

THE CITY OF SUMMIT

N E W J E R S E Y

CITY HALL 512 SPRINGFIELD AVENUE SUMMIT, NJ 07901

News Release

For immediate release

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2024 State of the City Address by Mayor Nora Radest

SUMMIT, NJ, January 3, 2024

It is with a profound sense of gratitude and reflection that I draft my final State of the City Address for 2023. As I look back on the past eight years of service as your mayor, I am filled with a deep appreciation for the journey we have taken together. The foundations we have built will support continued growth and prosperity, but the challenges ahead will require fresh ideas, renewed energy, and a steadfast commitment to the values that have guided us so far.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to each of you for the trust you have placed in me, for the opportunity to serve this extraordinary city, and for your support. Let us continue to work together, hand in hand, for the city we love and cherish.

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

The Department of Community Programs completed a master plan for city playgrounds that includes options for Mabie, Tatlock and Brayton playgrounds, and possibly a new playground in East Summit, perhaps at the Community Center. After much research the DCP has finalized plans for the Mabie playground project. The cost is expected to be \$1.6 million although nearly \$900,000 has already been secured through various grants. The city is applying for several additional grants and has initiated a public fundraising effort. We hope to have the new playground and basketball courts ready by the spring of 2025. New state of the art basketball courts at Memorial and Tatlock fields were installed, and repairs are out for bid for the Wilson Field paddle tennis courts. The DCP also worked on a master plan for the Wilson recreation area.

DCP expanded its summer camp by 50 campers to continue meeting the growing need in the community for affordable camp experiences. The department successfully assisted in the transfer of GRACE from Cornog Field House to the Community Center allowing us to strengthen the partnership and service delivery. More programs for seniors were added to the schedule, particularly additional pickleball opportunities to meet the growing demand seen at the Summit Community Center. The TryCAN collaboration continued to offer its regularly scheduled programs and increased the number of towns that are participating.

The DCP continued to host over 30 special events for the community to enjoy for free, including the expansion of its Juneteenth event on the Village Green. They received the new show mobile for the final winter holiday event of 2023.

DCP added disc golf to the regular programming schedule each week at the Summit Municipal Golf Course. The dam work at the Summit Municipal Golf Course was completed and the public enjoyed

THE CITY OF SUMMIT

N E W J E R S E Y

CITY HALL 512 SPRINGFIELD AVENUE SUMMIT, NJ 07901

more than 15,000 rounds of golf. More than 40,000 visitors enjoyed the sun and fun at the Summit Family Aquatic Center.

The department developed and expanded new sports programs for young people, including track and field clinics, off season volleyball programs for high school students, and middle school field hockey programs.

I am very grateful to the staff of the Department of Community Programs for always striving for perfection with unceasingly positive attitudes and a commitment to sharing the fun.

SUMMIT'S DOWNTOWN

Many residents and visitors to Summit enjoyed our downtown last year. Summit's very successful outdoor dining was a source of pleasure, in fact freedom, for many of us in the summer and fall. 25 restaurants participated in sidewalk cafés which, due to an ordinance passed by Council in late 2020, now allows for the operation of sidewalk cafés all year long.

SUMMIT POLICE DEPARTMENT

The Summit Police Department hired three new officers in 2023, filling the places of two retirements in 2022 and one in 2021.

The SPD and council remain very concerned about vehicle thefts and attempted thefts. Thefts are down from 2022, but attempted thefts continue. The SPD has taken several steps to reduce this criminal activity. The SPD has installed new camera systems equipped with License Plate Reader technology in all patrol vehicles and as part of a capital project, it purchased fixed LPR systems for nine separate sites in the city, bringing the total to 13 perimeter locations. The SPD has plans to complete the last phase of the geofencing project in 2024 with the installation of additional LPR systems at six remaining sites. Additionally, police patrols have been targeted throughout the city based on intelligence gathered from theft data. Lastly, many more residents have habitually locked their cars and removed the key fobs, which certainly has decreased the number of thefts.

