

# TOWNSHIP OF MARLBORO

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**Mayor**  
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## **SUBJECT: ANNUAL HURRICANE SEASON-TOWNSHIP UPDATE – JULY 2021**

Dear Resident:

Nearly nine years have passed since Superstorm Sandy brought us impassable roads and prolonged power outages. Until 2020, that event, more than any other, served as a sobering reminder of our vulnerability in the face of the forces of nature. Little did any of us know that we would face a storm of a different kind, one that impacted our daily lives in every way imaginable, changing how we work, attend school, obtain medicine and groceries and provide for our families. Storms pass, and after a relatively short period, fade to memory. The COVID 19 pandemic - undoubtedly one of the most difficult chapters in modern history - impacted our lives in a way that continues to this day, in some respects changing life forever. While we appear at the time of this writing to have turned a corner, the pandemic, more than any emergency that preceded it, reinforced the need to maintain open lines of communication, as well as how crucial it is to face the hardest challenges by working together as a community. It is for this reason that I write to you again now, and each year, on the anniversary of Superstorm Sandy.

As we approach this anniversary, and with the COVID pandemic still weighing heavily on us, I take this opportunity to remind you and your family to be prepared for emergencies, weather-related and other, and to review how we as a united community continue to Weather the Storms.

### **CONTINUITY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES**

In the world of public agencies, local government is unique – we cannot turn off the lights and close up shop under any circumstance. We do not shut down during a blizzard or hurricane – in fact, we activate. When emergency services are needed at any time of day, police, fire and first aid stand ready and available. This is the core mission of local government.

During this pandemic, despite the risks, our police, fire and first aid remained on-call - more on that below. Town Hall offices did not close for a single business day, and dedicated employees in public works, recreation, finance and community development reported to work throughout. The demand on departments actually increased at times during the pandemic – on some days it seemed like every resident was making home improvements, applying for permits and requesting inspections.

While showing up in times of need is our job, I do want to recognize the sacrifices of our staff and express my gratitude to them for helping ensure that the business of local government continued for the residents of Marlboro.

### **TOWNSHIP CREDIT RATING AND STRONG FINANCIALS – WHY THIS MATTERS**

In order to remain prepared for storms, whatever form they may take, the Township must maintain its infrastructure and inventory of equipment, financed - at least in part - through long term borrowing. A strong “credit rating”, which takes the form of a written opinion issued by an independent “rating agency” ensures that we can easily access capital markets at the lowest available interest rates. The higher the credit rating, the lower the cost of borrowing, and the greater the savings for taxpayers.

Following the Township’s upgrade to a triple A rating from Standard & Poor’s in 2017 and affirmation in 2020, we approached Moody’s Investors Service, the other preeminent rating agency for a rating. In our presentation earlier this year, we reported strong financials and conservative budgeting, a growing property

value base with prospects for managed growth, high education levels, and a first-rate education system which sends more than 95% of its graduates on to college. We emphasized the Township's long term and forward-thinking capital program which focuses investment on critical infrastructure such as roads, drainage, parks and water supply.

Moody's upgraded Marlboro to a triple A rating, the highest possible, and its report specifically highlighted the Township's sizeable and growing tax base, very strong economy and growing, healthy reserves as well as the Township's strong liquidity and manageable debt burden. We are particularly proud that Moody's made a special note of Township leadership, indicating that "Governance is a key driver of this rating action as its management team is extremely proactive in managing township operations."

This is not just me saying it – these are the actual words that the world's leading bond rating agencies have documented when valuing the Township's creditworthiness. There are few independent and truly objective report cards in the world of local government, and I believe the credit rating reflects not only Marlboro's fiscal strength and stewardship, but what we more generally offer as a community. It echoes what we feel and know to be true as residents – that Marlboro is a premier suburban destination in the State. Moreover, we are a community that is well-prepared for whatever storms come our way.

