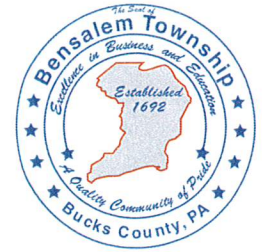


# Township of Bensalem



Joseph DiGirolamo  
Mayor

## 2023 BUDGET MESSAGE

To: Township Council  
From: Mayor Joseph DiGirolamo  
Date: December 2, 2022

Pursuant to Section 2-24 of the Code of the Township of Bensalem, on November 10, 2022, I submitted to you my proposed 2023 Municipal Budget. I now submit to you my accompanying Budget Message for my 2023 Municipal Budget.

As I prepare this Budget Message, I reflect first upon the challenges that have confronted our community during the past few years. Inflation, soaring prices, manpower shortages, rising interest rates, and supply-chain delays of many of the goods, materials and supplies we utilize, have presented challenges to our community that many of our residents, fortunately, have never had to previously endure. I can assure you that when you add to the continuing aftereffects the Coronavirus Pandemic has had, and continues to have, on our businesses, schools, healthcare facilities, and, First Responders, the challenges that have confronted our community are unlike anything that we have ever experienced before.

I am proud to say, however, that in confronting these challenges head-on, our Township Government has continued to operate and deliver essential services to our residents efficiently, responsively, and without delay or interruption.

As is always the case, no matter whether economic conditions are favorable or challenging, my Department Heads and I always monitor the Township's financial position, continuously, throughout the year, every year. As I have reminded you many times, this constant review and analysis of our revenues and expenditures, together with continuous analysis and vigilant research for opportunities to find savings and secure grants and other third-party funds, is not a unique response to the Pandemic or these challenging economic times. Rather, it is the manner in which my Department Heads, our professionals, and I have conducted Township operations since the earliest days of my Administration.

As you know, I was a local business owner for many years before being elected Mayor, and I have always attempted to run Township government with the same sense of fiscal responsibility that I employed in operating our family business. Our taxpayers deserve no less, and that is why I am proud to advise you that despite all of the challenges presented to the Township this year, my Budget for 2023 once again proposes no increase in any Township taxes.

As I have always said, much has changed in Bensalem from the days when I worked alongside my Father on our family farm on Dunks Ferry Road. Over the course of the past century, Bensalem has grown to become one of the 10 largest communities in all of Pennsylvania, with over 60,000 people residing within the 21 square miles of our Township. Today we have a police force of over 100 officers, an infrastructure of over 144 miles of roads, and nearly 1,400 acres of open space, parks and playgrounds within our borders.

I am proud that during my time as your Mayor, our efforts have led to Bensalem becoming a destination for so many people throughout our region who seek to share in our community's prosperity and unparalleled quality of life, civic attributes that have led to Bensalem attaining national recognition as "1 of the 50 Best Places to Live in America," and as "1 of the 100 Best Communities for Young People." Locally, the *Bucks County Courier Times* lauded our community as a "Model for America". I am equally proud that our community continues, without exception, to welcome and embrace all who wish to be a part of, and to share in, all that Bensalem is and has to offer.

As I have stated many times, the safety of this community and its residents has always been my paramount concern. This is certainly reflected in our Bensalem Police, Fire and Emergency Management Services, all of which are the best equipped, most well trained, and most community active of any such departments or squads in the Commonwealth.

Our Police Department has earned both national and state accreditation, an accomplishment achieved by only a handful of the more than 1,200 Police Departments in all of Pennsylvania. This recognition is reflective of the professionalism, dedication, and hard work of our officers and command staff alike to assure that our policies, practices, and procedures meet the highest levels to which law enforcement officers and departments can be held.

Our Bensalem Rescue Squad, with a staff of 25 full-time and approximately 35 part-time personnel, is the most busy unit in the County, responding to 1 out of every 7 emergency calls received by the County 911 Dispatch, with an average response time to any location in our community with Advanced Life Support level of care in under 7 minutes, well exceeding the Commonwealth standards for both Basic and Advanced Life Support.

Our team of six volunteer fire companies continue their long history and tradition of service to this community. Through a combination of government funding and their own fund-raising efforts, these brave men and women continue to undergo the training, and to operate and maintain the equipment and facilities necessary, to safely protect and save lives and property throughout our Township. Our Township also employs a complement of full-time firefighters as part of our Bensalem Fire Rescue, all of whom are available to respond to emergency calls anywhere in the Township during those daytime hours when our volunteer companies may not have the manpower available to fully respond to a call.

