

February 1, 2021

Meredith Tomczyk  
Mount Laurel Township Manager  
100 Mount Laurel Road  
Mount Laurel, NJ 08054

**Re: Final Transition Report**

Dear Ms. Tomczyk,

Thank you for the opportunity to Chair the 2020 Transition Team. It has been a pleasure and honor to serve Mount Laurel Township and our residents in this capacity.

Mount Laurel has gone through a number of changes during the last decade. We have become more ethnically diverse, a hub for commercial business and population growth.

This report contains the hard work of the transition subcommittees: Public Affairs and Communications, Housing, Finance, Inaugural, Construction and Labor, Community Development and Business, Fire and EMS, and Legal. The subcommittees consisted of some of Mount Laurel's finest residents who came to the table with a wide variety of professional and personal expertise.

For the past few months, the subcommittees have been working diligently to deliberate what they see as the most crucial issues facing our town and presented potential solutions. With their wealth of knowledge in a myriad of topics, I have no doubt that the future of Mount Laurel is bright and will be a beacon for all of Burlington County.

As transition chair and a Mount Laurel resident, I am thrilled to present the Transition Final Report. The previous year may have been one that brought great change throughout the world, this year will bring greater (and exciting!) change to Mount Laurel. I offer my thanks to the transition subcommittee for their incredible leadership in organizing and facilitating meetings; and for taking the time out of their busy lives and provide us with commitment and dedication to the improve the Township.

Though the transition team members have completed their work, the real work has just begun. With this report, members of my team and myself will be a continuing to stay engaged with Mount Laurel residents throughout the journey ahead. Open communication, transparency, and hard work was a central theme of the transition and will continue to be a major component for the new administration.

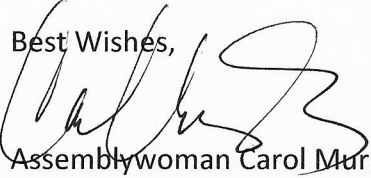
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**Re: Final Transition Report**

February 1, 2021

If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to Stephanie McAlary or myself at [aswmurphy@gmail.com](mailto:aswmurphy@gmail.com).

Best Wishes,



Assemblywoman Carol Murphy

Encl: Transition Report

cc: via email- [mtomczyk@mountlaurel.com](mailto:mtomczyk@mountlaurel.com)



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# MOUNT LAUREL TRANSITION REPORT





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# Letter from the Transition Committee Chair

## *Assemblywoman Carol A. Murphy*



Our team is looking forward to bringing new leadership, transparency and progress to Mount Laurel

Our operating principle is that nothing is off the table. Mount Laurel residents deserve a full analysis of how their municipal government works, from top to bottom. We will incorporate new ideas and fresh approaches at town hall to make sure government services are being delivered transparently and efficiently.

I charged the transition team with having a future focus of innovation and proactive communication. We will make Mount Laurel a success story where the government is responsive to the needs of residents.

It will take all of us to move forward with progress in Mount Laurel. With this report, we lay the foundation of the initiatives and innovation we strive to achieve with the constant underlying goal and responsibility to stay engaged with Mount Laurel residents throughout the journey ahead. Let's get to work!

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carol A. Murphy'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'C'.

Assemblywoman Carol A. Murphy



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# Overview:

## *Our goals for this report*

After the historic elections of 2018 and 2020, Mount Laurel residents chose a new direction embracing a council committed to progress and innovation. The Mount Laurel Transition has provided a vision and blueprint to guide the new council.

After speaking with Mount Laurel residents, various community leaders, and business owners, we recognize the critical need to enhance transparency, communications, and open government for the residents.

This transition report outlines our plans for committees and our transition team. The report will be broken up into these areas:

- Public Affairs
- Finance
- Fire Department and EMS
- Economic and Business Development
- Police Department
- Housing Department
- Boards and Professional Appointments

## Visions for the Community

**Communication:** Residents deserve open and easy ways to communicate with town officials on matters important to them.

**Transparency:** Citizens expect the government to be honest about issues facing the township and responsively manage our tax dollars.



