

# BOROUGH OF HIGHLANDS, N. J.

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## Mayor's Message & The State of the Borough 3/17/21

At the end of 2019, I planned for various projects for 2020. As a first-time Mayor, I wanted to address past issues as well as plan for Highlands' future for both residents and businesses. Some of the issues I wanted to address first were:

- The continuation and **implementation** of multiple infrastructure projects regarding flooding
- **Updates** to our buildings and equipment.
- **Move forward** with going out to bid on the new Municipal Building.
- **Negotiate** the two Areas of Redevelopment to formal Developers' Agreements.
- Procedure **changes** to make the Borough operate more efficiently.
- Capital **improvements** and purchases for our parks and open spaces.
- **Entry** into the Mayors Wellness Campaign to raise the level of awareness of our residents' health and wellness.

### Here is a monthly review of 2020:

**January:** we started working with the Bayshore Family Success Center to expand our recreation and outreach services. Highlands joined the Monmouth County Health Department. The Recreation Coordinator and I worked on programming for the Mayors Wellness Campaign [MWC]. The Borough contracted to make emergency repairs to the slope above Bayside Drive.

**February:** we discussed making the Mercantile process easier. We entered into an agreement with the Monmouth Affordable Housing Alliance to secure more Affordable Housing in the Borough to meet our requirement. Free Family Movie night continued. I toured the Emergency Department at Monmouth Medical Center with representatives of RWJBH. Contractors finished repairs to Cornwall and John Streets.

**March:** On March 11, the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic. On March 16<sup>th</sup>, the United States went into a national lockdown, so did Highlands. All Borough buildings were closed to the public. Four days later, March 20<sup>th</sup>, testing starting at PNC. The COVID-19 protocols emerged starting with Governor's E.O 107 on March 21<sup>st</sup>. We started discussing an agreement with JFK Meridian Health to have their rigs and staff in Highlands 7am to 7pm, the service was in place on 4/1. Recreation and MWC begins virtual programming. The Atlantic Highlands Navesink United Methodist begins drive by pick up in Atlantic Highlands and Highlands. New COVID-19 cases in March were 5.

**April:** From the beginning of April to this day, HPD, HFD and HFAS participated in birthday drive-byes. The SBA COVID-19 loan program began. We started organizing with food pantries at OLPH, the Methodist Church and the business community to help Atlantic Highlands and Highlanders who need a

helping hand with the Curbside Kindness food donation program organized by the Highlands Business Partnership [10,000 + lbs. in 2020]. The unemployment rollout had many pitfalls, but we helped as many Highlanders as we could navigate the system. The Recreation Department teamed up with the First Aid Squad to deliver Easter baskets. The Governor moved the Primary to July 7<sup>th</sup>. New COVID-19 cases in April were 16.

**May:** the County had 6,132 cases and the State had 121,190. Parks reopened and we were awarded a Safe Roads to Schools Grant. On May 6<sup>th</sup> we extended the deadline for property taxes due to June 1<sup>st</sup>. Testing expanded to the non-symptomatic. On May 9<sup>th</sup>, Sandy Hook reopened. What was once a blessing soon turned to a nightmare as all NYC beaches were closed at that time, so the traffic of those NYC folks flocking to Sandy Hook created a traffic nightmare in town. On May 23<sup>rd</sup>, we were notified that our first resident Mille Goleman age 94 passed away of Covid 19 at King James on May 16<sup>th</sup>. There was extraordinarily little PPE to be found. Private corporations started to give the Borough donations. With members VFW Post 6902, I took part in honoring our lost servicemembers on Memorial Day. We started the push for Census awareness and reminders to take part in it. New COVID-19 cases in May were 8.

**June:** Vote-By-Mail applications and outdoor dining arrived. The restaurant industry was especially hard-hit, so once the go-ahead was given, OEM and I worked directly with the restaurant owners to make outdoor dining happen. The Farmer's Market started in June to make sure Highlanders had easy access to fresh produce. We continued our shared service with Seabright Ocean Rescue to guard our bay beaches. New COVID-19 cases in June were 3.

**July:** The CARES ACT funding for businesses, non-profits and municipalities was released. Knowing we would be in this for the long haul, all Borough events were cancelled through August 31<sup>st</sup>. I asked Congressman Pallone's office and the Parks Department involved in the traffic situation to Sandy Hook. We took the first step into investigating school regionalization. New COVID-19 cases in July were 6.

**August:** brought continued outdoor dining and outdoor activities. Census response reminders continued. Tropical Storm Isaias came to town on August 4<sup>th</sup> and knocked out power for a few days. On August 6<sup>th</sup>, we opened the Community Center as a cooling and charging station. Property tax grace period moved to August 21<sup>st</sup>. New COVID-19 cases in August were 4.

