



Township of Bernards

1 Collyer Lane, Basking Ridge, NJ 07920
Phone: 908-204-3001; Fax: 908-204-3015; Website: www.bernards.org

Mayor Asay's Reorganization Meeting Speech 01/02/2024

Thank you to the Township Committee for selecting me as Mayor for 2024. I look forward to working closely with each and every one of you. I also want to congratulate and thank Andrew McNally for his leadership as Mayor in 2023. It is truly a privilege to serve with you. To Janice, I have appreciated your support and look forward to working closely with you as Deputy Mayor. Lastly, I'd like to congratulate Gary Baumann and Ana Duarte-McCarthy on their successful elections and look forward to working with you. I am truly humbled and grateful to serve as Bernards Township Mayor. When I moved to town in 2007, this was never "in the plan." I was just a busy mom, working full-time and volunteering in many capacities in my free-time. I knew we moved to Town because of the great schools, safe community, and quaint character, but little else about the town.

There were a lot of things I didn't know initially about my local government, like why my mailing address appeared as both Bernards Township and Basking Ridge interchangeably. While raising my older children, I was very active in our community, in their activities (like scouts, athletics, Destination Imagination, and music) and leveraged many of our community's resources. This increased my understanding and appreciation of Bernards Township. Here are five things that I've learned about our wonderful community:

1. Our town is well-run, due to our awesome employees and fiscally-responsible approach. Our township employees are simply among the best in the state. They are resourceful and responsive to residents. Our local government's fiscal responsibility ensures money is spent only where it is needed to be spent. Trade-off decisions are made to ensure that money is spent efficiently. The intentional focus to keep the tax levy as low as possible while delivering excellent service is real.
2. We live in a safe community – An article published in December 2023 highlighted why Bernards Township is one of the best places to live in NJ. It mentioned that when it comes to crime and safety, Bernards Township boasts low crime rates, significantly lower than the national average.
3. Education is important to our community. Many residents, like myself, moved to town because of the excellent school system. It is interesting to note: many residents don't realize that Township Committee, the municipal form of local government, is separate from the Board of Education. We have separate elections and while tax payers fund their remits, municipal taxes comprise 16% and the Board of Education comprises 66% of taxes levied.
4. Bernards Township is a caring community – We are blessed with many selfless volunteers. They serve on township boards and commissions, as firefighters or EMTs with our fire companies, or one of many non-profits that serve residents or causes that are important to them.
5. History is rich within our community. This ranges from the amazing "old Oak tree" to Revolutionary War stories, or fast forward to 2023 with the Sharpe Family Singers who competed on America's Got Talent. Our community is rich with inspirational history.



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As we look to 2024, it is not lost on me that we are starting in an enviable position because of those who have come before us, all previously elected officials, township employees, and policies such as “pay as you go” and maintaining the debt-free status that Bernards currently holds.

Each of us on Township Committee brings something unique. My personal interest has always been and always will be to simply: serve all residents. When I initially took office, I knew that most people had no awareness about the role of local government, like I had when I first moved to Town. As such, I asked for our key department heads to do presentations in the evening for residents could better understand the role and scope of each department and to host question and answer sessions. This is the “Understanding Bernards” Series. I listen, seek to understand, and take action. In addition to being active in many activities in town, like coaching my son’s rec basketball team or serving as Girl Scout Cookie mom, I have also spent time reviewing data, like the most current census data as well as speaking to residents, friends, and neighbors who have a historical view of the town as well as those who just moved here within the past couple of years. By participating, engaging, listening and inquiring, I better understand where needs exist, and work to create solutions to address those needs. I want every Bernards Township resident to know: your voice matters and we listen to you. This includes anyone who contacts us in any way: whether it is via an email to the Township Committee, coming in-person to a Township Committee meeting, or chatting at an event in town.

2024 holds promise for great things. We look forward to community events that bring us all together, like Charter Day in May or the Mayor’s Fall Festival. We will continue to offer the educational speaker series, Understanding Bernards, to provide information and transparency on how our local government runs from key township department leaders. We will also hold our Fabric of Bernards programs that celebrates the diversity and inclusion of all of our residents. While we rotate the groups highlighted annually, we will repeat the tremendously successful Senior Focus Event this year but hold it on a Saturday morning, to be more accessible to both our senior citizens and caregivers. We support our police department and their community efforts, like Coffee with a Cop, and the Safe Exchange Zone in the police parking lot. We are excited to host 2 Townwide “Green” Yard Sales, one in the spring and one in the fall, in 2024. This year, we will pursue participation in the Mayors Wellness Campaign, a statewide community health initiative that provides evidence-based tools and strategies for mayors and community leaders to help their residents achieve healthier lifestyles and to improve overall health and wellness in their communities. This is all in addition to the vital and core services provided by our other departments that residents commonly interact with, like the Department of Public Works, the Department of Health, the Police Department, and the Department of Parks and Recreation. One could encapsulate Bernards as extremely resident-oriented. While there is much promise, we are also cognizant of the important challenges we will knowingly face in 2024, mainly inflationary pressures and downstream supply-chain impacts, potentially affecting tax rates, attracting and retaining our excellent town staff, and overdevelopment threats due to affordable housing mandates in 2025. Like last year, keeping our municipal tax levy low while maintaining top-notch local government services will be difficult. Everyone is aware of the “competition for talent” that exists in the public and private sectors; we need to ensure we are providing competitive compensation and benefit



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packages and positive working conditions to attract and retain our talent. Lastly, the potential overdevelopment threat due to probable and unreasonable affordable housing requirements from the state to be made known in 2025 are coming. This overdevelopment has the potential to negatively affect our quality of life and have serious adverse effects on schools, traffic, and emergency services. We will work closely with other elected officials and township employees to mitigate the potential negative effects of these three issues.

I've shared the things that we and the town will do for our residents. I'm going to ask our residents for 3 things that they can do to help themselves and the town.

1. If you see something, say something. Whether this is related to personal safety or a pothole, please reach out to the department who can help you as quickly as possible. If you see something in your neighborhood that seems strange, please contact the police, emergently or via the non-emergency line, whichever is most appropriate. If you see an issue with a road, please contact the Department of Public Works via the phone or using the "Report a Concern" functionality on the bernards.org landing page.
2. If you have an issue or question with a particular program or project, please work with the town department that oversees that program. You can also attend a board or commission for that group. If your issue isn't being resolved to your satisfaction, escalate to the department's leader. Next step is escalation to the township administrator. If there is still no resolution, bring it to the attention of the Township Committee so we can look into the matter. This is the most efficient way to resolve a resident's problem. Sometimes people share their stories via social media or communicate to Township Committee as a first step. The quickest way is to deal directly with township employees first.
3. If you can make the time, please consider to volunteer on one of our boards and commissions and with one of our fire companies as a volunteer firefighter or emergency medical services responder. Completing a "tap the talent" form or contacting one of the fire companies is the way to "raise your hand" to help us, help residents.

As I'm nearing the close, I have a few more thank you's: I need to thank my husband, Derek and my children for their continued support. Without it, I would be unable to serve in this capacity.

Thank you to all residents of Bernards Township. I look forward to this opportunity to serve as your Mayor, working along with my Township Committee colleagues and amazing town staff. We will do our best to help ensure each resident is able to have the excellent quality of life that we are accustomed to living within Bernards Township. God bless you and God Bless Bernards Township.

Jennifer L. Asay,
Bernards Township Mayor