

THE CITY OF SUMMIT

N E W J E R S E Y

CITY HALL 512 SPRINGFIELD AVENUE SUMMIT, NJ 07901

News Release

For immediate release

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2023 State of the City Address by Mayor Nora Radest

SUMMIT, NJ, January 3, 2023

Good evening. Welcome to the 2023 Organization Meeting of Summit Common Council. Thank you for joining us whether it is in Council Chamber, on You Tube or HTTV.

My heart felt congratulations to Councilmember Lisa Allen on her re-election to council, and congratulations and welcome to Delia Hamlet on her election to council. I look forward to working with you and all members of council. Congratulations to Councilmember Greg Vartan on his election as Council President. I am confident you will handle this responsibility beautifully.

We are fortunate to live in a beautiful and well managed city. I want to thank Michael Rogers, every department head and city staff member for the dedication, hard work and creative thinking you bring to your jobs every day. With COVID 19 mostly in the rear-view mirror in 2022, you all were called upon to focus on many projects that were on hold due to the pandemic.

Many of you that are here tonight have heard me say that Summit's greatest asset is its corps of volunteers. We all want to make Summit the best it can be for our residents, businesses, and visitors. By working together for the benefit of others we get to know one another as neighbors. That is the essence of community – striving to make life better for all. And in doing so, we each gain satisfaction and joy. Just think about the good that comes from the volunteer-run Summit Free Market; residents can give away things they do not need, and others can take what they need. All for free. Or look at the GRACE pantry - volunteers who provide food for hundreds of people who are food insecure, most of whom live in Summit. I cannot list all the volunteer boards and committees, but the number of volunteers must be in the thousands. For that I am deeply grateful.

In the last year, however, I have seen an increase of incivility among residents, and that disturbs me. We will not always agree on how to do things, but we must get better at listening to each other and being respectful of our differences. We certainly experienced an increase of community engagement in 2022 and I absolutely welcome that. When we share our ideas, we improve our plans and projects. As an example, the original Broad Street West Redevelopment project plan was scrutinized by residents and was found to be wanting. Council listened and will not build anything on the lot between the library and YMCA. I am confident that a building will be built on the current firehouse lot that will satisfy most, if not all, residents. I am hopeful that all of us will hit the reset button and have respectful and productive discussions.

I recognize that we, your leaders, must regain a measure of trust that we lost last year. I pledge to do everything in my power to raise the level of trust. Every person on the dais and sitting in this chamber or watching at home wants what is best for Summit. Working well together will get us there.

THE CITY OF SUMMIT

N E W J E R S E Y

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Summit Police Department

We experienced a rash of car thefts in the summer, but thankfully we have not had a car stolen since September. The police altered their patrol process, and we added four new officers to the patrol division following several retirements of senior officers. Importantly, residents were conscientious about locking their cars and bringing their keys into their homes. In the first half of 2022, Summit was on pace for more than 40 vehicle thefts but with diligence we finished the year with 26. Chief Zagorski has requested additional cameras throughout our perimeter as part of his capital budget request. That will be further discussed by the Finance Committee. Additionally, the Safety Committee is looking at an ordinance that would impose a fine on anyone who attempts to steal a car from private property.

A topic of serious concern among residents is pedestrian safety. We will be launching a pedestrian safety informational campaign in the coming weeks. It is critical that drivers look closely when approaching crosswalks – check to make sure no one is beginning to cross. Once a pedestrian is in the crosswalk that person has the right-of-way. That said, pedestrians should always look to make sure the driver sees you. I have witnessed people crossing the street while looking at their phones. It is the mutual responsibility of the driver and pedestrian to be watchful. This year the police department welcomed back Officer Anthony Pysyk after a lengthy and successful rehabilitation, achieved accredited agency status and joined other Union County police departments in establishing a Safe Place Program with downtown businesses as part of a community policing initiative.

Summit Fire Department

As you drive down Broad Street it is hard to miss the new firehouse under construction. I am happy to report that the project is on budget and on track to be finished by early June. During the construction there have been no big surprises and very few change orders. I know our firefighters are looking forward to relocating to the new building. We have been raising private funds to provide exercise equipment and living quarters furniture for our firefighters. We are not quite at our goal yet, so if you want to donate and buy a brick paver, please go to the city website at cityofsummit.org.

In 2022, the fire department responded to approximately 2400 calls and successfully completed a state inspection audit. In 2023, they will be completing a survey of all multi-family dwellings and all new commercial buildings to ensure fire operations plans are set. This will help to streamline response times in emergency situations.

Parking Services Agency

While the number of commuters that are parking in Summit continues to slowly return to pre-pandemic levels, we are seeing more people visiting and parking in our thriving downtown. In 2022, Common Council approved the addition of more 15-minute spots to increase turnover and access to storefronts.

The Department of Community Programs

As the pandemic started to slow down, we finally saw the community center start to be used as it should be, many of our old and new seniors, adults and children were back enjoying the strong array of programs that were offered. The department implemented a new registration system called Civic Rec, which will enable residents to have an easier experience and is directly tied to the city website. We continued to offer robust programming for the entire community to ensure the needs of all residents are met. Many new programs were added to fill recreation

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N E W J E R S E Y

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programming gaps including pickleball. A field hockey league for girls and expanded volleyball program were also added to serve as feeder programs to middle and high school sports. The inclusion component to the recreation summer camp was expanded, allowing for a completely inclusive summer camp experience for over 25 Try CAN youth with special needs.

