

# Promises Kept: Year Two

## 2019 Priorities & Accomplishments

Earlier this month, the Planning Board adopted the Town's Master Plan Reexamination, taking a major step towards realizing a transformative vision for Westfield. As we look to the future, I felt it important to first recap what we accomplished in 2019, and extend my gratitude to our community for your support and active participation.

First, I'd like to thank the members of the Town Council, and in particular subcommittee Chairpersons [Councilwoman Dawn Mackey](#), [Councilwoman Linda Habgood](#), [Councilman David Contract](#), and [Councilman Mike Dardia](#) for their tireless efforts in leading many of our 2019 initiatives. Additionally, I'd like to express my gratitude to Councilpersons Jo Ann Neylan, Frank Arena and Doug Stokes for their years of volunteer service to our community as they finish their final terms.

The following accomplishments were only possible because of the hard work and unflagging efforts of our Town employees. In particular, I'd like to acknowledge the leadership of Town Administrator Jim Gildea, whose commitment to Westfield is only rivaled by the number of hours he puts in on our behalves. Being a full-time mayor, I have the benefit of getting to know many of our Town employees and see first-hand their enormous commitment to making Westfield a place we're proud to call home.

Since being elected, I set out to achieve four key priorities:

1. strong fiscal oversight,
2. charting a vision for our future,
3. championing quality of life issues, and
4. increasing resident engagement.

Beginning with some highlights, here are my administration's 2019 accomplishments:

### Highlights

- Achieved first 0% municipal tax increase in decades
- Maintained a robust \$9.5mm budget surplus and AAA bond rating
- Paved 20 miles of roads, the most in Town history
- Completed first Master Plan Reexamination, Parks Strategic Plan, and Bike and Pedestrian Plan with unprecedented public input
- Planted over 900 trees, the most in Westfield's history, and strengthened tree protection ordinance

- Successfully lobbied for restoration of RVL off-peak one-seat rides, and prioritized our fight for better service and peak one-seat rides
- Introduced policy improvements to incentivize Downtown business climate, and saw the opening of 23 new businesses!
- Received \$935,000 in grants, almost doubling what we have historically received on average
- Operated as a full-time volunteer Mayor

**1) Prioritize strong fiscal oversight, improve automation to enhance operating efficiencies, and identify new sources of revenue:**

- Delivered a 0% municipal tax rate increase for the first time in decades;
- Maintained robust surplus and AAA bond rating;
- Paved close to 20 miles of roads, the most in Town history, through an innovative partnership with Elizabethtown Gas;
- Introduced and passed Road Protection Ordinance to protect our paving investment by requiring utility companies to provide curb-to-curb repaving after road cuts;
- Completed town-wide roads assessment, enabling a transparent and cost-efficient paving plan for the Town;
- Invested in capital equipment to improve capabilities, including purchase of four pick-up trucks, two dump trucks, a sewer truck, a fire pumper, and the Town's first hybrid vehicles for health inspectors;
- Awarded Innovation in Governance Award from NJ League of Municipalities for the public/private partnership that brought [The Westfield Rink](#) to Gumbert Park;
- Introduced the Westfield Connect app, enabling online reporting and tracking of issues like potholes, tree damage, lighting outages, and more, surpassing industry-wide adoption rates and response times in the first six months of use;
- Established an Investment Advisory Council of qualified community volunteers which advised on investment management strategies;
- Completed state-mandated tax revaluation;
- Held the first open and public budget process to enable input from the community at large;
- Continued focus on automation by digitizing the Town Code to make it more accessible, and increasing online payment capabilities for town services;
- Received \$935,000 in grants, including seven for new initiatives, almost doubling our annual average

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

- Completed and adopted Master Plan Reexamination with unprecedented public input from an online survey, public workshops, and public presentations among residents, property owners, and local businesses;
- Completed first ever Parks & Recreation Strategic Plan, scheduled for adoption in 1Q20, which included unprecedented public input and partnership with Board of Education;
- Completed first ever town-wide Bike and Pedestrian Plan which was fully funded through a grant by NJDOT;
- Conducted North Avenue Walkability Study, funded through grants, resulting in recommendations to improve pedestrian safety along section of North Avenue;
- Continued efforts to drive Downtown foot traffic and support local merchants, including:
  - Ongoing Second Sunday events
  - Hosted second successful season of the [Westfield Farmers Market](#) on the north side
  - Introduced new events such as the Chili/Chowder Cookoff and Clue Hunt
  - Converted Quimby Street into pedestrian plaza for Sweet Sounds in the summer
  - Enhanced year-end holiday activities
- Hosted second annual [AddamsFest: Westfield Celebrates Charles Addams](#), which generated national press and partnerships with MGM and Hershey, solidifying it as a signature annual Town event with measurable promotional and revenue potential;
- Continued collaboration with [Lord & Taylor](#) parent company, Hudsons Bay Company, resulting in a commitment to stay, grow, and invest in Westfield
- Initiated review of zoning ordinances to curtail overdevelopment in residential neighborhoods and discourage subdivisions;
- Welcomed over 20 new businesses and restaurants including: [Lavash - Mediterranean Grill](#), [Buddha Fish](#), [OsteoStrong Westfield](#), Innovasion Taco, [Acting Out - Premiere Acting School](#), and [Roig Collection Westfield Art + Framing](#), as well as the expansion of [Spice Bazaar - Modern Indian Dining](#), [Fettle + Fare](#), and [Midtown Authentic](#). Coming soon will be [Lions Roar Brewing Co.](#) (our first brewery!), and [Bareburger](#) (expected to open early 2020!).

