, the Township's first priority must remain public safety and getting through the pandemic so that we can return to some sense of normal. We are not out of the woods yet, but Roxbury fared well

under the circumstances largely because of the cooperation of the community. We ask that you remain vigilant, patient, and understanding as we navigate through the next few months.

- The Council also remains deeply sensitive to the hardships many are experiencing in the community. That is why in 2020 , the Council unanimously agreed with Councilman Jim Rilee who suggested no municipal property tax increase.
- As the Council begins our budget review process this month, we will be sharpening our pencils with the understanding that things may become more difficult before they get better for many families in our community.
- We will also be taking a very close look at the maintenance of our recreational facilities and parks with a particular emphasis on passive recreation. As we mentioned earlier, the paths and trails were a vital outlet for many residents during the pandemic, giving the community an opportunity to be outdoors.
- That unprecedented use of the paths and trails took a serious toll on our parks that must be addressed. The Township will be looking for ways to repair and improve those facilities.
- We will also be focusing on our business community, recognizing that they have had a tough time during the pandemic and lock down. John Shepherd and I have been in regular contact with our Chamber of Commerce and we plan to continue to work closely with them to provide whatever assistance our businesses require.
- That said, Roxbury's local economy remains among the strongest in the County. Our town was recently recognized as one of the hottest real estate

markets and the new Shops at Ledgewood continue to rise rapidly from the ruins of the failed Ledgewood Mall. The new shopping center promises to be an economic engine for our community.

- But the Shops at Ledgewood was only one part of the significant amount of development -- residential and commercial -- that continues to take place in Roxbury because our town is a great place to live, work, and raise a family.
- Last but not least, we will also be continuing the aggressive road resurfacing program we began this year.

Conclusion

- Time only allows us to touch on some of the things we achieved and some of the things we will be focused on during 2021 in Roxbury. It is my hope that 2021 will be a better and more prosperous year for our community.
- But before I close this update, I do need to acknowledge the loss of long-time Roxbury resident and former Mayor Bob Badini. As I said at the time, he was the best of us – dedicated to the community, a true public servant, and someone who loved Roxbury and the people who make up our great community.
- I know that Deputy Mayor Fred Hall and others on the Council who knew him well and served with him will have more to say about Bob. I would just like to add a personal thank you to Bob for setting the bar extremely high for all future mayors. I will do my best to live up to his legacy.
- It has certainly been my honor to serve as mayor during this time and I look forward to working with the Council and Township staff in this new year.

- On behalf of the Council and Township staff, Happy New Year to all. Please be careful and stay safe.
- Now, back to our agenda.