**September:** Indoor dining resumed on the 4<sup>th</sup>.. Again, OEM and I worked with the restaurants to get them up to speed. Fire Marshalls issued temporary C.O.s with their allowed number of patrons inside. The Borough had a socially distant 9-11 ceremony at Veteran's Park. Construction of the Municipal Lot of former Borough Hall was completed. The Police Department entered partnership program with RWJBH and The Phoenix for recovery called "Unhooked." We were awarded CDBG grant for Marine Place in the amount \$179,605. New COVID-19 cases in September were 5.

**October:** Harry Potter "came" to Highlands with outdoor Teen Night movies. The Film Fest was Oct 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> at Kavookjian Field. Heartstrings concert at Snug Harbor Beach on October 18<sup>th</sup>. Resolution to have Bay Ave studied for an Area of redevelopment was approved. We hired a Redevelopment Attorney to handle the three Areas of Redevelopment. We bonded to fix Waterwitch Sanitary Pump Station, \$435,000. We Partnered with Bayshore Family Success Center for outdoor Baby Pop Up Pantry. Mountain Street was repaved. New COVID-19 cases in October were 9.

**November:** Locust Street improvements started using \$154,000 from a State DOT Grant. Cedar Street and Jones Creek Bulkhead replacement began. Recreation continued to provide mental health awareness options from the County and State. On November 3<sup>rd</sup>, we signed a contract with IMM Care to test for COVID-19 in the Borough starting November 21<sup>st</sup>. The VFW hosted a flu shot event on November 13<sup>th</sup>. Blessing Bag Brigade did their 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Thanksgiving meal as a take-away event on November 25<sup>th</sup> at the Community Center. On November 27<sup>th</sup>, the Lions club gave away coats for tots. New COVID-19 cases in November were 40.

**December:** Socially Distant Photos with Santa were featured. Limited in-person programming began in the Community Center. Santa PJ delivery around town was a great success, thank you FAS. We signed JFK Meridian on for the year of 2021 through R-20-259. Free Holiday dinner provided by Proving Ground on December 23<sup>rd</sup>. New COVID-19 cases in December were 65.

**The state of the Borough at the end of 2020:**

- Our community really pulled together during this pandemic. Residents, staff, businesses, charitable organizations, and clergy all worked together to get us through the worst part of the biggest health crisis of our lifetime.
- No business establishment went out of business in Highlands in 2020.
- The Municipal tax rate lowered for the first time since 2014.
- The combined valuation of all properties in the Borough soared to \$741,121,800. This was an increase in valuation of \$128,761,777. This was the largest increase ever recorded in Highlands.
- During the year, I participated in 5 calls with Federal representatives; 19 calls with State representatives; 27 calls with County representatives and 51 Municipal OEM calls to make sure Highlands received all the information, grant opportunities and awareness programs being offered. Other calls were NJ Restaurant Association 2 and Monmouth Medical Center 2.
- Received NJ Healthcare Quality Institute accreditation for a 2020 Healthy Town Up and Coming.

**Outside of getting our residents vaccinated, these are the Governing Body's Goals for 2021:**

- **Parks** – update electric, lighting, and water. Move utilities out of flood zone.
- **Address inequities** in tax assessments.
- **Install sewer meter** at R36 & Waterwitch for Monmouth Hills.
- **Address runoff** issues at Monmouth Hills.
- **Complete North and Valley St pump improvements** [including Valley pipe to the bay].
- **Complete Waterwitch Pump upgrades** and install backup generator.
- **install higher riprap** [rock wall in front of boardwalk] at Vets Park.
- **Create Overlook Park** at old Stymie's property [empty lot diagonally across from OLPH].
- Enter the Community Rating System [CRS] **program for lower flood insurance**.
- **Validate** all Borough owned property.
- **Update Open Space Plan** [last 2008] & Registered Open Space Inventory [last 1992].
- Clean up **Frank Hall Park**.
- **New apparatus at all Borough parks** including the Skate Park.
- **Categorize and scan records**.
- **Update** slope ordinance.
- **Replace trees on the slope with sea grass** [seek forestry grant].
- **Remove unused phone and cable lines** throughout the Borough.

**Sadly, we lost many friends and Highlands' legends in 2020. Some due to COVID-19, some because of issues surrounding the virus and others with no relation to it. May each of their lives be cherished and honored and may they all rest in peace.**

- Brian K Albright 1-18
- Janice Charlotte Jones 1-15
- Nancy Daley 1-21
- John Garner 2-22
- Louise Meliado 3-20
- Delores Racioppi 3-23
- Bryan Bodnar 4-1
- Jack Kraft 4-8
- Carl Dittman 4-15
- Carol Ann Dempsey 4-15
- Marc Degennaro 4-18
- Richard M Simmons 4-18
- Thomas Olsewski 4-29
- Mildred E. "Millie" Goleman 5-16
- Lawrence "Larry" Colby 6-20
- Margaret "Betty" Campbell 11-4
- Frankie Phillips 11-16
- Frank "Ozzie" Thomas 12-10
- Loretta "Lori" Dibble 12-11
- Walter Baker 12-20

All the best to you and yours in 2021,

Mayor Carolyn Broullon