

Promises Kept: Year Three | 2020 Year in Review

Our 300th year was not one any of us anticipated. It was a year marked by grief, isolation, and loss, but also by resilience, hope, generosity, and compassion. We rightfully mourn and focus on the lives we lost to COVID and the stolen memories of missed personal milestones. But, as 2020 comes to a close, it's also important to recognize the progress we made as a community, reflect on what we accomplished this year in spite of its challenges, and offer appreciation and gratitude to those who made it possible.

I share these 2020 accomplishments to reaffirm my commitment to keeping my campaign promises, and to ensure that you hold me accountable for doing so.

First, I'd like to thank the members of the Town Council, and in particular subcommittee Chairpersons Dawn Mackey, Linda Habgood, David Contract, and Mike Dardia for their tireless efforts in leading many of our 2020 initiatives. Additionally, my gratitude to Councilpersons Mark Parmelee, Scott Katz, and Jim Boyes for their support during an unconventional first year in office, and to Councilman Mark LoGrippe for his years of volunteer service to our community.

While we made progress on many fronts this past year, our biggest accomplishment was one we had not anticipated -- navigating through this pandemic as a community. I'd like to acknowledge our hard-working, indefatigable, and unflappable Town Administrator Jim Gildea, who led with a steady, professional hand while maintaining a safe and healthy work environment for our employees.

I would further like to acknowledge the extraordinary efforts and collaboration demonstrated by our Town department heads and their employees who worked tirelessly to provide uninterrupted service to residents, often working with reduced staff. Thank you to Westfield Police Chief Chris Battiloro, Fire Chief Tony Tiller, DPW Director Greg O'Neil, Public Information Officer Kim Forde, and Regional Health Director Megan Avallone who kept us safe, healthy, and informed, often while facing their own personal challenges.

This administration and the Town employees demonstrated creativity, resourcefulness, and resilience throughout one of the biggest crises of our lifetime. Here are a few exemplary highlights:

- Launched the *We Love Local* campaign days after shutdown was announced and raised \$300K for local businesses
- Pivoted to virtual operations across all departments
- Offered a wide range of virtual classes and programming through our Recreation Department
- Opened Memorial Pool for a safe and successful summer season
- Created Virtual Downtown Westfield as non-essential businesses were forced to close
- Welcomed Open Quimby with special events and festive outdoor dining spaces
- Established first virtual Zoom court in Union County

- Redirected the Police Department's School Resource Officers to serve as Community Resource Officers to assist seniors and residents in need
- Created Online Coronavirus Information Center and held Facebook Live updates to address community's pandemic questions
- Delivered more than 125 written COVID updates to ensure residents had latest information and ready access to resources
- Contacted seniors via weekly wellness calls

While the pandemic consumed much of our focus, it did not deter us from making progress on the transformational plans for our downtown and positioning Westfield for post-pandemic success. By recently designating Streetworks Development LLC as the developer for their Lord & Taylor properties and the train station parking lots, we culminated a public planning process that began almost three years ago to establish an overdue, long-term vision for Westfield. Their designation marks the beginning of a new public and actionable phase in our planning.

We are fortunate to have Streetworks, a nationally renowned planning and development firm, as both a partner and stakeholder to help design a cohesive development plan for our downtown. As evidenced in many struggling NJ communities, there is a cost to doing nothing. The steps we have taken will lead us to a brighter future.

I continue to focus on the four key priorities I committed to when elected: (1) strong fiscal oversight, (2) charting a vision for our future, (3) championing quality of life issues, and (4) increasing resident engagement. While uncertainty over the fiscal impact of the pandemic deferred some key 2020 initiatives, I am proud of the accomplishments we made on many fronts this year.