Marlboro's financial position remains robust, even in the wake of the significant economic disruption brought on by the world-wide pandemic. This is important because we need to remain positioned to absorb not only the costs of the pandemic (more on that below), but the extreme and unpredictable weather conditions which continue to drive the cost of operations. Tropical Storm Isaias in the summer of 2020 was the most recent event, necessitating a \$345,000 emergency appropriation funded in the 2021 budget. This past winter, like many before it, we experienced snowstorms necessitating multiple days of treating and plowing. Yet, for those items in our budget generally controlled at the local level, our budget has only increased by 12.78% since 2007, a rate of less than 1% per year. Over the same period, those costs in our budget which are passed through and mandated by the State of New Jersey have increased by approximately \$4.124 million or 75.48%.

Extraordinary costs due to the pandemic, including desk and counter partitions, personal protective equipment for emergency services and office staff, enhanced sanitizing services and automatic doors and plumbing fixtures were largely covered by federal "CARES Act" funding in 2020, to the tune of nearly \$700,000. Additional extraordinary expenses required in this second pandemic year are estimated at approximately \$390,000 and included in the 2021 budget. The most significant items relate to equipping and staffing a decontamination facility at the municipal complex for first responder vehicles, equipment and personnel. Also, when COVID-19 testing was not readily available we set up a facility at the Recreation Center affording our residents, employees and school teachers and staff free and convenient access to testing. In addition, the 2021 budget necessarily factored the cost of pandemic-related unemployment payments, which continued to run at a high level since March 2020.

Even factoring in these extraordinary expenses, and a mandated State pension system payment which increased by more than 9% or \$320,000 over the prior year, the 2021 budget has increased by only 1.38% over 2020. It is also noteworthy that the Township remains well under the State established limits on both taxation and spending.

It is important to note that while State budget law requires that the Township include the extraordinary items referenced above in the 2021 budget, we have requested reimbursement from the federal government for all of the expenses related to Storm Isaias, and the one-time expenditures and revenue shortfalls directly relating to the pandemic.

As evidenced by the most recent review by Moody's, the Township has struck the right balance between delivering services—including supplemental services during the pandemic--and strengthening its balance sheet. The Township remains committed to an aggressive capital program which invests in infrastructure for the long term. Under my Road Improvement Plan, in just the 2018 and 2019 budget years alone, we allocated \$10 million towards road and drainage improvements which have had a dramatic and noticeable impact upon

our community (more about this below). Preventative maintenance and repairs and strategic investments in infrastructure is sound policy and makes good financial sense in the long term.

## **INVESTMENT IN INFRASTRUCTURE**

Our multi-year capital plan continues to focus on roads, drainage and improvements to walkways and traffic intersections, to improve vehicle safety as well as enhance the walkability and overall quality of life in our community. The previously mentioned preservation of the Stattel Farm properties located at the busiest intersection in the Township is the centerpiece of a plan to connect and make key locations more accessible, including schools, recreation facilities, the municipal complex and library, retail establishments and houses of worship. Our plan also concentrates on those improvements which ensure our safety and security and critical services in the face of storms.

### **Road and Traffic Improvements**

Changing weather patterns have brought more severe weather over the last several years, placing an added strain on our infrastructure. The use of de-icing chemicals in freezing temperatures has accelerated the wear and tear on roadways throughout the State. With a combination of low interest rates, a debt load well below statutory limits, triple A bond rating and historically low interest rates, Marlboro has taken the opportunity to ramp up investment in our infrastructure.

In this regard, the 2021 budget includes the required 5% down payment on more road and drainage improvements which are currently underway. Maintaining the Township's infrastructure is expensive. For example, the cost of road reconstruction averages in excess of \$500,000 per mile—and we have more than 200 miles of local roads in Marlboro. Under my Road Improvement Plan, we have authorized the paving of approximately 55 miles of road.

We also continue to leverage local capital dollars using outside grants, reducing the local taxpayer burden for the quality-of-life projects so important to this community. On that point, 2020 was another exceptional year. The Township was awarded an additional \$490,000 in funding through the New Jersey Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside Program (TAP) for sidewalks on Route 79 between Route 520 and Wyncrest Road at the Henry Hudson Trail, bringing the total award for this project to nearly \$1.4 million. We also received a \$205,000 grant from the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) for improvements to Union Hill Road, a project which we expect to complete by 2022.

