



MAYOR'S ADDRESS TO THE ASSEMBLAGE

Reorganization Meeting

Tuesday, January 7, 2025

Welcome to the 121st Reorganization Meeting of the Borough of Emerson. I would like to welcome those who are joining us this evening in person as well as everyone watching on YouTube. Congratulations to our newly sworn in members of the Council, Councilwoman Ashley Sayers and Councilwoman Megan Ciolino, for their first full three-year terms. I look forward to working with you both as well as the rest of the Council to move Emerson forward.

Borough Hall is a very busy place and there is a lot going on every day. On behalf of the Governing Body, I want to thank all of our borough hall staff, police department, DPW, fire department, ambulance corps, auxiliary police, and all of the boards and commissions' volunteers for all of their hard work throughout the year as well as for always keeping everything running smoothly. Your commitment to the Borough is commendable and we thank you for that.

I would like to point out that the 2025 Mayor and Council Meeting schedule is different than the customary routine of the first and third Tuesdays of every month due to conflicts, including the recent change of the June primary date. In the spirit of transparency, I want to call attention now so that the public may plan accordingly. Please always check the website calendar for the most current information.

Some highlights from 2024 and things that we are looking forward to in 2025 include the following:

- We were excited to offer events and programs throughout 2024 that promoted healthy lifestyles and overall wellbeing including Community Conversations as part of the Mayor's Wellness Campaign which covered topics such as "Eating for Health" and "Opioid Misuse Among Teens". The 2024 Summer Concert Series showcased local musical artists and gave our residents opportunities to gather together and have some fun.
- In 2024, the Borough received designation as a "Healthy Town - Up & Coming" for our Mayor's Wellness Campaign programs and I look forward to resuming "Walks with the Mayor" and "Coffee with the Mayor". Be on the lookout for upcoming dates.
- The Recreation Commission put together another spectacular Summer Kickoff and fireworks display this past June as well as an exciting 2nd Annual Fall Harvest Festival packed with fun family activities including a tractor hayride and pumpkin patch.
- Earth Month 2024 was well celebrated with the Environmental Commission's "Yoga & Hiking Adventure in the Woods" as well as the "DPW Trucks and More" Tour. They also did an amazing job improving accessibility in the Community Garden with the addition of new raised garden beds which were hand-built by Emerson's own DPW.
- The Library continues to offer wonderful programs and activities for residents of all ages. There are a variety of programs held on weekdays that are geared towards young children so if you are new to town and want to become more acclimated in the community, the Emerson Library is a great place to start!
- The Borough also expanded our cultural and holiday festivities as a community this year with 2024 marking the first Hanukkah Celebration and Menorah Lighting. We currently are preparing for a celebration to kick off Ramadan with a Crescent Moon

Lighting in February and even more community events are being planned for 2025 that we hope you will join us at. We are also looking to add more recreation programs, especially for adults, through our recreation program and the Mayor's Wellness Campaign.

- All seniors over 55, should consider joining our vibrant senior group as well. They meet monthly and plan fun trips and activities.
- I encourage our residents to sign up to receive emergency notifications and other borough information through our RAVE Alert System at www.emersonnj.org/RAVE. And, as always, more information on all of our events and current news is posted on the borough website at www.emersonnj.org/news or our Facebook and Twitter pages.

The Emerson Volunteer Ambulance Corp and the Emerson Volunteer Fire Department are always looking for members. Please consider joining! Although it is a commitment, the reward of helping your neighbors in their greatest time of need is priceless.

Our shared service agreement with the Board of Education for the Student Resource Officer (SRO) was renewed and a second Special Law Enforcement Officer (SLEO's) was hired in order to continue to protect our schools and keep our children safe.

As part of our affordable housing commitment, Emerson's Home Improvement Program continues into 2025. Information about eligibility requirements and the application process is available on the borough's website.

We continue to make investments in our infrastructure that not only maintain our facilities, but also bring greater efficiency to our operations:

- As we've reported, the Borough purchased a tree trimming truck which has made it more efficient for the DPW to maintain branches and trees throughout town and has saved the expense of contracting out the service.
- Our Street Sweeping Shared Service has proven to be a successful and mutually beneficial agreement with Washington Township.
- The Cindy Lane Pump Station was replaced and officially went live in December.
- The Emerson Volunteer Fire Department acquired a new firetruck this year at a substantial discount off the MSRP.
- Our shared service with the Board of Education for the Pickleball & Tennis Court project at the Emerson JR/SR Highschool is well underway and we are looking forward to a Grand Opening in 2025.
- The Ackerman Basketball Courts project has been completed with resurfacing and installation of new basketball hoops. Although they are open for play, we look forward to an official grand opening ribbon cutting ceremony in the Spring.
- We received notice from Bergen County Open Space Municipal Park Improvement Grant Program that we were awarded \$84,000 for playground improvements at Rosengart/Sunset Park. In the coming months we will be applying for more grant funds to improve our parks and playgrounds.
- As addressing persistent flooding throughout town has been a top priority of this administration's agenda, we worked very hard to successfully obtain two appropriations, totaling nearly \$2,000,000 in federal funds to help mitigate stormwater and drainage issues in the areas of Forest Ave and Jordan Road as well as Vivian Avenue and Dorchester Road. The Borough is working with local officials in Bergen County on these projects, which are expected to commence in 2026.

- The long-awaited Streetscape Project along the Kinderkamack Road corridor from Etna Avenue to the Oradell border is finally coming to fruition and is expected to begin this summer.
- Phase Two of the Veterans Home project will be breaking ground in the Spring and will bring additional safe and affordable housing for disabled veterans as well as a dedicated meeting space for our American Legion Post 269 heroes. At our request, Bergen County has put a temporary trailer onsite so that they can meet in the meantime.
- Our investment in the installation of LED lights at Benkovic Field has proved worthwhile, resulting in a savings of \$14,500.00 dollars in electricity costs in 2024. With these utility savings combined with the two grants we received to offset the project costs this is a win for all.
- PSE&G expects to complete their gas system upgrade project in the Spring and then the roadways will be repaved.
- To enhance pedestrian and roadway safety, additional stop signs have been put up on several streets in town and audible devices will be installed on the traffic signals at Van Wagoner Avenue by the Stop & Shop Shopping Plaza as well as the intersection with Old Hook Road and Main Street in the next few weeks.
- In addition to all of the changes you can see around town, we are also making significant improvements to our online presence with a full website redesign coming this year.

Regarding the Block 419 project, I, along with all of you, am eager to see this project that the prior administration approved be completed. As many of you are probably aware the Borough was set to start a trial with the Redeveloper on December 2nd. On the eve of trial, our assigned judge, Judge Ostuni, talked with both sides and referred us to our Implementation Monitor, Retired Judge Harry Carroll, to discuss resolution to all the outstanding issues as it relates to Block 419 and the seven offsite affordable housing units. Our litigation committee is eagerly awaiting word from the Implementation Monitor, which we hope will be in the very near future, so that he may successfully guide us to a global resolution of this matter. The good news is that we do see people onsite again and we are told that work is continuing on the inside of the building.

I encourage you to join us at our meetings and if you can't, please watch us on television or YouTube in order to keep updated on all the work of the Governing Body and the Borough. And as always, if you need me, please call me. I am always available to our residents, to answer questions and to listen to recommendations on how we can make our Borough better.

Finally, thank you to the residents of Emerson for continuing to entrust us to lead our beloved family town. I am truly humbled by your support. This year is going to be an exciting and productive one in Emerson! I wish you all a happy and healthy 2025!