

February 11, 2020

Sea Isle City
2020 Budget Message and State of the City

Good morning. Last year, we decreased the local tax rate by half a penny; and when I delivered the state of the City then, I committed to a zero tax increase in 2020. I'm pleased to announce that we will be following through on that commitment this year -- there is no tax rate increase in the budget I'm delivering to council today. In addition, for the seventh year in a row, there will be no rate increases to our water and sewer utility.

Our surplus position is the strongest it's ever been. We started this year with an available surplus of \$6.4 million; and to put this into perspective, that amount is nearly double the surplus we had 7 years ago.

There is no doubt that the City is in great financial shape. We've accomplished this by continually analyzing our operations, following policies and procedures to ensure efficiency and economy; and working with council and the public to deliver the services needed to maintain a safe and clean community. We've also made sure we invest in our infrastructure. As everyone is aware, we have replaced underground water and sewer systems throughout the City; and followed that up with extensive road paving programs. We've upgraded our parks and playgrounds; construction is underway for decorative lighting and a speaker system on the promenade to be in place for this coming summer; and we have a contract in place for decorative street lighting projects in our commercial districts along Landis Avenue, Park Road, and 63rd Street. Next week, we'll receive bids for construction of a beautiful new fishing pier, gazebo, and kayak launch next to

the Dealy field complex, just west of the hockey courts; a project completely funded by the county open space program.

From an infrastructure standpoint, flood mitigation remains our highest priority. Last year we built the City's first pumping station; and we followed that up with submission of a grant application that is currently under review by FEMA for construction of another pump station that will serve the area between about 44th and 47th Streets. We are also working with the county on planning and design for future pump stations to address other low lying areas in the City. This is an ongoing effort that follows through on the citywide flooding analysis completed 18 months ago. As with all of our projects of this magnitude, we've followed a systematic process of planning that establishes priorities and ensures that we are investing taxpayers' money in the projects that will best serve the entire community.

Sea Isle City remains the leader in the state in flood mitigation efforts, and our property owners enjoy the highest discount to their flood insurance policies available in the state – 35%.

Our beaches are our greatest natural resource, and as everyone knows, they're in need of replenishment in the downtown area and at the south end. The good news is that the Army Corps of Engineers has a contract in place for replenishment of these beaches, and the contractor, Great Lakes Dredge and Dock, is expected to arrive around the end of April in time to perform the beachfill prior to the summer season. Currently, they are planning to start at the south end, and complete that area first before proceeding to the center of town. The contractor is

starting at the south end in order to complete that work before restrictions go into effect relative to endangered birds that nest at the far south end.

On the bay side, we are awaiting permits from the DEP to perform dredging of our marina and lagoon areas that need to be deepened; and we're working with property owners adjacent to 38th Street and Venicean Road to allow them to piggyback on the project to get their slips dredged.

We've worked with our county partners to complete critical work to the entrances to Sea Isle, and now enjoy a completely rebuilt causeway and a rehabilitated TI bridge.

At the north end of the island, we are continuing with our efforts to obtain the ability to place sewers north of 22nd Street. This has been a daunting task, with difficulties in overcoming environmental regulations, but it is ultimately the right thing to give the City and our property owners the opportunity to install sewers if we want them. It is the best thing for the environment, and for the long term viability of the properties at the north end.

Last year, we went through an extensive public process to determine what the community wanted in regard to a future community center. We held public meetings, we solicited information online; and we held a referendum on the question of whether or not to include a public pool in a future community center. From the feedback we received, it was clear that a majority of Sea Isle residents and taxpayers believe that a public pool should not be part of the project. Accordingly, council voted to authorize the administration to proceed with the design and construction of a new facility on Park Road.

Within the next month we expect to bring forward a professional services contract to develop detailed conceptual plans that can be shared with council and the public. As we move forward on this project, we will involve the entire community in the planning process to ensure we build a facility that meets all of our needs. While we seem to have settled on the matter of building a community center at Park Road, the details of such a project need to be worked out, and it's important that we take the time to do this right. Like our City Hall, this is a facility that will serve the community for generations to come. As we did on City Hall, we'll partner with Ocean City on the provision of project management services for the construction of our new community center. Over the past several years, we have developed and expanded shared service programs with Ocean City in the areas of project management, construction, and administration. Such shared services provide for cost savings and a sharing of talent and resources – it is truly a matter of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts.

As some may have heard, last month we had the first birth in Sea Isle City in over 40 years, as our EMT's and police responded to a woman in labor – and the baby did not want to wait to get to the hospital, so our first responders assisted in a successful delivery. I mention this to highlight the importance of our first responders – while this was clearly an unusual situation, there are countless situations that occur throughout the year, even in the winter, that require trained professionals to respond at a moment's notice. Most of these situations go unnoticed; but this was worth mentioning; and my thanks go to all of our first responders for their dedication and professionalism.

Over the years, we've established several consistent themes that are fundamental to good stewardship of government:

Keeping the City safe.

Keeping the City clean.

Maintaining our infrastructure and assets.

Maintaining financial stability.

Nurturing public/private partnerships.

We've also embraced the core values of respect, integrity, tolerance, and commitment to excellence. These things aren't exciting and some may say they're simply platitudes or clichés; but that's not the case. Our values form the foundation on which everything is built. It's why we've embedded them in our city seal... and we should remember that we established these together – as a community.

Another thing we've tried to do is keep everybody informed about what their local government is doing. Every two weeks we issue our newsletter to over 8,100 recipients – and that number continues to grow. We let folks know what's going on in the administration, with council, with public projects; and inform everyone of upcoming events and activities. Since we launched our newsletter, our goals have been basic – be timely and accurate in what we put out. In this age of social media and the internet, news is 24/7 and, unfortunately, you can't always trust all of it; some even call it fake news. But when it comes to Sea Isle's newsletter, we take great pride in that you can count on its accuracy.

I know that government isn't often popular. Frankly, there are plenty of examples of governments that have completely earned their unpopularity. But I believe through our actions, Sea Isle's government has done the right things to earn the trust of those we serve. Of course, we need to continue to prove ourselves, and

we expect that our citizens will hold us accountable. We also know we can't please everybody, but I promise you we will always do what we believe is the right thing for all the people of Sea Isle.

Thank you; and may God continue to bless Sea Isle City.

Leonard C. Desiderio

Mayor