



The Town Crier



"Crossroads of the American Revolution"

Hopewell Township Newsletter 2018, Edition 1

From the Mayor



Welcome to our first Hopewell Township newsletter! We are very excited to begin this new tradition to help us communicate with Hopewell residents and to keep you up to date about the great things happening in our community. The idea for this newsletter came out of discussions

we had with area residents who admire our yearly calendar and wanted to learn more about Township activities in an easy-to-access print format.

In this issue, you will meet the new Township Administrator, Elaine Borges, learn about our AAA bond rating from Standard

& Poor's, learn about our emergency planning, and discover how we are working with local utility companies to improve their service in our area. You will also find an exciting update on the planning of a new community and senior center.

Each newsletter we will feature content from at least two of our five Committee members, on a rotating basis, as well as other information from Township professionals. We look forward to hearing your feedback about other topics you'd like us to cover in other issues.

Kevin D. Kuchinski
Mayor

Standard and Poor's Reaffirms Township's



Each time Hopewell Township sells bonds, it is "rated" by Standard and Poor's, one of the largest rating agencies in the world. A bond credit rating represents the credit worthiness of an organization. This rating is used by potential buyers of the bonds to evaluate risk and pricing of the bond issue.

Hopewell Township typically issues bonds to finance the payment of our road programs, various building improvements and larger equipment purchases. The higher our rating, the lower the interest rate our buyers require from us in repayment, as we are seen as more "credit-worthy."

Hopewell Township had its AAA rating reaffirmed in 2017. This is the highest rating available from Standard and Poor's and reflects our excellent financial management and recent efforts to reduce Township debt. By definition, AAA bonds are Prime Investment grade issues. The credit worthiness of the seller is defined as having an "...EXTREMELY STRONG capacity to meet its financial commitments".

What this all means for Hopewell Township is comfort in knowing that our town is fiscally secure. Additionally, with a AAA rating, buyers typically compete in the bond market when our bonds are sold. Competition pushes the interest rate of the bond downward (because the default risk is minimal), saving us all money through lower interest costs.

Having a strong bond rating is also critical when a municipality faces an emergency. As an example, during the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, the bond market became flooded by towns that were in-need of emergency funding. Many had no bidders. Hopewell Township was fortunate to have a healthy surplus balance and funded our emergency repairs without having to borrow money. In the event the emergency had lasted longer and we had needed additional funding, we would have been able to sell bonds due to our superior rating.

Standard & Poor's Definitions

(www.bankersalmanac.com/addcon/infobank/credit_ratings/standardandpoors.aspx)

Holding Your Utility Partners Accountable

As we prepare for the upcoming winter, it is helpful to reflect on the real challenges that the weather presented to our support systems last winter and spring. After a series of major snowstorms, big winds in March created tremendous storm damage and widespread power outages across the valley. Fires destroyed several township homes. In addition, ice floes on the Delaware River slowed down the Trenton Water Works treatment plant, resulting in many residents receiving advisory notices about unsafe water conditions.

Here in Hopewell Township, we are blessed with fantastic Emergency Support teams. Our Office of Emergency Management coordinated efforts with the Police Department, Emergency Services, and the Volunteer Fire Departments in Titusville, Pennington, and Hopewell. During the storms, the men and women who serve in these organizations helped pump basements, rescued people in their cars, and went door to door in Titusville to alert residents of the rising water. We are filled with gratitude for the extraordinary role that Hopewell Valley's emergency responders played — and will continue to play — during these weather events.

In response to these storms, we have held several meetings with our police, emergency response team, health officer, senior service coordinator, public nurse and others to discuss what we can do to better support residents, especially our older citizens, during and after major weather events. Everyone agreed that improving emergency communications with the utility companies should be our first priority.

Many of us in the Township experienced power outages last winter. The customers of JCP&L in Titusville and areas to the north had some of the longest outages, leaving many residents with no electricity and septic users with no water, and no plumbing for days. In April we held a public meeting with JCP&L and insisted that the utility find ways to improve its repair service and to communicate more effectively with both our residents and the township Emergency Support team. We will continue to monitor JCP&L's performance.

