



## **2025 STATE OF THE TOWNSHIP**

### **Building a Better Bloomfield Together: Green, Clean, and Strong**

Good Evening, Bloomfield, and thank you!

First, let me begin by thanking our County Executive, a fighter and champion for the residents of Essex County. Thank you for the very kind introduction and your unwavering support of the Township of Bloomfield. We truly could not ask for a better County leader.

And to the other public servants with us this evening, thank you. Your partnership is critical to the work that we're doing to Build a Better Bloomfield. As we face uncertain times, collaboration across communities and levels of government is all the more crucial. As we've witnessed with flooding and so many other issues, what happens in one of our communities often affects all of our communities, and what happens at the federal level of government is no different in its impact locally.

To the Town Council, thank you for your leadership, collaboration, and commitment to our community. This moment calls for unity and bold collective action to continue the significant progress that we've made and to navigate these tenuous and uncertain times.

A special thank you to Councilwoman Cruz, our emcee this evening. I'm grateful for your leadership and friendship. You are absolutely one of my favorite people, and I am so honored to serve this town alongside you.

To the township administration, the administrator's office, our department heads, and all of our departments, I cannot thank you enough for your hard work and dedication to Bloomfield. Although we are making tremendous progress in a very short period of time, like communities all over New Jersey, we are facing significant challenges, and you continue to rise to the occasion. Your dedication to this town is without question.

And most importantly, to the residents of Bloomfield who are here tonight and watching online, I express my deep gratitude to you for entrusting me to serve as your Mayor.

There are seven of us that sit up on that dais as the town council, but Bloomfield is a strong and resilient community because of you.

I am here tonight because I made a commitment to transparency. And this State of the Township is part of honoring that pledge. This is the first time in recent memory that Bloomfield has held a State of the Township, and I am enormously proud to be restoring this important platform for communicating with you about what is happening in our town today and our plans for the future.

Some have characterized tonight's event as a pep rally, and believe me, I wish this were true. Yes, tonight is about updating you on our successes and vision for the future, because you helped to make them possible. Our accomplishments and plans for the future reflect the goals and aspirations that our community has shared with me through emails, at town halls and community resource meetings, and through conversations at local restaurants. My family jokes they no longer want to go to the Nevada Diner or Bloomfield's Best Bagels with me lest I get into a conversation... But the fact is, I am ALSO here to speak with you candidly and directly about any challenges we must confront.

It is no secret that what is happening at the federal level is putting us in uncharted territory and creating a difficult environment for people to thrive.

And while I have no doubt that — together — we are bigger than the challenges we face, it is important that I communicate to you exactly what we're up against. And tonight, I will do just that.

When I first ran for Mayor, I made a promise to lead with vision, accountability, and action. I campaigned on bold, community-focused ideas and real solutions — and in just six short months, I'm so proud to report that we've made tremendous progress towards a Bloomfield that is already becoming Greener, Cleaner, and Stronger.

From upgrading infrastructure and preserving historic landmarks to reimagining public spaces, our work is reflecting the shared values of this community.

We've deepened our commitment to environmental resilience — improving stormwater management systems, investing in green infrastructure, and forging powerful federal, state, and local partnerships to address the growing threat of flooding.

Under the leadership of our police department, we've made much-needed safety improvements at our major intersections to enhance pedestrian safety.

We've also expanded civic engagement like never before — welcoming new and diverse voices, creating more transparency, and making government more accessible.

All of this is happening despite uncertain economic conditions and the dismantling of environmental protections and government accountability — a powerful reminder of just how important strong, stable local leadership truly is.

But effective leadership also requires a plan, and I campaigned on delivering a new Master Plan that reflects community priorities. As promised, that plan has now been finalized, and it lays the groundwork for everything that comes next.

Our newly adopted Master Plan sets a decisive, community-driven course that preserves what we love about Bloomfield while preparing us for the future.

It reimagines our neighborhoods as walkable, bike-friendly, and dynamic — with local businesses, affordable housing, cultural destinations, and smarter transportation.

It centers sustainability, green infrastructure, flood mitigation, and renewable energy. It ensures smarter land use, protects our green spaces, and maximizes the use of town-owned properties.

Our Master Plan is more than a guiding document, it is a commitment to the residents of Bloomfield. And I'm enormously proud to share that we are already delivering on our commitments.

