

# BOROUGH OF HIGHLANDS, N. J.

INCORPORATED 1900



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COUNTY OF MONMOUTH

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CAROLYN BROULLON  
MAYOR

MICHAEL MUSCILLO  
ADMINISTRATOR

MICHELLE HUTCHINSON  
BOROUGH CLERK

## Mayor's Message & The State of the Borough

### Mid-Year Report inclusive of 6/30/21

On January 1, 2021, we started the year as we usually do, with the Council re-organization meeting. However, nothing was usual about this meeting. We were all home as we met virtually on Zoom. We were still in the height of the pandemic, and unbeknown to all, we were heading into our worst month ever of new COVID-19 cases. Our prior highest new case total was December at 65. Working closely with the Administrator and Department Heads, we continued to balance the management of the health crisis and do the Borough's business.

The Mid-Year Report by month is as follows:

#### January:

- New Council Members were sworn in: Kevin Martin, Donald Melnyk and Jo-Anne Olsewski.
- We welcomed new Administrator, Michael Muscillo [pronounced moo-shell-o]. He brings with him over 20 years of experience and an impressive rolodex of contacts.
- Also sworn in were Patrolman Alexander Braswell, Special Law Enforcement Officer II Kevin Connor, Fire Chief William Kane and First Aid Squad Captain William Mount.
- January marked the roll-out of the vaccine to Healthcare Workers, First-Responders, other Essential Employees and those 65+.
- Ordinances:
  1. Vacated the sidewalk section at the end of Cornwall St. This was done in the 1980s but was never filed with the County.
  2. Re-established the lease of property with the Waterwitch Beach Improvement Association after a lapse of 20 years.
  3. Repealed the ordinance for servers of alcohol to have Police issued ID cards as it is redundant to existing State law.
  4. Added two residents and two business owners to the Economic Development Review Board to have more inclusion on the Board.
  5. Revised the Mercantile License process to be streamlined.
  6. Added the Civil Service title Confidential Assistant to the Mayor and Administrator.
- New COVID-19 cases = 72

**February:**

- Extended our Open Space Grant deadline to 3-31-22.
- Received \$11,050 FEMA Grant for Hazard Training.
- Designated Alpine Residential LLC as the Conditional Redeveloper for the Shadowlawn property.
- Expanded the Bay Avenue Area in need of Redevelopment Study to include all properties in the Central Business District.
- The first Economic Development Review Board annual report was given for the year 2020.
- Ordinances:
  1. Approved designated parking space for a disabled resident.
  2. Updated stormwater ordinance per DEP mandate.
  3. Removed cannabis dispensary from prohibited use.
- New COVID-19 cases = 60

**March:**

- Indoor dining began with small capacity.
- Delivered the first ever Year in Review and State of the Borough for 2020.
- Streamlined outdoor dining permit.
- Working with the County Department of The Aging, I was able to get 35 seniors vaccinated.
- Designated Captain's Cove Marina, LLC as the Conditional Redeveloper for the marina property.
- Secured one company to service all sprinklers Borough Parks.
- Contracted with File Bank, Inc for electronic document management services.
- Purchase power-loader equipment for our First Aid Squad.
- Received Mayors Wellness Campaign designation as a "Healthy Town Up and Coming".
- Ordinances:
  1. Converted our \$2.4 million dollar Community Disaster Loan from a short-term debt to long-term debt as mandated by the Local Finance Board.
- New COVID-19 cases = 47

**April:**

- Two weeks of town-wide clean up.
- All folks 18+ made eligible for vaccine.
- Very successful Earth Day event with the help of many residents, civic groups, PBA, FD, PD, the Monmouth Conservancy and Mayor & Council Members.
- Working with the County Department of The Aging, I was able to get 44 seniors vaccinated.
- Community Development Block Grant confirmed for \$179,605 to help repair Marine Place West.
- Closeout of Cedar St & Jones Creek improvements cost savings of \$13,582.
- Recreation Department partners with HES STEAM and OPAK Camp for Summer Camp Program.
- Appointed Martin Hawley Special Law Enforcement Officer Special I.
- Ordinances:
  1. Establish Commercial Filming Ordinance.
  2. Reappropriate \$215,587 of bonds to use for various roads in the Borough.
- New COVID-19 cases = 26
- The State released municipal level vaccination rates: 4/30 Highlands 1 shot Total = 39%, 18+ = 46%, 65+ = 65% Completely Vaccinated: Total = 27%, 18+ = 31%, 65+ = 53%

