



MANCHESTER TOWNSHIP

1 COLONIAL DRIVE • MANCHESTER, NJ 08759 • (732)657-8121

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

Robert S. Arace
MAYOR

**From the Office of Mayor Arace
Presented to Council on January 22, 2024**

State of the Township 2024

Council President Conniff, Vice President Vacarro, Members of the Council, and the people of Manchester Township:

Though perhaps a new tradition for our town, it is my privilege to address you today and share with you the State of Manchester Township. 2023 was a year of progress, collaboration, and challenges, and I am proud to report on the positive developments that have shaped our community.

Environmental Stewardship:

One of our top priorities has been acquiring and preserving open space in Manchester. Our administration and open space committee dedicated their efforts to search out parcels of land threatened by overdevelopment. Because of our hard work, I am excited to report that in 2023, Manchester Township, with the help of the Ocean County's Natural Lands Trust Fund, has safeguarded more than 100 acres of land from development. Our most notable accomplishment in our work for land preservation was the acquisition of the Cherry Street property. This 34.5-acre preservation prevented the construction of 96 apartments. As part of this preservation agreement, U.S. Homes generously committed to constructing and donating three single-family homes intended for wounded veterans. We are looking forward to continuing this preservation in 2024.

Economic Development:

I think almost every Manchester resident sees that our town has struggled with economic development over the years, and I am thrilled about the recent positive transformations taking place in Manchester Township's retail scene. The successful establishment of businesses such as Starbucks, Jersey Mike's, UPS, and more have already shown that not only are Manchester residents in support of new retail options, but businesses want to come here. This is a testament to the rising median income, and the flourishing of our new businesses serves as a promising indicator. This not only enhances our town's economic landscape but also positions us as an attractive destination for prospective businesses. Our mission for 2024 is clear – to take advantage of the recent interest from retailers and work with our Economic Development Committee to create an environment where businesses can thrive. We are actively working to attract new ventures that will help offset budget obstacles while meeting the diverse needs of our residents.

Infrastructure and Public Works:



MANCHESTER TOWNSHIP

1 COLONIAL DRIVE • MANCHESTER, NJ 08759 • (732)657-8121

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

Robert S. Arace
MAYOR

Acknowledging the neglected state of Manchester Township's water and sewer system, substantial efforts have been made to revitalize the infrastructure. In 2023, recognizing the need for a transformative approach, a comprehensive 10-year improvement plan and rate study were drafted by the Administration and approved by the Council. We will begin to see this revitalization effort in action, with our first focus on the water main at Buckingham Drive and water meter replacement projects during the year. Our primary goal is to continue to deliver high quality, safe, affordable drinking water for all our residents.

In addition to these water and sewer improvements, we are pleased to announce the reinstatement of our annual road maintenance and drainage improvement plan, which includes resurfacing efforts for sections of Pine Lake Park, Roosevelt City, and Holly Oaks. This decision has been facilitated, in part, by a state grant. I look forward to presenting a comprehensive plan with our Director of Public Works to the Council this year that will include the most distressed sections of township roads. Residents can expect smoother, safer roads as we prioritize the upkeep of our infrastructure.

Emergency Services:

In 2023, Manchester Township prioritized significant upgrades in emergency services to address the growing concern for neighborhood safety among our residents, volunteers, and law enforcement. Key improvements included enhancing our fire communication system with upgraded radios, mobile units, and pagers, supported by an increased maintenance budget for Volunteer Fire Companies. Additionally, we invested in upgrading police vehicles and focused on bolstering police staffing levels. These advancements are a direct response to the need for heightened safety measures in our neighborhoods. By making these upgrades, we ensure that our emergency services can effectively keep up with the evolving safety needs of our residents.

Rental/Housing:

We've made significant updates to our rental inspection processes to ensure safer and better living conditions for residents. Our Landlord Registration Ordinance has been revamped to provide clearer guidelines and defined procedures, holding landlords to higher standards. The updated ordinance now includes rigorous identification and property insurance requirements during the application process, enhancing accountability for property owners.