Last winter's storms also led to concern about the water quality. Forty percent of Hopewell Township residents receive water from Trenton Water Works. This past year, these customers received advisories about their water that were late, unclear, and, at times, unintentionally misleading. After working with the Department of Environmental Protection and agreeing

to what is called an Administrative Consent Order (ACO), the City of Trenton agreed to address the many issues that made so many customers anxious last spring, including aging infrastructure, a poor system of public notification, and inadequate staffing. Along with other municipal leaders, I met with then Mayor of Trenton, Eric Jackson, to discuss solutions to these problems. We are fortunate that Mayor Reed Gusciora and his team are making every effort to reach out to each community that TWW serves with information and a commitment to providing safe water.

One concern deserves special mention. In January, Trenton Water Works reported that higher levels of lead had appeared in the water that went to customers in areas of Trenton and Hamilton that have older infrastructure. The news led some Hopewell Township residents to worry about the safety of their drinking water. Fortunately, our infrastructure was built with a looping system which prevents many of these problems from occurring. Nevertheless, we understand the concerns about lead contaminated drinking water. As a cautionary measure, we will continue to press the City of Trenton to test the water in Hopewell Township, and we are doing our own tests to give our residents reassurance that their water is safe.

The professionals from Trenton Water Works recently came to Stony Brook Elementary School for a public informational meeting and we will be sharing material on our website.

This letter has focused on the customers of Trenton Water Works, but we are also here to help residents who have their own well. If you would like free lead testing for your own well, please contact isles.org. They have agreed to provide Hopewell Township residents with free testing kits.

Please know that public safety and public health are our top priorities. I will continue to advocate for Hopewell residents. Feel free to contact me or any member of the Hopewell Township Committee if you have any questions or concerns.

Julie Blake
Deputy Mayor

Unsung Heroes - Thanking Our Volunteers

While the Township residents are served by a talented staff of professionals and five elected officials, there are a large number of people who serve as volunteers on advisory boards. Their hard work and input really make the difference between

a functional government, and one that strengthens and enhances the community. The Township Committee passed this resolution to thank them for their dedication and service.

RESOLUTION #17-400: A RESOLUTION OF THANKS TO HOPEWELL TOWNSHIP VOLUNTEERS

WHEREAS, Hopewell Township is a vibrant and engaged community; and citizens who share their time, energy, and thoughtful advice for the betterment of all Township residents deserve our highest appreciation and deepest thanks; and

WHEREAS, our township functions best when we hear from many voices; and our volunteer advisors provide knowledge and perspective which help inform the decisions we make; and

WHEREAS, our citizen volunteers shoulder a share of the burden of investigation and consideration of the many challenges facing the Township today.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Hopewell Township Committee hereby thanks our dedicated, thoughtful, independent, and selfless volunteers who serve on the many advisory boards for their service; and that the Hopewell Township Committee, on behalf of itself and all residents in Hopewell Township, thank our citizen volunteers for their strong, independent voices and enthusiastic support for the Township.

A New Senior & Community Center: Planning for the Future

The Township Committee has been working towards the creation of a new Senior and Community Center. We are taking concrete steps to make certain that our seniors will get the new, larger space they have dreamed for, and that all the residents of Hopewell Valley will get new recreational and community space that they can enjoy in pursuit of a healthier and more engaged life with their neighbors.

Over the past six months, I, along with other members of Township Committee as well as several of our professionals, have toured many different types of senior, community, and fitness facilities in NJ and PA so we can learn about popular services, management issues, and operating models. We are building a base of information and understanding so that we are as fully informed as possible as we move forward with this project.

We have had numerous outreach meetings with residents and Valley groups about their vision for this new facility. I have spoken to many of our homeowner groups, advocacy groups, and other interested residents to learn what types of facilities and services residents would use. Also, we are having ongoing

dialogues with other community groups to see how we can accommodate their needs in this new space. Finally, we have been actively looking for partnerships that would help us cost-effectively build and operate this facility.

Our lead site is seven acres we have reserved along Washington Crossing Pennington Road behind the ShopRite. We envision the building, parking, and beautiful community gardens in this space.