We continue to operate and maintain our own Township Fire and Emergency Training Facility, right here in Bensalem, constructed so that all of our First Responders would have the ability and facilities to train locally, and to also coordinate training among our Firefighters, Police and EMS for all possible emergencies within the Township.

The service every one of our First Responders provide to this community is the foundation of our success in making and keeping Bensalem a desirable place to live and work.

While we all certainly recognize the importance of Philadelphia to the economy of the region, for a community like Bensalem, located right along the city's border, our proximity to the city also results in great economic challenges to our community, particularly in the areas of law enforcement and crime prevention. Roughly 80% of the individuals arrested in Bensalem are not, in fact, residents of Bensalem. They have travelled into our community from other places, mostly from Philadelphia, to traffic in drugs or to commit other crimes. A tremendous amount of our Police resources is spent simply to prevent crime, and to arrest criminals, that come into Bensalem from across our border with Philadelphia.

Maintaining the safety of this community and its residents does come at a cost, a cost that represents 69% of our overall 2023 Township Budget. I am pleased to report that as a result of the decisions and policies of my administration, in 2023 we will be able to fund and maintain our Police, Fire and Emergency Medical Services at their current levels of service, levels that must be maintained, and even expanded upon, if we are to maintain the safety and quality of life we enjoy in our community. We must remain ever vigilant both today and into the future.

I am proud to say that the quality of life we enjoy today, and the quality of governmental services that the Township delivers to its residents, have greatly improved over the past quarter century. During that time, the Township undertook major capital improvement projects to improve our system of roads and improve the flow of traffic throughout the Township. Every Township road was repaved at a total cost of \$25 million, and eight different intersections involving State Highways were enlarged and improved at a cost to the Township of \$8.5 million.

More recently, in our continued efforts to improve traffic flow and traffic safety throughout the Township, we have undertaken the installation of an Adaptive Traffic Signal System along Street Road, Hulmeville Road, Rockhill Road, and Bristol Pike. This 21<sup>st</sup> century technology adjusts and changes the timing and phasing of the traffic signals along these roadways, based upon the real time traffic volumes and conditions at each of the improved intersections, to respond to the actual traffic conditions that arise throughout the day. My 2023 Budget includes continued funding for these efforts along Hulmeville Road and along Bristol Pike as we near completion of this project.

During my time as Mayor, the Township has also embarked on a number of projects and initiatives aimed at improving the quality of life in our community.

We built, expanded and developed our Bensalem Central Park, including the construction of our Amphitheater that today serves as the centerpiece of our Summer Concert Series and our Fall Festival Community Pride Celebration.

We rebuilt neighborhood playgrounds and constructed the Bensalem Community Park, the Firefighters' Field Complex, and, most recently, our First Responders Field, to provide much needed sports and recreation opportunities to our residents, especially our youth. Within the past

few years we also performed extensive repairs and a rebuild of our Imagination Land Playground. Imagination Land, built through a partnership with the Bensalem Kiwanis, provides recreation opportunities to children of all abilities within our community.

As demand for new and expanded recreation facilities and opportunities continues, my budget for 2023 also includes \$600,000 for the design and installation of a Spray Water Park within the Community Park, and over \$2,000,000 to make additional improvements to First Responders Park. The planned improvements to this nearly 18-acre recreation facility are well underway, including field restoration, field lighting, new irrigation systems, new bleachers, and the repaving of the parking areas.

During my time in office, we also constructed a brand new Senior Citizen Center, and we partnered in the construction of the Ashland Manor, Gravel Pike, Presbyterian Homes and Somerton Court Senior Housing Facilities that provide quality, affordable housing for our growing population of senior citizens. In 2021, we cut the ribbon on the Bensalem Veterans Residences on Mechanicsville Road. The Residences, constructed on land that was provided by the Township, provides affordable housing for age and income qualified Veterans of our Armed Forces, the first project of its kind in Bucks County and one that was long overdue for our Veterans.

Well over 200 acres of open space have been preserved by and through the Township during my time as your Mayor, increasing the total Township Open Space to well over 1,300 acres.

Stormwater management continues to be at the forefront of our future capital projects. Since 2020, we were able to construct and place into operation the first phase of the Ogden Avenue/Cornwells Stormwater and Basin Project, improving and alleviating many stormwater management problems that have long plagued the Cornwells Heights and Eddington neighborhoods, two of the oldest neighborhoods in our Township. Last year we continued our efforts in these neighborhoods with the upgrade and replacement of concrete curb radii to further improve stormwater flow and reduce ponding and flooding in these neighborhoods.

