

2023 MAYORS ANNUAL ADDRESS

Good evening everyone and Happy New Year. Like you, I am so grateful to be a member of this great community. Each year seems to bring more good fortune to our community and 2022 was no exception.

People move to Mountainside and continue to live here for long periods of time for a variety of reasons; low taxes which remain stable, high property values which continue to rise, a high level of services that our residents expect and deserve, recreation programs for residents of all ages, maintenance and improvements of our infrastructural maintenance, and of course, the small-town community way of life that we are so proud of.

I have always fought to maintain the quality of life that makes Mountainside the attractive community that it is, and I will continue to do so. Last year, the municipal tax increase on the average assessed house in Mountainside was \$56. In order to keep taxes stable we will continue to do what we have always done. First thing, we will continue to vigorously apply for grants. In 2022 we received over \$825,000 in grants. We've already applied for over \$510,000 worth of grants. These grants will help cover the costs of maintaining our infrastructure, our roads and our sewer system, to help make improvements to our facilities and to enhance and expand the services we provide to our residents.

This past year we completed paving improvements including curb construction, drainage improvement, driveway repairs, road repairs, milling, and paving of High Point Drive, Pheasant Hill Road, Garrett Road, Hickory Lane, Sunrise Parkway, and sections of Old Tote Road. In addition, in coordination with Elizabethtown Gas Main replacement program the Borough completed, the milling and resurfacing of full street sections of Greenwood Road, Hillside Ave, and Mountainview Road without cost to the Borough.

In addition, through our Senior Citizen Coordinator we received grants from the Union County Community Block Grant to support both Senior Services and the Transportation program, received a grant of \$36,000 to replace the front doors of Borough Hall, received a grant from Union County for Municipal Alliance for incorporating strategies in the schools and the community that address underage drug and alcohol awareness and received grants from the Watts Foundation for sensory communication kits, bags, new tables and chairs for the community room, carbon monoxide detectors for seniors, banners for veterans, the Senior Prom and new items for the police break room.

We also continue to participate in multiple shared services that keep our taxes under control, including the Joint Insurance Fund, Westfield Board of Health, UC Server for Information, Flu Clinics, UC Public Assistance, UC First Alert, UC Print Shop, UC DPW Equipment and Truck Loan Program, Emergency Services Mutual Aid Program, which includes Police, Fire, and Rescue. We have also entered into a shared Service Agreement with the Board of Education to provide 2 full time Police officers to help enhance the security of our children, teachers, and staff at Deerfield and Beechwood Schools. We also provide snow plowing services to the Board of Education. These cost

savings and grants enable us to better serve our residents and boost our quality of life with a variety of recreational programs and infrastructure enhancements. For example, the Recreation Department has expanded upon existing programs for children, adults, and seniors to include additional multisport camps, more pickeball lessons and tournaments started a Women's Softball league with Scotch Plains and the Rec. Department continues to work with our Senior Citizen Coordinator to provide programming for our Seniors including health and fitness classes, game nights, technology workshops, Bingo and Craft Events. The Kids Recreation Trust Fund Grant was used to make field improvements at the Borough Hall softball and soccer fields and the remainder of the grant is being used for baseball and softball field repairs at Deerfield School.

However, the true essence of why Mountainside is such a great community is "Our Volunteers". Volunteers are the fabric of small town living and the back bone of our community. We have a great Volunteer Fire Department as well as Volunteer Rescue Squad. Through their leadership, both organizations have been able to recruit new members, especially young members, allowing both organizations to respond quickly and effectively when emergencies arise. They continue to spend countless hours in training, preparing, and maintaining equipment to keep Mountainside safe.

Our Volunteer Rescue Squad volunteered over 16,000 hours; developed the Mountainside Squad EMS Special Operations Unit and responded to a record breaking 934 calls. The Mountainside Volunteer Fire Department has also volunteered over 9500 hours answering calls and participating in special assignments in protecting the Mountainside Community. The Borough also purchased a 2022 Pierce Fire Truck to replace an aging and obsolete truck.

