

THE CITY OF SUMMIT

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CITY HALL 512 SPRINGFIELD AVENUE SUMMIT, NJ 07901

News Release

For immediate release

Summit Mayor: Nora G. Radest (908) 273-6400
City Administrator: Michael F. Rogers (908) 522-3600
Media Contact: Amy Cairns (908) 277-9418

The Honorable Nora G. Radest State of the City Address

SUMMIT, NJ, January 2, 2020 – Good evening fellow residents, members of Common Council, and city staff. Welcome to our honored guests. Thank you for being here, and I wish you all a happy, prosperous and healthy New Year. I will begin by expressing my deep appreciation to the many voters in Summit who have given me the opportunity to serve as your Mayor for another four years. I am grateful for your trust and truly look forward to continuing my responsibilities to our city. I also want to thank my wonderful family; my husband Rob, my son Jes and daughter-in-law, Lauren and my daughter, Emma, and of course, my granddaughter, Grace. You give me great joy and I could not do my job without your unstinting support.

Tonight, it is my honor to stand before you and report that 2019 was a year of significant accomplishment in Summit. Together, we made a resilient city even stronger through the implementation of a number of thoughtful and fiscally-responsible civic improvements.

A few changes in the makeup of council; Councilman Mike McTernan has retired and newly-elected Councilman Danny O'Sullivan has joined the dais. Councilwoman Marjorie Fox has been elected Council President. Councilmembers Steve Bowman and Beth Little were re-elected in 2019 and Councilwoman Susan Hairston was elected to take the seat vacated by our dear departed colleague, Matthew Gould. We remain extremely grateful for the time, creativity and intelligence that Matt shared with council, city staff and many residents. We are all better off because of his generous service. Thank you to Stephanie Gould for serving in her husband's place until the November election. I am also grateful to Mike McTernan for his thoughtful, smart leadership on council. He is a consummate gentleman. We wish him well in his teaching career, and will certainly miss him as a colleague on council.

Members of Common Council and I have worked diligently to move the city forward while keeping an ever-present eye on the bottom line of the city budget. It continues to be a priority that council, city staff and I work closely together to address the needs and concerns of our residents and business owners. Consistent communication is absolutely critical and actively engaging with the community on a more than daily basis will remain an important imperative. We live in a world with a diminishing degree of respect for institutions, but I am confident that in 2020,

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we will continue to enjoy our Summit tradition of civility, robust debate, and thoughtful outcomes with the collective goal of a well-run Summit, the best in the state.

COMMUNICATION continues to be a major priority for me as Mayor. I will maintain my weekday and weeknight office hours, Meet the Mayor events on weekends and meetings by appointment. I have enjoyed speaking with many residents and business owners during my first term as mayor and appreciate you taking the time to share your thoughts and concerns. As a city, our strength lies in our ability to define priorities and work together to make them a reality. To do that, we need to be informed citizens, and we need to be able to share our ideas, experiences and skills. If you have not already done so, go to the city website and sign up to receive email or text notifications on emergency information, city services, events and information on all sorts of municipal activities in town. It really is the best way to keep abreast of what is going on. Traffic on our website continues to grow—we often exceed 30,000 visits a month. The City of Summit actively posts on Facebook and Twitter with two to three posts each day. In 2019, we increased our Facebook page likes and followers by 22% percent and twitter by 25%. We have expanded our video capability and regularly post on our YouTube channel. Please like and follow the City of Summit on social media. And if you have another idea about how we can better reach you with information, we would like to hear it. Please email pressoffice@cityofsummit.org.

This year is the mandatory national census and I have been working closely with the Communications Office to encourage all residents to answer the census questionnaire. The number of legislators allotted to communities and the distribution of 765 billion dollars in federal funding is determined on the basis of census data. For the first time we will be able to answer the census online and the census bureau is hoping that many people will do so. That will begin in mid-March. We will also have the option to answer a paper questionnaire. The challenge is to assure people that census data is confidential and critical to obtain; to that end I have created an ad hoc committee of community leaders and heads of leading institutions and have enlisted their help in communicating with their constituents. You will be hearing much more about this from me in the next few months.

COMMUNITY CENTER: A wonderful example of our ability to join together across demographics of age and income for the benefit of our residents has been achieved with the opening in May of our impressive, new Community Center building. The Department of Community Programs has increased its programs significantly. The Community Center has 183 senior members who enjoy yoga, tai chi and mahjongg each week. A new senior pickle ball program has been added and staff has collaborated with the YMCA and The Connection to offer a senior wellness expo. The number of open gym members is 475 and an average of 35 to 40 children participate in the afterschool program each day. In addition to volleyball and basketball, new programs such as Zumba, yoga, badminton and futsal have been added. The center offers over 40 special needs programs serving 367 participants, over 75 general programs serving approximately 2000 individuals and an expanded summer camp program with over 180 children.

