

# MAYOR MICHAEL SKUDERA

**2012 State of the Borough Address  
Tinton Falls Municipal Building  
January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2012**

*As Delivered*

## **Introduction**

Honorable members of the Borough Council, distinguished guests, borough employees, residents of Tinton Falls – good evening. I am excited to report on the state of our borough. It is an honor to serve as your mayor and work with the members of this borough council. Tonight I would like to share the many accomplishments that have been made during this past year and highlight our plans for 2012.

## **Taxes, Jobs and the Economy**

I was elected mayor in 2009. During that time as it is today – taxes, jobs and the economy were a main concern to the residents of this borough.

We inherited a budget that had too much spending and a historically low level of cash reserves. We inherited an aging infrastructure and poorly maintained equipment. I cannot take back the decisions of the past but it's **my job to find solutions to our problems and plan for the future.**

My administration faced enormous challenges from day one but took them on because the stability of our borough depended on it. We took many measures to cut spending and reduce costs including cutting department budgets by as much as 30%. Union contracts had to be renegotiated, salaries were reduced and the borough was reorganized and restructured. **Last year, the borough employees did not take a pay raise – this saved the borough a significant amount of money.**

We have come a long way in such a short time but we are not quite out of the woods yet. While the economy is starting to recover, it is not a fast process. Every year the cost of energy, goods and services keep rising. And healthcare and pension costs continue to put a strain on our budget. This is not just happening in our borough but in all towns and cities across the country.

**Work still remains but the much needed groundwork had been laid.** We need to continue working together to further improve our borough each and every year.

And even though Tinton Falls lost a lot of jobs with the closing of Fort Monmouth we are working to bring jobs back.

From businesses such as a new Sonic Restaurant to one of the largest solar farms in the northeast United States hundreds of jobs will have been created right here in Tinton Falls. More on the exciting solar farm later...

Companies are moving to our borough because we have a low tax rate and offer great services. We have created an environment that attracts businesses and promotes economic development.

But, we can do more; -- **we need to literally create thousands of jobs** to offset the closing of Fort Monmouth and **attract companies large and small that offer high paying jobs**. I am putting together an Office of Economic Development that will work with existing borough departments and outside agencies to streamline the process of helping companies locate to Tinton Falls and further reduce red tape.

Additionally, the Monmouth County Board of Freeholders has put together a committee called Grow Monmouth and Tinton Falls will be a member. This committee will focus on job creation throughout Monmouth County and Councilman Steven Schertz will be a member.

Work on The Fort Monmouth Economic Revitalization Authority is going well and there should be great progress this year. The entire 200 plus acres of Tinton Falls has been given a top priority for redevelopment – so this is an exciting time for job creation and economic prosperity in our town.

**2011 was the first year in decades that the budget was reduced.** Taxes and spending were lowered while greatly improving the services that our residents expect.

And while the Federal Government's bond rating was lowered last year...

Our bond rating was raised to its highest level in the history of the borough. Moody's Investors Service upgraded Tinton Falls' rating to just under triple-A status reflecting **stability of the Borough's financial operations and smart strategic management decisions**.

The Borough continues to maintain a low debt ratio. We are being careful managing the taxpayer's money. By making decisions such as accelerating loan payments and refinancing others at better rates, we have significantly reduced the borough's annual borrowing costs.

Budget revenues were far better than what we expected for 2011. However, we still need to take a conservative approach to revenue anticipation in order to maintain fiscal stability for our Borough.

In the coming months I will present the 2012 budget to the Council that will ensure we can continue to provide the critical services that our residents rely on while continuing to build our cash reserves and holding the line on taxes. Our Borough Administrator Gerry Turning and our CFO Steven Pfeffer continue to do outstanding work on the budget.

Going forward, we must stay away from being penny wise and dollar foolish. By the Borough Council working with me to maintain a responsible level of cash surplus, our bond rating can further improve and we can ensure the long term sustainability of the town's future. Our

surplus is not a luxury. It is a necessity. **Fiscal responsibly is not just about spending less money; it is about spending money wisely.**

Last year we held our first municipal election in decades in November. By moving the elections to November we are saving about 100 thousand dollars and increasing voter turnout. Brian Nelson, our borough attorney, helped us get this accomplished.

Additionally, there is pending legislation in Trenton that would allow school boards elections to be moved to November. This could save the taxpayers even more money.

### **Working with the Schools**

Speaking about the schools, just because our school board is separate from our town government and run by a separately elected board, it does not mean there should be a dividing wall that keeps us separated. We need to continue working together.

Councilman Scott Larkin who serves as the council liaison to the school board continues to do an outstanding job keeping us informed of important school issues that affect the residents of this borough.

Additionally, my administration is working closely with The Fort Monmouth Economic Revitalization Authority on securing additional classroom space for our schools. This will help alleviate overcrowding.

Last year, **the largest open space acquisition in the history of the borough took place, with the preservation of 75 acres of land in the southern end of Tinton Falls.** This land was already approved for hundreds of new homes that would have added hundreds of school aged children to our schools. It would have substantially increased taxes by millions of dollars.