One example is the long-abandoned DPW building on Grove Street. Vacant since the 1990s due to asbestos, this site has been a public health concern and an eyesore for decades.

Today, I'm thrilled to report that we've safely completed its demolition — a project that stalled for nearly 20 years was finally made possible through state funding that prioritized public health and community safety.

Nearby, the Royal Garage has made its final transition to Township ownership. This critical site adds to a larger inventory of parking availability, which includes the Glenwood and Six Points Parking Garages, which will provide much-needed parking for commuters, downtown businesses, and residents of the Center, boosting walkability, mobility, and our downtown's economic vitality.

And we're not stopping there. We're also preparing for a major renovation of the Lackawanna Train Station under NJ Transit's ownership. This long-awaited project will bring modern accessibility and infrastructure upgrades to this essential transit hub, reinforcing our commitment to smart, connected, and sustainable growth. We are grateful to the state for taking this on.

We're moving forward with plans to transform 328 Glenwood Avenue—formerly home to Roxy Florist — into a pocket park with walking paths, shaded seating, and a space for community events, from movie nights to music under the stars.

At 209 Franklin Street, we've preserved the former Essex County Vo-Tech property, protecting it from overdevelopment, while exploring recreational uses in partnership with the Board of Education. Any future plans will include stormwater management and robust community input, as promised. YOU will help to determine its future.

We've already enhanced five of our existing parks with 30 new trees, 21 benches, and picnic tables— special thanks to our **Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs** team along with **the Department of Public Works, who are** continuing that momentum with the planting of 10 new cherry trees along Newark Avenue. They've also prepared and submitted a grant application to fund an additional 100 trees throughout Bloomfield.

Sustainability guides our infrastructure, too. The long-awaited Pitt Street parking lot renovation includes upgraded stormwater drainage, solar lighting, bike racks, and mobile pay stations—all designed to minimize environmental impact while maximizing usability.

We've maintained our Sustainable New Jersey Bronze certification and are actively working toward Silver—thanks to progress in areas like stormwater upgrades, composting, pollinator-friendly planting, and Electric Vehicle fleet expansion, now with 14 municipal electric vehicles in service. Thank you to our Environmental Commission and our Green Team, Greener Bloomfield, for giving so much of your time to help move this all along.

Together, we're building a greener Bloomfield—not just for today, but for generations to come.

Improving quality of life for Bloomfield's residents is another top priority of my administration, and that begins with a cleaner, more beautiful town.

As liaison to the Bloomfield Beautification Committee, I've seen firsthand how small details — clean streets, well-maintained sidewalks, and safe roads — can transform our public spaces.

Our DPW leads the day-to-day operations that keep Bloomfield clean and well-maintained — from regular street sweeping and park cleanups to walking patrols through our business districts, they embody public service and civic pride.

Enhancing this work is Vialytics, an AI-powered tool that provides real-time data on the conditions of our roads and infrastructure. In partnership with our **Engineering Department**, it helps us assess maintenance needs, prioritize repairs, and plan more efficient projects, saving both time and resources. It also flags issues like clogged catch basins, overgrown trees, or utility concerns before they escalate.

Next week, pending weather cooperation, is Pothole Week. During this annual, concerted effort, the hardworking professionals at DPW are working to fill 100 potholes per day using resident reports and data from Vialytics. This is all part of our revived “Clean & Strong” initiative, and it's a perfect example of how technology, data, and community input drive real results.

This smart, data-driven approach is already shaping our 2025 Roadway Improvement Program. We plan to resurface 18 streets — totaling 2.7 linear miles — with many of these projects also including upgraded curbing, ADA-compliant ramps, traffic signal improvements, and improved stormwater drainage.

Additionally, we're digging beneath the surface to modernize our infrastructure. Through our Lead Service Line Replacement Program—financed through the New Jersey Infrastructure Bank—we've replaced more than 1,300 lead or galvanized lines, with thousands more scheduled for removal over the next five years.

This work earned our outstanding Engineering Department national accolades for Excellence in Community Engagement, recognizing both technical skill and public transparency in their commitment to ensuring clean drinking water for our community.

And of course, cleanliness and public health go hand in hand. That's why our **Health Department** is expanding early-morning garbage surveillance. After success in business districts, this initiative will extend to residential areas starting in June, helping reduce litter and pest issues while reinforcing our shared responsibility to keep Bloomfield clean.

