

# TOWNSHIP OF MARLBORO

1979 TOWNSHIP DRIVE  
MARLBORO, NJ 07746-2299

**Mayor**

Jonathan L. Hornik

**July, 2019****SUBJECT: ANNUAL HURRICANE SEASON-TOWNSHIP UPDATE**

Dear Neighbor:

For a while this spring, it seemed as if the rain would never stop so it is a relief that the summer season is well under way. That said, just as I was about to send this letter, we were struck by a fast-moving wind and rain storm that left in its wake fallen trees and widespread power outages throughout Town. First, I want to publicly recognize all of our first responders, employees and volunteers, and thank our residents and businesses for coming together and pitching in to get us back on our feet after this recent event. While summer officially kicks off the start of hurricane season, it seems increasingly common for ordinary, unnamed weather events to unleash havoc in our community. The new normal is that we need to be as prepared and on alert for the fast-moving summer lightning storms as we are for the Sandy and Irene hurricanes of recent years.

At the local level, hurricanes and severe weather events cause real and permanent damage to our infrastructure, disrupt our quality of life and adversely impact our municipal budget. While we are still tallying the costs associated with the recent July storm, it has long been established that planning for and delivering services in response to extreme weather conditions drives the discretionary operating budget. Snow removal costs and road treatment costs, in particular, have increased by more than 300% since 2007. We continue to allocate the resources necessary to address snow and whatever other emergencies Mother Nature sends our way.

This past winter was marked not by significant snow totals, but by unpredictable mixed freezing precipitation events. In order to keep roads safe for emergency response and other necessary travel, multiple rounds of road treatments were required, which, inevitably accelerate the deterioration of our roadways.

Nearly seven years have passed since Superstorm Sandy brought us impassable roads and prolonged power outages. This weather event, more than any other in recent memory serves as an important reminder of our vulnerability in the face of the forces of nature and the need to maintain open lines of communication. Emergencies such as Sandy reinforce 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 each year on the anniversary of the Superstorm.

As we approach this anniversary of Sandy, I would like to once again take the opportunity to remind you and your family to be prepared for weather-related emergencies, and to review how we as a united community continue to "Weather the Storms."

**INVESTING IN OUR INFRASTRUCTURE**

While improving the condition of our existing roadways remains the top infrastructure priority, the Township remains focused on improvements to walkways and traffic intersections to improve vehicle safety and enhance walkability in our community. In this regard the Township has continued to preserve more acres of open space and farmland in lieu of new residential development, construct sidewalks and complete park improvements at several locations. To meet these goals we continue to aggressively pursue alternative

revenue sources to invest in capital projects while continuing to maintain a debt level approximately one-fifth the statutory limit and less as a percentage of our budget than it was in 2003.

### **Municipal Bond Rating Upgrade**

In April of 2018, Standard and Poor's (S&P) once again reaffirmed Marlboro's AAA bond rating, citing a very strong local economy, strong management and budgetary performance and flexibility, very strong budgetary flexibility and liquidity, and low debt levels. This is the highest designation available and one that fewer than 5% of New Jersey towns achieve.

Why does this matter? Marlboro's philosophy with respect to an active and managed capital program was validated in this rating review, and we are now able to borrow at the lowest cost possible, saving taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars as we invest in our infrastructure.

### **Roads and Sidewalks**

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 low interest rates, Marlboro's debt load well below statutory limits, and a AAA bond rating, we have taken the opportunity to ramp up investment in our infrastructure. At the same time, we have aggressively pursued grant funding to leverage municipal dollars to complete even more improvements.

In February, 2018 I announced a four-pronged Road Repair initiative with the goal of more investment and a commitment to greater transparency in the presentation of information to residents. Under the program, we allocated \$5 million allocated to road repair, accelerated State and County action to address roads and intersections not under Township jurisdiction, launched new web pages dedicated to road repairs, and redesigned the "Pothole Portal" which facilitates map-based reporting of road conditions.

Under the 2018-19 Road Repair program, we recently completed much needed work on Gordons Corner, Ryan and Union Hill Roads.

Earlier this year, Council approved an additional \$5 million for road improvements. For the 2019-20 Road Repair initiative, with the assistance of \$420,000 in State and Federal grants, the Township will complete repairs on Buckley, Texas and Greenwood Roads, and make improvements to approximately five more miles of Marlboro roadways. On Station Road, three drainage culverts owned and maintained by Monmouth County will be reconstructed under a cost-sharing agreement, after which the Township can complete much needed repaving between Briarcliff and Crine Roads.

