



**Chatham Township Committee
2016 Mayor's Address
[Mayor Curt Ritter](#)
January 7, 2016**

Good evening and welcome to the Chatham Township Committee 2016 [reorganization meeting](#).

I want begin by thanking the [Committee](#) for their unanimous support this evening in electing me as Mayor. I appreciate the confidence and continued support of our dedicated and talented Committee members and I look forward to continuing to work closely with each of you as we work together, as one team, one Committee, to Build a Better Chatham.

I also want to take this opportunity to congratulate former Mayor, and now Deputy Mayor, [Kevin Sullivan](#) on his reelection to the Committee this past November. On behalf of the Committee and residents of Chatham Township, I want to thank you for your service as Mayor these past two years, and for your willingness and commitment to serve another three years on the Committee.

In preparing my remarks for this evening I wanted to briefly recap some of the Committee's key accomplishments from 2015 and highlight some areas of focus for 2016.

By all accounts 2015 was another successful year for the Chatham Township Committee.

Ensuring the Public's Safety

In 2015, we continued to make great strides on the Public Safety front. The [Police Department](#), led by [Chief Steven Hennelly](#), was accredited by the [New Jersey State Association of Chiefs of Police](#). This is a significant accomplishment and Chief Hennelly, [Lt. Thomas Miller](#) and the entire Department are to be commended for creating a best-in-class Police Department that other towns throughout New Jersey and the nation, can only hope to emulate.

In addition, this past year, in an effort to ensure that Chatham Township remains a safe place to live and raise a family we launched a new [Neighborhood Watch](#) program. This nationally recognized program brings neighbors together as a community so that they can assist our Police to ensure that Chatham Township remains one of the safest towns in America.

The significance of these two accomplishments should not be lost; in fact they were referenced in one of the many rankings this past year in which Chatham Township was recognized as one of the [safest places to live in America](#). One press release from Safewise stated, “Kudos to Chatham Township for being the [safest community in New Jersey!](#) We were pleased to discover that Chatham’s Police Department recently earned accreditation. Plus, a community-wide Neighborhood Watch Program just got off the ground, which exemplifies community involvement in safety.”

We were also pleased to recognize the hard work and efforts of Officers Brad Hayworth and Patrick Meade when they were promoted to Sergeant.

On the Fire safety front, we allocated funds for the purchase of a new FD SL75 Aerial Ladder Fire Truck for the [Green Village Fire Department](#). This commitment will ensure that our [Fire Departments](#) continue to have the state-of-the-art equipment they need to ensure our residents remain safe.

Additional public safety measures in 2015 included our effort to increase awareness of living with bears. In conjunction with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection we hosted a [Bear Awareness Seminar](#) for residents. This video remains posted on the Township website and given the fact that two bears were seen on River Road this past Tuesday, we again encourage all residents to view the video to educate themselves on what to do if they, or their children encounter, a bear. In 2016, we will look to further address this issue and explore the possibility of including the Great Swap National Wildlife Refuge in future bear hunts.

In addition, this past year the Committee was successful in [addressing](#) the safety concerns of residents who walk and bike through town and utilize our recreational facilities. We held a thoughtful discussion around the Safe Routes to School sidewalk grant, established additional crosswalks, posted pedestrian awareness signs and lowered the speed limit on Lafayette Avenue. We also erected a series of stop signs in the Sandy Hill neighborhood, and passed an ordinance prohibiting the use of drones on municipal properties.

Looking toward 2016, we will continue to make Public Safety a top priority.

Tonight we will swear in Nicholas Giordano as the newest member of the Police Department and our focus this year will be on further supporting the Police so that they have the proper equipment and training needed to handle any situation. I will encourage my fellow Committee members to support the acquisition of M4 rifles for the Department, and allocate funds for training and any related equipment that will be necessary to effectively utilize this new equipment.