Our most recent Town-Wide Clean-Up Weekend proved just how much our residents care. Hundreds of volunteers joined to remove litter and beautify public spaces, showing that clean streets and strong neighborhoods thrive when everyone gets involved.

From storm drains to sidewalks, from paving to public health, building a cleaner Bloomfield is a shared and community-driven mission — and it's one we're proud to lead together.

There are few times when a community's strength shines more brightly than in moments of crisis. Recently, the Bloomfield **Fire Department** responded to two major house fires within 48 hours, saving lives and preventing greater tragedy.

In one case, a 12-year-old girl became a hero by alerting her family just in time to escape. She had attended the Bloomfield Fire Department's Girls on Fire Camp last summer, a program designed to introduce girls to firefighting through hands-on experience and empowerment. Her quick thinking may have saved lives, and it's a testament to how community investment in youth can come full circle. Thank you to our firefighters, you are truly Bloomfield's bravest.

In the aftermath, our **Human Services Department** provided immediate support to the displaced families, and our community stepped up with fundraisers, too, because in Bloomfield, resilience is a community effort.

Beyond emergencies, our Human Services Department remains a lifeline for many. In just the first quarter of 2025, the department provided over 3,100 referrals and linkages for housing, food, utility relief, legal aid, mental health care, and more.

But strength is not just how we respond in a crisis — it's how we show up every day.

Our Fire Department, under Chief Venezia, recently earned national recognition for excellence in policy and training. Frequent joint training with neighboring departments in Nutley and Belleville ensures our firefighters are prepared for anything.

Under Chief Ricci, the Bloomfield **Police Department** continues to lead with a community-first mindset. Programs like Take a Walk with BPD, Coffee with a Cop, the summer youth police academy, and the CADET Program build trust, while new traffic safety features, like illuminated crossing beacons, traffic delineators, and high-visibility signage, are already slowing traffic and protecting pedestrians, especially in high-risk areas.

Just as we're building safer streets and stronger connections today, we're also preserving the places that shaped Bloomfield's identity, investing in our past to strengthen our future.

Repairs are underway at our historic Adult Library, while our beloved Children's Library prepares for a major renovation this fall, the funding for which was made possible without issuing new debt to the township. At Oakeside Mansion, preservation work continues with support from the New Jersey Historic Trust, including upcoming improvements to the Carriage House and Rose Garden Trellis.

We also recently secured nearly \$200,000 to preserve the historic Collins House, ensuring it remains part of Bloomfield's story for generations.

In today's economic climate, with rising costs and shifting funding at the federal and state levels, we know residents are counting on us to be responsible stewards of their tax dollars.

This is why, as I mentioned earlier, tonight is also about communicating with you directly and transparently about the economic challenges that the Township, alongside all of New Jersey, is confronting.

We are grappling with rapidly rising costs for everything from liability insurance to the cost of maintaining and purchasing equipment for essential services such as snow removal and garbage collection. 93% of our municipal budget is going to fixed costs. All of these challenges are being made much worse by the uncertainty and massive budget cuts occurring at the federal level.

While we are doing everything we can to address these issues, we are in difficult economic times, and tough decisions must be made.

To this end, we've asked every department to tighten spending.

Our Engineering Department has stepped up in a major way, taking on additional responsibilities of planning and design work to limit the use of outside consultants, saving hundreds of thousands of dollars that can be repurposed to address critical infrastructure needs.

DPW has also answered the call, assuming responsibility for maintaining nearly 100 Township-owned properties, including 13 parks, 5 parking lots, 13 bridges, and more,

saving taxpayers more than \$25,000 in just a few short months.

Shared services with neighboring towns also help us stretch resources without compromising quality, and when it comes to regional challenges like flooding, collaborating beyond our borders is an easy decision.

That's why we've partnered with neighboring municipalities, state legislators, and Congresswoman Mikie Sherrill to form a Regional Flood Mitigation Committee. We're working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to assess high-risk areas and secure funding for long-term infrastructure fixes.

This is what true leadership looks like — local, state, and federal partners working side by side to protect our communities, because floodwaters don't stop at municipal borders — and neither should our solutions.

At the heart of it all is our connection to the community. That's why expanding community engagement has been one of our top priorities, ensuring that more voices are heard and more residents are involved in shaping our future.