Ensuring we are prepared for extreme weather means taking a proactive approach to capital improvements. In our capital plan, we identify critical needs and seek out grant funding in order to reduce the burden on taxpayers. In this vein, I am proud to announce that the Township just received notice of a Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for \$420,000 for "Pleasant Valley Road Stabilization".

Since 2009, Marlboro has reconstructed approximately 34 miles of local Township streets. This does not include the busiest of Marlboro roads and intersections under state or county jurisdiction, such as Routes 9, 520, 79 and Tennent Road. The Township continues to work closely with State and County officials to address the numerous intersections and roads that run through Marlboro. Of great interest is the State's Route 79 Resurfacing project, scheduled for 2021, which will include improvements to several important intersections in Marlboro (more below).

The Township's pedestrian access plan calls for making key locations more accessible via sidewalk, connecting schools, the municipal complex and library, retail establishments and houses of worship. In what is turning out to be a record year for grant awards, the Township was recently awarded \$875,000 in funding through the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) Local Aid and Economic Development Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside Program (TAP) for sidewalks on Route 79 between Route 520 and Wyncrest Road at the Henry Hudson Trail. With the Township's support, Monmouth County also received funding under this program in order to complete the unfinished portions of the Henry Hudson Trail, a beautiful shaded trail that

winds its way through much of Marlboro. We continue to work hard to ensure that quality of life projects are prioritized in the most cost-effective manner possible.

### **Traffic Intersections**

Several years back I convened a Traffic Advisory Committee of volunteers, engineers and traffic safety professionals to identify local traffic issues and explore potential solutions. TrAC reported back, as expected, that our biggest challenges exist at intersections under the jurisdiction of either the County or the State.

In response to a comprehensive report prepared by the Township and submitted in 2016, we have received confirmation from the State that the Route 79 reconstruction project will result in a complete repaving of the highway and improvements to numerous intersections, including a combination of ADA upgrades, crosswalks, traffic striping and signal modifications at School Road, Wyncrest Road, Tennent Road, Route 520, Ryan Road and Lloyd Road. These important improvements will be made at no cost to local taxpayers.

In 2017, the Township entered into an agreement with the State and County for improvements to the intersection of Tennent Road and Route 520. While neither of these roads fall under Township jurisdiction, we recognized the critical nature of this location and approved the use of existing local reserves to kickstart the project. At last, I am pleased to report, that the State has begun field work on this project!

The Township is also working with Monmouth County to improve the intersection at Wyncrest Road and Route 520. The County has already modified its traffic signal to provide a dedicated left-hand turn arrow for westbound Route 520 traffic and is in the process of finalizing the second phase of this project, which includes the addition of a separate right-hand turn lane traveling eastbound on Route 520.

### **Parks and Recreation**

In 2018 the Township cut the ribbon on a new turf playing field behind the Marlboro Middle School and completed improvements at several Township parks.

The tennis courts at Falson, Hawkins Road and Robertsville parks were reconstructed and a new playground was installed at the Municipal Complex park. For 2019, additional work has been authorized at Marlin Estates, Woodcliff and Falson parks. Much needed repairs at Nolan Road Park are on the way, the cost of which will be offset by a \$145,000 County grant.

As a reminder, if you need to relay a question or concern regarding a park, please select the link to "Report a Park Issue" on the Town website.

### **DOING MORE WITH LESS**

Running municipal operations and responding to emergencies require a great deal of advance planning. Sufficient resources must be ready and available when the need arises. Local government budgets in New Jersey, which must factor in the probability of extreme weather, are funded primarily through property taxes. As you are probably aware, the tax rate and value of your property determine the amount of your tax bill.

### **Taxes**

"Local town services" under the control of the Mayor and Council include police, parks and recreation, snow removal, curbside brush and leaf pickup, recycling and capital improvements. The Township is responsible for collecting property taxes, but only 17 cents out of every dollar paid goes towards local town services. The School Districts (Marlboro K-8 and the FRHSD) receive 69 cents of every tax dollar and Monmouth County approximately 14 cents. In other words, 83 cents of every tax dollar is levied without any input from your Mayor and Council. I am pleased to announce that the 2019 municipal budget **reduces taxes** over the prior year -- the only portion of your property taxes to do so. For details, please see the insert sent with your annual tax bill and available on line.