### 3) Champion quality of life issues that impact all residents

- As founding co-chair of the [Raritan Valley Line Mayors Alliance](#), successfully lobbied for restoration of off-peak one-seat rides and additional same platform transfers (bringing the total to five); for the first time, prioritized the fight for peak one-seat rides in our continued work with key legislators and the Governor;
- Swore in new Police Chief who prioritized community policing, introduced body cams, and appointed police chaplains;
- Appointed new Fire Chief who is ushering in a new era of department leadership;
- Worked with [Westfield Historic Preservation Commission](#) to successfully designate four Historic properties, the most in recent Town history, as we continue to prioritize preservation efforts;
- Implemented new Green Team initiatives including:
  - Green Westfield Program to promote sustainability among Downtown businesses
  - Introduced first-ever Free Market to promote re-use; collected estimated two tons of gently used household goods
  - Provided 900 reusable bags and 600 reusable straws to reduce single-use plastics in Town
  - Launched organic food waste collection effort in Conservation Center, which is the first in Union County
  - Launched first-ever Westfield Home Energy Savings Program featuring low-cost residential energy audits
  - Hosted first-ever Earth Month featuring lectures, movies and other events
  - Held two sets of park clean-ups with over 60 volunteers participating
  - Held “3 Rs” assembly (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) in several elementary schools
  - Arranged for free training on Green Infrastructure in conjunction with the Rutgers Water Resources Extension
  - Obtained a technical assistance grant from Rutgers to assist the town in developing up to three demonstration rain gardens
  - Initiated a Town-wide impervious cover assessment and stormwater management plan
- Introduced numerous pedestrian safety measures, as part of the “Year of the Pedestrian,” including:
  - Enhanced speed limit enforcement
  - Installed new stop signs at locations where needed

- Introduced new striping patterns at Mountain & Lawrence, Dudley & North, and North & Fourth
- Installed pedestrian activated beacons at Rahway Avenue & Kehler stadium, West Broad & Palsted, and South Avenue & Cacciola
- Strengthened tree ordinance to protect our large trees, including increasing fines for unauthorized tree removal;
- Expanded smoking ban to include public events;
- Passed ordinance to require EV charging stations in all new development plans;
- Introduced Memorial Pool enhancements including new deck chairs, new food vendor with healthier choices and expanded play area;
- Initiated renovation of South Avenue train station coffee kiosk with anticipated reopening in spring 2020;
- Passed ordinance establishing a Public Arts Commission; introduced first public art mural funded by grants and private donations.

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

- Improved and simplified Town communication, including:
  - Expanded Town email capability enabling residents to receive minutes/agendas, press releases, utility work notices, and Mayor’s email newsletter
  - Transformed tax letter for greater transparency and understanding
  - Increased social media outreach on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter
  - Continued leveraging ward-specific Nixle alerts in cooperation with the [Town of Westfield, NJ Police Department](#) for timely communication related to police activity
- Established Westfield 300 Steering Committee to plan commemorations for 300th anniversary in 2020;
- Introduced Westfield’s first multicultural festival celebrating the diverse heritages of all of our residents;
- Celebrated and acknowledged Gay Pride Month by raising the Pride flag for the first time in Town history;
- Appointed Town’s first ADA coordinator; established first formal ADA grievance process as recommended by our new Access & Inclusivity Council;
- Introduced several new initiatives sponsored by the Senior Advisory Council, including:

- Monthly programming calendar on Town website
- Senior events focused on taxes, technology and the Master Plan
- Second annual Seniors Expo to promote senior services with over 20 exhibitors
- First-ever Senior Pedestrian Safety program in conjunction with WPD, including distribution of free safety vests
- Established Mental Health Commission with initial focus on the following initiatives:
  - Created a Teen Advisory Committee to help address the youth mental health crisis
  - Established a resource hub on emotional and mental well-being on the Town website
  - Declared Westfield a stigma-free community via proclamation
  - Introduced “Got CAKE?” (Compassion, Acceptance, Kindness, Empathy) initiative to the broader community

While I’m proud of how much we’ve accomplished, the transformational work now begins as we initiate the process of implementing the Master Plan recommendations based upon your input.

That being said, even positive change can bring uncertainty and anxiety among some residents. Now more than ever, continued public support will be critical to moving forward key initiatives that support new fields, parking solutions, bike lanes, historic preservation and sustainability measures, smart development and more.

I look forward to welcoming [Councilman Mark LoGrippe](#) as he serves his third term, as well as working with newly-elected [Councilman Jim Boyes](#), [Councilman Mark Parmelee](#), and [Councilman Scott Katz](#). As always, I’m committed to leading a governing body that is responsive, transparent, and ethical, and always puts the best interests of our community first. Please continue to hold us all accountable by asking questions, offering constructive input, and showing up!

Thank you for giving me the tremendous privilege to serve as your Mayor. Happy holidays!