

Happy New Year!

At the December 4 Council session, I mentioned a meeting that I and other Bergen County mayors had with state legislators, county officials, and public policy advisors in late November at Bergen Community College regarding “**Path to Progress.**” The latter is a report by the NJ Economic & Fiscal Policy Workgroup, whose members consisted of a bi-partisan mix of legislative, academic, and financial leaders from across the state.

It’s not often that I have praised, either publicly or privately, past efforts to deal with the State’s budgetary & fiscal crisis. This particular effort, however, is a worthwhile read for any citizen interested in righting the unsustainable financial state of affairs that exists in NJ. You may not agree with every recommendation in the report, but the need for action is undeniable and long overdue. They fall into five broad categories:

1. Pension & Benefit Reform
2. Educational Reform at the Administrative Level
3. County & Municipal Government Reform and Shared Services
4. State and Local Government Tax Structure, and
5. Leveraging Assets to Stabilize the Pension System

The Bergen County mayors understand that if action is not taken soon by Trenton, the consequences will roll downhill to the local municipalities. **That will mean reduced services, higher state & local property taxes, and reduced public bond ratings.** If you think Hillsdale will be immune from this, you would be sadly mistaken. I will have more to say about this in my “State of the Borough” address at the annual Hillsdale Council Reorganization meeting this Sunday, January 6.

I encourage all residents to read the Workgroup’s report, or at least the five-page Executive Summary. Several recommendations in the section on County and Municipal Government Reform are especially relevant to issues that Hillsdale faces, and they are ones where we don’t have to wait for Trenton to take action. Those recommendations are intended to increase the use of shared services in certain areas. The report mentions specifically the handling of 911 calls, public safety call taking & dispatching, code enforcement, and health services as being ripe for consideration. It also encourages county governments to provide the full range of local police services (in full or in part) to help municipalities lower their costs. Here in Bergen County, a good example of this is the County Public Safety Operations Center in Mahwah. Many of our neighboring towns have decided to use the County facility for emergency dispatch in an effort to stay current with technological advances, reduce administrative burden on their police force, and significantly reduce expenses.

You can find the report at <http://pathtoprogressnj.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/PDF-EFPP-Report.pdf> It will also be posted to the Borough website.

Mayor John J. Ruocco