In conjunction with Union County, the SPD implemented the highly regarded ARRIVE Together program, aimed at providing compassionate response during 9-1-1 calls involving a mental health crisis. The Summit Police Department has also implemented the Blue Envelope Program, a new countywide program to help people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) during a motor vehicle stop. The primary goal of the program is to assist drivers with ASD with document organization and to educate them about what to do during interactions with police.

SUMMIT FIRE DEPARTMENT

The new Summit firehouse is nearing completion. The architect is LeMay, Erickson & Wilcox, a firm that specializes in firehouses. Brahma Construction Corporation is the contractor and was awarded the bid in the amount of just over 15 million dollars. As of the most recent update from Chief Eric Evers, we are within budget. We expect to formally open the building in May or June 2024.

THE CITY OF SUMMIT

N E W J E R S E Y

CITY HALL 512 SPRINGFIELD AVENUE SUMMIT, NJ 07901

Aside from the increased size of the fire engine bays, the key features of the new firehouse include decontamination areas and safety zones for firefighters within the building, training features incorporated into the building design, a dedicated fire prevention and education room, and a state-of-the-art Emergency Operations Center for the city.

There were some features that we felt should not be included in the budget, as we did with the Community Center project. In 2023 we embarked on a fundraising campaign with our residents and businesses in the amount of \$400,000. We raised funds for a physical fitness and wellness room, ready room furniture for the firefighter living room area, training props, and a dual-purpose fire prevention/education and a historical room. I am happy to report that we reached our goal.

Upon completion of the new firehouse, the old building will be taken down; in fact, the process of taking down the building will be used as an exercise for the firefighters. One of the challenges that the new Mayor and members of Common Council will face in the coming years is how to utilize the vacant land in a pleasing and profitable way for the city and its residents.

FISCAL HEALTH

I am happy to report that the fiscal condition of the city is very strong. The city budget is only about 20% of the total tax levy, but this council and city staff have taken several actions to ensure that services have continued without interruption.

The 2023 Summit Municipal budget was 68.64 million, up 1.1% from 2022, representing a \$206 property tax increase for the average household. The council has begun to work on the 2024 budget with the express intention of keeping any increase at a minimum. We face many pressures on our budget, not least of which is increasing demands for capital projects. All of us want the city to be in the best possible repair, but we must maintain a long-term vision for the health of the city infrastructure and prioritize capital projects.

As I have said before, we are fortunate to have a strong residential ratable base that has shown positive incremental growth in recent years; the total tax base increased 82 million dollars in 2023 with a net increase of 45 million dollars in the industrial base.

Finally, to maximize the impact of our tax dollars, I continued to stay in close contact with our Union County Commissioners and the Governor's Office to ensure they understand the needs of our city and provide all the assistance they can. In 2023, the Commissioners delivered a budget that was flat for the fourth year in a row. This demonstrated their understanding of the impact of the pandemic on municipalities, but also that cities like Summit cannot continue to pay exorbitant taxes to the county. In addition to the grants received for the Canoe Brook Parkway and Broad Street projects, the Department of Community Services secured \$164,204 in grants from the Federal government, Union County, and the State.

Maintaining an informed dialogue with county commissioners and state representatives is critical to our cooperative relationship.

THE CITY OF SUMMIT

N E W J E R S E Y

CITY HALL 512 SPRINGFIELD AVENUE SUMMIT, NJ 07901

COMMUNICATIONS

It continues to be the mission of the Communications Office to keep the public informed through news releases, website postings and notifications, social media channels and media outreach, distributing more than 2500 general and emergency notifications in 2023. If you have not already done so, go to the city website and sign up to receive email or text notifications. It really is an essential way to stay connected and receive the information you need during normal times and particularly in emergent situations.

Traffic on our website continues to exceed an average of 35,000 visits a month. In 2023, we had more than 211,800 individual users visit the site completing 624,963 page views.

The City of Summit actively posts on Facebook, X, and Instagram with three to four posts each day. Weekly, our Facebook reaches exceed 23,000 individuals and continues to draw consistent views for the instructive content we post. In fact, in 2023, the reach of our Facebook posts increased 66.8% and the number of new followers increased 6.3%. In 2023, we added 428 new Instagram followers and 261 new followers on X. We continue to expand our social media followers and visits and look for ways to increase our outreach on all channels.

