

**State of the Borough Address**  
**Mayor Jason F. Cilento**  
**Reorganization Day Meeting**  
**January 1, 2025**

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, members of the Dunellen Borough Council, and Borough Staff. It is an honor to stand before you today to deliver my sixth State of the Borough Address, and I would like to begin by wishing you and your families a happy and healthy New Year. It's hard to believe it's already been a year since our last reorganization meeting, but 2024 has been filled with many accomplishments, milestones, and achievements that have pushed our Borough forward and I am eager to share them with you. The Borough of Dunellen is a truly special place, thanks to the amazing people who call it home, the business owners who invest in our community, our volunteers - many of whom were sworn in today, and so many others. It is a true privilege to know that the Dunellen Borough Council and I are up here today thanks to your faith in us. Thank you for allowing us to lead this great community.

At this time, I'd like to introduce the members of Dunellen Borough Council; Crisol-Iris Lantz, Trina Rios, Daniel Cole Sigmon, Hal VanDermark, as well as Teresa Albertson and William Scott, who I congratulate on their swearing-in today. Congratulations to Councilman Daniel Cole Sigmon for being appointed as Dunellen Borough Council President for 2025. It is an honor to spend another year working with you all. Thank you to Assemblywoman Nancy Munoz and Assemblywoman Michele Matsikoudis, of New Jersey's 21st Legislative District who swore in our Council Members today. The Borough is truly grateful for your ongoing support and I thank you for being here.

Today, I am filled with immense pride as we reflect on our Borough's remarkable achievements over the past year and the spirit of our community. Together, we've made tremendous strides in enhancing the quality of life for all who call Dunellen home. We've welcomed new members to our team, many of whom are here today, whose new

perspectives have helped elevate the quality of services we provide to our residents. From our administrative staff to our first responders, their contributions have strengthened our ability to address challenges, deliver essential services, and create opportunities for growth.

As we celebrate our progress, we also look to the future with optimism and determination. One of the things I am personally most proud of is our redevelopment efforts. Redevelopment in Dunellen began back in 2001 under my predecessor, Mayor Robert Seader. 2024 was our most successful year so far with the completion of several projects, the start of others, and the approval of more to come.

526 North Avenue, the Borough's most recently completed project, is home to Metro 526, a modern 43,200-square-foot apartment complex featuring 40 apartments, including six affordable housing units. This transformative development replaces several vacant buildings that were severely damaged by fire, bringing new life to the area. Metro 526 celebrated its grand opening on September 28, 2024, marking a significant step in the revitalization of our downtown.

Another notable accomplishment this year is the completion of 150 North Avenue, a three-story mixed-use building consisting of 1,578 square feet of commercial/retail space and a 14-apartment rental development at the corner of Jackson Avenue and North Avenue, including two affordable housing units. The commercial/office space, located on the first floor, is home to new businesses and the residential units on the second and third floors have welcomed new residents to each unit. The space also offers ground-level covered parking for both residents and businesses.

Currently under development, "The Gateway" at 745 Bound Brook Road exemplifies our commitment to smart growth and thoughtful design. It is projected to have 23 luxury and boutique multi-family units with three affordable housing units. A significant architectural feature is a "turret" that symbolizes the entrance to the borough. This project will replace an existing vacant restaurant/club that unfortunately closed due to the

pandemic and will truly act as a new welcoming “gateway” into our Borough.

Finally, one of the most significant and successful redevelopments is the Art Color Complex, now known as Dunellen Station. Once an underutilized industrial site and the start of discussions for redevelopment in Dunellen over twenty years ago, it is now home to a thriving mixed-use development that integrates townhomes, apartments, and retail spaces. Many of these residents, whom I have had the pleasure of meeting, have quickly become involved in our community and are proud to call Dunellen home.

