

THE CITY OF SUMMIT

N E W J E R S E Y

CITY HALL 512 SPRINGFIELD AVENUE SUMMIT, NJ 07901

SUMMIT, N.J., January 6, 2015 – State of the City speech presented by Summit Mayor Ellen Dickson at the January 6, 2014 Common Council Reorganization Meeting.

MAYOR ELLEN DICKSON'S STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

Thank you everyone for joining us this evening! Tonight is about thanking the volunteers and City staff, giving a summary of the past year and sharing a vision for the future.

To start, let me thank Sandy Lizza and Mike McTernan for a very productive first year. They really hit the ground running. Congratulations to Robert Rubino and Pat Hurley on second terms. We look forward to their continued good governance. Thank you to Greg Drummond for serving as Mayor pro-tem and performing weddings. In the past year, we officiated 36 weddings. Richard Madden is the senior person on Council and we are grateful for his wisdom and common sense. Al Dill, we appreciate your experienced perspective. Al was first elected in 1988.

I will have a hard time being on this dais and not seeing David Hughes. David is our City Clerk and, after 40 years of service, has announced his retirement. David has had the privilege of working with 61 different Council Members including at least eight Mayors. In my nine years as both Councilmember and Mayor, "Uncle David" has always provided us with sage advice even when we did not want to hear it. He is our resident historian and will be missed.

The state of the City of Summit continues to be strong. We attract a diverse group of young families and interesting new businesses to Summit.

As a City, we recently borrowed \$16.56 million for 10 months at a rate of 0.1612%. This is possibly our lowest borrowing rate ever. We have been reaffirmed as an AAA credit by all three credit rating agencies. We are refinancing to save \$400K over the life of one of our bonds. The City budget declined by -0.4% last year for the first time in memory. Schools were up 0.5% and the County was up by 3.1%.

On a positive note for the County, the Runnells Hospital sale was finalized December 15 for \$26 million. Congratulations to the Freeholders for making some tough decisions that benefit us all. We look forward to future cost savings at the County level that may include the combination of Country Sheriff Department and the County Police Department.

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Attesting to the continuing and increasing confidence of property owners in Summit; for 2014, more than 2355 construction permits were issued representing \$87 million in value. Some key development sites are a five-story office building and parking garage at Celgene; a retail and office building replacing the former Bagel Chateau property at 466 Springfield Avenue; and a townhouse development replacing a former automobile dealership on Franklin Place.

During this past year elected officials and staff have been working closely with representatives of Merck as they market for sale their 88 acre campus.

We are confident that Merck understands what an important corporate citizen they have been and continue to be for Summit. As the City's largest tax payer we look forward to continuing to work with Merck as they transition from the Summit site and ultimately to welcoming and working with the next owner of this property that may be finalized in the next few months. Merck has fully honored its tax commitment for 2014 but the City has to be prepared for the reality that Merck taxes may be lower in the future until the property is sold.

Next, let me turn to City staff. I am proud to work with such a dedicated team of City employees who provide essential services for the community led by City Administrator Christopher Cotter. From Finance and Tax to the Clerk's Office to Engineering and Administration, thank you for all that you do.

Our Police Department led by Chief Weck is staffed by talented and dedicated individuals. I appreciate your sensitivity to the needs of our community, especially your focus on community outreach. These excellent programs are currently being executed by our police force:

- New patrol initiatives to build relationships with our citizens and schools;
- Community policing events, such as National Night Out;
- Police Open House;
- Monthly show on HomeTowne TV;
- Summer Youth Academy;
- Creation of the CERT Program with the Fire Department;
- And my favorite, the third edition of the Police trading card program.

The Police Department continues to exceed training requirements to ensure we are one of, if not the best, Police Department in the county and the state.

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Congratulations are in order to two members of our Police Department, Chief Robert Weck and Captain Steven Zagorski, for their 25 years of service to the citizens of Summit.

Now, on to the Fire Department. It is easy to like the Fire Department because they only come when they are called. Some of the major accomplishments for the year are:

- The Center for Public Safety Excellence approved the Summit Fire Department's third annual fire service accreditation compliance report in October;
- A firehouse feasibility study was conducted and the architect recommends replacement of the fire headquarters. A four-year capital plan request was submitted to design and build a new fire headquarters;
- This year the Department added a Spartan ERV engine to its fleet replacing a 1987 rescue pumper. Members spent hundreds of hours designing and outfitting the engine.

Our emergency management team was not taxed with any significant incidents this year but remain vigilant and met numerous times this year to conduct training, update our plans and implement new technology.

Finally, the New Providence, Summit, and Millburn (NPSM) Emergency Services Dispatch Center is scheduled to begin operations by the end of March.

The First Aid Squad building project is progressing and is expected to be completed by late spring of 2015. Thank you to the First Aid Squad for all you do for the community and for Chip Duane of Salerno Duane for housing the Squad during this time of transition.

For the Department of Community Services there were many achievements and highlights in 2014:

- Being awarded the 2014 Sustainability Champion Award for Sustainable Jersey Certification at the Silver Level in the Medium Municipality Category;
- Winning second place in the Municipal Construction projects category of the New Jersey Society of Municipal Engineers (NJSME) State Engineering Project Awards for the Waldron Avenue Reconstruction Project;
- The completion of the Promenade Park Rehabilitation/Reconstruction Project;
- Reconstruction of the Family Aquatic Center parking lot;
- Completion of the Deforest Avenue Improvement Project;
- The Glenside Field parking lot installation and shared services with Union County.

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I want you to know that the Morris Avenue Bridge is out for bid, which is a welcome development for this long overdue project. No date has been given for a start of what is estimated to be an 18-month-long project.