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The new building is providing exactly what we had hoped for – a wonderful facility for all members of our community. I am certainly very proud of city leaders who approved the 6.5 million dollars to build this facility and residents and corporate partners who contributed nearly 1.5 million to the project. If you have not been to the center, stop by and staff will be happy to give you a tour.

DOWNTOWN: Our downtown is flourishing. I am happy that there is ample good news to share on that front. Our retail vacancy is at .19% with only a few unleased vacant spaces. Several new businesses have opened, reflecting a modern economy mix of experiential and traditional retail. The space formally occupied by Bombay Bistro is now Ani Ramen, and the space vacated by the Summit Food Market will be divided between the Bull and Bear Microbrewery, and the Lash Lounge. The former newspaper store on the corner of Beechwood Road and Springfield Avenue is now The Shade Store. In addition, the ground floor of 47 Maple Street houses Special Properties, a subsidiary of Christies. Additionally corporate tenants see a value in locating in downtown Summit. Employees want to be in a location where they can walk to restaurants and shops. This is great for ratables as well as for street life. I appreciate the strength of the pedestrian traffic that helps to support this important community asset, particularly when some of our neighboring towns with similar demographics labored with 15% vacancy rates as recently as one year ago.

The Planning Board thoroughly reviewed and updated the Development Regulations and Ordinances. The review was prompted by requests made by residents during the Master Plan process in 2016. The process took nearly two years to complete and the DRO now contains design and sustainability standards. The Planning Board will review the Historic Preservation criteria in 2020.

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES: One of the most important responsibilities of the city is to maintain and improve its infrastructure, which is crucial to resident safety and public health. While these projects are not generally very exciting, residents are always happy when streets are repaved or otherwise improved. In 2019, the city repaved 1.5 miles of roads and micro-paved three miles of roads. We completed five major infrastructure projects improving drainage, sewers, sidewalks and roadways throughout town, including Oakland and Linden Place, Laurel Avenue and Wallace Road, and phase two of the Village Green improvements. Most of us only notice roadwork, but with miles of sanitary and storm sewers and thousands of sanitary and storm structures, a significant portion of city infrastructure is underground. As I said, these projects are not exciting, but good stewardship of our physical surroundings is a hallmark of what makes Summit such a well-run and desirable place to live. The Department of Community Services has many areas of responsibility beyond road work. The department continues to use technology to improve service to residents and business owners. In 2019, DCS processed 3,245 SeeClickFix requests, reviewed 270 engineering permits, a 16% increase over 2018. Total construction office revenues are up \$20,000 over 2018 as well. The department created FAQs in multiple divisions

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to improve customer service, completed a Snow and Ice Control Plan, and the city's Community Forestry Management Plan was approved by the state. The city entered into an agreement with the Park Line Foundation that delineates the respective responsibilities of the city and the foundation regarding construction and maintenance. At this time, the foundation has hired an engineering firm to determine the feasibility and cost of building the Park Line. The city will decide how and if to move forward. Working with the DCS staff, Council passed restrictions on the use of single use plastic checkout bags, the use of polystyrene food containers and how plastic straws are distributed.

POLICE: Our stewardship of our roads and sewers is an important factor in safety. But, of course, our safety mainstay here in Summit is our outstanding police force, providing the most professional, dedicated and community-based service in the state. As you may know, we reinstated a Traffic Unit over two years ago with the primary goal of enforcing moving violations, when necessary. Motor vehicle accidents were down from 934 in 2018 to 738 at the end of November 2019. Motor vehicle stops were up in 2019, which I think correlates with the reduction of motor vehicle accidents. Please slow down and use care when navigating our Summit roadways. The department continues to answer over 35,000 service calls a year and its Community Policing Unit continues its excellent programs, including the addition of a self-defense class for high school and middle school young women and girls.

Another important safety priority is to improve conditions we know to be dangerous. Last year we installed four-way stops at various intersections, and while drivers needed some time to adjust to the new stop signs, most people appreciate them. In addition, the Safety & Health Committee authorized the installation of speed humps as well as illuminated crosswalk signals at intersections with high pedestrian traffic. Every member of council and I receive complaints about speeding in town, (some perceived and some a reality), and we are determined to continue to take whatever steps necessary to address and decrease speeding issues that occur in our city. While the police and engineering department can educate, enforce, and redesign roadways and intersections for safer travel for pedestrians and motorists alike, it is incumbent upon each of us to travel with deliberation and focus, whether by car, on a bike or on foot.

As a result of requests from several residents for more sidewalks to increase the walkability of our town, council approved a Sidewalk Master Plan. Now sidewalks will be installed as road work is performed on streets designated to receive sidewalks. Additionally council removed the requirement for homeowners to pay half the cost of sidewalk installation.