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***Roads and Infrastructure:*** Every day our roads experience wear and tear as up to 150,000 residents and commuters hit rush hour. We plan to provide smart solutions to improve response time to traffic flow, work with state government to provide key road improvements and provide better access to major arteries.

***Citizen Involvement:*** Encourage citizen engagement and opportunities to have a real dialogue about the future of Mt. Laurel.

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# Public Affairs Department

Our Public Affairs Department will be designed to provide seamless access to resources and information for the citizens of Mount Laurel. Our team has identified important steps we will take to provide transparency while engaging with our community.

## Public Affairs Department Recommendations:

- ✓ Coordinating with the Township Manager and township department heads on all public matters and foster proactive communication
- ✓ Develop a user friendly website with a three clicks or less approach to find relevant information
- ✓ Easy sign up and registration to Community Pass for residents
- ✓ Modernizing and enhancing public safety communications such as Nixle to keep citizens alert and up-to-date on local public safety announcements
- ✓ Township interface with community members through email
- ✓ Creating a social media platform used as a single source of information
- ✓ Developing a calendar of events, activities and important information for township residents (events, trash collection, numbers)

## Four Unique Elements

We recommend creating a Public Affairs Department that will include four unique elements.

### **Structure**

A dedicated position of Public Information Director to establish channels of communication. The Director will work with the Township Manager and others on scheduling, implementing, and executing all township events.



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The Public Affairs department's goals are to resolve community matters and provide proactive communication through transparency and community input.

### ***Development of Communication Center***

We will connect with public information officers in different counties to collaborate on strategies used to build their departments.

Mount Laurel Township will have a unique presence on popular social media platforms. We will be updating the community on current events, important safety reminders, calendars, and answering questions.

### ***Website Recommendations***

Our goal is to develop a user friendly, three clicks or less revamped site for our residents to easily find information. If a resident is looking for town hall meeting notes, it will be accessed in three clicks or less. The public affairs department will look closely at the current site to determine what key information highlights are first priority to update and improve.

We will lay out a special section for Public Health information and resources. The website will be updated for COVID 19 testing and vaccination center information.

### ***Township Council Meetings***

Our transition team is built on providing transparency and proactive communication. We will be displaying town hall meeting notes for all residents to access. Meeting notes and agendas will be posted on the main Mount Laurel website in easy to find steps.

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# Finance and Administration Department

The purpose of the Finance Department is to protect and properly account for Township funds and to provide excellent customer service to its residents in a professional, courteous and efficient manner.

## Mount Laurel Township Financial Summary

Mount Laurel Township has an operating budget of approximately \$40 million. The past few years have been characterized by stable revenues and expenses resulting in consistent financial performance. As result of the COVID 19 pandemic Council will need to find cost savings and efficiencies to ensure the fiscal health of the Township.

The Township has had a relatively stable source of funding, benefiting from rising property values and ancillary revenue sources. 2020 Local Property Tax Levy was raised by approximately \$58 thousand. The result was a stable tax burden for residents and businesses in 2020. The Transition Team did not assess whether future property tax increases would be required due to COVID-19's impact.

2020 revenue realization has been largely in line with expectations and full year revenues are anticipated to be in line with budget except for Special Items. The large variance versus budget for special items has been determined, based on conversations with the Finance Department's personnel, that an estimated shortfall of municipal occupancy (hotel/motel) tax of \$800,000 is projected due to COVID-19. Also, it has been projected that tax appeals will be incurred in the future due to COVID-19. The transition team is unable to predict the financial impact this will have on the Township's financial position in future years.



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## Debt and Financing Costs

Mount Laurel Township guarantees approximately \$39 million of total debt. Approximately \$27 million of this debt is direct obligations of the Township through general improvement bonds and the remainder is debt through the Township's Open Space Bonds. The Township has an AA rating from Moody's and is generally viewed favorably by the credit agencies because of its diverse tax base and positive income and growth trends. A high rating typically results in an aggressive competition from financial institutions which in turn, favors lower borrowing rates.

## Capital Projects

General infrastructure projects are captured in a five-year capital plan developed by management. The Finance Department reviews the list of projects to understand funding needs and timing. Finance then works to prioritize projects and recommends which projects should make it into the Township's budget.

