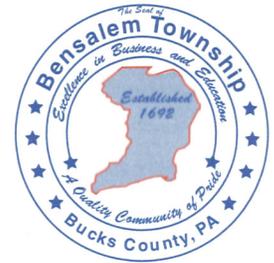


# Township of Bensalem

**Joseph DiGirolamo**  
Mayor

## 2020 BUDGET MESSAGE

To: Township Council  
From: Mayor Joseph DiGirolamo  
Date: November 27, 2019



Pursuant to Section 2-24 of the Code of the Township of Bensalem, on November 8, 2019, I submitted to you my proposed 2020 Municipal Budget. I now submit to you my accompanying Budget Message for my 2020 Municipal Budget.

As I have reminded you many times, much has changed in Bensalem from the days when I worked alongside my Father on our family farm on Dunks Ferry Road. We have 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. We have a police force of over 100 officers, an infrastructure of over 144 miles of roads, and over 1300 acres of open space, parks and playgrounds.

Today, Bensalem has become 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."

As so many of our friends and neighbors have only recently made Bensalem their home, I would like to take this opportunity to remind you, and at the same time share with them, just a few of the many accomplishments of our Township since I first was honored to become your Mayor.

When I took over as Mayor in 1994, the Township was in severe financial distress, facing a budget deficit, runaway expenditures, a significant tax increase, and poor revenue projections.

Upon being sworn into office, I opened the Budget and immediately rolled back the tax increase that had been put into place by the outgoing administration. I cut expenditures from that budget, and I instituted a strong financial management and investment policy for the future fiscal growth of the Township. I also instituted a plan to improve our decaying infrastructure through sound capital expenditures.

In the years that immediately followed, 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. The Township also redeveloped a major portion of Bristol Pike through Eddington, Cornwells Heights and Andalusia, from Street Road to Mill Road, at a cost of \$9.5 million.

Hulmeville Road was widened between Street Road and Bensalem Boulevard to improve Township-wide traffic flow along this major corridor, and the Rockhill Road extension was also constructed at the direction of the Township to improve traffic conditions surrounding the Neshaminy Mall.

The Township also embarked on a number of projects and initiatives aimed at improving the quality of life in our growing 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 Day Celebration. We rebuilt neighborhood playgrounds and constructed both the Bensalem Community Park and Firefighters' Field Complex to provide much needed sports and recreation opportunities to our residents, especially our youth. We also proudly partnered with the Bensalem Kiwanis to build our Imaginationland Playground that provides recreation opportunities to all children of all abilities within our community.

We constructed a brand new Senior Citizen Center at a cost of \$1.6 million, 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.

We grew the size of our police force, expanded their facilities, modernized their equipment, and provided them with the training and technology to fight crime in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and to continue to keep us safe on our streets, in our homes and in our schools. We constructed our own Bensalem Township Emergency Training Facility that allows our firefighters, police and EMS personnel to regularly train and prepare, together, right here in our Township, for all types of emergency situations that might confront our first responders and our citizens. We created a paid daytime fire service to complement our outstanding volunteer fire companies to make sure that we are providing our homes and businesses with full and fast response throughout the Township to fire emergencies that occur at any hour of the day or night.

All of these improvements and projects led to the development of an expanded and improved housing base, a stronger business climate in Bensalem, a significant boost to our local and regional reputation, and a strong sense of community pride.

Proudly, we successfully weathered the economic challenges of the recent past that saw our nation experience some of the worst economic conditions since the Great Depression, during which time we were able to continue to provide our residents and businesses with an unsurpassed quality of life and a full and complete level of municipal services, all without any increase in our Township real estate taxes.

More recently, thanks to our current, strong fiscal position, we were able to construct the first phase of the Ogden Avenue/Cornwells Stormwater and Basin Project. This Project has already improved and alleviated many longstanding stormwater management problems that have long plagued the Cornwells Heights and Eddington neighborhoods, two of the oldest neighborhoods in our Township.

We have also been able to begin to address stormwater management and roadway drainage on and along State Road within our Delaware River Renaissance District that have similarly been a problem for decades, and the improvements made thus far have significantly reduced the road flooding problems on State Road near Street Road.