My budget for 2023 includes \$8.9 million earmarked for storm sewer repairs utilizing the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) funds provided by the Federal government. To that end, our engineers continue to both identify and implement plans and facilities throughout the Township, especially in light of the flooding experienced during the One Hundred Year Storm of July 2021. Chief among the targeted areas are the State Road corridor, especially within our Delaware River Renaissance District, the construction of new stormwater facilities on Hulmeville Road in the area of the Bensalem Country Club, as well as drainage improvements along Glendale Drive, Ogden Ave., Marion Ave, and Carolyn Court to name a few. As 2023 begins, engineering is well underway, and coordination with PennDOT and PECO continues, on the aforementioned Hulmeville Road stormwater facility improvements, which, when constructed, will function in concert with stormwater facility improvements that were recently constructed in that area to further alleviate stormwater issues for properties located near that section of Hulmeville Road.

All of these improvements and projects, both past and more recent, have all contributed to the development of an expanded and improved housing base within our community, a stronger business climate in Bensalem, a significant boost to our local and regional reputation, and a strong sense of community pride.

As a result of the fiscally responsible decisions and policies of my administration, heading into 2023 the Township's fiscal position is, and remains, strong and stable.

We have not only successfully weathered the economic challenges of the past that saw our nation experience some of the worst economic conditions since the Great Depression, but we are also successfully weathering the more recent challenges that have seen skyrocketing inflation, rising interest rates, continuously increasing material and equipment costs, and the overall downturn of our National and Global economies.

In the process, we have achieved and maintain both the short and long term financial stability necessary to maintain and improve our already strong credit rating of Aa1. Contributing to our financial stability and this strong credit rating are our conservative budgeting style, a tax base growth rate that is on an upward trend, a general fund balance that meets general accounting standards, and a Township liquidity that remains solid. Further, as I reminded you above, my Directors and I constantly study and analyze our operations to assure that we remain efficient, and, as always, we continue to look to find ways that our Township government can "do more with less."

These policies and practices of my administration not only have made and kept our financial position strong, but they have also allowed us to provide all of the government services our residents continue to receive and enjoy, and to accomplish the many capital and community projects detailed above, without any increase in Township property taxes during the 29 years that I have been your Mayor. I am proud, once again, to report to you that this remains unchanged in the coming year, as my 2023 Budget proposes no increase in our Township property taxes.

The benefits of holding the line on property taxes are obvious for most Bensalem residents and businesses. As I have shared in the past, however, there are added benefits that may not be quite as obvious. For instance, by holding the line on property taxes, we have allowed the more senior members of our population, especially those on fixed incomes, to age in place without being taxed out of their homes. Furthermore, as we continue to weather the effects of the global pandemic, those members of our community hit hardest by the Governor's Orders, especially those on tight budgets or enduring extended periods of unemployment, are able to focus their energies and priorities towards getting back on their feet without having to contend with the added burden of a Township property tax increase.

In that same regard, I am extremely pleased to report that I am proposing to continue the Homeowners' Assistance Grant for 2023 at \$300.00. As of the date of this Message, Bensalem will have returned over \$50 million dollars to its residents over the life of the Homeowners Assistance Grant Program, and with the funding I am proposing for 2023, that figure will increase to over \$54 million. I am proud to have fought in Harrisburg, alongside Senator Tomlinson and then Representative DiGirolamo, for the inclusion of the Casino Host Fees in the State Gaming Laws, and I am proud that **Bensalem remains the only community in Pennsylvania that provides any Casino Host Fee monies directly to its residents.**

Bensalem is a proud, dynamic, diverse and vibrant community. While our strong financial position, the unparalleled services we provide, and the ambitious public works projects we pursue all contribute to our success as a community, our prosperity as a community is not dictated by just these factors alone. Ultimately, it is the people of this community that make it a great place to live, work, worship and raise family. The ongoing involvement, commitment and support of our residents and business partners are essential to Bensalem's continued success and our recognition as a strong and unified community.

In closing, I would like to once again thank my staff and our professionals for their hard work, support and dedication. Without them, the many successes we have accomplished for the people of Bensalem over the years would not have been possible, and certainly the Township's ability to continue to respond throughout the pandemic to previously unimaginable issues, and to maintain, without interruption, the exceptional levels of service that our residents and businesses both expect and deserve, is a testament to all of their dedication and hard work.

I must also take this opportunity to once again thank the members of Township Council, past and present, who have given me their support though the years, and especially to our current Township Council, all of whom have given me their counsel, cooperation and support throughout the Coronavirus crisis. I believe that together we have been successful in our efforts to make and keep Bensalem a community with quality of life of which we can all be proud.

Bensalem's future remains bright, and I am grateful to have the opportunity and the privilege to continue to lead this community into that bright future.

Thank you.