DCP also signed a pledge to join the Mayors Wellness Campaign to ensure they continued meeting community recreational needs. The building was used as a vaccination center until the end of May, which ultimately was a blessing for all Summit residents and people in surrounding towns. Well over 50,000 individuals received vaccinations. DCP was proud to partner with GRACE and FLAG to hold the second annual community Thanksgiving.

In addition to the indoor activities, we saw huge crowds at our special events, including two new cultural events, the Juneteenth celebration, and the Asian American Pacific Islanders festival. The Summit Family Aquatic Center eclipsed the record numbers in 2021, with just under 5400 members and over 60,000 visits for the first time ever, while the Muni stayed consistent at 1,556 members, with 15,700 rounds of golf played.

Through capital expenditures and grants, and to the delight of the basketball community, the Memorial Field and Tatlock basketball courts received a state-of-the-art face lift. We have started the master plan for all city playgrounds, which include Mabie, Tatlock, Brayton, East Summit, the Art Park at Wilson, and the Aquatic Center. Hopefully by years end we will see the start of work on Mabie playground. A new show mobile with a handicap lift, upgraded LED light system and an extended stage has been ordered and should be here just in time for the start of our special events in the spring. Lastly, through a collaboration with Summit Lacrosse alumni, there will be a new lacrosse practice wall and gazebo at Investors Bank field at some point this year.

The Department of Community Services

The department planted 920 trees in the city towards its 2023 goal of planting 1000 trees. As of mid-December, DCS staff processed 5,532 See Click Fix requests. They processed 2,300 Open Public Records Act requests, representing a 217% increase over last year. The city received \$1,687,388 awarded from County, State and Federal grants.

The Engineering and Public Works staff were very busy in 2022. They performed over 250 inspections and reviewed 315 annual engineering permits as of December 1, 2022, for grading, water and gas, curbs and sidewalks, sanitary sewers, and road openings. Two miles of city roads were paved through capital budget improvements and through negotiations with PSE&G as part of city-wide gas main upgrades.

DCS coordinated with NJAW and PSE&G for large-scale improvements to critical utility infrastructure. I know there was considerable disruption on Morris and Summit avenues, but the infrastructure was in serious disrepair. The roads will be properly paved in the spring. Micro paving on 12 streets for a total of 27,100 square yards was also completed this year.

DCS staff performed 21,000 linear feet of storm and sanitary video inspections to find blockages in our aging pipes before they ruptured. Our engineering staff responded to numerous calls from residents, contractors, and agents to resolve several grading and drainage disputes between neighbors. The engineering division also prepared in-house construction plans for upcoming 2023 Capital Improvement Projects having a projected value of approximately \$250,000.

THE CITY OF SUMMIT

N E W J E R S E Y

CITY HALL 512 SPRINGFIELD AVENUE SUMMIT, NJ 07901

To date, they conducted 10 traffic speed studies utilizing radar equipment. The Safety Committee will discuss any measures that may need to be taken based upon the results of the studies. Engineering also managed in-house inspection and project management for the Park Avenue Improvement Project valued at an \$80,000 savings. The Park Avenue beautification project transformed the retail business area, incorporating decorative streetlights and sidewalks, and the planting of new street trees.

Phase I of the Summit Park Line Project received a new pedestrian bridge over Morris Avenue. We fully expect the project to continue over the next year.

Affordable Housing

We made progress in 2022 with the city's affordable housing initiatives, including, but not limited to the following:

- Several additional 30-year affordable deed restrictions were filed for various locations throughout the city.
- The city began discussions with a group home nonprofit for deed restriction with one of their existing Summit properties.
- Planning for the Broad Street West Redevelopment project continued in 2022. If developed, the project will yield new construction units towards the city's 50-unit goal by 2025.
- A concept plan is in development for two new construction units on Ashwood Court as part of the Morris Habitat Settlement Agreement.
- The Zoning Board approved a development application that will yield seven new construction units under the multi-family set-aside ordinance, all of which will count toward the city's 50-unit goal by 2025.
- Brandywine Living, the assisted living facility at 41 Springfield Avenue, produced 10 units under the mandatory 10% state set-aside rule.
- Morris Habitat began construction on their 12-unit 100% affordable project at 146 Morris Avenue.
- The city's affordable housing webpage was updated to include an Affordable Housing 101 information guide.

The Affordable Housing Committee met in February 2022 to discuss the status of affordable housing activity in the community and again in October 2022 for a fall progress update. The next committee meeting will be held in February of 2023. The detailed 2022 annual report and all prior reports as well as meeting information can be found at cityofsummit.org.

Communications

Our Communications Office ensures that information is shared with citizens in a comprehensive and timely manner. The city website is the official place to find information on City of Summit actions. I encourage everyone to sign up for notifications so you will not miss items of importance from city agencies and offices. In 2022, the number of website visits continued to grow with 579,893 visits, 569,975 page views and 487,230 users. The top searches were for information on birth certificates, parking and Broad Street West Redevelopment with recycling and trash a close fourth.

THE CITY OF SUMMIT

N E W J E R S E Y

CITY HALL 512 SPRINGFIELD AVENUE SUMMIT, NJ 07901

Followers on city social media channels continued to grow as well with 56,888 visits to Facebook and 319 new followers in 2022. Top posts reached from 4000 to more than 9000 followers. Twitter saw an increase of 108 new followers with 55,113 visits. Our YouTube channel generated 239 new subscribers and 7,261 hours of watch time. And the city Instagram channel has climbed to 4,896 followers.

I appreciate everyone who has visited me during my Office Hours at City Hall or at a Meet the Mayor weekend event. It is important to me to hear from residents and business owners, and I will continue that priority through 2023.

Thank you for your time and attention this evening. I look forward to 2023 being a productive year.

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