

**STATE OF THE TOWNSHIP ADDRESS**  
**MAYOR VICTOR DE LUCA**  
**January 1, 2019**

Happy New Year!

Thanks to all of you for attending today to help us kick-off 2019.

I want to thank my colleagues for electing me as Mayor for one more year. We've worked well together and accomplished a great deal. I know we will continue do so over the next 12 months by always putting the interests of our community first and foremost.

Today I start my 20<sup>th</sup> year in office and my last year as Mayor. This is my final State of the Township speech, so buckle up because I have a lot to say.

To begin, the State of the Township of Maplewood is outstanding. We have a stellar reputation in the region and across New Jersey. Our fundamentals are sound and families continue to choose Maplewood as a place to live and raise their children. Entrepreneurs and business owners are looking at spaces throughout the town to open new stores and food establishments. And members of the LGBTQ community are attracted to Maplewood because of our commitment to being welcoming, diverse and inclusive.

Homes in our community are selling above asking prices and staying on the market 14 percent less time than a year ago. The average home sale price of \$615,000 is 2 percent higher than 2017. Rentals also are doing very well and the new apartment buildings have few vacancies.

To all of our credit, people want to live here. Unfortunately, not everyone can. Our hot real estate market is pricing out some buyers and renters and making it more difficult for folks, particularly our seniors, to stay in their homes.

To help our seniors, we worked with Assemblywoman Mila Jasey on an outreach initiative to ensure that senior homeowners take advantage of state rebates and property tax relief programs. And we adopted a new ordinance permitting seniors to take into their homes two individual borders or a couple. This shared housing program will allow seniors to bring in extra money to cover their housing costs and give them an opportunity for more companionship. Our task now is to spread the word among our seniors and develop a mechanism to help them find prospective borders.

We also moved forward with our affordable housing obligations. In November we received judicial approval of our Fair Share and Affordable Housing Plan, becoming the first municipality in Essex County to do so. It seems fitting that we accomplished this in 2018, the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of President Johnson's signing of the Fair Housing Act, which sought to eliminate housing discrimination and residential segregation in our nation.

Our affordable housing plan requires developers to set aside 15 percent of new apartments for 30 years to house families meeting income guidelines. In addition, the Maplewood Housing Rehabilitation Program will provide \$20,000 in forgivable loans to assist eligible Maplewood households to make repairs to meet health and safety codes. And we will undertake a homeownership program that will subsidize the purchase and rehabilitation of two existing foreclosed or vacant houses and sell each of them to an eligible family.

I'd like to take a moment to thank the women and men in our police department for the work they do to keep us safe and secure in our homes and in our community. I'm happy to report that major crimes in Maplewood are down by nearly eight percent from a year ago. Thank you to Chief Jimmy DeVaul and Deputy Chief Al Sally for making a number of positive changes in the Maplewood Police Department, including creating a Traffic Bureau and a Community Policing Unit.

Last year we established the Community Board on Police, one of the first of its kind in the state. Among the Board's responsibilities are to help build a culture of transparency and accountability in the police department, suggest trainings and best practices, and work to ensure a relationship of respect between the police and community. I want to recognize Committeemen Lembrich and Dafis for making this board a reality and guiding its formation. And I want to thank the six citizen members who volunteered to sit on this very important board.

I also want to give a shout out to Deputy Mayor McGehee who worked with police officers to develop a mentoring program for our youth and facilitate the open gym nights at the high school. These critical programs bring young people and the police together in a positive environment.

But we definitely have more to do to re-build trust between our police and community. In November, NJ Advance Media released The Force Report, an investigative report on the use of force by police from 2012 through 2016. Of the all the local departments across the state, Maplewood ranked first in the use of force; 172 incidents of force on 1,549 reported arrests. Additionally Black people in Maplewood were four times more likely to face force than white people.

The use of force by our police officers is an issue of great importance to the Township Committee and one that merits further review. On Monday, January 14<sup>th</sup> at 7:30pm at The Woodland, we will sponsor a community forum on The Force Report. Township officials, police department representatives, members of our Community Board on Police and a representative from the New Jersey Attorney General's office will join the public in discussing what we have learned from The Force Report and how it will influence our actions going forward.