The completion of Dunellen Station is a testament to the power of smart redevelopment and as such, The Nell was awarded the prestigious 2024 New Jersey Future Smart Growth Award on October 22, 2024, which Borough Administrator Alex Miller and I had the pleasure of attending alongside our partners from Prism Capital Partners and others. This award honors projects, plans, and policies across the state that demonstrate smart growth principles in action. This project not only preserved the character and charm of our Borough but also introduced a diverse range of housing options and amenities that attract both new residents and businesses to the area.

Further accolades from this year include Dunellen being featured in Business View Magazine in October 2024. This national leading publication showcased the Borough’s unique blend of small-town charm, strategic redevelopment efforts, and commitment to preserving our rich history and values while engaging the future. Additionally, in November 2024, Downtown Dunellen received the “Great Downtown” designation from the New Jersey Chapter of the American Planning Association. This annual award celebrates outstanding places that demonstrate the transformative power of great planning to create vibrant, healthy, equitable, and sustainable communities.

In 2025, we look to continue this great momentum for our Miracle Mile and we will be featured in the January edition of Real Estate New Jersey’s

monthly issue, which will be available in both digital and print formats. This article will cover new construction projects in the Borough as well as our larger efforts to revitalize our downtown. The January edition of Real Estate New Jersey is expected to be online a week or so into the month with physical copies being released the following week.

These redevelopment initiatives have brought new commerce to our downtown, and the increased population has helped support local businesses, driving further economic growth. For example, since taking office in 2020, we have seen nearly \$100 million dollars of investments in downtown Dunellen, that is on top of the Dunellen Station's project's \$100 million investments secured by Mayor Robert Seader, totaling around \$200 million in investments in downtown Dunellen. The success of our efforts would not have been possible without the use of PILOT agreements. In 2024, the Borough received nearly \$2 million in PILOT revenue, accounting for approximately 14% of Dunellen's anticipated total revenue. Without these redevelopment projects and the financial flexibility provided by PILOTs, this revenue would either have had to be raised through property taxes or the reduction of municipal services to avoid a significant tax increase. Additionally, this revenue year-over-year will assist with debt service payments, therefore alleviating any additional burden caused by payments of note on bonds, most specifically on the interest of said bonds, which will help lower taxes over time. PILOT agreements, therefore, play a critical role in stabilizing taxes for all of our residents while driving new growth. These projects have contributed nearly \$250,000 directly to the community, funding important initiatives such as bike and pedestrian safety improvements, upgrades to our parks and playgrounds, and necessary infrastructure enhancements.

A common misconception and concern with redevelopment is the impact it can have on our school system, however, the results here in Dunellen have been reassuring. Our redevelopment projects have introduced 51 new students to the school system, which is 25% fewer than originally projected, demonstrating that our Borough is well-prepared to manage growth without overburdening our schools. Moreover, the Borough and the School District

maintain an open line of communication regarding the potential impact of redevelopment and school-aged children, so that we may properly prepare for the completion of these projects and more accurately project any impact on our schools.

In addition to redevelopment, a main focus of our administration has been improving the roads throughout Dunellen through cost-effective means, such as through relationship building and partnerships with New Jersey American Water and PSEG, shared services through the Middlesex County Mill & Pave Program, as well as NJDOT Municipal Aid grants. Since 2020, we have successfully paved just over 10 miles of our 16 miles of municipal roadways. In 2024 alone, 1.8 miles of roads were paved including Center Street, Pulaski Street, Kline Place, North Washington Avenue, Penfield Place, Maple Avenue, Madison Avenue, and Mountainview Terrace. Each completed project includes advanced measures to increase pedestrian safety throughout the Borough such as enhanced striping and signage.

To further enhance pedestrian safety, especially for our students, we have begun work with the New Jersey Department of Transportation on North Avenue and Bound Brook Road to install ADA-compliant sidewalks with flashing beacon crosswalks at key intersections to follow in a later phase of this project. This NJDOT project started in November 2024 and spans from the Warrentville Road & Bound Brook Road intersection to the Jefferson Avenue & North Avenue intersection.

Since 2020, the Borough of Dunellen has been awarded a total of \$8,206,206 in grants from State and Federal agencies for various road, park, environmental, and transit village projects that have already been or will be implemented over the next two years.