### **Personnel Costs**

Since 2007 the costs for State-mandated items such as pensions and medical benefits have increased dramatically -- by \$3.73 million or more than 68.2%. Yet, items generally set at the local level in the Township's 2019 operating budget increased less than 8.7% over the same 12-year period.

Salaries, health benefits and State-mandated pension payments represent more than 10 of the 17 cents of every tax dollar retained by the Township for local town services. We have achieved savings by reducing the number of full-time employees by more than 11%, requiring employees to contribute up to 35% of the cost of health insurance, and offering a program to incentivize employees who have alternate coverage to opt out of the Township's insurance plan. In 2017, we negotiated a new base health plan with the two largest unions which has resulted in a 21% premium savings on every enrollment. We have instituted a merit-based raise program with two other groups, tying raises to higher performance in the workplace. Reductions in the number of paid municipal holidays, wages and paid time off for new employees, and curtailing or eliminating the practice of paying for accumulated sick time at the time of retirement are further examples of the Township's successful efforts to reduce personnel costs.

Yet, our focus is always on serving our residents. Despite implementing necessary and permanent reductions in staff, Township offices remain open to the public, the Registrar, Tax and Water offices continue to schedule evening hours, and inspections take place on evenings and even weekends in order to better serve the public. On-line applications are now accepted in a number of areas, and a convenient 24-hour secure payment drop-box is now available in the lobby of Town Hall.

### **Sharing Services and Contracting**

Reducing the size of government is not a fixed goal, but a process by which we constantly review our service offerings and attempt to deliver them more efficiently. We have dissolved redundant governmental agencies, established separate revenue streams to fund user-based programs, and secured goods and services more cost effectively through purchasing cooperatives and partnerships. The School Districts continue to share in the cost of Resource Officers (SRO) and Security Officers (SSO). These important programs place police officers trained in educating, counseling, and protecting the public in our schools. Matawan remains a partner in the area of animal control services, and our neighbors in Freehold and Manalapan provide court and inspection staff, respectively. The Western Monmouth Utilities Authority (WMUA) supplies Marlboro with snowplow operators and a confined space entry rescue team. Morganville Volunteer Fire Company leases space to Marlboro Recreation for expanded programming for senior citizens. With Manalapan, we entered into an agreement to jointly acquire and share the cost of maintaining a material conveyor unit to support public works functions. Through the United States Department of Defense, the Township has been the beneficiary of millions of dollars of emergency response equipment at little or no cost to taxpayers.

We continue to look to the private sector to provide services where they can be performed more efficiently. For example, the Department of Public Works (DPW) has had great success contracting out property maintenance and street sweeping operations. DPW continues to contract for snow removal and maintenance of commuter parking lots, freeing up critical resources dedicated to snow removal on our roadways.

The use of shared services agreements and outside contracts help keep the Town budget millions below the State limits ("caps") on both spending and taxes. We continue to seek out these opportunities wherever possible with the goal of maintaining service delivery and responding to natural events and emergencies in the most cost effective and efficient manner possible.

### **PRESERVING OPEN SPACE**

We continue to preserve more acres of open space and farmland in lieu of new residential development. Over the past ten years, the Township has preserved more than 260 acres of land. I am very proud of our record of protecting property from development and in securing outside funding to complete this work.

The purchase of Stattel Farm, located at the center of Marlboro on both sides of Route 520 at Route 79 was completed in 2017. This acquisition protects 56 acres from development in perpetuity. The purchase of Stattel Farm prevented more than 500 homes from being built, and, notably, was accomplished without current local taxpayer dollars. An added bonus – the Stattel Farm is now home to the Marlboro Farmers Market which celebrated its grand opening this June!

The State is completing cleanup of the 411 acre former Marlboro State Hospital site in preparation for transfer to Monmouth County for residents to enjoy for generations to come. We eagerly await the State completing the required utility work in order to make the transformation of this property a reality.

I must note that the success of our program is a tribute to the hard work and dedication of the Open Space and Farmland Committee and the Marlboro Council members who remain committed to improving the quality of life in our Town.

### **BOLSTERING REVENUES THROUGH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

We have made a concerted effort to pursue smart development strategies to attract businesses that are useful to 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 one million square feet of new commercial development and \$100 million in new tax ratables that enhance the quality of life of our residents. For example, many new commercial establishments including Whole Foods, Osteria, Burger King, Fireside, Aunt Butchies, Cousins, Buffalo Wild Wings, Costco, Food Emporium and most recently, Zinburger and Ray Catena Range Rover/Jaguar, call Marlboro home.

