

Mayor Richard M. Onderko

Mayor's Address - January 4th, 2021

Good evening everyone.

With 2020 finally behind us, it was a year we certainly will never forget. The pandemic cancelled many events in our lives but not everything was cancelled. Things like caring for others, our friendships, remote learning, and our hope; our hope is for a vaccine to help end the pandemic and for our lives to go back to normal.

It is with great sadness to report that our community lost 10 residents to the virus and many more suffered from the adverse effects. As we head into a New Year, there is much optimism that things will eventually get back to normal. In addition, with climate change upon us, last year there were a record number of named hurricanes. They even ran out of letters in the alphabet! Thankfully, we did not encounter any major flooding in our Borough and that is always great news!

2020 was not a wasted year from the Borough's perspective, even though it may have felt like it at times due to all the cancellations we encountered. We continued to make progress even in very trying and stressful times. The Council worked hard and introduced a fiscally responsible 2020 municipal budget under the 2% hard cap on the tax levy to help stabilize property taxes.

Given the current state of our economy and the impacts the virus shutdowns have had on our small businesses, we must continue to hold the line on any unnecessary spending in 2021. We continue to be one of the lowest towns in Somerset County for property taxes paid on the average valued home as compared to the other 20 towns in our county. Keeping Manville affordable is worth all our efforts.

Other recent accomplishments in 2020 were our efforts to finally codify our land use ordinances from 1988 and provide electronic access to them on our website.

Board of Health ordinances were also recently codified and will be published on-line soon.

We were officially notified we achieved a class level 5 in the FEMA Community Rating System, one of the best ratings achieved by any town in New Jersey. It gives homeowners a 25% reduction on their NFIP flood insurance premiums. This achievement shows we are headed in the right direction making our Borough more storm-resilient. We will also be making the case for financial assistance to the Somerset County Open Space committee to help remove 3 existing structures from our floodplains and for support of the nature's park proposed in Lost Valley.

Improving communication with our residents remains a top priority. Our monthly newsletter and social media will continue to be used to keep the public well informed. The Borough's website will also be actively maintained and improved for ease of use.

Three new ordinances were put into effect in 2020. The rental housing ordinance allows for rental home inspections to ensure occupant safety by enforcing fire safety laws. Inspections have been underway since July and many violations have been found.

The new sump pump inspection ordinance will allow the Borough to inspect for any sump pumps hooked into our sanitary sewer system for discharge. Pumps need to be disconnected and discharged outside. This will help reduce overcharges we pay to the Raritan Valley Sewage Authority during excessively wet rainfall years.

A new ordinance for starting an Economic Development Committee was adopted. This new committee will substitute for our defunct Chamber of Commerce. It will help bring a spotlight to our small businesses and allow their voices to be heard. Main Street revitalization efforts will be our primary focus for 2021.

Governor Murphy has recently proposed a billion-dollar, multi-year economic recovery package that will offer Main Street focused programs that are designed to lift New Jersey out of the deepest recession of our lifetime and build towards a more equitable and prosperous future. We will work closely with the Economic Development Agency in Trenton to ensure that Manville is not forgotten and that

we need their help to move the redevelopment efforts of the old Rustic Mall property along.

We have recently met with the developer and the property owners on several occasions and have stressed they have the “green light” to proceed. It is either now or never to move this project forward. I am hopeful we will see new plans for the site in the first quarter of this year.

Our main street will be under construction for the long awaited “road diet” reducing 5 lanes down to 3 on the north side of town. Pedestrian safety and preventing future accidents along the entire length are the primary focus of this federally funded, \$5 million dollar project. In addition, sections of South Main Street will be placed into designated “rehabilitation zones” to enhance the opportunity for attracting State grants and giving tax breaks to property owners who improve their properties.

This year enhanced communication with our small business owners and the sharing of information from Trenton will be key to our success to revitalize our Main Street. I will be dedicated to leading this effort by appointing members of our community to help serve on the new Economic Development Committee later this month. Meetings will be open to the public and will most likely be over Zoom to begin the year.

Late last year, we had the opportunity to appoint a new Chief of Police. Former Chief Mark Peltack retired after 35 years of service to our Borough. We wished him a long and healthy retirement. The Council and I appointed Tom Herbst to lead our police department. It was an honor to appoint a new Chief of Police for our Borough. I assured Chief Herbst he has our full support and wished him all the best in his new leadership position.

I would also like to thank outgoing Fire Chief Joe Barilla for his service as Chief of our fire department. We look forward to working with our new incoming Chief Robert Kostowski better known to all as Junior, new Deputy Chief Ken Skirkanish and new Assistant Chief Scott Stapleton. Thank you for your bravery fighting fires.

In closing, the Mayor and Council have plenty of work to be done this year. Stabilization of our tax base and the revitalization of our Main Street will be our

primary focus. I am confident there will be no significant municipal tax increase in 2021 as we will work hard to keep any increase under the 2% levy cap.

I would like to thank all the employees of the Borough for their efforts and our various volunteers who serve on our fire department, rescue squad, boards, and committees. We have the absolute best volunteers in Somerset County.

For a small 2.5 square mile Borough, we have something larger townships do not have, and that is we are a tight knit, walkable community that is so desirable today as seen by recent home sales. Homes are selling quickly, and prices are up. Manville is surely a great place to live in Central NJ.

Our community spirit was on display this past Memorial Day with our VFW veterans' convoy which brought the parade to your neighborhood and from this past holiday season as we all noticed numerous homes beautifully decorated for Christmas. Many homeowners participated in the Manville Arts Councils "Bright Lights" home decorating contest and fundraiser. The contest was so much fun for our residents as they drove around town and voted on their favorites. It was a successful fundraiser for the Arts Council.

The Borough of Manville was also designated a Purple Heart community in late 2019 that shows the love we have for our Hometown Heroes and for all veterans who served to protect our precious freedoms. Showing our patriotism for the love of our Country will help unite us. "Be an American worth fighting for", that was the theme of this year's Wreath Across America Day, it was so appropriate for such divisive political times and for the social unrest we witnessed in America last year.

God bless the United States of America and may God continue to bless our town and keep all future hurricanes away. Stay safe from the virus until vaccines are readily available in the months ahead. Remember, wear that mask, wash your hands often, and watch your social distance when out in public.

Best wishes to all for a prosperous 2021! Happy New Year!

Mayor Richard M. Onderko