

Mayor's Message
April 2021

Lots of news, from the passing of a wonderful volunteer to a new face in town to the budget, but first, a request for continued caution.

In March, our little ones hunted Easter eggs by the gazebo and visited with the Bunny, and we cleared out our attics, garages and basements at a hyper-busy Environmental Day. Both days were gorgeous, and optimism filled the air.

We wore our masks and socially distanced, and the egg hunt was done in multiple stages to limit congestion, but it almost felt like normal, thanks to the Recreation Department, the Little Silver PBA, and our Environmental Commission.

I say almost, because as I write this at the end of March, new COVID cases continue to appear in Little Silver, typically three or four a day. And while the vaccine supply is increasing and more of us have become eligible, here is the simple reality: if the numbers of new cases don't come down, the state has promised to slow the reopening.

So please continue to follow the familiar prescribed protocols, and help contain this thing. We know it's draining, but hang tough for the foreseeable future.

That said, with your help, we anticipate a time, as soon as possible, when state restrictions are further relaxed, and we can further reopen.

Among other things, the town is discussing protocols to get the public back into Borough Hall, the Woman's Club, and the Library. Concerns for the public's and our employees' health will drive our decisions, but we're moving in that direction as quickly as we can safely do so.

In addition, the expectation is that we will have some form of in-person Memorial Day ceremony. We're not quite sure what it will look like yet, given that we'll be required to comply with whatever guidelines are promulgated by the state at that time. But we'll surely do something to honor our fallen soldiers.

Next, the town was saddened to learn of the death of Steve Strauss in March. Steve was a life member, trustee and former lieutenant in the Little Silver EMS. Police noted that he responded to so many first aid calls that he was always one of the first EMS members that new officers met.

Universally, Steve was recalled as a devoted volunteer and mentor, as a friend, and as a gentleman. Little Silver will miss him, and we extend condolences to his family, his friends, and his EMS colleagues.

Looking forward, the Borough Council has introduced the municipal budget, which will come up for a public hearing this month.

Our CFO, Laura Geraghty, tells us that overall spending stayed relatively flat, with a total spending increase of \$160,000, half of which was due to mandatory statutory expenses. In addition, our volunteer services budgets increased somewhat because of the Active Threat/Tactical project training necessary to keep our devoted first responders and the public they serve safe in the current environment.

Still, the municipal purposes increase is less than a tax point and is \$161,341 under the two-percent tax levy cap.

So, with the overall increase in property valuation, the municipal tax rate will decrease this year from 0.446 in 2020 to 0.440 in 2021, meaning that a house valued at \$700,000 will see a tax decrease of \$48.00, assuming the value remained the same. Please remember that your municipal tax rate is just over a quarter of your yearly tax bill;

because the school and county (making up more than two thirds your tax bill) have not yet passed their budgets, the overall tax rate is not yet known.

Ms. Geraghty advises that savings in the budget were attributable to smart departmental spending, shared services on equipment and certain borough operations, and dollar-for-dollar reimbursement of our COVID-related expenses (through Monmouth County and the CARES Act).

And speaking of Ms. Geraghty, this is her last municipal budget. Our friend Laura is retiring in July, and deservedly so, after many years of devoted service. Conscientious and always friendly and helpful, Laura was a consummate, reliable professional, and we will miss her. Please take the opportunity over the next couple of months to wish her well in her next chapter.

Looking forward, we're pleased to note that our sidewalk project has been jump started after COVID- and weather-related delays. Many of you have seen the work, either in person or posted on line, beginning with the 'missing link' on the north end of Prospect from before Crest and extending all the way to Harding Road.

We're also trying to keep up with post-winter potholes, using cold patch as a temporary fix, and sharing the hot patch machine we purchased with Rumson as it is available. We have some real dingers on our list.

In other improvement notes, our Department of Public Works has done an extraordinary job with the courtroom in borough hall (while it has been empty) completely removing the old fake wood paneling motif dating to the early 1970s and replacing it with a blue, white and gray color scheme on wainscoting and sheetrock walls.

Rick Ferrante and Rocky Nolin of our Public Works department did very skillful work, with lots of input from Director Jimmy Gannon and other denizens of interior decorating in and around Borough Hall. Because we did not have to contract out for this work, the financial savings to the borough was huge. Thank you to all involved.

In similar skilled fashion, Larry Harrington, Nick Plevier, and Brody Heron of public works reconstructed the raised wooden garden boxes and the compost box at the Community Garden, just in time for spring planting.

Those projects and the hard work plowing snow in February, and now taking care of the 'new grass on the field[s]' for our athletes, has kept our public works folks hard at work: a tip of the hat to them when you can, please.

Next, Councilman AJ McNally, along with the offices of Sen. Declan O 'Scanlon and Assemblywoman Serena DiMaso, organized an effort to get vaccine appointments for our seniors and other eligible recipients, focusing on those who may have had a difficult time navigating the electronic sign up maze.

Many have already been signed up. To seek assistance, please call borough hall at (732) 842-2400, or log on to the borough website at www.littlesilver.org. Thanks to AJ and all involved for this thoughtful effort.

As to that new face, please welcome our newest police officer, Christopher Ibarra. Chris comes to us from Rumson, and hit the ground running after a swearing-in by Zoom, with new family members in Brazil looking on. We're excited to have him join the force. When you see him, please welcome him to town.

Lastly, as we move into warmer weather, our resident naturalist, John Heidema, has been walking our trails and keeping a sharp eye out. He's seen owls, eagles, herons and other waders, and so many other wonderful critters in and around our fair borough.

We'll continue to publish John's writings periodically. But even if you don't have the chance to catch up with John, please do get out and enjoy our natural spaces and trails. You'll be glad you made the effort.

On behalf of the Governing Body, have a wonderful spring! If you have questions or comments, please call borough hall at (732) 842-2400, or contact me at home at (732) 576-8595, or by email at bobneff80@gmail.com.