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, Rock Hill Road, and soon on both Hulmeville 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. We have replaced every one of the more than 3,300 street lights within the Township with programmable, long lasting, energy efficient LED fixtures to improve safety throughout the Township. We engineered and partnered with PennDOT on the construction of the Galloway Road extension to alleviate traffic congestion at the intersection of Hulmeville and Byberry Roads in the heart of our town, and for the past several years we have also been partnering with the County and PennDOT on plans to fund and construct a new slip ramp onto I-95 South in the hope of alleviating congestion and back-ups we all currently endure at the I-95 and Street Road interchange.

Notably, this past year also saw the completion of the second Township-Wide Road Repaving Project that the Township has undertaken during my time as your Mayor. I can state with great confidence that few if any surrounding communities, particularly communities of our size or with our number of miles of roads, have completed the repaving of their entire community twice in the span of 25 years!

After years of planning, earlier this year we broke ground on land that was provided by the Township for the Bensalem Veterans Housing Project that will provide affordable housing for age and income qualified Veterans of our Armed Forces, the first project of its kind in Bucks County and one that is long overdue for our Veterans.

The ongoing transformation of our Delaware Riverfront as a residential, dining and entertainment destination, and the continuation of the Bensalem Greenway, continue to be initiatives that will help to shape and direct the redevelopment of our community for years to come. We are also actively engaged with the owners and stakeholders of the Neshaminy Mall to discuss their plans and vision for the future of this important part of our Township's economic base.

Well over 200 acres of open space has been preserved by and through the Township during my time as your Mayor, increasing the total Township Open Space to over 1,300 acres. The open space acquired by the Township has been used for active recreation, such as Firefighters' Field, Bensalem Community Park, for passive recreation such as Central Park and Newport Park, and for green belts along the Poquessing Creek, Neshaminy Creek and Delaware River. Most importantly, this land has been forever preserved from future development and will instead continue to contribute to the high quality of life we enjoy in Bensalem Township.

I cannot be more proud of all that we have accomplished for this wonderful community throughout my time as Mayor, and I am looking forward to continuing and building upon this record of accomplishment and initiative in the years to come.

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

We have been able to achieve and maintain both the short and long term financial stability necessary to maintain and improve our already strong credit rating of Aa2, and with the Bond Refinancing unanimously approved by Council, we are confident that our credit rating will be maintained if not improved. 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, 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 26 years that I have been your Mayor.

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. Similarly, it has allowed those members of our population most affected by the long economic downturn, especially those on tight budgets, 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 2020 at \$300.00. As of the date of this Message, Bensalem will have returned almost \$38 million dollars to its residents over the life of the Homeowners Assistance Grant Program, and with the funding I am proposing for 2020, that figure will increase to over \$42 million. I am proud to have fought in Harrisburg, alongside Senator Tomlinson and 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.**

I am also pleased to report, as I did last year, that we are now in a fiscal position where we have the ability and resources to continue to address larger, greatly needed infrastructure projects without having to incur additional debt to bring them to fruition. The continuation of much needed stormwater management projects along State Road, along Clark Avenue in Trevoise, and in the Cornwells Heights and Eddington neighborhoods, particularly in the vicinity of the

Country Club, are chief among these projects, as are the Adaptive Traffic Signal System, the I-95 and Street Road Slip Ramp, and other infrastructure projects mentioned earlier in this letter.

Most importantly, as a result of the decisions and policies of my administration, we have been able to fund and maintain our police, fire and emergency medical services at their current levels, and we will further be able to do so into the foreseeable future. Our Police Department is nationally accredited and the finest in the Commonwealth. Our officers are among the best equipped and most highly trained law enforcement personnel at any level of government in this nation. Our Bensalem EMS recently placed into service our Mobile Stroke Unit, one of only two in the entire country that is revolutionizing the diagnosis and treatment of stroke victims in those first crucial minutes of the onset of a stroke. Our team of fire companies continue their long history of service to this community, and with the recent approval of additional funding by our residents, these brave men and women will continue to maintain the equipment, training, manpower and facilities necessary to safely protect and save lives and property throughout our 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. I have pledged to the people of this community that our public safety will always be my top priority, and that we cannot, and I will not, allow anyone to play politics when it comes to keeping the people of Bensalem safe in their homes, on our streets, in our schools and in our businesses.

I am proud that Bensalem is a 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 for their hard work, support and dedication. Without them, the many successes we have accomplished for the people of Bensalem would not have been possible. 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. I believe that together we have been successful in our efforts to make and keep Bensalem a community with a nationally recognized quality of life and future that knows no limits.

I look forward to continuing to lead this community into that bright future.

Thank you.