We reserved \$40,000 in capital funds in the budget last year to design the new center. When we have a full understanding of the needs of the community, we will be able to begin work on a design.

Additionally, Mercer County has funds (\$1.5 million dollars) that we will be able to use for the Senior Center portion of the facility and another set of funds (an additional \$1.5 million dollars) for the active recreation portion. A survey of Valley residents was conducted last year which showed the strong support of the community for this type of project.

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Senior & Community Center continued

Administering the survey was the required step to unlocking the senior focused funds. We have completed that step and have the data to show our residents are enthusiastic about the need for a new facility.

We are also working closely with Pennington and Hopewell Boroughs as well as Mercer County to renovate the current senior center while we plan for and ultimately build the new space. The Center had been scheduled to close this past December, but we worked with our partners to ensure that it will remain safe and operational until the new center is built. The parking lot was repaved and striped last fall with help from a generous donation from Trap Rock and help from Mercer

County. The interior issues will be addressed in the months ahead. Our seniors will have a safe and comfortable facility to use while the new building is planned for and built.

A beautiful community center which can offer our residents a healthy and exciting gathering place is a goal many in the community have had for a long time. While the process is lengthy, we are pushing hard to gather information, listen to residents about their needs, and find community partners to help make the future center a true beating heart of this strong and vibrant Valley we all call home.

Kristen McLaughlin
Township Committee Member

Supersized Brush Collection

Brush collection in Hopewell Township has reached extraordinary proportions this year due to an unusual series of storms, including the epic Winter Storm Quinn. Residents spent months pulling brush to the curb after the thaw. The Public Works Team's focus from May forward has been cleaning up after storms that produced over 12,000 cubic yards of brush, which is more than double the total brush collected in all of 2017 (and approaching Superstorm Sandy-like levels). Furthermore, the Town did not receive state or federal financial assistance this time for storm clean-up. Many New Jersey towns are facing similar challenges.

The Hopewell Township Department of Public Works prioritized brush collection into summer, while safeguarding the roadways, servicing emergency vehicles, maintaining public buildings, and caring for parks. Our goal was to collect the brush as quickly and safely as possible. I am personally grateful to all the public works employees who work tirelessly every day to make Hopewell Township a beautiful place to live. I would also like to thank the many residents who were patient during this remarkable undertaking.

Looking ahead, I would like to offer some suggestions to help with future clean-ups. Township ordinance requires the brush be cut into 4' lengths, neatly stacked, and butt ends facing the

road. Piles stacked like this allow crews to quickly collect the brush at



your property, and then move onto the next pile, expending the least amount of time. When the brush is oversized and piled in a crisscross pattern, the loader operator has to pull the pile apart. Then, a laborer cuts the pieces to fit in a truck. The ordinances are well thought out and crews as well as homeowners are indebted to the residents who follow the rules and fast-track brush collection.

Going forward I have been meeting, and will continue to meet, with staff members to develop operational plans to address unexpected, extended events that may require additional resources. This may include creating a storm emergency reserve like we have for snow removal. I am confident the employees and residents will continue to work together for a better Hopewell Township.

George Snyder
Director of Public Works

Meet Our New Township Administrator: Elaine Borges

Effective at the end of December 2017, long-time Township CFO and resident Elaine Borges was appointed as Township Administrator, succeeding Paul Pogorzelski who served Hopewell Valley for many years as Administrator and Engineer. Elaine will continue to serve as CFO, in addition to her new role as Township Administrator.

Commenting on Elaine's promotion, Township Mayor Kevin Kuchinski said "Elaine has been a huge asset to the Township as CFO, and we look forward to working with her to move Hopewell Township forward. We felt it was important to appoint a leader who understands Hopewell Valley and its residents, and who can hit the ground running."

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Elaine Borges continued

Elaine grew up in Hopewell Valley and went through our public school system, graduating Central High in 1984. She later went to college and earned her BS degree in Accounting and her MBA at Rider University. After school, she started off work at Deloitte as an auditor, steadily moving up through a succession of new roles. In 1995, she was appointed as Township CFO. She and her family currently live in the Township in the house her grandmother used to own.

