

MAYOR ZIMMERMAN'S SPEECH AT 2024 REORGANIZATION MEETING

I trust everyone had a wonderful Christmas and Holiday season, and enjoyed spending quality time with family, friends and loved ones.

I'd like to officially welcome everyone to our 2024 Reorganization Meeting, and thank you all for taking the time out of your busy schedules to support us here in Mantua Township.

I'd like to congratulate my good friend and colleague, John Legge for his re-election victory. I look forward to serving with you again this year.

It's truly an honor to serve as the Mayor of our community. I'm truly grateful that my fellow committee members placed their confidence in me to serve in this leadership role. I want to thank them personally for their votes of confidence.

I'd like to touch on some of the highlights for 2024 as we welcome in the new year.

Enhanced communication and transparency has been a main focus for our township committee (and myself as the committee's facilitator) and will continue throughout 2024. I'm extremely proud of Mantua Township, and want to ensure that important information is constantly being disseminated to you (our residents) in a timely fashion. My weekly mayors messages with the Mantua Sun and periodic mayor video updates can be found on our township website and on our social media platforms. Please follow our official platforms, and be careful of other social media outlets that mimic the township and are filled with vitriolic narratives.

This Spring, we enthusiastically anticipate the opening of the world class Jean & Ric Edelman Fossil Park & Museum of Rowan University. The museum is expected to attract an estimated 200,000 guests annually. This will boost our economy, provide educational opportunities, and create jobs in our community. As an added bonus from the township's perspective we will generate over \$600,000.00 in revenue between the sale of the property in 2019 and over the course of the 10 year municipal impact fee being paid by Rowan.

So much is going on with the Rowan University Rt. 322 project, but I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the "The Shreiber School of Veterinary Medicine" which broke ground last year on the West Campus (in Mantua). It will be the very first veterinarian school its kind in New Jersey, and is expected to have the first graduating class next year (2025).

The township committee and I are excited to announce that by mid-year, it will be permissible to bring your dogs to Chestnut Branch Park. Of course, leashes will be required and owners will be responsible for cleaning up waste. As a dog owner myself, I can't wait.

We are also thrilled to report that we are bringing back “National Night Out” in 2024. This community building event helps to promote the police-community partnership. Historically, this was always an amazing and fun filled time for our residents. This year’s program should be no different.

It warms my heart to know that we have continually been a model of excellence for free and cost effective services provided to our senior citizens here in Mantua Township. Even through the most challenging budgetary cycles, our township committee has always insisted that senior services remain paramount and that our senior friends be a priority.

In 2023, the township was awarded a Community Development Block Grant to install a new roof and fix some structural issues at our Community Center on E. Mercer Avenue, and with the assistance of the Capital Transit Investment Plan, we were able to purchase a new senior bus for the township. We are grateful to the County Commissioners for allocating these funds, and will be putting these new resources to good use for our seniors during the upcoming year.

With the renovations complete at the Community Center, it is now fully reopened for our senior activities. We will be bringing back our monthly dinners for the entire 2024 calendar year, and to compliment these dinners, we have scheduled other dinners by way of bus trips (in the new bus) to our senior’s favorite eating establishments around Gloucester County. Our intentions are to also add a senior picnic or two during the coming year, modeling what is already offered (and is extremely popular) at the county level.

As many of you know, we officially opened the initial nine holes of the Tornado Crossing Disc Golf Course at Chestnut Branch Park on October 14th of this past year. With work continuing by our volunteers on the remaining nine holes, we anxiously anticipate the projected completion of this course by September 2024. I’d like to thank residents, Jim Kiel and Jason Moore for their efforts in spearheading this project.

Regardless of what happens at other levels of government, we will continue to tighten the belt, and keep our local property taxes in check. In 2021 and 2022 we did not raise taxes, and in 2023 we had a very minimal increase in order pay our bills. There was no fluff in this past year’s municipal budget, and this will stay true for 2024.

I’d like to acknowledge every member of our township committee. Each is extremely qualified and educated with diversified personal and professional backgrounds. We’re all long-standing residents with well over a hundred years of combined residency between us. We have the best interest in our community at-heart and we love our community (just like you), which is why we choose to serve in this role as your elected leaders.

Our police, public works and all other team members at the township building have continued to do a phenomenal job serving the public as those on the front-line, making our jobs easier as local government officials. I want to thank each and every employee and department head, and especially thank our Township Administrator, Jennica Bileci for leading the charge.

Finally, I want to recognize my wife, Diane and daughters, Brittany and Ashley. They're the ones who have ultimately sacrificed over the past 20 years, as the commitment to being an elected official takes time away from family.

In closing, The township committee and I would like to wish everyone a very happy, healthy and prosperous 2024. We look forward to continuing our service with honesty, integrity and trustful leadership during the upcoming year!

Respectfully,

Mayor Robert T. Zimmerman, MAS