Our video capability and YouTube channel has been an asset, broadcasting Common Council meetings, and public service announcements from my office, police, fire, and EMS. Please like and follow the City of Summit NJ on social media. And if you have another idea about how we can better reach you with information, we would like to hear it. Please email pressoffice@cityofsummit.org.

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES:

One of the most important responsibilities of the city is to maintain and improve its infrastructure, crucial to resident safety and public health. I am proud to report that the members of the Department of Community Services continued to provide the services that residents and business owners expect.

The Department of Community Services was extremely busy in 2023. Some of the highlights are that we achieved and exceeded the goal of planting 1,000 trees in four years by 17%, processed 3,847 See Click Fix requests as of early December 2023, and fulfilled 666 Open Public Record Act requests for information.

The Engineering/Public Works division performed over 350 inspections and reviewed 224 annual Engineering permits as of December 15, 2023.

The DPW paved 1.77 miles of roads this year with 4,435 tons of asphalt and coordinated with New Jersey American Water and PSE&G for large-scale improvements to critical utility infrastructure. The engineering division responded to numerous calls from residents, contractors, and agents and served to resolve several grading and drainage disputes between neighbors. The annual micro paving project was completed on 12 streets for a total of 43,000 square yards or 2.35 miles.

The department prepared in-house construction plans and documents for Capital Improvement Projects having a projected value of approximately \$306,400.

THE CITY OF SUMMIT

N E W J E R S E Y

CITY HALL 512 SPRINGFIELD AVENUE SUMMIT, NJ 07901

Lastly, DCS managed in-house inspection and project management for the Park Avenue and Prospect Street Improvement Project having a projected value of \$1,400,000.

Affordable Housing

In 2023, the city made progress with its affordable housing initiatives. Morris Habitat conducted a dedication ceremony in December with the new families set to move into the 100% affordable, 12-unit project at 146 Morris Avenue in January of 2024. It is expected that the Zoning Board will approve the Tyrconnel Park project at 557-565 Morris Avenue, adding seven more affordable units. The Summit Housing Authority is in the process of financing much needed renovations to the Housing Authority properties.

The city amended its affordable housing ordinance to comply with language regulated by the state. The ordinance also consolidated code for easier access, increased residential development fees, and closed a loophole being used by developers to avoid affordable housing fees on new residential construction. The updated Operating Manual includes details on the mechanics for administration of the city's affordable housing plan; it was finalized and posted on the city website along with a new flyer promoting affordable housing opportunities. The website also contains an updated tally of affordable unit progress. The Administrative Agent continued to qualify applicants for affordable housing units that are slated for completion or in need of re-rental in 2023. In 2024 we will see newly formed affordable housing committees and increased planning activities as Summit prepares for the affordable housing round four spanning the years 2025 to 2035.

The Affordable Housing Committee met in February 2023 to discuss the status of affordable housing activity in the community. The next committee meeting will be held in February 2024. All prior annual reports as well as meeting information can be found at: www.cityofsummit.org/AH.

Pedestrian and Vehicle Safety

The Common Council, police department and city staff continued to improve pedestrian safety. Flashing beacons were added at Ashwood Avenue and Baltusrol Road, Pine Grove and Springfield avenues, Ashwood Avenue and Pearl Street and Orchard Street and Briant Parkway. Plans for flashing beacons at Summit and Euclid avenues, Morris Avenue and Morris Court are underway. Briant Parkway is now permanently one-way. The Prospect Street sidewalk is complete and so is the Hobart Road sidewalk project. The city received a \$1,000,000 grant for the upcoming Canoe Brook Parkway project and a \$500,000 grant for the Broad Street project.

DCS conducted 33 traffic speed studies to date utilizing radar equipment.

CONCLUSION

The accomplishments in this report are possible because of the hard work of the men and women who work for the city and the many volunteers who comprise the Common Council and the various boards and committees that make up our governmental structure. Thank you all for your hard work.

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