Thank goodness we're a train town. Direct train service to and from New York City and Hoboken is a critical factor that people consider when deciding to move here. Unfortunately, NJ Transit has failed us. Years of shoddy management and disinvestment from former Governor Christie have eroded the rail agency. Governor Murphy has promised to restore NJ Transit and was able to meet a critical federal deadline to keep the trains running. Last year we continuously engaged with NJ Transit officials, legislative representatives and Governor Murphy's office to explain the importance of the train to Maplewood and to lobby them to take short and long term steps to make improvements.

Well here's some good news. Starting tomorrow, Wednesday, January 2<sup>nd</sup>, Maplewood and South Orange rail commuters will have another morning option to travel to New York City. NJ Transit will provide express bus service from the two train stations to the Port Authority Bus Terminal at 7:00am, 7:30am and 8:00am. Commuters must present their rail tickets or passes to use the bus and there is no additional charge.

We will continue to work with the Governor's office to advocate for the replacement of the Portal Bridge and the construction of a third tunnel under the Hudson River. We'll also focus on NJ Transit's customer communications practices so our commuters are informed sooner than they are now about train delays and cancellations.

Whether you're a commuter or not, the trains have a huge impact on our community and the Township Committee will continue to be a strong advocate for making NJ Transit a top rail agency once again.

And speaking of impacts on our community, it is staggering how the Trump Administration has denied climate change and rolled back environmental rules. A Harvard study estimates the 78 enacted or proposed rollbacks could lead to at least 80,000 extra deaths per decade and cause respiratory problems for more than one million people.

Well Maplewood has not backed-off its commitment to promoting sustainability and protecting the environment. We believe the climate is changing and have signed onto efforts to preserve the Paris Climate Agreement, to promote solar energy and to advance electric vehicles. We changed local laws to facilitate the installation of residential solar energy systems and we set up the first public electric car charging station in The Woodland parking lot.

Last year we discussed banning single use, plastic shopping bags in Maplewood. I want to thank Committeewoman Adams for raising this important issue. We took a step back because we were told the Legislature would move forward with a state-wide ban on plastic bags. Unfortunately, Trenton is not going to act anytime soon so I can assure you we will be revisiting a Maplewood plastic bag ban in early 2019.

Maplewood is also the lead municipality for the Sustainable Essex Alliance, a multi-municipal cooperative that will purchase greener and cheaper electricity and promote energy efficiency for nearly 120,000 residents living in Maplewood, South Orange, Millburn, Glen Ridge, Montclair and Verona. You'll hear more about this groundbreaking program in the first half of the year.

Back in June, Sonia Viveiros, our former Assistant Administrator, was appointed as the Township Business Administrator. She has brought new energy and ideas to the position and has followed the Township Committee's charge to be bold with her recommendations. One of her biggest ideas will go into effect today. We've created two super departments – Department of Community Services and Department of Community Development. Community Services will bring together recreation, the pool, summer camps, cultural affairs, senior services, the health department and the welfare office under one roof to foster synergy in the delivery of human services to the public. Community Development will put zoning, building, code enforcement and economic development under one tent to improve coordination and communication. These super departments will break down institutional silos and allow us to provide better municipal services.

Traffic concerns and pedestrian safety remain top priorities. The Police Department's Traffic Bureau undertook a number of initiatives to slow traffic and protect pedestrians. And we worked with a consulting firm funded by the NJ Department of Transportation to develop a comprehensive traffic safety plan for Prospect Street and Burnett Avenue, which we'll begin implementing this year. We'll also work with Essex County to install a new traffic light at Valley Street and Pierson Road.

Two years ago the Maplewood Village Alliance asked the Township Committee to sponsor a visioning effort to bring together Village stakeholders to discuss its future. We reached out to the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs and it provided us with free professional planners from the Office of Local Planning Services. In July we had a spirited community visioning session and nearly 1,000 people responded to our on-line survey about the Village. The planners have come up with a number of far reaching recommendations which will challenge our thinking about Maplewood Village and be the basis for serious discussions in the months ahead.