Marlboro's innovative, first of its kind "Shop Marlboro Property Tax Reward Program" has just completed its sixth year in operation, and is being replicated in communities throughout the State. The premise is simple – support local businesses here in Marlboro and save money on your property taxes. Modeled after private-sector reward programs, residents receive a reward in the form of a direct credit against their property taxes, simply by purchasing goods and services in Marlboro. Since its inception, participating merchants have realized \$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. This win-win situation further enhances our ability to attract new businesses in Marlboro. With almost 50 participating businesses, every homeowner can benefit from this free program.

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.

### **COMMUNITY**

Our residents are busy but find the time to participate in local programs and activities and give back to Marlboro. When severe weather strikes or a neighbor needs help, we step up.

#### **Giving Back**

I put a call out for volunteers when I was first elected and the response was overwhelming. We continue to seek out volunteers as vacancies open up on boards and committees, and the response is as strong as ever. We could not do all we do without our resident volunteers.

Marlboro teenagers are active community servants. Our Teen Advisory Committee (TAC) boast the largest membership in the State, with over 1,800 registered youth committed to *Do Good!* in our community. TAC members volunteer at town events, assist various non-profit and commercial organizations in town, and work one-on-one with seniors to provide instruction on everything from navigating the internet to programming their phones. The members of our Police Explorers post serve to help keep the public safe at community events throughout the County. On the other end of the spectrum, our Senior Advisory Committee (SAC) meets on a monthly basis with my office to provide feedback about how to improve our community for senior residents.

The Marlboro Community Garden occupies approximately five acres of the more than 260 preserved during my term in office. Operating under the direction of the Shade Tree Committee, the Garden offers residents the opportunity to learn about agriculture, plant and grow fruits and vegetables, assist the local food bank and participate in various community gatherings. Marlboro's Green Team helps maintain our Sustainable New Jersey certification and organizes the Mayor's Bike and Stroll each year to promote bicycling, walking and enjoying the outdoors on the Henry Hudson Trail.

The Municipal Alliance is comprised of individuals from multiple walks of life, from police officers and teachers to medical professionals and community members. This committee interacts with parents and youth and works closely with the schools on issues of drug and alcohol abuse and other concerns affecting our kids.

Other selfless unpaid volunteers staff our land use boards, Recreation and Swim, Open Space and Farmland, Youth Exchange, Historic and Veterans Committees. As I mentioned previously, the number of boards and committees, charitable event organizers and individual volunteers are too numerous to name in a single letter, but I am personally grateful to them all.

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. 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 recently 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.

### **Programs and Events**

Marlboro offers a wide array of events that bring our community together throughout the year, from events which honor our veterans and pay tribute to residents who were lost on 9-11 to those which celebrate holidays and highlight our diversity. During the summer, thousands of residents enroll their kids in our camps and join the Marlboro Swim Club. The summer concert series and fireworks display are huge hits, capped off by Marlboro Day in September. We close the year with Halloween events -- a tradition added in the wake of Superstorm Sandy -- and a winter holiday lighting ceremony. For 2019, Recreation has once again added several new programs including Goat Yoga, Marlboro Rocks and the Scrambled Egg Hunt.

The Marlboro Farmers Market celebrated a grand opening in June. Located on a 46 acre preserved parcel near the corner of Route 79 and 520, the market provides a weekly opportunity for residents to interact and shop while complementing our *Shop Marlboro!*, open space, green and sustainability initiatives right in the heart of Marlboro.

We have worked very hard to develop affordable programs for our seniors. Physical activity and social programs go a long way towards maintaining the well-being of our senior population. With this in mind, we added a second location and additional classes in 2018 to address the overwhelming demand for health, wellness and strength-training programs.

Last year, we opened up the Township commuter lots for free parking at night and on weekends in order to make taking a trip to the city for dinner or a show as convenient as possible.

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 residents receive a "welcome packet" mailed to their home filled with a wealth of information. Even longtime residents have told us that the "Welcome New Residents" link on the Township homepage is a great resource.

### **PUBLIC SAFETY AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT**

Coordination and planning for emergency scenarios such as power outages to hurricanes, school security to snow events and vehicular accidents, takes place year round. 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.

#### **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 and the ancillary benefit of discounted insurance premiums for the Township. The Division has a proactive, community focus, with numerous programs designed to facilitate communication and protect the public.