These past few years we have been fortunate that we have not encountered any natural and manmade disasters. Despite this good fortune, in 2016 we will look to revitalize our [Community Emergency Response Team](#) (CERT) in an effort to identify community volunteers who can assist the Police and the Office of Emergency Management in their efforts should the need ever arise. We will also develop a Public Safety Awareness campaign in conjunction with [National Preparedness Month in September](#) to promote disaster preparedness among our residents and we will also coordinate an all-agency tabletop exercise to measure our emergency planning and preparation process.

Recently the Morris Country Freeholders indicated that they will allocate \$500,000 of federal [Homeland Security grant funds](#) to train first responders in how to treat people involved in violent incidents like the recent mass shooting in San Bernardino. We will seek the support of the Freeholders as we look to better prepare our first responders and implement our various public safety initiatives in 2016.

Public health will also be a focus this year. I have previously spoken of the importance of increasing awareness of mental health issues and suicide prevention. In 2013, suicide claimed more than 41,000 lives in the United States, with someone dying by suicide every 12.8 minutes. In 2016, in conjunction with the [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](#) and [Caring Contact](#), we will coordinate Suicide Awareness training for our first responders, and host a separate Suicide Awareness and Prevention seminar for residents to increase awareness of this important issue. We remind anyone in crisis to please call 1-800-273-TALK.

Keeping Chatham Township Beautiful

On the public works and utilities front, in 2015 we extended our heartfelt thanks to John Pacelli who retired as the head of the [Department of Public Works](#) and we welcomed Rich Young as the new head of the Department. Tonight we will welcome three new employees to the Department, James Alphonse, Mendez Fernandez and Kevin Ames.

The DPW men and women are responsible for keeping Chatham Township the beautiful place we are all proud to call home; whether it's prepping recreational fields, plowing roads, or filling potholes, on behalf of the Committee I commend Rich and his team for their continued great work.

In addition, this past year, due in large part to the efforts of [Committeewoman Karen Swartz](#), we increased our communications and information sharing with our local utilities. The importance of having a close working relationship with our utility companies cannot be understated and we thank Karen for her efforts.

A Focus on Fiscal Discipline

Looking at our Township finances, the Committee continues to take pride in its efforts to prudently manage expenses while increasing awareness of the budget process so all residents understand how their tax dollars are being spent. In [2015](#), we decreased the municipal tax rate by a full cent to \$0.28 per \$100 of assessed value. This decrease gave the Township the smallest tax rate for the municipal portion of the tax bill since 2007. Few, if any municipalities in NJ can match this accomplishment, and this is something everyone on this dais should be proud of.

In addition, we hired Nisivoccia LLP, a leading accounting and advisory firm, as our new auditor. This is an important step in ensuring that Chatham Township remains at the forefront in the utilization of best practices in all matters concerning our budget and finance-related initiatives.

Looking toward 2016, we will continue to maintain a balance of prudent fiscal responsibility while meeting the quality-of-life needs of our residents. Over the next few months we will discuss the 2016 budget. We encourage all residents to come to a future Committee meeting, or view a [replay online](#), to better educate themselves on the process and to see how their tax dollars are being spent.

Stopping the Pilgrim Pipeline

One important issue that came to a head in early 2015 was the proposed [Pilgrim Pipeline](#). Led by former Mayor Sullivan, with the assistance of Township Attorney Albert Cruz, the Committee passed the first of its kind [ordinance](#) prohibiting unregulated pipelines in the Township. This was an important first step in what will continue to be a long fight. Our efforts in 2016 will require the support of all residents and businesses. [Committeeman Bob Gallop](#) will continue to serve as the liaison on this important initiative. We thank him for his dedication and look forward to future updates as the process evolves this year. Only in working together and being vocal can we help to prevent this pipeline from coming to our backyards.

