



Township of Bernards

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Mayor Baldassare's Reorganization Meeting Speech 01/04/2022

Thank you very much. First and foremost, everyone, Happy New Year and I hope everyone had an outstanding and safe holiday season and I wish you all the best in 2022! I would first like to extend my sincere thanks, appreciation, and gratitude to my colleagues on the dais for their confidence and support in selecting me as Mayor. I promise everyone to once again give my utmost in executing the duties of this office to the best of my ability for our Township and all of its residents.

I would like to thank our outgoing Mayor Janice Fields. Janice stepped into this role mid-pandemic and dove right in not missing a beat and worked tirelessly for the residents of Bernards Township. In addition to routine Township business, through her many "Meet the Mayor" series, Janice exemplified community outreach. Janice, we sincerely appreciate everything you've accomplished over the last year and look to your ongoing leadership being instrumental in continuing to bring our residents together with worthwhile events in the coming weeks and months. I'm sure I can speak on behalf of all of my colleagues when I say "Thank you for all of your hard work and efforts over the last year."

With that said, I'd like to next turn my attention to our newest members on the dais and recognize their accomplishment as well. To both Deputy Mayor Andrew McNally and Committeewoman Jennifer Asay, congratulations on your well-deserved and convincing victory. Andrew and Jennifer bring an extraordinary amount of experience and expertise to our committee. They are both long-time public servants who have held important volunteer positions in our town. Their past experience and selfless service to our community is well-known and much appreciated. As first-time candidates for Township Committee, Andrew and Jennifer ran an outstanding campaign and our residents responded with overwhelming support for their message of preserving and protecting our town's great quality of life. Andrew and Jennifer, I am looking forward to working ardently with both of you in the coming year. And I also want to commend our colleague Kate Grochala for her steadfast selfless service on this Committee. I expect that I will continue to seek and rely on her input, wisdom and experience in my role as Mayor.

Once again, our residents have chosen overwhelmingly to keep Bernards Township a fully Republican run town. As Republicans, we have a responsibility to govern in line with the basic beliefs of a government that is small, lean and efficient, keeping government within its bounds, its defined role and responsibilities, and allowing for individual liberty and personal freedom to flourish.

We believe that all people are created equal, should be treated with dignity and respect and that everyone have the same opportunity to life, liberty and pursue their happiness as they see fit. We believe in dialog that is both civil and respectful and being able to agree to disagree where we don't (and won't) see eye to eye.

Bernards Township continues to remain one of the most, (if not the most) well-run fiscally conservative towns not only in New Jersey, but in the entire United States. Our good fortune is due to continued good governance and exceptional leadership as well as outstanding service from our Township Administration, staff, and employees. This is no accident and reflects years in building and maintaining a solid relationship

putting our residents first. We will continue our careful spending and “pay as you go” approach and will not waste your taxpayer money taking on any needless borrowing or debt. Every dollar paid by our residents will continue to go directly into the services the Township provides.

In our continued pursuit of fiscal management excellence, we will be asking our Township Administration to continue looking at ways we can save our residents money while maintaining, if not exceeding, the high quality of municipal services our residents have come to expect and deserve. This year, we will be taking a look at all shared services across the board to gauge economic viability, provide cost/benefit analysis and determine whether these arrangements are where they need to be or if they need to be revamped. We will continue to look at all department functions and levels and determine where additional LEAN initiatives can be instituted in order to cut down on waste and unnecessary functions. Our philosophy is to always look for ways where we can pare down government spending while not sacrificing needed services.

Bernards Township also continues to shine as one of the safest municipalities in New Jersey and the entire United States. This is once again a testament to the men and women in blue who tirelessly serve our community to the benefit of every resident, every day and every night. We have some of the most highly trained professional police officers who put their lives on the line daily, not knowing what can happen on any given day. I can again promise that this administration will continue to fully support our police wherever we can to maintain the excellence they deliver regularly.

Working with staff we will also continue to make the necessary improvements and prudent investments in our parks, our roads and infrastructure. These are some of the things that affect the high quality of life Bernards is well known for, and these improvements remain a priority.

We will also continue to seek out opportunities and work to support parents and our schools on mental health, opioid and substance abuse issues. We have several organizations here in town that are dedicated to educating our community on these dangers such as the Municipal Alliance and Community in Crisis and, along with our resources at the Board of Health, we can be in a position to help out wherever appropriate. We will also continue to support partnering with our schools on maintenance, engineering and safety as well.

The blessings we continue to enjoy as one of the debt free and safest towns while being recognized as one of the “best places to live” are not perpetual “happy accidents”. They are the result of the many quality choices and decisions made over the years. Our good fortune can easily and quickly be lost if we do not remain prudent and vigilant.

The ongoing burden of potential overdevelopment still looms large as 2025 approaches with probable and unreasonable affordable housing mandates coming down on municipalities. As we all know, overdevelopment has the potential to seriously affect our quality of life and have serious adverse impacts on schools, traffic, emergency services and finances. This is not something that we can successfully address alone - where the solution lies in Trenton with the State Assembly, the Senate and the Governor’s Office. We need to continually work with other towns to solidify and effectively articulate reasonable and responsible solutions and potential actions with regard to any future affordable housing requirements as 2025 approaches. I will continue to work with the Township Committee, other Mayors throughout the state and our elected State officials to help find appropriate solutions.

Another of the many great things about Bernards is the level of engagement by many of our citizens. Our volunteer first responders in both fire and rescue as well as first-aid and EMT services, along with our Police Department, has been the backbone of Bernards Township in times of need and emergency. We can’t thank these citizens enough for all their time and commitment.

We have many great volunteers but could use many more. Volunteering is a measure of selfless commitment to the community and its improvement, and I continue to urge all of our residents to find opportunities to become engaged and serve in some capacity toward the betterment of our town. Volunteering is a big part of what makes us who we are as a community. We are after all a community of families with a strong family focus.

I like to think of myself as an eternal optimist. My strong and unwavering belief in the power of positive thinking is surpassed only by my belief in this country, its founding ideals and the promise of a better life for anyone (and everyone) who makes the dedication and puts in the hard work and effort. Nothing worthwhile is ever easy. How you think and act is everything in terms of creating the right environment for success, and personally knowing the character and capabilities of my colleagues on this dais, coupled with the most outstanding municipal administration, staff and employees as well as all of our wonderful resident volunteers who step up and make our community a better place to live, I have no doubt that our future in Bernards Township is bright.

And last but certainly not least, I'd like to thank my wife and family (especially my wife) for her continued unwavering support, inspiring confidence, and unconditional love, without which I would be lost. Thank you for always standing by me, always being there and always supporting me.

In conclusion, I would like to say that I am again very thankful, grateful and humbled to serve as your Mayor and I am looking forward to working with my caring and very competent colleagues on the Township Committee, and; along with our outstanding and unparalleled staff, I have no doubt that the interests of our Township and its residents will continue to be well served in 2022. God bless you all.

Please join me at the mayor's reception being held at the Liberty Corner Fire Company on Church Street. I look forward to seeing you there.

James Baldassare, Jr.

Bernards Township Mayor