By rezoning a large tract of land on Shafto Road in 2011, we were again looking out for our schools. Instead of adding several hundred more school aged children and millions more in new taxes, we attracted the construction of a 100-acre solar farm. This solar farm will contain about 85,000 panels and will generate the equivalent energy to power nearly two-thirds of the homes in Tinton Falls. This project will also create hundreds of highly skilled union and professional jobs right here in our borough. Council President Gary Baldwin was very helpful in working with my administration to get this project started. The solar farm is expected to be completed and operational by this year.

### **Open Government and Communications**

I believe communications and open government are very import. Greater communications with the residents has always been a top priority for my administration.

**Our Borough website has won awards from Rutgers University and Monmouth University** because of its design and ability for residents to access important information quickly.

In 2012 we plan on expanding the website even further as well as utilizing social media to get information out to residents. For residents that don't have access to internet on regular basis, we plan on publishing a quarterly newsletter.

### **Laws and Regulations**

Like most towns, we have many laws in Tinton Falls but some of them are outdated and inconsistent with state statutes.

This year I'm challenging the Borough Council to start reviewing existing laws to make sure that they are clear and make sense.

### **Park Improvements**

Our parks are one of the great treasures that we have in our borough. Last year we provided better pedestrian access to Hockhockson Park and Liberty Park II by installing nearly a half mile of new sidewalks – **making sure access to our parks is safer for children and all residents of this borough.**

This year we will be paving the gravel parking lot at the Sycamore Avenue Soccer Complex. This project will improve parking conditions for a very busy area that is used for events from Community Day to soccer tournaments.

Additionally in 2012, we will be creating 50 new parking spaces in Liberty Park II. This will alleviate a parking shortage that has plagued the park since it was opened.

Going forward we need to continue the trend of maintaining and upgrading our parks. We should make sure they continue to meet the needs of borough residents.

### **Streets and Infrastructure**

We have approximately 80 miles of road in our borough and they require constant attention and maintenance. For years our roads have been in bad shape and potholes have been unfilled.

In 2011 we had an **aggressive plan to fill potholes and repave our streets.** In fact, it was one of the most aggressive in our borough's history. Over 2 million dollars was invested in our roadways from north to south. Numerous streets were either repaired or repaved. Our 2011 road program was completed on-time and under budget. Our Director of Public Works, Gary Gebele and our Borough Engineer David Marks, continue to do an outstanding job.

**For 2012 we need to continue the progress and further invest in our road program.** This year we need to finish repaving Heritage Boulevard, repave Apple Street and repave West Park Avenue – among other roads that need attention. We must not stop the progress now, as it is very easy to fall behind.

Last year the groundbreaking for the much needed Asbury Avenue & Pine Street realignment took place. Work is expected to be completed in 2012. Additionally we should budget money to provide pedestrian access – linking this project with Seabrook Village.

In 2011 we fixed storm drains, sewer pumping stations and greatly improved our aging infrastructure. We cannot afford to take the easy way out and not provide funding for these important projects. True, fixing sewers and drains are not glamorous projects – they don't make headlines but it's the right thing to do to ensure the long term stability of this borough.

Last year we made energy efficient improvements to the EMS South building, Borough Hall, the Public Works building and the Borough Library using a hundred thousand dollar grant. This has resulted in the borough saving thousands of dollars every year in energy bills. Councilwomen Nancy Fama serves on our library board and has worked hard with the administration to improve the services that are offered.

In 2011, Hurricane Irene severely damaged Water Street and several areas of the road were eroded into the Pine Brook River. However – work on building a new retaining wall and fixing Water Street is underway and the road, weather permitting, is expected to be opened in four weeks.

Further information on the progress and status of Water Street and our other infrastructure projects will be posted on our borough website.

## **Public Works**

From garbage collection, to park maintenance, to snow removal and countless other duties, I am very proud of the work our public works department does. **None of the many improvements to this department during the last year have come with an increase in labor costs – all have come from working smarter.**

In 2011, close to 3 million pounds of single stream recyclables were collected and processed. This saved and brought as revenue, hundreds of thousands of dollars to the borough.

Last year our Electronics Recycling program received over 32 tons of equipment that was dropped off by our borough residents.

And for a second year in a row a special holiday cardboard collection pickup was offered that yielded tons of extra cardboard to be recycled.

After last winter's record snow fall we listened to our residents and stepped up to the challenge to improve our snow removal operations. Tinton Falls hosted the first annual Snow Summit where other neighboring towns could share their insights and experiences on ways to improve snow removal and cleanup efforts.

You know, some of our trucks were close to 20 years old and in bad shape. So in 2011 we invested money to purchase new equipment and update our communication systems.

Also in 2011, we replaced an antiquated pen and paper system that was around for decades with a new cutting edge software tracking system. We are one of the first boroughs in the state to now have a GPS based internet system that allows us to track salting and plowing operations in real-time.

