



**Raymond A. Giacobbe**  
Mayor

# City of Rahway

**Office of the Mayor**

**One City Hall Plaza  
Rahway, NJ 07065**

**Tel (732) 827-2009  
Fax (732) 574-0477  
mayor@cityofrahway.com**

## **Mayor Raymond A. Giacobbe's 2022 State of the City Address**

Good evening, fellow Rahway residents, and welcome! It gives me tremendous pride to stand before you in person and to be able to deliver this, my fifth State of the City address. Thank you to the Arts Center's staff, volunteers, and trustees for providing this beautiful space for this event.

I also would like to welcome everyone viewing this address via livestream.

Thank you very much, Senate President Scutari, for your gracious introduction. It's my honor to count you as a colleague and a friend. Thank you also to Pastor Ealey for tonight's invocation and for your leadership in our community for over 50 years. Thank you also to the incredibly talented Rahway High School students who delivered a terrific performance, and congratulations to all of our honorees, who are so deserving of recognition. Let's have one more round of applause for everyone!

I would like to acknowledge and welcome the dignitaries who are present tonight.

We are joined by many local, county, state, and federal representatives, and I am honored by your presence. At this time, I ask that you stand to be recognized.

I'm grateful to each of you for your partnership in creating progress for the people of the City of Rahway and the State of New Jersey.

My next thank you is to my family, who are my constant source of support as I work to do what's best for our City. First, of course, is my wife Laura, who, while achieving so much in her own career and endeavors, has been my side for over 25 years. Also, my children, Anabella and Raymond - you continue to inspire and amaze me as the young adults you have grown to become. Thank you to my mother, Gina, for always being there for me and helping me to become the man that I am.

To all of my family and friends, knowing that you are there and I have your love and support is greatly appreciated and I thank you.

My next acknowledgements are for individuals whose day-to-day collaboration is perhaps the most important to me. Our Rahway City Council members bring to the table diverse perspectives, experiences, and abilities, which we leverage to move our City forward. And I'm thankful to have them as partners working on behalf of our residents.

I'd also like to take a moment to acknowledge former Councilmember James Baker and his 15 years of service to our City. We're fortunate that he now represents us as a Union County Commissioner.

I welcome all the City of Rahway employees who are here tonight. You're the people who work consistently to serve our residents. Over the past two years, you've been asked to step up even

more than ever, and you've answered the call. I thank each of you for your day-in and day-out efforts.

I want to also welcome our new Business Administrator, Jacqueline Foushee who works diligently to assure that the operations of our City are carried out as effectively and efficiently as possible since assuming the role in September.

Speaking of Business Administrators, I'd also like to thank Bob Landolfi, who preceded Ms. Foushee. His experience and wisdom were critical to helping guide the City through challenging waters of COVID. I value Bob's continued service as Executive Director of the Rahway Redevelopment Agency. Thank you, Bob.

I also want to recognize my personal staff, the members of the Administration Department. Matt, Michelle, Lauren, Karina, Daija, and Joe thank you for all your hard work and dedication.

At this time, I ask that all the City employees present stand to be recognized.

I also want to extend a warm welcome to our many community partners. From members of the clergy to our local nonprofit organizations, your collaboration is invaluable in supporting our residents, especially the most vulnerable.

Tonight I'll highlight our City's accomplishments and initiatives, and the many ways my administration has – and will continue to – move our City forward.

Let me start with one of my proudest accomplishments and a tremendous benefit for residents. Earlier in my term as Mayor, I asked my directors to continue providing a high level of essential services to our residents without increasing taxes. While our property taxes also include school, county, and library components, the portion that we control – the municipal component – was not increased in 2021.

I'm also proud to announce that my administration will present to City Council a 2022 budget which again will result in a 0% tax increase.

This achievement demonstrates our ability to be fiscally responsible while we continue to find additional ways to increase revenue and efficiency for our residents.

Over the course of the pandemic, nearly 7,000 Rahway residents tested positive for the virus. Thankfully, the vast majority have fully recovered. However, 125 of our residents have passed away due to Covid. These family members, friends and neighbors will forever be in our hearts.

As the severity of the public health crisis became clear in early March 2020, my team and I immediately began planning and acting with an overriding objective - to protect the health and safety of our residents and employees while continuing to provide the essential services that our community relies upon.

A particular focus was – and continues to be – protecting our senior citizens and others who are most vulnerable to the disease. It's not an overstatement to say that our efforts have literally saved lives.

Our focus began with making wellness calls to seniors – and I do encourage seniors to register with our Senior Center so that we can be in touch with you as needed. We also provided free Covid testing to our residents, in partnership with the County.