In recent years, in order to prepare for extreme weather, we have applied for and received funding through FEMA's Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant Program and the Federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG). We regularly submit applications to these programs for projects featured in our capital plan in order to reduce the impact on local taxpayers.

Marlboro also has a number of roadways under County and State jurisdiction, and we spend a lot of energy coordinating with these other entities to ensure our infrastructure gets the attention it deserves. We eagerly await Monmouth County's improvements at the intersection of Wyncrest and 520 which will include the addition of a dedicated turn lane. We also await the State's Route 79 Improvement Program scheduled to begin in 2022. At no cost to Marlboro taxpayers, this project will result in a complete repaving of the highway and improvements to numerous intersections in Marlboro, including a combination of ADA upgrades, traffic striping and signal modifications as warranted at School Road, Wyncrest Road, Tennent Road, Route 520, Ryan Road and Lloyd Road. On a related front, we expect additional signalization on Route 79 to ensure that the safe and efficient passage of motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists in areas where residential units will be constructed.

### **Parks and Recreation**

We have not let the pandemic get in the way of much needed recreation facility improvements. In fact, over the past year, our parks, open space and recreational facilities took on an ever-greater importance with kids schooling and parents working from home, and vacations cancelled. Court resurfacing improvements at

Marlin Estates and Falson Parks were completed in 2020, and the second phase of improvements to Nolan Road Park will be completed in 2021, the cost of which will be offset by a \$200,000 grant. Playground improvements at Marlin Estates and Wicker Place Parks are currently underway. Our most recent projects have added eight (8) pickleball courts across three (3) facilities throughout the town to meet the ever-growing demand.

### **Water, Power, Fuel and Shelter**

We learned from Sandy and Hurricane Irene before it that local preparation is critical. We cannot wait for outside agencies to act in times of emergency, and as a result, we have invested in critical infrastructure, leveraging grant dollars to ensure we are resilient.

After experiencing more than a week of power outages, the first step we took after the Superstorm was to enhance the Township's backup power generation capabilities. With a \$250,000 grant from FEMA, the Recreation Center now has full backup generator capabilities, allowing the building to be a place for warming, for charging devices and to act as a shelter if necessary.

In collaboration with the State, several major traffic intersections have been upgraded so that lights can operate without dedicating public safety resources during outages. All gas stations in the Township are now required to have backup generators on site so that they can pump fuel even when the power is out.

The Marlboro Water Utility continues its investment in infrastructure utilizing federally-subsidized financing with interest rates at 75% or 50% of market rate. The recently-completed Tennent and Harbor Road Water Treatment Plants feature backup generation capabilities, ensuring a safe, reliable and affordable water supply, reducing reliance on outside water companies and ensuring that drinking water continues to flow during emergencies. It is worth noting that Marlboro Water customers still pay substantially less than surrounding water suppliers.

Electricity in Marlboro is supplied by a State-regulated utility, Jersey Central Power & Light (JCP&L), a division of First Energy. We closely monitor JCP&L's service, often publicly urging the company to improve its service, communication, response and overall commitment to a reliable electricity infrastructure. To the extent possible, the Township works to ensure that proactive measures are taken by JCP&L to remove hazard trees which are the leading cause of power outages.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGED GROWTH**

### **Economic Development**

We continue our efforts to pursue smart development strategies to attract businesses, including high-end retail establishments that enhance the quality of life of our residents and generate new revenues to offset residential property taxes. We formed the Economic Development Committee (EDC) in 2008 with a mandate to make Marlboro more business friendly and attract new enterprises. Since then, we have more than 1.2 million square feet of new commercial development and \$120 million in new tax ratables.

In 2012, Marlboro instituted the first in the country 'Shop Marlboro Property Tax Reward' program with a simple premise – shop local at participating businesses and save money on your property taxes. Other towns followed our lead and, in 2021, the State of New Jersey passed a law modeled after our program. Since its inception, participating merchants have realized in excess of \$4.0 million in *Shop Marlboro!* sales, and our residents have saved more than \$263,000 on their property taxes. Residents are choosing to make their purchases in town, and local merchants are reaping the benefits.

Our mantra continues to be "Smart Growth" as we continue to generate new, clean, smart commercial tax ratables and support our local businesses, with the understanding that this directly reduces the burden on residential property taxpayers.