Highlights:

- ✔ Led our community through a global pandemic, prioritizing health, safety, and communication, while also adapting operations to ensure the safety and welfare of employees, residents, and businesses
- ✔ Reduced Town budget by 1.32% in anticipation of pandemic-related revenue declines; first decrease in eight years, in spite of 2% increase in non-discretionary expenses
- ✔ Maintained a healthy \$7M budget surplus and AAA bond rating
- ✔ Made significant progress on downtown redevelopment plans, a giant leap towards our downtown's transformation
- ✔ Continued to prioritize our RVL fight for better service and peak one-seat rides by lobbying the Governor, legislature and NJ Transit as co-chair of the RVL Mayors' Alliance

- ✔ Introduced park improvements at Mindowaskin, Tamaques, and Sycamore, and made significant progress on Edison School turf field proposal in collaboration with BOE
- ✔ Planted approximately 500 trees
- ✔ Implemented new outdoor dining and land use policies that enabled improvements to Downtown businesses
- ✔ Received \$833,000 in pursued grants
- ✔ Commemorated Westfield's 300th anniversary with a variety of events funded by private donors and sponsors, including lectures, art displays, time capsule, architectural tours, the first African American walking tour, and more
- ✔ Established Public Arts Commission, resulting in two new murals funded through grants and donations, and successful first public art installation, *Art Takes Flight*, which raised \$24K through public art auction to fund future art exhibits
- ✔ Awarded Silver Certification by Sustainable Jersey for the first time in Town history, increasing eligibility for grants and funding

Listed below are additional 2020 accomplishments, broken out by key priorities:

1 Provide strong fiscal oversight, enhance operating efficiencies, and identify new revenue sources

- ✔ Prudently managed expenses through COVID to ensure future fiscal stability
- ✔ Applied for \$280K in CARES Act funding reimbursements
- ✔ Paved five miles of roads, mostly funded by County, State, and utility companies
- ✔ Expanded online permitting and payment capabilities to improve service and cost efficiencies
- ✔ Digitized Town Code to ensure all ordinances are easily searchable online
- ✔ Prioritized a Town culture of innovation and customer service with new hires in key positions including Zoning Officer, Tax Assessor, Court Administrator, and Construction Official

2 Chart a vision for Westfield's future that embraces growth and innovation, improves the downtown business climate, and effectively manages redevelopment

- ✔ Designated our Central Business District as an area in need of rehabilitation to incentivize private investment in aging buildings and infrastructure
- ✔ Initiated first-ever Land Use and Circulation Plans with traffic and zoning recommendations expected in March

- ✓ Renovated train station coffee kiosk in anticipation of reopening in Fall 2021
- ✓ Initiated RFP for converting north side train station to a restaurant/bar
- ✓ Passed zoning ordinances to expand permitted uses downtown
- ✓ Installed permanent Executive Director of the Downtown Westfield Corporation and expanded DWC board
- ✓ Received \$150K in state COVID Main Street grants for DWC
- ✓ Partnered with the DWC on initiatives to drive downtown foot traffic, including the holiday Downtown Welcome Center, new festive lighting funded by Westfield 300 sponsors, and expanded outdoor dining capacity with Open Quimby and multiple parklets

3 Champion quality of life issues that impact all residents

Parks/Recreation

- ✓ Opened Memorial Pool during pandemic successfully and safely
- ✓ Installed new pet friendly, ADA accessible water fountain at Mindowaskin; added sensory garden Girl Scout project and repaved pathways
- ✓ Installed new playground at Sycamore
- ✓ Renovated Tamaques pavilion and added art and ADA-compliant picnic tables; aerated fields 1 and 2; installed Town's first rain garden
- ✓ Partnered with newly established Friends of Brightwood for extensive clean up and to expand educational opportunities
- ✓ Conducted first-ever County deer management program to curtail deer overpopulation

Green Team/Sustainability

- ✓ Launched free leaf bag distribution program to improve leaf collection
- ✓ Launched first Adopt-a-Drain Program on the east coast
- ✓ Expanded Conservation Center recycling programs to include corks, tennis balls, and pumpkins
- ✓ Signed agreement to install six EV chargers in Town parking lots at no cost
- ✓ Held events such as second annual Free Market and Virtual Earth Month
- ✓ Launched second year of Green Westfield Medallion Program for businesses