As vaccinations became available, we acted aggressively to ensure access for every member of our community who wished to be vaccinated and established a weekly clinic at our Senior Center. The City partnered with public schools, nonprofits, and churches who also hosted vaccination clinics and helped educate residents about vaccination as a tool to contain the virus. Over the course of 2021, we operated over 90 vaccination sessions and provided almost 9,500 vaccinations. According to recent statistics, 76% of our eligible residents are fully vaccinated, and nearly half have received boosters.

Our efforts also included frequent distributions of food in collaboration with the County and our nonprofit partners and churches. We provided both fresh produce and packaged foods, as well as heart-healthy meals to our senior buildings.

Of course, special occasions call for special touches and so, for two consecutive years, we've delivered over 1,000 freshly prepared meals from over 30 Rahway restaurants to our seniors as part of our "Be Our Valentine" and "Picnic at Home" programs.

The need of our senior citizens to access essential goods and services also prompted us to expand our free Senior Transportation Service. To accomplish this, we added a second bus and, in 2021, provided over 6,000 rides, including transporting seniors to receive over 1,000 vaccinations at our clinics.

It took the work of so many individuals to provide these services, but I'd particularly like to recognize our Health Officer, Dennis Green, whose expertise has been invaluable in guiding our response, and Anthony Deige, Director of Recreation and Senior Services, whose organization and coordination has been remarkable. Gentlemen, I thank you and your staff for all your efforts.

As shutdowns and restrictions were implemented, the need to help our small, family-owned businesses became clear. One of the most significant ways in which we did that was through the creation of the Rahway CARES program. In the first phase of the program, funding was provided to nearly 70 small businesses, to help them stay afloat. In the second phase, grants for needs related to the pandemic – including construction, PPE, and technology – were awarded to over 100 businesses. In total, almost \$550,000 of Special Improvement District surplus was distributed back to our businesses through the Rahway CARES program. Our small businesses are a cornerstone of the City's economy, and my administration has helped support them through the incredibly challenging conditions that the pandemic has presented.

While the pandemic has taken its toll on small businesses across the nation, Rahway has remained strong. I'm proud to say that many have continued to thrive and in fact, over 25 new businesses have opened since my last State of the City address.

I understand the importance of having a strong and viable business community. Last summer, we transitioned management of our Special Improvement District, or SID, to City Council. This was an essential change allowing collaboration between the City, SID and Redevelopment Agency to truly focus on economic development for the City. This change also expands the scope of the SID beyond its traditional focus on events.

This transition has been supported by hiring an Economic Development Officer Elton Armady and establishing committees of stakeholders from our community who will focus on the interests of our business and the arts. This transition is already bearing fruit, and I'm confident that we will continue to see enhanced collaboration and services for our SID community.

In early September of last year, Mother Nature handed us another significant challenge, namely the impacts of Hurricane Ida and the resulting flooding. The unpredicted flooding affected so many of our residents' homes and many businesses, in some cases leading to short- or long-term displacement.

The night of the storm, our first responders rescued well over 100 people who were stranded and at risk from flood waters. During the storm, we established short-term emergency shelters for residents at our Recreation Center and Roosevelt School.

As the sun came out and the waters receded, our work was only beginning. In the days following the storm, inspectors from our Building and Property Maintenance divisions went door to door in impacted areas, providing initial assessments, information and forms regarding permits and available resources.

A critical focus for my administration was to work with our local, county, state, and federal officials to have Rahway and Union County included in the federal disaster declaration. You may recall that this was not initially the case, but we were successful in our efforts.

Having Rahway included in the declaration opened the door to significant federal resources through FEMA, including short- and long-term financial assistance for residents and businesses. For many weeks, FEMA staff and County representatives were on the ground in Rahway to identify the community's needs and provide targeted access to resources.

Our Office of Emergency Management was vital in coordinating our Hurricane Ida response, both during the storm and in the days, weeks, and months that followed. I'd like to recognize our OEM and Police Director, Jonathan Parham, and OEM Deputy Director, Thomas Brougham, for their tireless efforts to protect our residents and ensure access to much needed resources for recovery.

The severity of the storm was evident from the flood debris that briefly littered our streets. I say briefly because our Department of Public Works, under the leadership of Director Mike Smalling, was very much on the case. While continuing to perform the vital work they do each day, they also collected and disposed of approximately 1,000 tons of flood debris following the storm.

Whenever possible, the City Council and I have taken steps to help relieve the financial burden of the storm and allow our residents to focus their resources and attention on recovery. This has included property tax reductions, parking fee waivers, adjusted water bills, and temporary housing for residents in dire need.