Looking ahead, Elaine's key priorities for the Township are providing the residents of Hopewell Township access to quality government services with a hometown feel. She also believes in empowering our employees and has been soliciting their ideas for delivering more effective and efficient government.

We wish Elaine the best of luck in her new role. Stay tuned for more updates in future newsletters.

From The Tax Assessors Corner...

Here is an issue we experienced this year. What happens if you have a fire or other major damage to your home before January 1? Property tax values for the coming tax year are typically set as of October 1st every year. However, NJ Statutes 54:4-35.1 states that if material depreciation, such as result from a fire, storm, or demolition, occurs after October 1st and before January 1st, a review and possible change of assessment can occur. To get this done, the property owner must notify the Assessment office of their loss by January 10th. This effectively values property as of the last day of the pre-tax year, correcting its value for tax purposes.

This is a benefit to residents, as it gives them more time than usual to seek a reduction in property value (and the corresponding decrease in their assessment). Taxes for the

year will also be lowered to account for the reduced home value. While this creates some time pressure in our office, it is the right thing to do for our residents. Notably, there have been unfortunate instances of fire damage occurring after New Year's. This leaves property owners responsible for the pre-damaged property value and tax for the entire year. Unfortunately, this is governed by state statutes and beyond municipal control as valuations are tied to the budget process — e.g. municipalities must finalize their assessment base well before tax rates are finalized. I hope this gives you a little more insight into how we work.

Next newsletter, we will cover the process for valuation changes and what you can do if you think your assessment is too high.

Hopewell Township Celebrates Hometown Heroes

We are thankful to be so well-served by our highly professional and caring Police and Fire Departments. We would like to highlight several officers and emergency personnel who changed lives in the course of their duties this past year.

On November 20, 2017 at approximately 8:00 am, Officer Mark Panzano responded to a Mine Road address for the report of a twenty-year old man suffering from cardiac arrest. Upon their arrival at the scene, he took over CPR from the victim's mother. Detective Louis Vastola and Hopewell Fire Department Deputy Chief William Mullen then arrived on scene to assist. Detective Vastola took over chest compressions while Deputy Chief Mullen utilized a Bag Valve Mask and oxygen to provide respirations for the victim.

Due to their quick actions and their cooperative effort with each other and responding emergency personnel, these officers were able to provide lifesaving assistance to this victim and place him under the care of more advanced medical personnel.

For their actions, Officer Panzano and Detective Vastola was awarded the department's "Life Saving Award" in January of this year.

On December 15, 2017 at approximately 5:56 pm, Officer Robert Voorhees and Officer George Peterson responded to a Pennington Harbourton Road property for the report of a dog that fell through the ice in a pond. The dog was unable to get out of the pond on its own.

Officers Robert Voorhees and George Peterson, along with Hopewell Valley Emergency Services and Pennington Fire Company personnel arrived at the scene to assist the dog's owner. Due to their quick actions, disregard for their own safety, and their cooperative effort with each other and responding emergency personnel, these officers were able to rescue Nisel from the pond and reunite her with her owner. For their actions, Officer Voorhees and Officer Peterson were awarded the department's "Award of Merit." For his actions, Specialist VanDoren was presented with a "Letter of Appreciation."

Thank you, Officers Panzano, Voorhees and Peterson, Detective Vastola, and Specialist Van Doren. The entire Valley is grateful for your service.

Township of Hopewell

201 Washington Crossing Pennington Road
Titusville, New Jersey 08560-1410

Hopewell Township Upcoming Events

- **October 20th:** Electronics/Shredding Event, Public Works Facility, 9AM-1PM
- **October 25th:** Planning Board Meeting, 7PM
- **November 1st - Dec 14th:** Leaf Pickup Month
- **November 3rd:** Rabies Clinic, Public Works Facility, 10AM-12PM
- **December 3rd:** Communities of Light
- **December 10th:** Committee Meeting, 7PM
- **December 13th:** Planning Board Meeting, 7PM
- **December 17th:** Committee Meeting, 7PM
- **November 15th:** Planning Board Meeting, 7PM

Looking for ways to be more engaged
with Hopewell Township?
Please sign-up at www.hopewellnj.org