## **Generational Housing**

As I have reported previously, for the first time in more than a decade, Marlboro is experiencing some new residential construction stemming from a 2020 order issued by Superior Court Judge Linda Grasso Jones. While this new construction is in fact viewed favorably by the credit rating agencies, we are well aware that these projects, which will include some affordable units, can have an impact on local infrastructure and government services.

In order to make the best of this situation, we have established a new zoning designation termed “generational housing”. In our region, a family of three may qualify for affordable housing with an annual income of nearly \$80,000. New housing constructed as a result of the court order will open up housing opportunities for the returning children of Marlboro parents and young entry-level professionals such as police officers, teachers, social workers and nurses. Empty-nesters and seniors on a fixed income who wish to remain in Marlboro will have the opportunity to do so. Recognizing our duty to those who have sacrificed on behalf of our country, veterans will have a chance to call Marlboro their home. Mandated housing will also create the opportunity to redevelop blighted, environmentally-questionable junkyard sites in town, and lay the groundwork for a long-awaited downtown with small shops accessible by bicyclists and pedestrians, and newly-preserved acres of open space for future generations to enjoy.

I frequently run into fellow graduates of Marlboro High School who, like me, are raising families in town, just around the corner from where their parents still live. I hear from Marlboro grandparents all the time that they would love to have their grandkid, who has recently become a teacher or police officer, be able to live in Marlboro. Many parents like me who grew up here can think of nothing better than having their children follow in their footsteps and live in the safe and supportive community that is Marlboro.

## **Preserving Open Space**

Through the preservation of even more acres of open space and farmland, we continue to reduce development and mitigate the impact of mandated new construction. During my tenure, we have preserved in excess of 260 acres of open space and farmland, protecting valuable land from development for the benefit of generations to come. We have concentrated our efforts on preserving the large parcels in town to avoid further sprawl in our community, critical to maintaining our suburban character.

The purchase of Stattel Farm, located at the center of Marlboro on both sides of Route 520 at Route 79, protected 56 acres from the development of more than 500 homes and was made without current local taxpayer dollars. An added bonus – the Marlboro Farmers Market opened on that site and is flourishing in its now third year of operation. We are looking forward to the addition of hundreds more undeveloped acres of open space in Marlboro at the site of the former State Hospital Property, and are now poised to preserve the VanMater Farm on Route 79, another 28 acres of precious farmland that will never be developed.

In addition to the focus on generational housing and the preservation of open space, we are requiring those who are constructing housing to address off-site traffic impacts with signalization and intersection improvements, and where possible, donate undeveloped parcels to the Township to supplement our preserved land inventory.

I must note that the success of our program is a tribute to the hard work and dedication of the Marlboro Township Council and Open Space and Farmland Committees who work hard to improve the quality of life in our town.

## **PUBLIC SAFETY**

An important component of Marlboro’s status as a premier suburban community is safety. The Township continues to receive high marks from various independent organizations in this regard: 6th Safest Small City/Town in America and the 1<sup>st</sup> safest in New Jersey by Money Geek; 37<sup>th</sup> Best Town in New Jersey for Families and #1 in Monmouth County (NJ Family); and the 9<sup>th</sup> safest city to live in New Jersey

(BackgroundChecks.org). We attribute this success to advance preparation, thoughtful long range planning and a focus on engagement with the community.

### **Police**

The Marlboro Division of Police serves the community 24 hours a day, 7 days a week - from the dispatchers who answer your call to the police officers who arrive at the scene. Ours is a State-accredited agency, a status which ensures the application of best practices in police response with the ancillary benefit of discounted Township insurance premiums. The Division has a proactive, community focus, with numerous programs designed to facilitate communication and protect the public. Through extensive outreach in the schools, volunteer organizations, recreation programs and other community events, the Division strives to find the most effective ways to engage with residents.

