



Mayoral State of Bloomfield Speech January 5, 2015

**“With bold leadership and determination, we are leveraging today’s successes into a brighter future for all our residents, and we are not done yet.”**

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Good evening Bloomfield. Tonight, I stand before you proud and humbled to be your mayor. It is truly an honor to serve this township, this township that raised and inspired me. This township that I’ve called home my entire life.

I want to congratulate Eli, Nick and Carlos on their re-election. It was well deserved and I look forward to being your colleague for another three years. I would also like to recognize Nina, Joe and Carlos. Your hard work makes me work harder and be a better Mayor.

I want to acknowledge my wife Laura who could not be with us here tonight. I want to thank her for the sacrifices she makes each and every day so that I am able to serve.

Today the State of our Township is safe, fiscally stable and growing. We are emerging as a vibrant, world-class township that is attracting new residents, businesses and visitors.

It’s a privilege to serve with each and every one of you. Together, along with the residents of Bloomfield, we’ve faced many challenges over the years – turning them into opportunities. But the tough times are not over yet. What lies before us is an opportunity to reshape what it means to be a 21<sup>st</sup> century township. In short, a smart township. By listening to our residents, businesses and our workers, hearing concerns and addressing

them head on, over the past year we've begun to deliver that township. We're delivering safer streets, improved housing, better parks and in the near future a brand new DPW site and an 18-acre park for all Bloomfield residents young and old. We're striving to become a government that provides the highest quality of services at the lowest possible cost. With bold leadership and determination, we are leveraging today's successes into a brighter future for all our residents, and we are not done yet. We have to think smart, we have to plan smart, we have to use our resources wisely and we have to take advantage of smart 21<sup>st</sup> century tools.

Smart government works for its people by meeting them where they are, and people are more electronically connected than ever. That's why Bloomfield is leveraging its technology to lower costs and provide convenient customer service.

My goal for this coming year is to make our government the easiest to do business with. In 2015 each and every Bloomfield employee will undergo a customer service training program. We are working on making it easier for our taxpayers to work with staff members at town hall. We are going to change the culture to a citizen centered customer service model.

When I was in college I worked as a server at a restaurant that used to send secret shoppers to the restaurant. Well I am proud to announce Bloomfield will be doing the same thing. Each and every tax payer should be treated as if it were Mayor Michael Venezia calling town hall.

We recently set up Facebook pages for certain departments as a test drive to better communicate with Bloomfield's residents. We realize that it can be challenging for residents to get information, so we are going to bring information to the residents through

the channels being used most. My goal from the beginning was to have increased communications with the public, making our government more transparent. Some of the ways we've done that is by hosting town hall meetings, engaging with residents on social media and trying to make our government more visible than it was in the past.

In 2014 we launched a citizen app at no cost to the township. This allows residents to ask and report issues directly from their mobile devices to a department.

In 2015 we plan on launching a new revamped webpage. This webpage will have a new feel and look. We are currently working on an additional app where residents will be able to view and track building and permit applications from the app or web-portal. We know this isn't going to be perfect from day one, so we look forward to input from all our residents to make this the best it possibly can be.

In 2014 we saw the start of many construction projects in Bloomfield. We currently have \$400 million worth of redevelopment going on in Bloomfield. As we proceed into 2015 and the future many of these projects will be completed and our once proud downtown of the 60's and 70's will once again be the most vibrant in Essex County. Too many of our residents are going to other communities to shop and dine, but with the improvements to our downtown and partnerships with businesses we are looking at every way possible to change that.

We are focusing on downtown Bloomfield by expanding access to the heartbeat of the region, New York City. In 2015 we will start work on our historic train station, turning it into a 21<sup>st</sup> century hub with a historic vibe to it

In 2015, after close to 30-years of being vacant construction of south junior middle school will start. We are going to turn that complex into an artist village to go with our new and

improved downtown. I know we are not where Montclair is on their redevelopment, but like I've been saying, let Montclair be Manhattan, Bloomfield will be Brooklyn.

We are proud to announce that we are in great financial shape for today and in the future. In 2014 we saw the lowest municipal tax increase in thirteen years and in 2015 we make a promise before you tonight that we will have the lowest municipal increase in fourteen years. We currently have a bond rating of AA2 and this year we are putting nearly \$3 million dollars into surplus getting closer and closer to the state recommendation of \$7.5 million which is 10% of our budget. This will make it easier for us to borrow money for special projects and keep our rates low.

