

## **2022 State of the City Mayor Darren Matik**

Over the past year, the residents of Linwood have worked together to contain the virus and we are ready to take on the opportunities ahead and emerge from this time of historic challenge as a healthier, greener, more equitable, and more just community. Small businesses, shops, restaurants, schools, students & educators, and municipal operations came together to help each other. Families and neighbors helped one another, and volunteers donated time to nonprofits that assist local families. The City has proven to be resilient and so has its staff as we have not missed a beat and have remained open for the public fully staffed. The City Council also has put in the work this year as we have completed many projects and are in the planning stage for many next year. First a little about City Hall:

The Construction Office was always open and is led by Jim Galantino our Construction Official as well as Angela Marshall who serves as TACO/Zoning Officer with her assistant Donna McBride were as busy as ever and handled every transaction without missing a note. Our esteemed Fire Official Tom Flynn and his Deputy Nick LaRotonda took the department to new heights completing 716 inspections for the year and raising revenue to its highest level ever. Also, a special shout out to our Hazard Mitigation team who again successfully worked on our CRS rating as well as the overall County plan which will allow us to fix some problem areas in town with grant money. The great news out of the Tax Assessor Diane Hesley's office is that tax appeals are down to 14 successful appeals from a high of almost 300, and real estate prices are rising. We had similar good news as our Tax Collector Silvia Washington and Assistant Michael Allenbaugh have our collection rate at 99.23 percent which in any year is exceptional. The Public Works Department led by Chip Jones and assistant Mike Ware took on some major projects this year. They worked at the Library, on the renovations to the new Makerspace/Media room, installed cameras on the bike path, installed new lighted pedestrian crossing signs at Belhaven, updated fire and security alarms at all public buildings, completed a comprehensive drainage project at the football/lacrosse field, cracked sealed City roads, and of course leaf collection and helping to beautify the City for the holidays. Chip and his crew are amazing and we thank them for the little and big things they do every day for the residents.

We are lucky to have a Fire Department to call on that will come out in any kind of weather to assist residents and even sometimes non-residents who are injured on the City's roadways. The Department is led by Captain Jay Loder and Volunteer Fire Chief Marty Walley and we thank them for their service. The Police Department had a remarkably busy year keeping the roadways safe as well as responding to residents in need. Do not be surprised to see them on their bikes on beautiful Linwood's sunny days patrolling and visiting with residents in and around the bike path. The Police Department fully took over the Code Enforcement and really have made a difference around the City. The Police have and will be instituting a Share the Path initiative to help with congestion on the City's Bike Path. This year will mark a leadership change as Chief Jason Weber a 32yr member of the Linwood Police force retired as of the end of the year and we wish him well in his retirement. Steve Cunningham will be taking over as Chief and we know he will do a great job with 16yr's of experience on the force.

The City Engineer and now State Senator Vince Polistina and his staff especially the wonderful Jen Heller moved and are moving on several projects around the City for this year plus completed many last year. Highlights include the paving of Wabash from Patcong to Poplar Avenue paid for by a DOT grant, numerous drainage and parking improvements, completely refurbishing the

Poplar Avenue pump station, videoing and surveying all of the sewer lines in the City which in turn prolongs the life of the sewer and helps us find problem areas before the problem happens with roots, extensive renovations at the Library which include a new room, parking lot repaving and drainage improvements, new ADA doors, new curbs and sidewalks some of which are completed and some to be completed this year. In 2022, we will be repaving Franklin Boulevard, continuing sewer improvements amongst other projects. Speaking of the Library, I would like to thank Maria Moss and Mary Ann Branciforti for their many years of service to the Linwood Library and especially this year going above and beyond to keep the Library open to the best of their ability.

The shared Municipal Court had its second full year in Linwood and they had to learn a whole new way to serve the public as Courts went over to Zoom. Laura Garvey Santoro the Court Administrator and Deputy Shantal Swaby put many hours in getting us ready to have court in this new way. We thank both for their service as they will both move on to the new County Court. I worked on this endeavor personally as a member of a committee with other Mayors, Council Members, and Business Administrators from 8 other towns to further a shared service that will not only save Linwood residents significant money but taxpayers throughout Atlantic County. I would like to thank the other committee members for their service and for a tremendous time commitment.

The City Clerk and Finance Offices run with upmost professionalism, and I thank CFO Anthony Strazzeri and our Deputy City Clerk and Planning Board Secretary Mary Cole for the great work they do every day. Our Auditors, Leon and Carol, make sure we are doing everything correct and usually have a perfect score every year. City Solicitor Joe Youngblood now in his 45<sup>th</sup> year is always a guiding force on our decision making. I would also like to thank all the volunteers who dedicate much time and commitment to the City. All the Planning Board members, Environmental Commission members and new Green Team, the Library Board, Economic Development Board, Senior Citizens Advisory Committee, Recreation Board, and our Arboretum Curator George Butrus and the Friends of the Linwood Arboretum. All the volunteers help make our City great. And I will say it again this year that the glue that hold everything together is our City Clerk Leigh Ann Napoli who makes everyone's life easier, and I am sure all the people who serve on Council or work for the city would agree that they would not want to do this job without her. This year we said goodbye to my friend and Councilman Todd Gordon and thank him for his service to the city and we welcome a new member Blair Albright to the team. In closing I would like to thank all of our Council Members, board members and volunteers who give so much time to the city. I also would like to thank my wife Brett and my two boys Zach and Xander for allowing me to do this job and serve the residents of this great City. I am proud to be the Mayor of Linwood.