Adult volunteers are recruited to serve on the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT), the Domestic Violence Response Team (DVRT) and the Sexual Assault Response Team (SART). For youth, the Division runs an “Explorer Post” and a Summer Youth Police Academy. Residents can help facilitate police response by linking home alarm systems directly to headquarters. Police Officers will keep a closer eye on your home if you submit a request prior to your vacation. By appointment, an Officer can help you install your child’s car seat. The Division offers an “Internet Exchange Zone” in the parking lot of town hall for a more secure exchange for your on-line transactions. Residents with special-needs adults or children can register with the Division to improve emergency responses to our most vulnerable citizens.

With the premise that an alert public makes for a safer community, we have promoted the “*See Something. Say Something. We Will Do Something.*” campaign for the express purpose of engaging residents to help proactively identify public safety threats before incidents arise.

My compliments go out to Chief Peter J. Pezzullo and the entire department on their performance during this pandemic.

### **Office of Emergency Management (OEM)**

The OEM conducts drills for emergency scenarios year-round, from power outages to hurricanes, school security to snow events, and vehicular accidents involving hazardous spills. Planning in Marlboro for the COVID-19 pandemic started before any State or Federal declarations, and as a result, our police and volunteer ambulance personnel remained fully prepared, staffed and equipped throughout.

After each County, State and Federal pronouncement was released, OEM was responsible for translating guidelines into operational protocols, with the goal of protecting staff and the public and minimizing the disruption to critical services. This was a significant challenge as the guidance was changing with great frequency throughout the pandemic. An example that was mentioned earlier, a decontamination facility was established at the municipal complex to ensure that equipment and personnel potentially exposed to the virus were thoroughly sanitized on-site and in an expedited manner, protecting the workforce and minimizing community spread.

### **School Safety and Education**

A quality education relies upon a safe and secure space for teaching kids. It is for this reason that Marlboro Police maintain a substantial presence in our local schools. School Resource Officers are specially trained to work in the school environment, where they occupy a unique position to identify trouble before it occurs. In 2018, before the tragic school shootings in Parkland, Florida, the Township budgeted an additional officer dedicated to school security and explosives detection. Repeated violent acts in schools throughout the country have underscored the need to do all we can to keep our kids safe. For the 2021/22 school year, in a cost-sharing arrangement with the school districts, the Township will continue to station armed officers under the direction of Marlboro Police in all of our public schools.

In many ways, we have not even begun to grapple with the long-term impacts of this pandemic as relates to our school kids. In this light, our continued partnerships with both School Districts take on additional importance. The Marlboro Municipal Alliance and the Department of Public Safety understand the post-

pandemic challenge at hand, and will continue to share resources and offer additional “eyes and ears” to ensure that we are addressing issues before they become more serious problems.

Ours is a first-rate education system, a fact that we make a centerpiece of our presentation to the credit rating agencies. The pay-off on an investment in strong schools as relates to college admission and future careers has long been established. We give our children and grandchildren the best learning environment and tools with which to succeed, and these future leaders flourish.

## **COMMUNITY**

When severe weather strikes or a neighbor needs help, we step up. There has been no better example than the outpouring of assistance that came from residents and businesses in support of Township first responders during this pandemic. When shortages of masks, gloves and other supplies received media attention, we received boxes of donations. In short, our residents are busy but find the time to participate in local activities and give back to the community they love.

### **Giving Back**

We could not do all that we do without our resident volunteers. I put out a call for volunteers when I was first elected and the response was overwhelming.

There are numerous opportunities for young and old alike. For example, our Teen Advisory Committee (TAC) boasts the largest membership in the State, with over 1,800 registered, committed to *Do Good!* in our community. We also have an active Senior Advisory Committee (SAC) which provide feedback directly to my office about how to improve our community for senior residents.

Let us remember that our Township relies on volunteers to staff our First Aid Squads and Fire Departments. We are remarkably fortunate to have such a dedicated group of citizens ready and willing to serve the public and quite literally save lives at any time of day or night. Also, when we speak of community service, it is important to recognize the work of military veterans. In this regard, I am proud that Marlboro was recognized as New Jersey’s first “Veteran Friendly Community” by the State Veterans Chamber of Commerce. I salute the men and women who volunteer to save lives and have sacrificed on behalf of our country.

We welcome and encourage our residents to get involved. For more information, visit ‘Volunteer Opportunities’ in the *I need to learn about*’ drop-down box on the website homepage, [www.marlboro-nj.gov](http://www.marlboro-nj.gov), and keep an eye out for notices sent via Township email and social media outlets.

