



The

MAYOR'S MESSAGE

APRIL 2016

Dear Residents and Stakeholders:

In the two years that I've had the honor to serve as the Mayor of East Orange, I have encouraged and empowered my team to develop and implement creative and innovative solutions to restore fiscal stability to our city. This has often meant making strategic, bold, and difficult decisions to get the job done. The creation of the municipal budget serves as an opportunity every year for my administration, with the support of the East Orange City Council, to deliver a responsible, cost-conscious plan that promotes the proverbial "most bang for the buck" for our city.

The City of East Orange is a vibrant, living community that operates at well over \$130M. As proposed, the 2016 budget meets the needs of our community, and includes a 1.9% tax levy increase, which is just under the state's cap and the lowest since I took office. This continues the downward trend toward the total stabilization of taxes that our residents deserve.

For the first time in a long time, our water commission will NOT be financially supported by the city's budget in order to fulfill shortfalls in their own departmental budget. This measure gives back \$1 million to the city to help further stabilize our fiscal footing. By aggressively addressing the issues of our water commission, we are now able to move forward on stalled development projects, which will help increase the share of property taxes paid by businesses and commercial properties. This also will bring East Orange closer in line with state averages and help to significantly reduce the tax burden on our homeowners.

One only needs to look to the water crisis in cities much like our own to be reminded of how valuable clean, safe drinking water is to a community. As one of only three municipalities in the state to own our water utility, we took drastic, but necessary steps to ensure that our water is safe for generations to come.

Over the past two years, we have worked hard to balance our budget with reduced spending and increased investment in our community. In one year's time, we've doubled private capital investment to over \$250 million in upcoming projects that represent the construction of commercial and residential properties in every ward of the city. We've invested in our own assets, like the East Orange Golf Course and the East Orange Water Commission, ensuring that those valuable resources are making money instead of losing it.

Here are some highlights from the past year:

- The newly-renovated East Orange Golf Course created revenue for the first time in years, bringing in over \$300,000.
- The Department of Public Works reduced solid waste costs by half a million dollars.
- The Department of Property Maintenance put 355 vacant and abandoned properties back on the tax rolls. That means an estimated \$3 million in tax revenue will be generated based on each house paying an average of \$8,000/yr in property taxes.

Without a doubt, this 2016 budget demonstrates our commitment to ensuring that our government continues to work as effectively and efficiently as possible. I look forward to working together with the City Council in good faith to meet the state deadline in approving this budget and continuing to set the standard for urban excellence and making East Orange a destination city.

Mayor Lester E. Taylor III