For 2024, this includes a \$496,620 NJDOT Municipal Aid Grant for Second Street Phase 1 to improve the roadway, a \$529,000 Transit Village Grant for Bound Brook Road Street Decorative Lighting, and a \$218,500 grant for the Mountainview Terrace Bike Path Project.

Beyond grants and other infrastructure improvements, we have been happy to welcome Comcast as a broadband provider in the Borough of Dunellen, following the adoption of Ordinance 2024-03 at the April 21, 2024, Council Meeting and authorization from the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities. Service to the borough will be delivered with fiber to the home that can provide high-speed internet access, digital video, video on demand, high-definition television, and Xfinity Voice. Comcast will join Optimum/Altice as another provider for internet, television, and phone services in the Borough of Dunellen. This will promote competition, which should improve the quality of services and hopefully competitive pricing, allowing residents to have more options in choosing their provider. Over the last couple of months, Comcast has been conducting underground work throughout the Borough to install fiber lines in preparation of the availability of their cable and internet services.

In 2024, the Borough implemented key organizational changes within the administrative offices aimed at improving efficiency, effectiveness, and transparency in local government operations:

- Alex Miller completed his first full year as Borough Administrator, balancing his part-time role with his full-time duties as Superintendent of Public Works, Parks and Recreation. Alex has streamlined internal processes, improved communication across departments, and identified cost-saving opportunities and shared services. He will continue in this role moving forward.
- Lauren Staats, in her first year as Municipal Clerk, has ensured timely completion of clerical and secretarial tasks, delivered excellent constituent services, coordinated council meeting agendas, and helped run productive council meetings. Briana DeCandia, who earned her registrar certification this year, serves as a front-line administrative assistant in the Clerk's office.
- The Department of Community Development was created, led by Derryck White, the new Director. This department consolidates

several divisions, including the Construction Office, Code Enforcement, and Planning Board, to improve operational efficiency and revenue collection while supporting redevelopment and economic development efforts alongside the office of the mayor.

- Kelly Seader, as Recreation Programs Coordinator, has effectively managed the recreation department, programming, events, and facility scheduling.
- William “Billy” George, the new Communications Coordinator, has enhanced Borough communications, designed graphics, coordinated the Dunellen Report, handled press outreach, and supported community engagement efforts.
- Cherron Rountree supported the Borough Administrator in developing organizational structures, improving processes, exploring shared services, and managing grants.
- Dawn Hutchinson took on the role of full-time Tax Collector, ensuring accessibility for residents while collaborating with the finance team, including part-time CFO Scott Olsen, to streamline communications and budgeting. Maria Santos was hired as a full-time Tax Clerk to assist with tax collection and support Debbie Weaver, our Accounts Payable & Receivables/Human Resources Manager.
- Ken Baudendistal joined the Property Maintenance Department as Second Code Enforcer alongside Property Maintenance Officer George Deene. Together, they are dedicated to ensuring more efficient property maintenance throughout the Borough, which helps maintain the appearance of our neighborhoods and increases public health and safety, as well as the overall property values of homes in Dunellen.

By ensuring each department is properly staffed and cross-trained, we are better equipped to provide efficient, transparent, and effective services to

the residents and businesses of Dunellen, ensuring they receive the value they deserve for their taxes.

This past year saw our continued efforts to further increase in the Borough's communication methods and how we can most effectively distribute information to our residents and beyond. We continue to virtually broadcast each Council Meeting, host engaging Mayoral Town Halls and monthly Walks & Talks with the Mayor, and deliver monthly "Messages from the Mayor" on our website.

Important alerts such as emergencies and road closures are promptly shared across multiple platforms including the Borough's Facebook pages as well as my Facebook and Instagram, @MayorCilento, in addition to the E-Notify system to further spread these notices.