## Finance and Administration Department Recommendations

1. An enhanced management review will be conducted for key employees and contractors.
2. We have introduced the idea of Zero Based Budgeting, where each department starts their budget at zero and justifies every penny of tax dollars they want to spend before final approval.
3. When making budget decision we will ensure working people's livelihoods and safety remain a top priority for Mount Laurel families.

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# Mount Laurel Fire Department

The Fire Department is part of the Mount Laurel Fire District, an independent agency created by referendum and this section is for informational purposes only.

The Mount Laurel Fire Department is dedicated to providing all residents with a wide variety of emergency services and management.



## Department Structure

The Fire Department has continued to grow in size and responsibilities which necessitated the need for a Career Chief. This resulted in the formal reorganization of the two Fire Companies into one Department having two divisions. Division 1 comprises the Masonville Firehouse, with serious consideration currently being given to adding a second station in that Division to service the Townships South Central area, known as the Larchmont section.

Division 2 comprises the Fellowship and Birchfield Stations.

## Administration and Operations

The overall and daily operations of the Fire Department is supervised by the Chief of Department. The Chief of Department is a career position and reports to the Board. The department also employs two Deputy Fire Chiefs, one assigned to operations and the other assigned to the administration, both of whom report directly to the Chief of Department. The Deputy Fire Chiefs work on departmental administrative and operational issues assigned to him by the Chief of Department.

The financial and business operations of the Fire Department is performed by the Deputy Chief of Administration. The Administrator is a career position and reports to



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the Chief of Department. The position also performs confidential operations for the Board as the need arises and responds to incidents.

The Mount Laurel Fire Department, being a combination department, is composed of volunteer and career firefighters. Our standard of coverage consists of the following staffing:

- Station 361 (Masonville)- staffed 24/7
- Station 362 (Fellowship)- staffed 24/7
- Station 363 (Birchfield)- staffed 24/7

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# Economic and Business Development

Mount Laurel's success relies on the investment and commitment to our business community. We aim to create a strong relationship between our administration, citizens, and the business sector. Mount Laurel's small businesses are the backbone of the economy and we will put policies in place that will help small businesses succeed.

## Rancocas Woods

The Rancocas Woods development area leaves enormous potential for business growth. Rancocas will be a thriving economic area for large and small businesses.

The latest master plan for Mount Laurel was conducted in 2016. The township has grown exponentially since then and our transition team recommends that the Council direct the Planning Board to update this plan to reflect growth.

A community main street will be a top priority with plans for craft fairs, beer gardens, and local restaurants to attract members of the community.

## Impact of Hotel Industry in Mount Laurel

As recently as 2016, Mount Laurel was ranked third highest as it relates to the number of hotel rooms in the state, behind Atlantic City and Newark.

We recommend creating a Mount Laurel Hotel Association or Mount Laurel Restaurant & Hospitality Association to assure Township officials are understanding of and responding to their needs, especially on the heels of the pandemic. By creating this network, the Administration can be sure it is responsive to the industry's needs, look for ways to assure this industry continues to thrive, as well as think creatively about how to brand these businesses as a tourist destination.



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## Workforce Development Recommendations to Consider

Utilize Rowan College Burlington County (RCBC) to help leverage workforce development opportunities for the municipality and its residents. For the past three fall terms, RCBC enrolled approximately 660 Mount Laurel residents. In terms of graduates, over the past several years RCBC graduated approximately 200 Mount Laurel students per academic year.

## Transportation and Development



By working together with the state government our transition team has laid out the foundations of projects designed to improve the quality of life for Mount Laurel residents. We plan to protect our remaining open spaces from the onslaught of development. We will improve our flood prevention management and secure our

electric grid.

### ***Tackling Issues Head First***

150,000 residents and commuters use our roads daily, causing significant wear and tear and obvious congestion. Mount Laurel is increasing our economic development initiatives in terms of building a main street and increasing our small businesses in the area. In order to have successful businesses we need stable infrastructure. We will prioritize repairs to cut traffic time and help in times of winter weather issues.