Unfortunately we did have 11 residential vehicle thefts in 2019. In every instance, cars were unlocked and the keys or fobs were left in the cars. This behavior is making neighborhoods less safe because would-be thieves know they

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can often access vehicles quite easily in our town. I implore every vehicle owner to lock your cars and keep the keys inside your homes.

TAXES: Taxes are never a popular topic, but nonetheless, crucial to the fiscal health and to our quality of life here in Summit. While it is important to maintain and improve city infrastructure, we are always mindful of the demands on our taxpayers. We had a 0% municipal tax increase in 2018 and a 1% increase in 2019 and council and city staff are working diligently to develop a stable budget in 2020. We face many pressures on our budget, not least of which are increasing demands for capital projects. All of us want the city to be in the best possible repair, but prioritization and vision are essential. As I mentioned, we completed the Community Center in 2019. We also entered into an agreement with the Summit Conservancy to build the Summit Free Market building at the transfer station. This is a great example of a viable public/private partnership to enable an enormously popular program, free-cycling, to continue on a more permanent basis. Additionally, the city sold 71 Summit Avenue to Family Promise for its full appraised value.

To maximize the impact of our tax dollars, I continue to stay in close contact with our Union County Freeholders to ensure they understand the needs of our city and provide all of the assistance they can. In 2018, the Freeholders delivered a budget that was under the 2% cap and in 2019 the increase was 1.75%. These increases were the lowest in years and demonstrate the Freeholders' understanding that cities like Summit cannot continue to pay exorbitant taxes to the county. We received \$108,000 in grants from Union County and \$357,000 in grants from the State of New Jersey. Additionally Union County is sharing 50% of the cost for planting 1000 trees over the next 4 years. Continued vigilance of our urban canopy is vitally important for the health, beauty, water control, and property values of our residents. Maintaining an informed dialogue with county freeholders and state representatives is critical to our cooperative relationship.

We are very fortunate to live in a city that offers first-class services and amenities, which we both enjoy and have come to expect. Increasing our asset base is an important factor if we want to hold the line on taxes. As you may know, Celgene was purchased by Bristol-Myers Squibb in 2019 and they expect to relocate personnel from the 44-acre campus on Morris Avenue near the Community Center to their 95-acre location on western Morris Avenue. They anticipate this relocation to be complete by the end of 2021 and the eventual sale of the Bob Hugin campus. I firmly believe that this is an opportunity to bring in one or more tenants or owners to the eastern Morris Avenue location. In the last few years, Celgene spent more than 160 million dollars on a central office building and conference center. Council is keeping a close eye on this transaction and we will do everything we can to help bring one or more viable occupants to this desirable location.

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We have a strong residential ratable base that has shown positive incremental growth in recent years; in 2019 we experienced an increase in construction value of approximately \$28 million dollars. But frankly, that is not enough to avoid tax increases while delivering the services we all have come to expect from the city. Increased ratables, both residential and commercial, are a crucial component in a healthy city budget. That is why we are proceeding with thoughtful redevelopment in the Broad Street West corridor.

BROAD STREET WEST REDEVELOPMENT: One of the clearest mandates of the Master Plan Re-examination process in 2016 was a need for balanced redevelopment. The national housing market now places a premium on the ability to live within walking distance of a vibrant town center with proximity to shops, restaurants, places of work and mass transit. Summit is uniquely positioned to take advantage of this trend: we are a transit hub, 20 miles from New York City, with a thriving downtown and an excellent school system. The obvious opportunity for redevelopment is Broad Street West, an area of town that has been called out for thoughtful change for the past 30 years. In 2018, council declared the 10-acre Broad Street West area as an Area in Need of Redevelopment. This designation allows the city to offer tax incentives to redevelopers and it also allows the city to maintain control over the type, quality and quantity of redevelopment initiatives. As I mentioned last year, this designation is one of non-condemnation, meaning that any of the private property owners in the designated Area in Need of Redevelopment can participate in the redevelopment, or choose not to. The city does not have the desire or statutory authority to force any of these owners to participate.

A steering committee made up of council members, city staff, members of the Planning Board, and our planning professionals met throughout 2019 to review proposals and interview developers. We chose a consortium of L&M and Toll Brothers to be conditionally designated as developers of the site. The agreement includes an escrow by the developer for funds to be paid to city professionals during the planning phase. The next step will be to negotiate the Redevelopment Agreement with the developers, and to lay out in detail the specifics of the buildings to be built, amount of money that the developer will pay for the city-owned property, a time table for construction and phasing, and penalties for missing deadlines, etc. In the meantime and to maintain control of the space, the city purchased 7 Cedar Street because it is in the center of the redevelopment area.