During the recovery, the unique spirit of Rahway rose up and we saw the tremendous efforts of volunteers who stepped up to assist each other and their neighbors. This included the work of resident Dee Smalling, who organized the collection and distribution of clothing, food, household goods, and other items to those in need, and provided meals to seniors who were displaced from their homes.

I'd also like to recognize members of our City Council for their important role in this effort. Countless other residents did and gave so much to help those who were impacted. These efforts were truly inspiring to witness. This is exactly what I mean when I say "Rahway All Day".

In facing the challenges of Covid and Hurricane Ida, and frankly the challenges of everyday life for many, our churches and nonprofit community organizations are vital partners that we collaborate with to help serve the needs of our community.

My administration has found ways to not only collaborate with these organizations but to also support them financially so they can continue to perform their vital work. The Covid and Ida Relief Grant enabled the City to help non-profits address operational and capital needs and provided over \$27,000 to 15 nonprofit organizations throughout our City.

My administration, the City Council, and our municipal workforce has achieved so much over the past year that to list everything would have us here until midnight.

I do want to take the opportunity to highlight a few of those accomplishments, especially those which most directly benefit our residents.

Continued and expanded outdoor programming and events, many of which have been adapted to safely provide creative and recreational outlets despite the pandemic.

Our comprehensive Beat the Fatigue programming was recognized just last week with a prestigious award from the New Jersey Recreation and Parks Association.

We expanded our outdoor music programming, including the addition of a series of house music events hosted by Kevin Simmons that proved to be quite popular.

We also saw the return of the Mayor's Summer Concert Series. So...who came out to enjoy En Vogue and the Pop 2K Tour last August?

Also related to recreation, we've renovated several of our playgrounds by replacing the equipment, installing state-of-the-art safety surfaces, and adding specialized staff for individuals with disabilities, paid for by grant funding.

We've partnered with the Rahway Board of Education to create a tutoring program to provide additional support to students, especially those who may have struggled with virtual learning.

We also resumed and enhanced our TeenWorks summer youth employment program, finding new ways to help our teens gain work experience, increase their job readiness, and engage in civic participation.

Another significant area of focus for my administration over the past year has been to enrich our social services by hiring a full-time social worker. Ms. Jareah Lambert-Spivey, was instrumental in presenting last summer's Living Well event, which helped connect our community with health and wellness resources. She has also partnered with the Rahway Police Department and the YWCA of Union County on efforts to combat domestic violence and raise awareness around this issue.

In an additional partnership, she has joined forces with our Police Department on a community outreach initiative to aid our small population of homeless individuals. This involves regular checks to identify individuals in need and determine if they require medical assistance, food, shelter, or mental health services. As a result of this initiative, last October, Rahway Police Department Sergeant Frank Pauling and Officer Darius Singletary were recognized as Officers of the Week by the New Jersey Attorney General.

Speaking of our Police Department, let's focus on some of the changes and initiatives that have occurred in the department over the past year. Last summer saw the retirement of former Police Chief John Rodger, after 37 years of service. Let's take a moment to thank him.

The Police Department is now under the leadership of Director Jonathan Parham, who joined us in July. In less than a year, Director Parham has introduced numerous initiatives to enhance the knowledge, efficiency, and effectiveness of the department. Director Parham has created a stand-alone Training Unit to help ensure compliance with county, state, and federal training mandates. One of the most visible – and innovative – developments on the training front has been the implementation of a Jiu Jitsu program to provide police officers with safer and more effective ways to control subjects who resist arrest. These initiatives were implemented while the department continued its vital daily work. Let's hear it for our Police Department!

Another branch of our first responders – the Rahway Fire Department, under the leadership of Chief Michael Roberts, has been busy as well. In addition to its heroic actions during Hurricane Ida, over the course of 2021, the Department responded to over 2,700 calls for service. The department also focused on planning and preparation, including acquiring and outfitting a new rescue truck to replace a 30-year-old vehicle and designing and ordering a new fire engine specifically built to fit our City's size and needs.

The department has also increased its preparation through extensive training programs, including swift water rescue. The Department's responsiveness and dedication to protecting lives and property in our City is truly admirable and they earn the title of Rahway's Bravest each and every day.

Infrastructure, and particularly our roads, are important to us all, and I'd like to touch on some of our accomplishments in that area over the past year. Our new Director of Engineering and Land Use, Dan Lee, has overseen approximately \$2.5 million in road and sidewalk improvement projects, 30% of which we received in grants from the New Jersey Department of Transportation and Union County. We also received over \$700,000 in Community Development Block Grants funds that were used for various projects around the City.