For example, you may want to let Marlboro Police know if you are planning to take a vacation - officers on patrol will keep a closer eye on your home during your absence. Residents may also link home alarm systems

directly to Police headquarters to ensure the quickest response. The Traffic Bureau, by appointment, will help you install your child's car seat properly.

The Police Division maintains a Special Needs Registry for adults and children, with the goal of improving the response to our most vulnerable citizens during an emergency. The Division also works with and trains citizen volunteer groups which support our residents in times of need, such as the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) and the Domestic Violence Response Team (DVRT).

For youth interested in law enforcement, the Marlboro Police Explorers is the largest post in the County. The Division also runs a Youth Police Academy where kids can gain first-hand knowledge of the duties and responsibilities that are required of a police officer.

The Township's On-line Exchange Zone remains open and available in the municipal parking lot. This service provides for a more secure location for the exchange of goods transacted on-line.

Chief Bruce Hall is retiring at the end of the summer and I would be remiss if I did not thank him for his years of dedicated service to this community and his leadership as Chief of Police. Under his stewardship Marlboro has garnered many awards.

Over the last several years, Marlboro has consistently been named one of the 50 safest communities in New Jersey, including 2019. In 2017, Marlboro was recognized as one of the 100 best places in New Jersey to raise a family, one of only three in Monmouth County. We were recently ranked #22 in the list of "Safest Cities in America to Raise a Family" and 34<sup>th</sup> "Safest City in America".

### **Keeping Schools Safe for Our Kids**

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, the Township budgeted for the hiring of an additional officer dedicated to school security and explosives detection. Proposed before the tragic school shootings in Parkland, Florida, repeated violent acts in schools throughout the country have underscored the need to do all we can to keep our kids safe. For the 2019/20 school year, in a cost-sharing arrangement with the school districts, the Township will continue to station armed Security Officers under the direction of Marlboro Police in all of our public schools.

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

We learned from Sandy that local preparation is critical. We cannot wait for outside agencies to act in times of emergency. 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.

In collaboration with the State, several major traffic intersections have been upgraded so that lights can continue to 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 75% interest-free financing. The recently-completed Tennent and Harbor Road Water Treatment Plants feature backup generation capabilities, and will ensure a safe, reliable and affordable water supply, reducing reliance on outside water purveyors and safeguarding the continuity of operations during emergencies. It is worth noting that while the Township continues to invest in capital improvements, Marlboro Water customers still pay substantially less than surrounding water suppliers by up to 80% margins.

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.

On an ongoing basis, the Township continues to work with JCP&L to improve its service, communication, response and commitment to a reliable electricity infrastructure. The Township and JCP&L continue to partner on removing hazard trees which are the leading cause of power outages.

## OPENING UP GOVERNMENT

A great deal of the information referenced in this letter can be found on the township website and has already been released in Township email blasts, social media, "reverse 911" calls and cable channel 77. Whether it is town events or weather emergencies, it is critical that we have as many ways to contact you as possible. We urge every resident to visit the "Communications for Residents" section of our website 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 safely and securely available to residents online. Property look-ups, tax and utility payments, various zoning and engineering permits and pet licenses are all available via the Township website. And, if you are so inclined, you can now even stream a meeting of the Township Council!

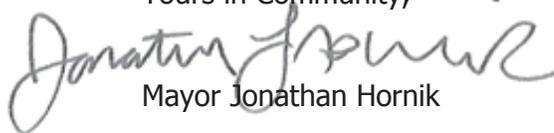
## FINAL THOUGHTS

For the year ending December 31, 2018, we have, for the seventh consecutive year, received a perfect independent financial audit. The Township's AAA credit was reaffirmed by S&P in 2018, a rating shared by only 5% of New Jersey municipalities. Just as an auditor or credit rating agency recognizes a responsible commitment to long term planning and investment in infrastructure, so do the new businesses and families who call Marlboro home. Beyond the numbers, Marlboro is regarded as a forward-thinking community, and continues to be a premier destination in the State of New Jersey.

Our efforts to open up government have attracted a large family of talented and committed community servants who volunteer to make life better for all who live and work here. It is because of this spirit of teamwork and the engagement of our residents that I remain passionate about the day to day work required to "Weather the Storms", and excited at what the future holds in store for us.

Enjoy your summer, be prepared and keep in touch during this hurricane season.

Yours in Community,



Mayor Jonathan Hornik



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