The Borough's website, Dunellen-NJ.gov, remains a centralized hub for all Dunellen information, in addition to Facebook pages, Instagram, email blasts through MyRec, Next Stop Dunellen E-Newsletters, and our quarterly print publication, The Dunellen Report, now in its 14th year, which is mailed to every resident in the Borough on a quarterly basis.

2024 was an exciting and eventful year for the Dunellen Parks & Recreation Department, providing countless hours of community engagement for residents of all ages through successful programs and new initiatives. The department successfully expanded 11 youth programs, including the addition of the Summer Tennis Academy, and organized three adult programs, two senior citizen events, and nine community-wide events for all to enjoy. Flag Football, Spring Track, Tennis, and Summer Camp all saw record participation this year, a feat that is also thanks to the dedication of 58 volunteer coaches who made these programs possible.

Recreation-led events drew larger crowds than ever, and new events such as Volunteer Picnic Day and Founders' Day proved to be big successes that we are excited to build upon further this upcoming year. They also

partnered with the Dunellen Public Library to host family-favorite events including Movies in the Park and a Night Out at the Somerset Patriots.

Meanwhile, Dunellen's senior community has remained as active as ever through Senior Holiday Parties, a Senior Picnic, monthly pizza parties, movie days, and special activities in collaboration with Middlesex County.

The Hometown Heroes Program continued to grow, now honoring 112 of our armed service members with banners along North Avenue and N. Washington Avenue. Out of these 112 banners, 17 were added in 2024.

And of course, one of our most anticipated events of the year was organized through the Recreation Department as we celebrated the Homecoming of Dunellen native and four-time Olympic Gold medalist Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone on September 23, 2024, at the Sydney McLaughlin Track in Columbia Park. Sydney competed this past August in the 2024 Paris Olympic Games where she won the gold in the Women's 400m hurdles, setting her sixth world record in the event with a time of 50.37s. She would go on to join Team USA and win her second gold at the Paris games, and fourth in her Olympic career, in the Women's 4x400 Relay.

This event was attended by local, county, and state officials as well as individuals from throughout Sydney's journey to the Olympics, including Lt. Governor Tahesha Way, Assemblywoman Nancy Munoz, Assemblywoman Michele Matsikoudis, Senator Jon Bramnick, Faber Elementary School Principal Brendan Tennant, Union Catholic Coach Mike McCabe and Principal Sister Percylee Hart, Middlesex County Commissioner Chanelle Scott McCullum, and Sheriff Mildred Scott. Following the conclusion of the event, Sydney greeted her fans, staying at Columbia Park for over two hours to make sure she had the chance to speak with every one, take pictures, and sign autographs.

Our Municipal Clerk's Office has been instrumental in handling a variety of services for our residents, including the processing of pet licenses, and

marriage licenses, and municipal services such as planning the agendas, meeting minutes, ordinances, and resolutions for our Dunellen Borough Council Meetings. Their work during 2024's election season was especially invaluable in ensuring that all residents were able to successfully cast their votes and have their voices heard.

2024 served as a homecoming for the Dunellen Fire Department, marking the end of a challenging journey and signaling a new start for our firefighters. On December 7, we celebrated the Fire Department's resilience, dedication, and commitment to our community with the reopening and rededication of the George W. Hodulik Firehouse after a fire shut down the facility just over three years ago. This state-of-the-art facility is named for lifelong resident, longtime fire department member, and World War II & Korean War veteran, George W. Hodulik. George first joined the department at the age of 35 in 1961 and has been an active member ever since. In anticipation of this milestone event, the Dunellen Fire Department proudly accepted the delivery of Truck 4 and Engine 3, vital pieces of apparatus, which will be joined by Rescue 5 in 2025, further strengthening their ability to serve the people of Dunellen and neighboring communities.

The challenges presented by the temporary loss of the firehouse didn't stop the Dunellen Fire Department. Throughout the rebuilding process, they continued to operate and responded to over 300 emergency calls in 2024, ranging from structure fires to car accidents to unintentional alarm activations.