Celebrating Environmental Conservation

On the flip side, in celebrating environmental conservation, this past year we opened the 136-acre [Giralda Farms Nature Preserve](#) to the public. Again, thanks in large part to the efforts of former Mayor Sullivan, Township Administrator Tom Ciccarone and Township Attorney Cruz, for the first time in more than a century the general public is now able to walk freely on the property. This acquisition will forever be protected for future generations and is one all residents should take pride in.

The Colony Pool Club – A Point of Pride

Another point of pride in Chatham Township is our community pool. In 2015, we undertook a comprehensive effort to rebrand and market [The Colony Pool Club](#). We created and launched a new website, developed a comprehensive marketing campaign, made improvements to the facility, created new member activities and acquired the now famous “Colony Log Roll.” As a result of these efforts, membership increased by more than 7%. In 2016, we will continue to focus on improving the Colony Pool Club member experience and, given tonight’s captive audience, we encourage you to consider joining at www.thecolonypoolclub.org

Meeting Our Affordable Housing Obligation

Another important issue the Committee will address in 2016 is the preparation of the Fair Share and Housing Element of the [Master Plan](#). This element of the Master Plan will address the Township’s affordable housing obligation. We will continue to work closely with the [Planning Board](#), Township Administrator Tom

Ciccarone, Township Planner Frank Banisch, Township Attorney Albert Cruz and others, to address this matter in the coming months.

Volunteer Appreciation

Chatham Township is blessed to have [hundreds of volunteers](#) who donate countless hours of their time in support of our community. In 2016, we will look to further promote the efforts of the many volunteer organizations in our community to help increase awareness of their efforts. This April, as part of [National Volunteer Month](#), we will look to formally recognize the efforts of volunteers throughout the community and consider hosting a volunteer fair to promote awareness and membership recruitment for these many great organizations.

We will also make a concerted effort to assist our two Fire Departments in growing their membership and increasing awareness among residents that these two all-volunteer departments are dependent upon them in order to survive, both in manpower and in financial support. We thank those who volunteer in our community and encourage all residents to consider getting involved in some capacity.

A Continued Focus on Communications

In 2015, we continued to make great strides in advancing our communications efforts with residents. We continued to publish our [bi-monthly e-newsletter](#), which remains one of the most visited pages on our Township website, and we continued to promote [Alert Chatham Township \(ACT Now\)](#) to ensure residents are registered for this free community and emergency alert system. In 2015 we saw a 15% increase in registrations and we now have more than 4,100 subscribers.

We continue to supplement these communication vehicles with our [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) pages where we now have close to 1,000 Facebook likes, doubling our total from 2014. We encourage those of you who haven't done so already to follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

In 2016, we will redesign the Township [website](#) to ensure that it is more user friendly when viewed on mobile devices and tablets. We will improve the navigation and update content throughout the site. We will also investigate the option of establishing a mobile app that will allow residents to more easily communicate to Township agencies when reporting non-emergency related

issues, be it a pot hole that needs filling or a tree that needs trimming. Special thanks go to [Committeeman Mike Kelly](#) and Tom Salvas, the man you don't always see in the booth at the back of the room, who manages the Township's Government Access Channel, for their continued work on the Communications Committee.

As always we remind residents that if you want your voice to be heard, or have a suggestion on how we can improve services to residents, we invite you to attend one of our Committee meetings, email the Committee at Committee@chathamtownship-nj.gov or email me directly at Mayor@chathamtownship-nj.gov

The Backbone of the Committee, Our Township Employees

In conclusion, I would be remiss if I did not thank our all our Township employees, including our Township Administrator Tom Ciccarone and our Clerk Greg LaConte.

I also want to express our gratitude to our Township Attorney Albert Cruz and Township Engineer John Ruschke for their assistance in ensuring that we as a Committee are able to provide the best service to our residents.

I thank you again for your support. I look forward to working closely with all of our Committee members as we work together to Build a Better Chatham.



Curt Ritter
Mayor, Township of Chatham
January 7, 2016