The members of the Maplewood Fire Department provide critical services to our community and we thank them for their commitment and professionalism. As you may know, we are in negotiations with South Orange about consolidating our two fire departments. Our goal is to have one stronger, unified department that will better serve the residents and businesses in our two towns. And there is a cost savings involved. As we've designed it, the consolidated department will keep open all three firehouses with the same number of engines and trucks as we have today. We have a lot more to negotiate and we will be reaching out to Governor Murphy's share services specialists to help us work through personnel and legal issues.

There were many other accomplishments in 2018.

- The Youth Advisory Committee was established to help get young people more involved in government and the overall community and to fine tune their leadership skills.
- Public art came to Maplewood. We worked with the Springfield Avenue Partnership on its mural program and now there are eye-catching murals on the sides of three buildings and more to come this year. We've asked the Maplewood Arts Council to undertake a mural project for the two tunnels at the train station and that campaign is about to get launched.
- We started replacing the sidewalk pavers in Maplewood Village, a three quarters of a million dollars improvement project that will be completed in the spring. We also paved Maplewood Avenue.
- Thanks to Mr. Dafis, Rainbow Crosswalks were painted on Valley Street and Oakview Avenue. The crosswalks, which attained international status, are a visual demonstration of our being an inclusive community where everyone is welcomed.
- The Memorial Park Conservancy completed a planting program at the flagpole in Memorial Park. We agreed to construct a new basketball court in DeHart Park. And an elevator was installed in The Woodland, the major step in making the building's third floor accessible for additional music and cultural activities.

So what are our plans for 2019?

- The Library for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is a top priority. We've been anxiously waiting for the state to issue regulations for the \$125 million library bond approved in 2017. As soon as the rules are made official we'll submit our funding application and lobby in Trenton to get the dollars we need.
- The long awaited Irvington Avenue Redevelopment Project will be ready to start in the spring according to Essex County officials. As we begin phase one, we will get the ball rolling on phase two which includes a redesign of the Irvington Avenue and Parker Avenue intersection.
- We'll continue to work with new businesses that are looking to open in town, including Luna Stella Bar and Restaurant, a noodle shop and a co-working space in Maplewood Village; a redesigned O'Reilly's Tavern on Millburn Avenue; coffee, bagels and other food shops on Springfield Avenue and a craft brewery in our industrial area.
- We will join with the School Board as it undertakes a critical long range facilities and K-5 expansion plan. Our students deserve the best and if we are going to continue to attract people to live in Maplewood and South Orange we need to have safe and modern school facilities. This is an investment in the next generation of leaders and in the continued viability of our two communities.
- One of our toughest tasks this year will be negotiating collective bargaining agreements with the labor unions representing our police, fire, public works, library and town hall employees. We intend to be fair and supportive while being cognizant of our responsibilities to the taxpayers.
- The 2020 Census is critical and we'll get ready for it this year. Our hard work in 2010 resulted in a final count of just one less person than in 2000. Our job will be even more difficult this time around because of a decision by the Trump Administration to include a citizenship question of all households, the first time citizenship will be asked of all since 1950. A legal case is winding its way through federal court to determine if this question is justified or politically motivated. No matter what, we'll gear up for 2020 and help our residents navigate the Census process.
- Finally, there's cannabis. In early 2019, it is expected that the Governor and Legislature will agree on a path forward to legalize adult use of cannabis and expand its medical use. We've spoken to firms looking to distribute, process or grow cannabis here in Maplewood. We'll move forward with these development opportunities if it makes sense and we can craft zoning and operational conditions that do not negatively affect our residents. Stay tuned on this one.

So we have a big 2019 agenda and the Township Committee will be very busy.

We'll be counting on the steady leadership from our executive team of Sonia Viveiros, our Administrator; Roger Desiderio, our Attorney; and Liz Fritzen, our Clerk. We thank them for all they do and for their continued support of and assistance to us.

We also want to recognize the contributions of all our employees who serve the people of Maplewood in a professional manner. Will all our employees please stand so we can thank you?

Finally, there's an opportunity for you to get involved as a volunteer. Let us know of your interests and how you would like to make a positive difference in our community.

I am excited about the future of Maplewood and I hope you are too.

Thank you very much.