The Dunellen Borough Police Department celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2024, and it is truly fitting that a milestone year would be filled with many notable happenings. The department saw the retirements of several officers - Sergeant Prescott Chin, Detective Joe Dudley, and Patrolman James Daniel - and I thank them all for their years of dedicated service to our Miracle Mile. We also welcomed a new officer, Saul Vargas, who joined the department on January 16, 2024. Several officers were promoted including Detective Sergeant Nicholas Goldman, Sergeant Jonathan DeAngelo,

Lieutenant John Doherty, and Captain Christopher Beenders, Dunellen's first Police Captain in nearly 30 years.

They had a busy year with 161 arrests, 2,920 motor vehicle stops, and 3,856 summonses issued. As a testament to their hard work, Patrolman Keith Irons was recognized by Mothers Against Drunk Driving in June 2024 for his outstanding efforts in 2023 with the most DWI arrests in Dunellen, in Middlesex County, and for a municipal officer in the State of New Jersey. Patrolman Michael Lowder, Patrolman Marcin Nierodzik, and Drug Recognition Expert Sergeant Brian Robbins were also recognized for their outstanding efforts.

In 2024, the Construction Department achieved significant milestones that highlight the ongoing growth and improvements within our community. Over the past year, the office issued a total of 275 permits, reflecting the thriving development in our Borough. They also conducted 93 rental inspections, a number they look to double in 2025 as we continue to welcome new residents in a thriving housing and rental market. Additionally, Construction completed 34 time-of-sale inspections, which is fewer than last year's total, indicating that more residents are choosing to stay here in our Miracle Mile. Finally, 104 zoning applications were processed, highlighting the work our residents are putting into working on and improving their homes and properties.

I would like to take a moment to recognize the significant accomplishments of our Municipal Court this year, led by the Honorable Judge Katherine Howes, particularly during a time of transition as we welcomed the new Court Administrator, Liz Dabbagh, and celebrated the retirement of Terri Crisafulli. The promotion of Denise Donato to Deputy Court Administrator, and the addition of part-time Violations Clerk Dawn Mayer-Doll were essential in ensuring that our courts continued to run smoothly. Their tireless efforts allowed day-to-day functions to continue without having to delay justice in our court system.

Dunellen's Department of Public Works is a vital backbone of our community, ensuring the daily operation of the Borough through their dedication to maintaining and improving the quality of life for our residents. In addition to their essential responsibilities of maintaining our parks, downtown area, streams, curbside pickup, and snow plowing, DPW swept 310 miles of roads, collecting 380 tons of debris to keep our streets clean and safe. These efforts extended even further to the restoration of 10 catch basins and beautification efforts such as the installation of a new landscape planter at Washington Memorial Park, redesigning two planters at Columbia Park, and planting 45 new trees in our downtown while repairing the surrounding brick pavers to enhance the area's aesthetics and functionality. The department has played an integral role in the maintenance of the Bandalong Bandit Litter Trap, which they helped install in the Green Brook as part of a new Pilot Program that is the first of its kind in New Jersey.

Volunteering in Dunellen thrived in our Miracle Mile this past year, with 167 total volunteers between our Recreation Programs and Volunteer Organizations. One such organization is the Dunellen Downtown Management Organization, also known as the DDMO. The DDMO celebrated its 11th annual HarvestFest, a fall favorite that has become a cherished Dunellen tradition and the organization's largest fundraiser. Proceeds from HarvestFest help fund volunteer-led downtown enhancements, including holiday trees, hanging baskets, planters, and benches.

The DDMO also celebrated the grand openings of several new businesses and commemorated milestone anniversaries for longtime local businesses. In their ongoing support of our local business community, the DDMO once again offered their Small Business Saturday promotion in November, which helps drive traffic to the many unique local businesses throughout the Borough.

Another volunteer organization with a highly successful year in 2024 was the Dunellen Arts, Inclusion, and Culture Commission. The commission made significant strides in enhancing the Borough's public art landscape

with the completion of the Madison Avenue murals and approval of the Prospect Avenue mural, which support the organization's mission to celebrate creativity and community in public spaces. The completed mural depicts characters participating in the wide variety of programming and activities offered by our Recreation Department. Recently, upgraded lighting was installed at the underpass, allowing more opportunities to view this piece once installed in the spring of 2025. The Prospect Avenue mural is expected to be completed and installed by the end of 2025 and the artwork will be a tribute to our first responders who protect and serve our community.