Additionally, the public works conference room was upgraded with a projector and large screen so workers can better monitor weather maps and our entire snow plowing operation. Our supervisors now use digital infrared thermometers to monitor road surface temperatures. This will help them deploy salt at just the right time and further help them monitor for freezing rain conditions.

Last year we expanded our shared service agreements and worked cooperatively with Red Bank, Ocean Township and Eatontown.

Public works is not only busy with snow removal and garbage collection; they work hard year round and provide many services that our residents need. There have been many improvements in 2011 and we will continue the progress in the coming year.

### **Emergency Management**

As I just mentioned snow before, and hopefully there will be very little of it this year – The office of **Emergency Management was completely overhauled** following the huge storm that blanketed our borough and the State of New Jersey. John Mack was appointed the new emergency management coordinator and has transformed this office to new levels. David Boehning, our assign coordinator, works tirelessly making sure all the operations in this office run efficiently. Many borough volunteers stepped up to make sure when there is a time of emergency, the residents would be safe in Tinton Falls. Special thanks to our CERT Team, our Fire Department, EMS crew and all emergency service personnel for the outstanding job they do each and every year.

In 2011 we faced several weather events throughout the year including snowstorms, heavy rain with flash flooding, an earthquake and a hurricane. Each of these events costs the borough a lot of money. And after the storm is over and our residents are safe, we immediately begin filling out paperwork and more paperwork to get reimbursements from FEMA and other governmental agencies to help pay the costs. And we have been doing that quite well. The borough received over 180 thousand dollars in 2011, which is one of the highest in Monmouth County. Jill Pegosh who works in public works has done an outstanding job making sure we recoup this money.

For 2012, increased communications is a continued priority. We will be having a borough-wide program to promote our Code Red Emergency Notification System to make sure we can reach as many people as possible during a weather related event or natural disaster.

For 2012, we need to take our emergency communications to the next level. We already have our own generators, our own computer servers and a high-speed data network. We need to take the initial steps and explore cutting edge ways to provide and deliver a steady stream of voice and data to our Fire Districts, Police Departments, Emergency Management Crews and our Public Works Department even when other neighboring towns may be without power or cell tower service.

### **Police**

You know, our police department does an outstanding job protecting the residents of this borough. When I appointed Chief John Scrivinic I knew he would do an excellent job. The department was restructured, reorganized and still provides **top level service that our residents demand - all while saving an astonishing 700 thousand dollars.**

Our court revenues have increased significantly by over 22% compared to the prior year. And our programs and services continue to be very popular and effective including our Jr. Police Academy, the National Night Out and our K-9 dog program.

Due to the economic trouble we are facing in today's economy, burglaries are happening more frequently in the entire state and county. Tinton Falls is no exception, however our detectives do a fantastic job arresting criminals and putting them behind bars. Our police officers work with the FBI, the Monmouth County Prosecutors Office, and other agencies in collaborate effort. We have also increased our DWI arrests in 2011 by over 33% compared to last year. Our borough continues to have a low crime rate and our streets continue to remain safe for all residents of this borough.

### **Recreation**

Our recreation department is dedicated to providing educational and recreational opportunities for residents of all ages within Tinton falls and it continues to improve each and every year thanks to the work of our Recreation Superintendent Sherri Eisele and her entire team.

**In 2011 the department has almost become self-sufficient, requiring only a small budget to run the programs that thousands of participants enjoy.**

The recreation department also assists many organizations with field maintenance, gym scheduling and distributing information including the Tinton Falls Little League, which Councilman Chris Pak has volunteered for many years. Also, T-Ball, Soccer, Travel Basketball and the Monmouth Pop Warner Football and Cheering programs. In total, these groups have over 1400 participants, which speaks volumes to the quality and popularity of these programs. The recreations department also sponsors a variety of special events throughout the year. Our sports programs rely on the dedication of our over 200 volunteer coaches and without them our programs would not be successful.

I'm proud to report that the recreation programs are here to stay because this is what helps make Tinton Falls a great community to live in.

### **Information Technology**

As you may know, I come from a strong Information Technology background and understand the **value of technology and the role it plays in increasing efficiently and reducing costs.** We invested in our IT infrastructure in 2011 and we must continue this trend into 2012.

Last year we upgraded our servers, installed tools to offer better collaboration between departments, and installed wireless access points throughout borough hall. Dan Romanov, our networking administrator has done a fantastic job.

Additionally, my administration is working with the Borough Council on ways to digitize and archive the thousands of documents that are collected each year by the Borough Clerk's office. We are also working on ways to reduce the amount of paper that the borough uses each year. In 2012 I encourage the Borough Council to trade in their mounds of weekly printed materials and go digital by providing funding for iPads.

### **Closing Remarks**

Ladies and gentlemen, I am very pleased to report that the state of our Borough is in good shape, even in these difficult times. And we expect our progress to continue in 2012 and beyond.

We will stand tall, be proud and be ready to face the many challenges that come our way.

It has been my pleasure and honor to speak with all of you tonight.

Thank you and God Bless.

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