The members of both organizations have missed holidays, birthdays, and normal dinners with families and friends; all to ensure the safety of all our residents. I thank both organizations, they are fabulous. However, even though they have done a great job in recruiting this doesn't mean they don't need more volunteers. If anyone is interested in volunteering they should contact the Fire Department and Rescue Squad or Borough Hall. We also have a number of volunteer organizations: Mountainside Youth Baseball and Softball, Mountainside PAL, VFW, Lions Club, Rotary Club, Friends of the Library, Mountainside Beautiful and the Elks. We have Daisy, Girl Scouts, Brownies, Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, and Eagle Scouts. These are all excellent volunteer organizations that help to provide numerous additional programs for our children and adults (including seniors), and I encourage all who can volunteer for these incredibly important organizations to volunteer.

With respect to our Mountainside Police Department, this year we were able to fill all leadership positions in the Department for the first time in many years. Michael Jackson was promoted to Captain, Shaun Bendik and William Stolting were promoted to Lieutenants; Christopher Feighner and Andrew Yasinski were promoted to Sergeants, and James Urban, William Sforza, Kevin Pierre, and Jonathan Hagan were all promoted to Corporals. Congratulations. We also hired several new police officers including Melissa Hernandez, and Dan Consentino. Welcome to Mountainside.

Together with our residents we have celebrated many outstanding community events in 2022 which include the Annual Baseball and Softball Parade, Memorial Day Celebration and Parade, the Annual 4th of July Fireworks, Tree Lighting and various activities at the Hetfield House and Levi Cory House and the Menorah Lighting. All of these events just enhance the small-town suburban way of Mountainside.

I am sure you have noticed all the excessive building of apartments and other residential developments as part of the Affordable Housing Plans in our surrounding communities and there are more coming. However, Mountainside was ahead of the curve when it comes to Affordable Housing. Mountainside has a Court approved affordable housing plan which allows for only 6 units per acre which is the lowest in the state. The Echo Ridge development on Route 22 was the first part of the plan and is completely sold out. The second is the Alpine Ridge, a luxury 55 and over community which requires minimum rents of \$4500 per month. This project is fully rented. The newest project which is part of our affordable housing plan is in Park West in Mountainside on Mountain Ave. The first building is almost completed, and the second building is under construction. There are 4 units under contract. Also included in the plan is Arbor Terrace which is an award-winning Senior Living Community.

As a result of our affordable housing plan, Mountainside is able to maintain its single-family residential character while satisfying the state mandated affordable housing requirements.

I would also like to update the residents on several matters:

First, the Borough has completed the purchase of the property on the corner of New Providence Road and Mountain. The property has been cleared and seeded. The next step is to develop the plans for the Passive Park which the Borough in conjunction with Mountainside Beautiful are beginning to work on. Maybe some of you have noticed the holiday tree there this year. Mountainside is a small town with many parks. We are fortunate to have great areas to walk, hike, bike, as well as playgrounds and fields. Through my healthy Mayor programs, I have walked with many of you or have seen you walking. It is a great way to meet people.

Second, the Borough has completed the construction of a salt dome on the property that was purchased at 1329 Route 22 E. The day before Christmas Eve was the first chance for our DPW and snow contractor to utilize this dome. The ability to obtain salt in a facility in Mountainside lead to the safe and efficient salting of our road. I know this salt dome will be beneficial for the Borough in keeping our citizens safe for years to come.

Third, As I have indicated previously, the Borough is in the final stages of finalizing the contract with Our Lady of Lourdes Church for the purpose of ensuring it will remain for recreational use and would never be used for residential development. I anticipate these negotiations will be completed shortly.

Mountainside is a gem. I am proud to serve as the Mayor of Mountainside. I will pledge to maintain the quality of life in Mountainside and our long-standing record of making sure decisions about the challenges that we face in Mountainside are always in the best

interest of Mountainside. We must always strive to keep Mountainside the great community we all love.

Happy New Year to everyone, God Bless Mountainside, and God Bless you all.