The Dunellen Municipal Alliance has remained committed to its mission of educating our students and community about Substance Abuse Disorders, providing training to 45 youth leaders to facilitate programs for students from grades 1 through 12. Working in teams of two or three, these youth leaders have brought meaningful and engaging lessons directly into the classrooms, empowering students with knowledge and tools to make positive choices. The Dunellen Education Association provided support to the Municipal Alliance by providing valuable educational materials for our students. Looking ahead, the Municipal Alliance continues to work with the Borough Council, Borough Administration, and the Dunellen Borough Police Department to continue in their efforts.

The Dunellen Office of Emergency Management, OEM, secured its fourth consecutive \$10,000 Emergency Management Assistance Grant, which helped facilitate the purchase of a 40ft. Container and shelving for emergency supply storage, along with additional radio equipment accessories. OEM expanded its leadership team with the appointment of Joe Cummins as a second OEM Deputy. Joe has been instrumental in evaluating Dunellen Schools as potential emergency shelters and was recognized in December with an Outstanding Service Award from the New Jersey Emergency Management Association (NJEMA). At the same event, OEM Director Homer Mosley was sworn in as NJEMA's Recording Secretary. Additionally, OEM and CERT member Chris Mueller was appointed as Dunellen's Search and Rescue Coordinator and is being

nominated as Middlesex County's Outstanding CERT Member of the Year for his dedicated service.

OEM also held educational events throughout the year including the first-ever Senior Official All-Hazards Preparedness Workshop at the Dunellen Senior Center, Safety Saturdays sessions, and the August Mayoral Town Hall focused on OEM and Storm Preparedness. They also provided support for major community events throughout the year.

The Dunellen Rescue Squad began their next chapter by saying goodbye to their old building on North Avenue and have begun focusing their energy and attention on continuing to provide high-quality EMS services as they prepare for their eventual move to 635 Bound Brook Road. This new location will house a brand new facility that will allow them to better serve the community, setting the rescue squad up for success for current and future members. We wish them well in this endeavor and offer our support where appropriate.

The Dunellen Parking Authority implemented several changes to better serve the community, including the board transitioning to a monthly meeting schedule to ensure the prompt resolution of operational and business matters, and a new Superintendent position was created to manage day-to-day operations, improving efficiency and responsiveness. Routine maintenance kept all of the Borough's parking meters fully operational, and the organization celebrated the holiday season by offering free parking throughout the month of December. Since June, the Parking Authority has received and resolved 21 complaints related to on-street parking and is actively addressing parking issues near Bound Brook Road, Front Street, and Lincoln Avenue in collaboration with the Borough. Additionally, the Parking Authority worked closely with the Borough Administration to comprehensively amend and adopt an ordinance that aims to improve downtown parking. This ordinance includes no overnight parking along Route 28 and the designation of specific parking spots for free fifteen-minute drop-off & pick-up locations, to better support the needs of businesses in downtown Dunellen.

I'd like to take a moment to honor and remember those who helped shape our community, especially those who are no longer with us. This past year, Dunellen mourned the loss of a dear friend, Mayor John J. Gibney, Mayor of Dunellen from 1988 to 1992, who passed away on May 5, 2024, at the age of 76. As a lifelong resident, he was deeply committed to his family, especially his wife, Jean, and their children. John's public service included four years on the Dunellen Planning Board, two terms on the Borough Council (1982-1987), and as Mayor. He also gave back through the Dunellen Lion's Club, the High School Booster Club, and as a coach for Little League and Pop Warner. John's professional skills helped beautify the borough, designing key signage, including the "Welcome to Dunellen" signs and park markers. To me, he was a friend and mentor, particularly during my time as mayor and I will miss our conversations about the Miracle Mile. May his memory remain eternal, and his legacy of service to Dunellen be remembered for generations.