**May:**

- Purchased playground equipment for Community Center, Huddy, Snug and Veteran's parks using budgeted items and unused Open Space grants from 2016 and 2018.
- Contracted with Heyer & Gruel to conduct the Midpoint Review and Annual Monitoring Report Required by The Fair Housing Act.
- Contracted with O&M for sanitary sewer operations, saving the Borough \$3,600 annually.
- Council Meeting returned to in-person on 5/18/21.
- Ordinances:
  1. Saved \$462,000 by refinancing old sewer authority bond.
  2. Updated raffle ordinance to allow drawings on Sundays.
- New COVID-19 cases = 2
- 5/31 Highlands 1 shot Total = 44%, 18+ = 51%, 65+ = 69% Completely Vaccinated: Total = 37%, 18+ = 43%, 65+ = 61%

**June:**

- Coordinated Senior vouchers for use at the Farmer's Market. These vouchers have not been distributed to our seniors since 2016.
- Submitted grants for Green Acres and Urban Parks to help pay for Skate Park upgrades. We met with Sporn Ranch who provided a plan. Many residents sent in letters of support and those letters were attached to the grant submissions.
- Add trust accounts for donations to new Borough Hall and skate park improvements.
- Collaborate with VNA and HBP to offer vaccines at the Farmer's Market every Saturday and selected events in the Borough.
- Ordinances:
  1. Revised peddler's license to include services as well as goods.
  2. Repealed obsolete parking ordinance.
  3. Updated ordinance for off-duty police officer rates to reflect collective bargaining agreement.
  4. Issuance of \$4,750,000 in bonds to help pay for new borough Hall.
- New COVID-19 cases = 0
- 6/30 Highlands 1 shot Total = 48%, 18+ = 54%, 65+ = 71% Completely Vaccinated: Total = 43%, 18+ = 49%, 65+ = 65%

**The state of the Borough at the end of June 2021:**

- Our community continues to pull together during this pandemic. Residents, staff, businesses, civic/charitable organizations, and clergy continue to work together to get us through the biggest health crisis of our lifetime.
- The tax rate went down for the second consecutive year.
- The combined valuation of all properties in the Borough continued to rise to \$764,905,800. This was an increase in valuation of \$23,784,000.
- We are updating our parks using budgeted dollars as well as two Open Space grants.
- So far this year, I participated in many calls/meetings as follows: 4 with Federal representatives; 16 with State representatives; 8 with County representatives and 11 Municipal to make sure Highlands received all information, grant opportunities and awareness of programs being offered.

**The Governing Body's Goals for the remainder of 2021 with updates:**

- Create Overlook Park at old Stymie's property [empty lot diagonally across from OLPH] – reviewing proposals.
- Enter the Community Rating System [CRS] program for lower flood insurance - getting proposals from engineering.
- Validate all Borough owned property/Update Open Space Plan [last 2008] & Registered Open Space Inventory [last 1992] – Open Space Committee & legal will complete this year.
- Update slope ordinance – with Shade Tree Commission for update recommendations.
- install higher riprap [rock wall in front of boardwalk] at Vets Park – with Engineering for design.

**Status on other priorities:**

- Replace trees on the slope with sea grass – grant writer looking for grant.
- Remove unused phone and cable lines throughout the Borough – waiting for response from both Verizon and Comcast.
- Move electric out of flood zone in Borough parks – waiting for quote.
- Address inequities in tax assessments – looking into different software, must work with County on this.
- Address runoff issues from Monmouth Hills – on-going discussions with State, County and Middletown officials. Monmouth Hill's hired an engineering firm to try to solve the problem. Waiting for that to be given to us.
- Complete North and Valley St pump improvements [including Valley pipe to the bay] – this is with engineering.
- Complete Waterwitch Pump upgrades and install backup generator – engineering is working with FEMA.
- Waterwitch and Bay Avenues sanitary project – waiting for DEP to signoff so we can go to bid.

Sadly, we lost many friends and Highlands' legends in 2021. Some due to COVID-19, some because of issues surrounding the virus and others with no relation to it. May each of their lives be cherished and honored and may they all rest in peace.

- Ronald Ledder 1-12
- Nina Flannery 1-20
- Carol Bucco 1-26
- Ray Goddard 2-16
- John Burton 2-26
- Joseph Amiel 2-26
- Frank McGarry 4-8
- Anthony Caizza 4-21
- Maureen Leahy 5-15
- John Murphy 5-29
- Lucille Kane 6-14

All the best to you and yours in 2021, we will get through this together.  
Mayor Carolyn Broullon