The late Jackie Robinson once said "a life isn't significant except for its impact on other lives", and one thing I am proud of is how our health and human services department is affecting lives of our most needy residents one day at a time. With the help and partnership with Essex County the township received close to \$150 thousand in grants for homeless prevention.

Through a partnership with the township of Montclair, Montclair emergency Shelter for Homelessness (MESH) the Bloomfield recreation department, Temple Ner Tamid and Union Baptist church we are making sure our homeless population has shelter when temperatures are under 20 degrees. And this year we established a homelessness task force committee, working with the library recreation DPW and police to establish guidelines to identify the needs of the homeless and transition them into permanent homes.

Also just this year, our health department created a partnership with Bloomfield College nursing students to visit with our seniors with the creation of the friendly visitors program.

In 2015 our health department is set to do even more great things. We are on track to receive national accreditation which required the department to meet rigorous standards that promote high performance and continuous quality improvement. Also this year we are providing health and human services to five towns which awards Bloomfield with thousands of dollars worth of revenue and reducing our overall budget. I want to thank Karen Lore and the health department staff for all of the hard work they put in on a daily basis.

On my second day on the job last year Bloomfield was hit with a snow storm, but this would be the first of a very tough 6-weeks of constant snow and cold weather. Our department of public works showed myself and members of this council why we have the best DPW in the state. Last year this township was faced with 80-inches of snow. I want to recognize and thank DPW director Anthony Nesto and the staff. We have spent countless hours on how we can improve all operations including snow removal of the DPW. This year we effectively outsourced our sweeping program which provided more consistent service for our residents, while providing in house manpower to better serve the needs of our community

Two other departments I want to recognize is the Fire Department and Chief Joseph McCarthy and the Recreation Department and director Michael Scurman. In 2015 the fire official and training officer will develop and deliver an on duty NJ fire inspector course. This will improve the quantity and quality of inspections that personnel can legally perform. This will greatly increase operational flexibility of our comprehensive inspection program. Our Recreation department, which is always finding new programs and activities

that residents will benefit from, will be creating a drive in movie night to the 2015 summer of fun calendar.

There is no greater mission for a mayor than keeping the people of Bloomfield safe, and fostering a strong relationship between our residents and our police department. We are doing that. We are changing the culture at the Bloomfield police department.

I would like to recognize police director Samuel DeMaio and members of the Bloomfield police department here with us tonight. Police officers are constantly under attack for a few bad apples.

Crime in Bloomfield was down 5% in 2014. I am proud to say that we were the only community that borders Newark that did not have a murder in 2014. Our police department went from averaging 300 tickets per month to over 3,000. For the month of December our police department gave out 4,323 tickets, both moving and parking violations. Let me be clear, this isn't an effort to create more revenue for the township, we are simply creating an environment where the laws we have are abided to and respected.

Under the direction of Director DeMaio we have implemented multiple review boards such as use of force, pursuit and motor vehicle accident review board. One of our goals in the beginning of 2014 was to create a better community policing unit to create better partnerships and collaborations with the community. We created programs such as coffee with a cop and neighborhood watch groups.

In 2015 we are creating a clergy affairs partnership to increase interaction with the religious community within the township. A police youth academy will be created. This will allow youth of the township to experience what it would be like to be a police officer. We are also creating the position of civilian police aid. This will allow us to put more

police on the street. When the ten individuals graduate from the academy in February Bloomfield will have 125-officers, the most in eight years.

Lastly I would like to mention this administration's efforts to strengthen our relationship with the Bloomfield board of education. We've had monthly meetings with both superintendent Sal Goncalves and members of the board of education. In 2015 we will continue those meetings, including joint meetings on how we can improve Bloomfield.

We are going to improve Bloomfield's image to be a model community that is in demand. We are going to improve participation and volunteer opportunities for citizens by encouraging the formation of opportunities.

We all know our future depends on our smart kids and Bloomfield... this is about our future. It's about building a brighter tomorrow for all our residents. And we are not waiting. With determination and collaboration, and with your help, we're going to deliver a better, smarter Bloomfield.

**Thank you Bloomfield and God Bless**

**At Your Service - *Mayor, Michael J. Venezia***

**Township of Bloomfield, NJ**