Now, as we look ahead, I am proud to say that the future of Dunellen is bright and that is reflected in the many upcoming initiatives on the horizon that will continue to propel our Borough forward in 2025 and beyond.

This year, we look to continue our redevelopment efforts, with several approved projects set to begin construction, which will play a key role in revitalizing the downtown area. These projects will capitalize on their transit-oriented design, taking advantage of the proximity to Dunellen Train Station and local bus routes.

The development at 120-126 North Avenue will replace vacant properties with 33 residential units, including five affordable housing units, and 2,192 square feet of commercial space, enhancing walkability and expanding the commercial district.

The North Hamilton Project at 405 North Avenue will transform the former bank and Rescue Squad building into a mixed-use complex, featuring 50 residential units, including seven affordable housing units, commercial

space, parking, and providing Rescue Squad the ability to build a new facility at another location in downtown Dunellen.

The 431-441 North Avenue development will add 62 residential units, including nine affordable housing units, and ground-level retail, further enhancing the downtown area.

The 337 Front Street project will create eight residential units, including one affordable housing unit, in a two-story building, preserving the neighborhood's charm, with rear parking for residents.

The 440 North Avenue project will feature a three-story mixed-use building with 1,155 square feet of commercial space and nine residential units, including one affordable housing unit and an ADA-accessible apartment.

The 501 North Avenue project, which is currently under negotiations and is proposed to redevelop a dilapidated old mechanics shop at the corner of North Avenue and Madison Avenue. This mixed-use project, if approved, will further enhance the aesthetics of this area of downtown.

These projects are essential not only for improving the physical landscape of Dunellen but also for addressing the Borough's fiscal health. As Dunellen's tax base is heavily reliant on residential property taxes - nearly 90% - increasing commercial property values is vital to alleviating the financial burden on homeowners. By generating additional commercial revenue, these projects will provide long-term benefits to the community and stabilize the Borough's finances to reduce reliance on residential taxes while simultaneously stimulating our local economy.

We will also be adding Wayfinding signage that we received funding for through NJDOT Transit Village Grants that will help guide residents and guests to key locations throughout Dunellen such as Borough Hall and public parking areas. Additional signage will detail the history of Dunellen while others will provide QR codes for digital maps and a directory of Dunellen businesses.

We will also continue our assessment of a Special Improvement District for our downtown with INK Creative Strategies and will be holding a follow-up to our October 30, 2024 meeting with local business owners and stakeholders on January 15, 2025, for further discussion and input. Special Improvement Districts serve as an additional tool to support our downtown businesses and provide them with resources to help them thrive.

As a commuter town with its own train station, we will continue to advocate alongside our state representatives from Legislative District 21 for the modernization of the Dunellen Train Station to improve travel for residents and commuters. Year after year, we continue to issue requests to the state offices in Trenton to help fund improvements to the Dunellen Train Station, as we realize that the train station not only needs to be accessible for all, but is a means for access to jobs in and out of the Borough, as well as an economic tool that can be utilized in the ongoing revitalization of our downtown. This Administration and Council will continue advocating so that we are not forgotten when it comes to these needs on the Dunellen Train Station and we appreciate the efforts of Senator Bramnick and Assemblywomen Munoz and Matsikoudis as they have continued to advocate for this funding on our behalf.

As we've done in previous years, we will continue to apply for grants that will allow us to further beautify our Borough and we will work with the Middlesex County Mill & Pave Program, PSEG and New Jersey American Water to improve infrastructure and roads. In 2024, contracts were awarded to two projects that are anticipated to begin in the spring. Second Street Phase 1, which spans from Schwartz Place to Madison Avenue will see the removal and replacement of severely damaged curbs and sidewalks, the installation of new ADA-accessible sidewalk ramps at the intersections, the replacement of any damaged castings, and the installation of two-speed check radar systems, push-button beacon lights, enhanced traffic safety strips, and markings, concluding with the milling and paving of the street. The Washington Avenue Streetlighting Project will see the installation of decorative LED lights along Washington Avenue between First Street & Dunellen Avenue and between North Avenue & the Railroad

Tracks.