We plan on developing long range ideas to help with traffic congestion in Mount Laurel. Our ideas include beginning work on an overpass on Route 73 and Fellowship

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by working with state government, including discussions on future construction of the ramp at Route 38 (Exit 40) and State Highway 295.

### ***Flooding Challenge***

We plan to deploy the most advanced public safety tools and secure federal emergency management program funding so our residents have the support they need. We will provide updates on social media alerting members of the community of potential flooding areas to avoid accidents.

### ***Infrastructure***

As more workers and children work and learn from home, we need to develop and modernize stronger electric grids. We will place an emphasis on the deployment of small wireless cells to give our families and businesses the resources they need.



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# Mount Laurel Police Department

The Mount Laurel Police Department aims to protect and serve the members of the general public of the Township, communities, businesses, and schools.



## Members and Organization

Currently the police department employs 82 personnel. That personnel is broken down as follows:

- 72 full time sworn officers
- 1 full time Special Law Enforcement Officer (SLEO)
- 2 part-time SLEO
- 7 civilian support staff

## Salaries and Budgets

The police department's total budget is 8,211,700.00. As of November 18, 2020, the Balance YTD \$1,863,123.43 or 81% used of the total budget.

## Goals and Objectives

The department has identified eight goals and objectives that they would like to work on in 2021 and beyond.

- Replace vacancies created by officer retirements.
- Increase the number of community outreach events sponsored by the police department.
- Create a proactive policing unit.
- Increase the amount of storage space available for property and evidence storage.
- Fill the vacant Traffic Officer position in the Traffic Bureau.
- Create a "Power Shift" to put more officers on the street where historical data demonstrates the need for more officers especially during busy call times.

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- Replace our aging vehicle-mounted license plate readers.

The implementation of the new Townships Public Affairs Department will be an asset with the police's community relations team and advancing the department's goals to increase the number of community outreach events sponsored by the police department.



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# Housing Department

The prosperity of Mount Laurel starts with the opportunity for families to have the ability to cement a home in our township. As the new governing council begins to implement the Fair Share Plan, it will play a vital role in expanding the opportunity for families in Mount Laurel to create generational wealth moving forward. We will work with existing community partners on affordable and moderate income housing units.

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# Boards and Professional Appointments

The subcommittee on professional and board appointments sought to widen the available talent and expertise to best serve local residents. As this process was undertaken, an emphasis on recommending professionals with extensive knowledge, experience and ability to work in a collaborative environment was considered. Our recommendation was to foster greater competition and expand the skill set amongst entities that would be able to coordinate for the greater good.

The first year of the new council majority begins with two appointments to the planning board (1 member, 1 alternate), three to the zoning board (2 members, 1 alternate), one to the Municipal Utilities Authority and two to library board, which includes filling the vacancy created by the resignation of Karen Cohen as she elevates to serve on township council. The recommended appointments attempt to achieve a substantial improvement in gender, racial and ethnic diversity.

In addition to the existing boards, the subcommittee is recommending to add two additional commissions, an Environmental Commission and Diversity Commission. The Environmental Commission was approved by the township more than 50 years ago, but was never activated, and would provide guidance regarding environmental considerations for local projects. The Diversity Commission, once established, would help bring communities of interest together, seek a more inclusive local government and highlight important issues facing the residents of the township.



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# Conclusion

Our transition team is ready to contribute to the ongoing and future success of Mount Laurel. We aim to provide transparency and open communication in every step we take.

## **Transition Committee Chair**

Assemblywoman Carol Murphy

## **Senior Advisors**

Michael Muller

Mickey Quinn

Ken DeRoberts

Dan Keashen

Ashlyn Grisetti

Stephanie McAlary

## **Committee Members**

Rajpal Bath

Tammi Bathke

Karen Cohen

Douglas Connors

Fozia Janjua

Jim Kehoe

Nikitas Moustakas

Kareem Pritchett

Christina Renna

Stephen Steglik

James Tulino

A special thank you to the residents of Mount Laurel for the opportunity to serve you. With the help of many we were able to develop a stronger path to put Mount Laurel on the map!