See, I told you there was a lot to talk about. And there's so much more. Once again, I must credit the many dedicated City employees for their efforts to carry out all this work. This includes our department directors, who bring a wealth of experience, expertise, and energy to leading their staffs. I've mentioned several of them thus far in my remarks but would be remiss if I did not recognize some whose work may be less visible but is nonetheless vital to carrying out the business of the City. Please hold your applause until the end while I recognize Chief Financial Officer Frank Ruggiero, Director of Code Enforcement Frank Spallone, City Clerk Jeff Jotz, Municipal Court Administrator Marylene Sheppard, Director of Law Louis Rainone, and the Director of the Rahway Public Library, Ian Sloat. Let's give them all a round of applause!

I'd also like to recognize several employees who retired over the past year after 25 or more years of service to our City. Their names are listed on the screen behind me.

A special but sad recognition is in order for two of our colleagues who passed away during the past several months. These are recently retired Lieutenant Joseph Kostick of the Rahway Police Department and active Firefighter Robert DiAnno. Both left us way too early, and they are missed.

Having spoken so far about all that we have accomplished, let's turn our attention to what is yet to come in 2022 and beyond, as my administration and the City Council continually seek ways to enhance our community and the services provided to our residents.

The programs and services offered through our Health Department will continue and be expanded. In one significant initiative, the Department will increase its presence at our senior citizen buildings and offer on-site services such as blood pressure screenings, referrals for housing, food, healthcare, and mental health services. The Department will also continue its collaboration with the Police Department on its Community Outreach and Domestic Violence initiatives.

Our youth will be served by additional playground and other park upgrades. These include safety surfaces at Berzinec and Grover Cleveland playgrounds, installation of a splash park at Brennan Field, and completion of improvements at Madden Field. I'm also pleased to announce that the City has been awarded over \$100,000 in grant funding to replace the play structure at the Grover Cleveland playground.

We will also expand our programming for teenagers to include year-round opportunities, with a focus on college and career preparation.

Our event programming, which offers recreation, entertainment, and enrichment for residents and visitors of all ages will continue and grow. This includes introducing an expanded Fourth of July celebration at Rahway River Park. Additional events will include block parties, community cleanups, and new offerings for seniors and individuals with disabilities.

Music and other art forms will continue to fill our streets. This year's Mayor's Music Series will include free outdoor events every Friday and Saturday from May through September, and our Mayor's Concert Series will be expanded to six concerts, including a June kickoff featuring two of our favorite local bands, Day One and Midnight Rock Show.

I've spoken of the importance of our nonprofit partners and our small business community, and we'll continue our efforts to support both. 2022 will see the establishment of a nonprofit alliance, designed to enhance coordination and create synergies among our local organizations. The Special Improvement District and Redevelopment Agency are exploring additional grants and other programs to attract new businesses while supporting our existing ones.

Our list of planned infrastructure projects is extensive. Our roads will see continued attention and improvement, including a project to turn Main Street between New Brunswick and East Milton Avenues into a grand, welcoming, and pedestrian-friendly boulevard that will serve as a gateway to our downtown.

To address and mitigate flooding during rain events, we'll implement improvements to manage our waterways and storm sewer system. A desnagging program is underway and we'll replace two failing structures along our waterways. We'll continue to collaborate with the other communities along the Rahway River to advocate for federal and state funding and action to prevent flooding.

As we prepare for Rahway's post-pandemic future, we'll do so in a proactive manner. Our redevelopment will be guided by the recently introduced strategic vision plan for downtown and beyond. One very visible highlight will be the reconstruction of East Cherry Street using over \$600,000 in grant funding. This streetscape project will increase the usability and safety of this

gem of our downtown while retaining its charm and will also include the construction of a park on City-owned property.

Our Department of Public Works will continue a tree pruning program that was initiated in 2020 and is in the process of conducting an extensive tree inventory, accounting for the size, species, and condition of every tree on public property. Further, the City will form a Shade Tree Committee to help guide our efforts.

Finally, as we progress into the future, we will not forget our past, especially the rich history that Rahway possesses and that is reflected in many of our buildings, houses, and other features. To help maintain our City's physical character, my administration and the City Council will be guided by forthcoming recommendations from the City's Historic Preservation Commission.

As I conclude my remarks this evening, and as you consider all that you've heard about our City's recent past and its bright future, I hope that your lasting impression is that we have made tremendous progress.

It has been said that "If you want to experience significant progress toward your goal, you need to be intentional about the work you're doing every day." That notion is a guiding principle for me as your Mayor and for our City Council.

Through the significant challenges we have been presented with over the past two years - and in the face of unknown challenges that the future will surely hold - we have and will continue to work hard to create positive change for all residents of this great City and to move Rahway forward.

Thank you all for your attendance this evening. May God bless you, may God bless the great City of Rahway, and may God bless the United States of America.