We've also revised our Certificate of Re-occupancy Regulations to align with the International Property Maintenance Code and N.J. State Housing Code. These changes ensure that both rental and non-rental units comply with governing codes, contributing to improved housing quality in Manchester Township.



MANCHESTER TOWNSHIP

1 COLONIAL DRIVE • MANCHESTER, NJ 08759 • (732)657-8121

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

Robert S. Arace
MAYOR

Looking ahead, we're in the early stages of establishing a dedicated "Housing Division." This division aims to implement strict housing standards, prioritizing public health, safety, and the welfare of our community. Through a cyclical inspection schedule, we plan to address concerns related to overcrowding and occupancy limitations, setting clear guidelines for maximum occupancy in dwellings. These efforts reflect our commitment to enhancing rental housing conditions and creating a safer living environment for all residents.

Rent-leveling achievements:

During the 2022 election, I became aware of a pressing issue affecting residents in our manufactured home communities. In the face of high inflationary pressure, some communities experienced annual rent increases exceeding 6%, placing a significant burden on fixed-income seniors who make up a substantial portion of these neighborhoods. Recognizing the urgency of the matter, I made a campaign promise to address this issue promptly. Collaborating with our Township Council, we successfully drafted a township ordinance within the first 60 days of my Administration to protect residents, particularly seniors, from unjust rent increases by certain landlords. We worked hard to make sure this ordinance came into effect within the first three months of our Administration, marking a significant victory for our residents. Following its amendment in November 2023, the Rent Leveling Board has taken on the role of mediator, and we anticipate timely evaluations of both landlord and resident requests throughout the year.

Whiting Annex:

The successful completion of the Whiting Annex in 2023 has significantly expanded support for seniors on the west side of town. Housing satellite offices for Manchester Senior Outreach, Ocean County Veterans Services, and the Mayor's Senior Community Liaison, the annex has become a vital hub for delivering life-changing programs and essential government services. The positive impact of these additions is evident, and as we look ahead to 2024, there is enthusiastic anticipation for further growth, particularly benefiting Whiting Senior residents.

Community Engagement and Exciting Events:

In 2023, Manchester experienced a series of successful events orchestrated by our recreation department. The township proudly hosted its first Farmer's Market and celebrated a festive Christmas in the Pines, which brought together our young families and retirees. We are so proud to have these events that bring a sense of community to residents of all ages. As we set our sights on 2024, our commitment is unwavering – we aim to elevate and broaden these events further, ensuring the continued enjoyment and participation of all residents in the vibrant happenings of our community.

Navigating Budget Challenges:



MANCHESTER TOWNSHIP

1 COLONIAL DRIVE • MANCHESTER, NJ 08759 • (732)657-8121

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

Robert S. Arace
MAYOR

Upon assuming office in 2023, we immediately confronted budgetary challenges and had to look for ways to ease the burden on taxpayers in a difficult economic climate by creating a plan that lowered the tax hit in 2023 and set the stage for a more positive budget outlook in 2024. I want to express my gratitude to each council member for their commitment to getting our budget back on track. While it's a step in the right direction, there's still more work ahead to get us back to a healthy financial state. I look forward to presenting the Council with our budget for 2024.

Though we've come a long way in just one year, there's more work to be done, and make no mistake – we will continue to roll up our sleeves and make the tough decisions you elected us to make. My focus this year includes building on the progress we made in 2023 and implementing new initiatives for 2024 to improve the quality of life for all Manchester residents. We will continue our preservation efforts to protect Manchester's rural character, increase municipal engagement with the community, take responsible action to improve our water infrastructure, and prioritize crucial economic development in town. And lastly, re-initiate our road improvement program, which will have a positive impact on drainage and pavement issues in our most affected neighborhoods, from east to west.

I thank you for your continued support and your faith in our leadership as we continue making Manchester Township an exceptional place to live, work, raise a family, and retire.