- ✔ Awarded NJ State Department of Education Awards for food waste program with Jefferson School Green Team
- ✔ Secured adoption of a Sustainable Land Use Pledge, Green Building Policy Resolution, and Green Development Checklist Ordinance to support sustainable development
- ✔ Adopted revised solar ordinance allowing front facing solar panels
- ✔ Delivered energy efficiency efforts that included audits for municipal buildings, grants to install storm windows at Town Hall, continuation of the Westfield Home Energy Savings Program, and the launch of the Government Energy Aggregation initiative for 2021 implementation
- ✔ Installed first permanent bike lane on Prospect Street

Public Safety

- ✔ Initiated Westfield Police Department accreditation process; when complete will mark first time WPD attained certification
- ✔ Delivered new Engine 5 for Westfield Fire Department
- ✔ Conducted numerous speed studies throughout Town to assess conditions for traffic intervention
- ✔ Installed traffic calming median at St. Marks and South Euclid
- ✔ Approved by Union County for new traffic light systems at W. Broad & Scotch Plains Ave and Lamberts Mill Road & Rahway to be installed in 2021
- ✔ Streamlined crossing guard posts to follow industry best practices, resulting in optimal staffing, cost efficiencies, and increased efficiency of Police Department resources

Quality of Life

- ✔ Passed revised Historic Preservation ordinance prioritizing preservation efforts and discouraging tear downs
- ✔ Designated another historic property at property owner's request, totaling five designations in the past two years, most in recent Town history
- ✔ Passed infrastructure-driven ordinances to address stormwater management and protection of road paving investment
- ✔ Board of Health passed ordinance regulating the sale of vaping devices to discourage sales to minors
- ✔ Passed noise ordinance to disallow leaf blowers/lawn mowers past 5:00PM on Sundays
- ✔ Passed ordinance requiring registration of vacant and abandoned buildings to hold owners accountable for property maintenance

4) Increase resident engagement by improving transparency and communication to better reflect the open, inclusive, innovative and collaborative spirit of our community

✔ Formalized Senior Advisory (Lifelong Westfield), Mental Health Commission, Access and Inclusivity Council, and Human Relations Advisory Commissions to engage volunteers and historically disenfranchised members of the community

✔ Launched the Mental Health Commission C.A.K.E (Compassion, Acceptance, Kindness, Empathy) campaign to certify Westfield as a stigma-free community

✔ Introduced Alt AddamsFest, with a series of sold-out, socially distanced, and safe events

✔ Conducted Town Council meetings on Zoom with significant public participation

✔ Painted rainbow crosswalks in town to honor LGBTQ Pride month

✔ Raised \$50K to support local food pantries by partnering with Westfield United Fund on Be the Light Hunger Drive

✔ Launched several events for seniors through Lifelong Westfield, including 300 Milestone Awards; mask giveaway; safe walking program with safety vest giveaway; seminar on Medicare; senior scam webinar with Police Chief; and a quarterly newsletter

While I'm proud of how much we've accomplished, there is much more work to be done. First and foremost, we need to ensure our community stays healthy in anticipation of the vaccine distribution that will begin to scale in Q1. Simultaneously, we will continue planning for our post-pandemic economic recovery, focusing on our downtown businesses as we implement expanded outdoor dining and events once again beginning April 1.

Longer term, the opportunity for public input will begin as we move into an actionable planning phase with Streetworks Development in January. I encourage you to participate and to subscribe to Town email updates at westfieldnj.gov/townupdates to ensure that you stay informed of all the latest developments.

This has been a difficult year for all of us, but we should take heart in how we have come together as a community. Thank you for your notes of support, encouragement, and constructive input over the last year. I remain committed to leading a governing body that is responsive, transparent, and ethical, and always puts the best interests of our community first.

Once again, it remains a tremendous privilege to serve as your Mayor. Wishing all of you a bright, prosperous, and healthy new year!