### **Programs and Events**

Marlboro offers a wide array of events that bring our community together throughout the year. We honor our veterans and pay tribute to residents who were lost on September 11<sup>th</sup> and celebrate holidays which highlight the great diversity in this Township. While many traditional recreation events were curtailed during the pandemic, our Recreation Department got creative offering outdoor movie nights, drive-by scrambled egg hunts, a drive-in dance party and more. We even found a way to open the Marlboro Swim Club under Department of Health guidelines. As one member told us, “The swim club saved summer.” I am pleased to report that Rec Camp, concerts and fireworks returned in 2021, and we will be holding Marlboro Day once again. We will close the year with Halloween events -- a tradition added in the wake of Superstorm Sandy – and a winter holiday lighting ceremony.

The Marlboro Farmers Market located at the preserved Stattel Farm property near the corner of Route 79 and 520 is open Sundays through October 31 from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm and provides a weekly opportunity for residents to interact and shop while supporting our *Shop Marlboro!*, open space, and green/sustainability initiatives right in the heart of Marlboro. We were proud to have opened the Market in the midst of the pandemic, offering residents a rare opportunity to get outside and interact with friends and neighbors in a safe manner.

We have worked very hard over the years to develop new and affordable programs for our seniors. During the pandemic, with the understanding that physical activity and social programs go a long way towards

maintaining the well-being of our senior population, Recreation staff maintained personal phone and electronic contact with our seniors, offered on-line exercise classes and outdoor activities. The full complement of senior programs will be back again soon.

In the face of changing weather patterns and extreme conditions, we have maintained our full-service leaf and brush removal and spring clean-up programs. I remain committed to delivering the quality of services that residents deserve in the most cost-effective manner possible, but do ask that everyone adhere to the published collection schedules to keep our neighborhoods beautiful and streets free and clear of debris. New in 2021 – we have instituted a Landscaper Registration process and will be offering leaf bags to residents. Look for program details in town emails and social media.

Whether you are a new or long-time Marlboro resident, the "Welcome New Residents" link on the Township homepage is a great resource for all that the Township has to offer.

### **Communication and Access to Information**

From emergencies and schedule changes to programs and updates, a great deal of the information referenced in this letter can be found on the Township website, and is regularly communicated through a combination of email blasts, social media posts, “reverse 911” calls and on cable channel 77. We urge every resident to enter their email in the blue ‘Email Alerts’ box on the website homepage and register for any and all of the available communications options.

I know how busy everyone is. With this in mind, we constantly work to make more municipal transactions available to residents online. Property look-ups, tax and utility payments, various zoning and engineering permits, pet licenses and parking permits are all available via the Township website. One of the few silver linings of this pandemic is that you can now do even more of your Township business online, from the comfort of your home.

### **CONCLUSION**

We have always worked hard to anticipate and tackle the next challenge, and it has never been harder to do so. Whether preparing for extreme weather or delivering services during a global public health emergency, the general formula is the same. We maintain an open line of communication with the public and close coordination between governmental agencies. We engage in long term planning, build smart redundancies in processes and employ the resources necessary to get the job done. We then pursue all avenues for reimbursement of extraordinary costs incurred. We achieve results by harnessing a spirit of volunteerism and enlisting the participation of the members of this great community.

What often gets less attention is the benefit our approach has with respect to the value of our individual properties. Since 2016, the average sale price of Marlboro homes has increased by 20%. The work we have done together has ensured that Marlboro remains an attractive destination, and it clearly remains in our collective interest to keep it that way.

Emerging from the pandemic, Marlboro remains a premier community in New Jersey, consistently recognized as such by independent outside organizations in areas of management and finance, education and public safety. We already know this as residents here. With our great resolve, energy and dedication, we will turn the page on this difficult period. And with an even greater appreciation for this place we all call home, we are well-positioned to face the next storm that will inevitably come our way.

Don’t forget – it is hurricane season – sign up for Township emails and visit [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov) to learn how best to help keep your family safe. Stay vigilant and be prepared.

Yours in Community,



Mayor Jonathan Hornik