I want to re-emphasize how fortunate we are to be positioned to take advantage of this opportunity for careful and thoughtful redevelopment of an underutilized part of our downtown, at no cost to taxpayers—and with the future benefit of an increased tax base. Summit has gone from strength to strength when it comes to our downtown, and it is a pleasure and pride to me as Mayor to see people out and enjoying Summit's downtown at all seasons of the year, whether it be at a movie night on the Village Green, at the Farmers Market on Sundays, or out shopping and dining during the holidays. Adding another pedestrian-friendly area to our current downtown allows

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us to increase our opportunity to have experiences like these—which increases our desirability as a community while adding to the well-being of our residents. I appreciate the positive energy, forethought and collaborative spirit of our council members, residents and city staff who have contributed to the redevelopment process, ensuring that this project provides value not just for current residents, but for future generations in Summit.

FIREHOUSE: One important synergy of the Broad Street West redevelopment project is that it will help us address a significant need for a new city firehouse. One of the most important responsibilities I feel as Mayor is to keep our citizens safe. There were two major fires here in Summit in 2019, providing a serious reminder of the debt we owe our brave firefighters. It is a testament to their planning and training that there were no life-threatening injuries. In 2019, the fire department responded to 2400 emergency calls ranging from severe weather issues to fires. The department also performed 800 inspections of commercial and residential properties. Currently, we have a firehouse that is 100 years old. It was built for a generation of equipment that cannot meet today's needs. It is not even large enough to accommodate the size of modern fire engines. In addition, it is in serious need of upgrades and repairs. This is a responsibility we cannot shirk. Fortunately, the current building site can be sold as part of the Broad Street West redevelopment process, allowing additional flexibility in negotiations with the developer, and significantly defray the necessary costs.

Thorough research has determined that the best location for a new firehouse is on a portion of the non-resident commuter parking lot on Broad Street, next to the Salerno Duane car dealership office. This year we will finalize plans for the new firehouse, begin the bidding process, and hopefully break ground in mid-2020. The location of the new firehouse will necessitate some reconfiguring of parking spaces, but I want everyone to know that determining a parking plan during the construction of the firehouse is priority number one.

This is indeed a very large capital project: the anticipated cost is approximately 11.5 million dollars. I realize that this is a significant decision and may seem like a substantial risk, but it was not made lightly. A new building is an absolute necessity, and this is one of those tough decisions that council and I are elected to shepherd through our community. I am confident that we will find the most cost-effective way possible to make this investment in our public safety.

PARKING: Finally, the ever-popular topic of parking. Council and I, working with the Parking Services Agency, continue to look for acceptable parking solutions in our downtown. In 2016, we pioneered the promotion of ridesharing as a way to ease parking congestion in the downtown. This year we expanded the program to include up to 300 commuters and resident employees. The parking kiosks that were installed in 2018 have greatly improved turnover in the premium downtown parking spaces. The kiosks work especially well with the ParkMobile app that the city adopted a few years ago. If you have not tried the app yet, I strongly encourage you to do so.

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This new kiosk system not only helps our merchants, it helps all of us find a space in town when we need one. I am certain that through the Broad Street West redevelopment project we will increase parking to address existing parking deficits as well as parking needs created by new development. On a lighter note, the city partnered with Summit Public Art to install a mural on the tiered garage on Springfield Avenue. If you have not seen it, take a drive past the garage. It is wonderful.

THANK YOU: Many of you have heard me say that Summit's best asset is its people, and that continues to be true. Tonight we recognized the many men and women who have volunteered on various boards and committees. They are all committed to making Summit the best that it can be and their hours of service are invaluable. We are committed to engaging even more citizen volunteers to help create a plan for the future of our city; we are fortunate to have community members who have tremendous talent and are willing to share their expertise. I also want to thank the hundreds of residents who generously donated money and items to the victims of the two house fires that occurred in the last few months. Tens of thousands of dollars were collected through GoFundMe pages for our fellow residents. As the late Mayor Walter Long used to say "Summit is a little city with a big heart." Having been your mayor for four years I am here to tell you that in addition to the strength of our volunteers, our paid professionals--the men and women who work for the city--are top notch. We live in a world where trust is in short supply, but I do not find that to be the case in Summit. We receive thousands of requests for assistance and/or improvements from residents and business owners and our professional and dedicated city staff always responds. These requests come to us because people trust that we will help them. And they trust us because the men and women who work for the city work hard and take pride in their jobs and in our city. Much of the innovation I have discussed tonight is the result of the hard work and creativity of these individuals.

Finally, please do not underestimate the uniquely cooperative relationship council members and I have with one another, and with city staff. I am proud that our goal is to work together leading Summit to become an even greater city than it already is.

Again, it has been a pleasure working with the 2019 council. It truly has been an honor and a privilege. I look forward to all that we can accomplish in 2020.

Thank you, God bless, and Happy New Year.

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