

Mayor Dina Long 2017 New Year Message
Reorganization Meeting, January 7, 2017

There's something about being a Sea Brighter. An independence, a ruggedness of spirit. Maybe it's living on the edge. Or living off the wall. Traveling outside of town, when people ask me where I live, I go on and on with such pride and in terms so favorable it sounds like Sea Bright is next to heaven. If you live here, you know what I mean. Right? Aren't you so proud to be a Sea Brighter? I know I am.

Looking back over the state of things, from when I took office in January 2012, it's bittersweet. My friend Mayor Maria Fernandes was still here, along with a lot of other distinguished and colorful Sea Brighters who aren't here anymore, either. I have been blessed to hold the office of Mayor during the last five years of such an important time in Sea Bright's history.

The storm's impact, ten months into my first year as Mayor was, in a word, devastating. But I don't have to tell you that. And yet, being Sea Brighters, that wave knocked us down and we got right back up.

I remember saying right after the storm "give us five years. Five years." Now, five years is right on the horizon. And we are getting there.

Our property values, one of the single biggest indicators of recovery from a natural disaster, are back where they were pre-storm. New, rebuilt houses, even better. *(Show postcard from Sotheby's realty co, showing New Street property that sold for \$560K- downtown and next door to the DPW building!)*

Most of our full time residents are back, or in the process of elevating their homes if required by flood insurance. This office moved 210 building permits in 2016 alone.

Our long awaited municipal projects are underway or, in some cases, completed. We finished the bulk head project and installed a new pump station at Osborne. Streetscape is in progress, bringing us new sidewalks, street furniture and lighting, with plantings to come in the spring. Plans for the beachfront pavilion are being finalized and will go out to bid by end of month.

The municipal complex is close behind. This gym (1167 Ocean Avenue) has served us well, but the spaghetti soup of electrical wires at our employees' feet... this is not safe, or

sustainable. Thanks to the success of the referendum, for the first time ever, Sea Bright will have new municipal facilities. This is a grave responsibility for us as elected officials, to deliver the best, most cost effective and future-looking project that is possible.

We have aggressively pursued, and continue to do so, every eligible, appropriate grant and Sandy recovery program: If you add in the cost of the Sea Bright portion of the sea wall project, with all the FEMA, federal and state grants and aid, we are up to 40 million.

And recently, we received a 500K grant for our non-federal cost share of Sandy debris clean up costs through a state program, and 200K grant from the Monmouth County Park Commission toward construction of a waterfront open space park on the old Anchorage Apartments site.

All of this is accomplished with a handful of people who, despite their working conditions, the extraordinary volume, or the curveballs, keep this Sea Bright machine running. Tirelessly. and yet there are less full time employees now than when I took office in 2012.

I am so grateful for our 24/7 employees, our excellent Police Department, our Public Works Department, our Borough Admin. staff, our Water Rescue team.

Add to that the hundreds of hours given in volunteer service by our Fire Rescue Department, our Emergency Medical Services, and our Office of Emergency Management.

Also by our elected officials. The phone calls, emails, meetings, more meetings, time away from family to help our town. You have my/our sincere gratitude.

But next to gratitude is sober assessment of ways we fell short in 2016. Goals not met, situations that could have been handled better. With everything that we have going on, we left ourselves lots of room for improvement when it comes to communicating our activities, to disbursing information to residents.

Like America, we saw some divisiveness in our hometown this year. Personally I was disappointed at the volume of rumor, innuendo and spam during the local and national elections. At times I stopped to question, why am I doing this? I need this like I need a hole in my head, as my grandma used to say.

But, on the flip side, I was so encouraged by the engagement of the community through the referendum process, the *positive* energy I experienced talking with so many neighbors. And at the end, we are stronger for it.

Looking back over this year, what seems most clear to me is that whatever side you are on, you're still on the Sea bright side. It's us all, sink or swim, together as one Sea Bright. It's the one thing we all have in common after all: that love, that pride that beams forth from our faces when we talk about Sea Bright to complete strangers.

And we all agree that it's worth it.

So going forward, in 2017, we need to keep the momentum going. To take our disagreements in stride, knowing that if we keep the energy positive our outcomes will be positive. I'd like to share a quote from Henry Ford that came across my Twitter feed this morning: "Coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress, working together is success."

I look forward to working together with all you to help us get there. May god bless our beautiful hometown, and each and every one of us.

Thank you.