We've launched new advisory committees and added more than 90 new committee members to help guide Township decisions. We've hosted resource meetings in every ward, providing a space for neighbors to speak directly with elected officials and staff, sharing concerns, asking questions, and building trust. Programs like Mayor on Your Block and our Information Session webinar series bring leadership directly to residents, making local government more accessible and accountable.

This outreach extends to our senior community, thanks in large part to our new Mayor's Senior Citizens Advisory Committee. At Oakeside, we've expanded senior programming to offer yoga, crafts, music, and social opportunities. With over 112 participants, it's become one of our most joyful spaces and meaningful programs. In fact, I have had people tell me it has changed their lives, so if you know a senior in town, please let them know about it.

All of this—safer streets, stronger services, engaged residents—is laying the groundwork for Bloomfield's future. Because building a stronger Bloomfield isn't just about where we've been—it's about where we're going and growing together.

As part of our ongoing effort to enhance quality of life across Bloomfield, I'm proud to announce a major enhancement to our "Clean and Strong" initiative.

Since its launch in 2022, this proactive program has empowered us to respond more effectively to community concerns, from infrastructure and roadway issues to sanitation and public safety.

Now, we're taking the next step. We're activating a powerful tool through our SDL portal that will streamline how resident concerns are reported and resolved.

This means when you report an issue, it will be automatically routed to the appropriate township department, making the process simpler, faster, and more efficient for everyone.

Residents will also be able to track the status of their complaints and see real-time updates on how their concerns are being addressed.

And what's even better: this upgrade comes at zero additional cost to the Township. Many of our departments already use the SDL system, and this enhancement builds right into the tools we've already invested in.

Further, it gives us a comprehensive view of where problems arise frequently so we can be proactive in our planning and distribution of resources, addressing matters before they become issues.

I want to recognize the tremendous collaboration and hard work that made this possible, driven by the vision and efforts of our Township Administrator, Anthony DeZenzo. It is a testament to the strength of teamwork across departments and a shining example of what we can achieve when we work together.

And we're calling on both our community and our employees to continue working together — identifying concerns early and responding proactively — so we can keep Bloomfield clean, safe, and strong.

To further strengthen our connection with residents, we're also investing in how we communicate. We're developing a Strategic Communications Plan that will modernize the way we share information and engage with our community.

That includes a much-needed upgrade to the Township website — a top request from residents — and improvements to other communication tools that help keep you informed and connected.

We're also excited to share that we're expanding our digital presence to Instagram, finally, meeting more residents where they are, and ensuring key updates reach a broader audience. It is live right now, so please be sure to follow it.

And as part of our ongoing commitment to inclusion, we're prioritizing Spanish translations for key township communications, so that language is never a barrier to participation or access.

This plan is about more than just updates and upgrades — it's about building trust, accessibility, and stronger two-way communication with every resident in Bloomfield.

As we reflect on all that we've accomplished, it's clear that we are on the right path. From our environmental successes to our commitment to community development and sustainability, we are laying the foundation for a better Bloomfield — for today and for generations to come.

But we can not rest on our laurels. Whether it's expanding our green initiatives, addressing the housing needs of our residents, or continuing to build out infrastructure that will support our growing community, there is still much to be done.

However, I am confident in the strength and resilience of this community. The future of Bloomfield depends on the collective commitment we share — a commitment that spans across the Town Council, our administration, and every single one of you.

We have proven, time and time again, that Bloomfield is a place where people care for one another — a place where, together, we can overcome any challenge and achieve any goal.

And in that spirit, I want to acknowledge the members of this community that contributed to this State of the Township.

**That includes:**

Small Businesses like Casa de Flora Bar, Desi Dukaan, Love & Plates, Tootie Cookies

Program Participants: Youth Performing National Anthem (give them another round of applause), Pastor Boling from the Bloomfield Presbyterian Church on the Green. And of course, our township staff, Kim, Jackie, Jean Guy, Bob, and Eunice, who put a lot of time and effort into this event, alongside Carly, Justyna, Tara, and the entire Tara Dowdell Group. Thank you for hearing me when I said, we need to do something to get information to the community...and I need you to run with it.

Although we have some difficult decisions and times ahead of us, I am confident that Bloomfield will come out stronger because that is what we do, that is who we are. We are a compassionate community of doers and fighters. And we will succeed because we will work together and accept nothing less.

Thank you, Bloomfield, for your continued support and dedication to our community. Now let's get back to work on Building a Better Bloomfield Together: Greener, Cleaner, and Stronger.