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MAYOR'S MESSAGE

APRIL 2015

Dear Residents and Stakeholders:

Smart. Strategic. Bold. That's what we have to be in order to achieve long-term fiscal stability in the City of East Orange.

On March 23, 2015, I introduced the 2015 Calendar Year Budget to the East Orange City Council. My administration looks forward to the continued partnership with the City Council as we work to stabilize taxes while providing the services and quality that the residents of East Orange expect and deserve.

Creating this year's budget required months of meetings, numbers crunching, innovative thinking and soul searching. It was no easy task, but I can guarantee you that every decision was made with the best interest of our families and taxpayers in mind.

Many of the difficult choices I had to make those first few months after I took office are paying off exponentially, and we are on course to see so much more. By overhauling two of our largest assets – the East Orange Water Commission and the East Orange Golf Course – we are well on our way to transforming them into the revenue generators that they are intended to be. After successfully lobbying the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, the city was approved for bond financing to make long overdue repairs to these assets. We can no longer afford to put off for tomorrow that which can be achieved today. That's being smart.

There is no quick fix for structural deficits that took years – even decades – to create. Right sizing our government is the best strategy for reaching my administration's vision: "Setting the standard for urban excellence and becoming a destination city." We can no longer continue business as usual simply because that's how it has always been done. We are thinking outside of the box and making difficult, but sound decisions with our city's future stability in mind. That's being strategic.

Many of our recent efforts to increase efficiency and generate new revenue have already yielded success. The Department of Public Works' one-time purchase of new trucks to add to our snow fleet saved us nearly \$200,000 this winter, and is estimated to save the city nearly \$2 million over the next decade. In addition, our newly-established Division of Vacant and Abandoned Properties has identified 591 properties, tracked down 119 owners and generated over \$100,000 in revenue in just three months.

Utilizing a proactive approach, the 2015 budget proposes a path toward fiscal solvency through the consolidation of services, modernizing government services, and a minimal tax increase with the intent of a steady decline in the tax increase as the city returns to strong fiscal footing.

For the Calendar Year 2015 Budget, I have proposed a municipal tax levy increase of 3.5%, down nearly a point from last year's increase. That is an equivalent to a property tax increase of \$212.70 a year, or \$53.18 per quarter, for the average home valued at \$175,000.

We have taken a hard look at programs funded with taxpayer dollars and asked critical questions: Can we provide services at a lower cost while maintaining the quality of services? Can we eliminate redundancy in our services, increase efficiency and bring our government into the 21st Century? If the answer is yes, then we are going to make it happen. That's being bold.

Thank you to our department heads, all of our city employees, the residents, and the City Council for helping us to make such huge strides this past year. I am proud to have your faith not just in my leadership, but our collective and continuing effort to work collaboratively together to make East Orange a great place to live, work and play.

Mayor Lester E. Taylor III