The Department of Community Programs continues to “share the fun” with multiple program offerings for every age group. Check the website for future offerings. They created a successful fundraising campaign for the Senior Connection bus. The new Rec Center building, a \$4.5 million project was approved with the challenge of raising an additional \$1 million to complete a second full-size gym. A park development plan is underway for Tatlock and surrounding areas. This will be a big year for advancing public properties in need of renovation and repair. Stay tuned.

The need for more parking continues to grow. We made a lot of progress standardizing the pay stations. Way finding and parking directional signage is underway. Our head of Parking Services, Council and I continue to believe we need a new parking garage. Site evaluation and traffic studies should move forward in 2015. Please remember the parking is not paid for by taxpayers; parking revenues cover the costs. I believe such a project will also add to the value of our downtown properties.

It has been a successful year for Communications. We continue to extend our reach and ability to convey timely, important information to residents, businesses, and visitors to Summit. Over the past year, we have increased our website traffic by 15%. That’s approximately 700 more visitors each month in 2014. Our social media presence continues to grow. This past year as compared to 2013 saw a 300% average increase to Facebook views for the majority of posts and a steady increase in likes of Facebook and followers on Twitter. We have established a LinkedIn page for the City of Summit and continue to look for ways to better communicate general and emergency information to the community.

The Library is where lots of good things are happening. Please check out summitlibrary.org for community programs. The Friends of the Library are sponsoring museum passes for the Intrepid, Grounds for Sculpture and the Morris Museum. A foundation for the Library has been established with the help Council President Robert Rubino and Chairman Amy Liss. Our heartfelt thanks to John Plaut who gave us ten years on the Board. He has great passion for and has been a great asset to the Library.

Our schools are a major reason why many young families choose Summit and our young people continue to thrive and succeed. As of December 31, 2014, we have 4,122 students in our schools. The Class of 2014 graduated 267

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students; 94.5% went on to further their education in college. The Class of 2015 has 21 National Merit Scholars, 7 of whom are semifinalists. The Summit Board of Education announced in November the selection of Mr. June Chang as the next Superintendent of Summit Public Schools, effective March 1, 2015. Mr. Chang will succeed Dr. Nathan Parker, who has led the district since 2008 and will retire on March 1 with the Board's deepest appreciation for his dedication to Summit students and commitment to the district.

Another passion of mine is our beloved downtown. Life is changing. Baby Boomers and Millennials are seeking an urban/suburban experience, blending old with new. Our City is being reshaped in a very positive way. We will soon have 12 townhomes on the site of the former Infinity dealership on Franklin Place. Flynn's Garage may soon be transformed into six apartments. The Post Office may be put up for sale and development may include a smaller post office with other retail and living quarters above.

Quoting the Local Source newspaper author Frank Capese who quotes the trade publication *Real Estate Forum* on a study that predicts "beyond the boom growth in the urban centers the state suburbs will be undergoing some economic stagnation. The impact on real estate value and delivery of services may be significant."

I am committed to an economically viable downtown and working with new and existing business owners, Summit Downtown Inc. and the Chamber of Commerce to make that happen. As we have mentioned in past years, Summit has been recognized as a Transit Village and received a Historic Downtown Designation. The plaques have arrived and will be installed soon. Our Downtown has also been recognized by the New Jersey Chapter of the American Planning Association as one of the 2014 Great Places in New Jersey. And we are.

Our Downtown continues to grow and evolve with some exciting new businesses, including Boxwood Coffee in the former Red Mango space. Umi Asian Fusion restaurant will join us in the old Beacon Hill Tavern location. Pino's Palette will offer pottery painting with wine in the space that Catchware used to occupy. The New Jersey Dance Reparatory Theater, Greek Grill, and Hilltop Tutoring will also be opening soon.

Summit Downtown Inc. is looking to hire a retail resource recruiter to bring new and different businesses to Summit and has embarked on a rebranding effort for Summit's Downtown.

Our volunteers are the heart of our community and the donation of their time and talents helps to enrich our City in many ways. We stand on the shoulders of many generations of volunteers who have managed our City so well. I would like to give a special thank-you to the 25 volunteers who are here tonight for their wonderful service. And I

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would like to mention that anyone interested in volunteering, please fill out a form that you will find on the City website, cityofsummit.org.

As Mayor, I continue to think about how our quality of life can be improved. One of the ways to do that is to maximize the potential of our natural resources. Let me now talk about a few of our efforts. The Environmental Commission in partnership with the Summit Conservancy, Union County, and the Overlook Hospital Neighborhoods Initiative is working to better establish and renovate a trail system along the Passaic River that will connect our community with Chatham, New Providence and Berkeley Heights.

The Summit Conservancy, a newly formed 501(c)(3), is raising money for an Environmental Center and permanent home for the Summit Free Market, a reuse initiative led by students that has kept more than 100 tons from the waste stream since its inception in 2008. They have raised nearly half of the \$200K needed to complete the project. Generous support from the Summit Area Public Foundation has kicked started this effort. Thank you to Jack Kelly of the Rosen Group for the building design and the many of you who have already supported this important project. Check out summitconservancy.org for more information.

These projects along with a proposed Summit Highline initiative will be a crown jewel in a trail system in Summit. The highline, a project that has been revived by Council President Rubino, will rehabilitate deactivated train tracks that run behind Briant Park, Celgene, and ending at the Summit Train Station. A highline committee has been established and more details will be available soon.

How fortunate are we to be born in this country, at this time and to live in this wonderful City? Happy New Year everyone!

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