2025 will also see further improvements to pedestrian safety with projects scheduled to be bid upon this year including an NJDOT project along North Avenue and Bound Brook Road. This project includes the installation of new ADA-compliant sidewalk ramps along Route 28. Push-button flashing beacons will also be installed at the intersections of Sanford Avenue & Bound Brook Road, Lincoln Avenue & North Avenue, Prospect Avenue & North Avenue, and Jackson Avenue & North Avenue. Additionally, push-button flashing beacons will be installed at Madison Ave at Dunellen Avenue & First Street, and North Washington Avenue at Dunellen Avenue & First Street. The traffic lights at Washington Avenue and Madison Avenue will also receive updated pedestrian crossing signals.

The Borough will also continue their work with the Dunellen Parking Authority for a Downtown Parking Assessment to determine locations for future parking, and how we can make our current lots more accessible for parking and bicycling.

I would like to end my address to you today by thanking the Borough's administration and staff, and our various boards, commissions, and committees. Though there are many I'd like to recognize by name, here are a few individuals:

- Alex Miller, our Superintendent of Parks and Recreation & Public Works, and Borough Administrator;
- Lauren Staats, our Municipal Clerk and Registrar;
- Derryck White, our Director of Community Development;
- Debra Weaver, our Human Resources Manager;
- Kelly Seader, all Recreation Staff, and the Recreation Commission;
- Richard Herkert and all of our Department of Public Works employees;
- Cherron Rountree, our Special Project Advisor;
- William Robertson, our Borough attorney;

- Scott Olsen, our Chief Financial Officer;
- William George, our Communications Coordinator;
- Tax Collector Dawn Hutchison, Tax Office Clerk Maria Santos, and Tax Assessor Dawn Guttschall;
- Judge Katherine Howes, Municipal Court Administrator Liz Dabbagh, Deputy Court Administrator Denise Donato; and Violations Clerk Dawn Mayer-Doll;
- George Deene and Ken Baudendistel, Code Enforcement;
- Scott Brescher, Claribel Acevedo, John McManus, Mike Rossi, Travis Lamberson, and Michael Mullin in our Construction Office;
- Police Chief Daniel Smith, Captain Chris Beenders, Lieutenant John Doherty, Administrative Assistant Debbie Ritchie, and all our Police Officers;
- Chief William Scott of the Dunellen Fire Department and all of their membership;
- Chief Jeff Best of the Dunellen Rescue Squad, and all of their membership;
- OEM Coordinator Homer J. Mosley, Deputy OEM Coordinators William Carlson & Joseph Cummins, and their entire CERTs Team and OEM Staff;

Thank you to all of our government services employees and volunteer agencies. In 2024, we had 167 volunteers participate in recreation programs and/or Borough commissions, committees, and boards, and I hope we continue to build on that number. Dunellen's success is truly measured by those who serve our community.

Finally, I would like to recognize and thank my family and friends for their unwavering support. I extend my love and gratitude to my wife, Lindsay, and my daughter, Kennedy because without them, I would not be able to be here today; my thanks and love to my mother and father, sister and brother, their families, my in-laws, and thank you to former Mayor Robert Seader for his friendship and mentorship throughout all of these years. Finally, I'd like to extend a special thank you to my Pop-Pop, who originally inspired my

journey into local politics. I am humbled and proud to serve the community that helped to raise me and my family.

As Mayor of Dunellen, I promise to work with all members of the Council and all municipal staff to ensure responsible and transparent government is delivered to our constituents, with all residents feeling they are fairly represented and welcomed in our Miracle Mile. May we continue to devote our minds and hearts to public service above all else, so that Dunellen continues to be a place where our neighbors, friends, and families seek to create the greatness that uniquely defines our community. Thank you for your time today, and Happy New Year!