



CITY OF
ENGLEWOOD
NEW JERSEY

MAYOR
MICHAEL WILDES

Mayor's Message - January 3rd, 2025

Happy New Year Englewood! As our city continues to grow and prosper, I want to ensure that every resident is able to stay in the loop with important happenings in our community. To that end, I will be initiating regular updates such as this, "The Mayor's Message", going out to our community. For this initial message, I would like to present an update on our new City Council assignments, and to share with you the 2025 State of the City report, which I presented at our Annual Reorganization Meeting on January 2nd, 2025.

I also invite you to join our Virtual "Coffee with the Mayor" session held every Friday at 11am. For the past four years, beginning during the early days of Covid-19 and quarantine, these sessions have been used to deliver important community updates and allow residents to ask questions and voice concerns in real time. As we continued, they have evolved to include special guest speakers highlighting various aspects of our community such as education, recreation, community service organizations, and many more. Please join us to keep up to date on current events, and to add your own perspectives to important conversations taking place in our community.

*~Mayor Michael Wildes
City of Englewood, NJ*

Virtual "Coffee with the Mayor" - Fridays at 11am

Participate Via Zoom - Meeting ID: 870 9063 8973 Passcode: 549999 Or Dial-In: 646 876 9923

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2025 City Council Update

- ◆ Councilwoman Lisa Wisotsky will serve as City Council President for 2025. She will also serve as liaison to the Municipal Alliance.
- ◆ Councilman Ken Rosenzweig will serve as City Council President Pro Tempore, as well as liaison to the Special Improvement District (SID) and Traffic Advisory Committee.
- ◆ Councilwoman Angela David will serve as liaison to the Englewood Board of Education.
- ◆ Councilman Kevin Wilson will serve on the Planning Board.
- ◆ Councilman Dan Tokayer will serve as liaison to the Recreation Advisory Committee.



Mayor Michael Wildes, Englewood: State of the City 2025

Introduction:

Thank you to everyone joining us here tonight or viewing remotely. I want to thank the voters of Englewood for continuing to place your trust in me as Mayor of our City and electing me this past November to my fifth term, and third consecutive term since my return to public office in 2019. We face new challenges every year, but it's an honor for me to continue working with and for our entire community in helping our City rise to meet these challenges.

I want to give special thanks to my wife Amy and my entire family for their support and tolerance for what a large component of my life our City government has held for so many years. I have been through more elections, swearings-in and State of the City addresses than any other Mayor of Englewood, but this year hits differently. As many of you know, my father Leon Wildes passed away at the beginning of 2024. He instilled in me so much of what drove me to public service in the first place – helping others, promoting open minded dialogue, and a love of community. His loss was a significant change for my family and I, one that made me contemplate whether to run for another term last year. I know there is more work to be done, and I still feel a passion for doing it. Having now welcomed my 7th grandchild, I knew dad would want me to continue onward, to set an example and to do the best possible to leave our city and our world a better place for them, and for every Englewood family.

To be sworn in by my son Josh, who has also joined Amy and I at our family law firm, which was founded by my father, is a very special occasion for our family. To Amy, Raquel, Josh, Lauren Ruth, Jaclyn and our entire extended family, you give me resolve and inspiration, and I truly thank you for all your support.

I would also like to note the passing of our former dear Congressman Bill Pascrell. He would fight for us without any exhibition of hate, and wasn't vengeful. He stood as an exemplary model as a Teacher, Mayor and a fiercely loyal friend who had the courage of his convictions and left our nation stronger and a better place than when he started.

City Council - I would like to welcome our new Councilman-At-Large Dan Tokayer. I have known Dan for many years and am looking forward to seeing the energy and new ideas he will bring to the table. I also want to thank our former Council President Charles Cobb for his many years of service on the council and wish him all the best in his next endeavors. Since 2020, our City has now seen a turnover of all five of our seats on the City Council. Some of the changes on the council have come about with the retirement or relocation of the former representatives, while others have been decided by contested primary elections dictating a desire within the community for change. Regardless, every member of this Council has been duly elected by our residents to serve our City. Regardless of what Ward they live in, their gender, religion, color of their skin or other background, we take the oath to serve every resident of our City, and I trust, that each of us will do so to the best of their abilities.

Most of you on the Council are not new to public service but beginning today you have an opportunity to write a new chapter in the story of Englewood government. Anyone who has viewed our Council meetings over the past several years has witnessed far too many instances of unprofessionalism, infighting and factionalism that have obstructed progress and divided our community on many issues, most problematically when race or religion are introduced as a factor in play. It is my hope that we can all find ways to better communicate with each other, maintain focus on the goals and challenges at hand, and constructively collaborate to best serve our city, as we have all sworn to do. We don't all have to agree all the time, but we have a choice if we let disagreements lead to breakdowns in civility, or instead if we maintain our resolve to move forward and accomplish results for our community. If at any time during these meetings you have thought to yourself, "we can do better" or "we owe the people more than this behavior", as I have many times, now is our time to commit to do better, and to give them more.

Financial Report – Our city begins 2025 on a sound financial footing, which is a factor impacting not only our individual wallets but also our ability to provide various services to residents. The City of Englewood received a credit rating upgrade from Standard and Poor's to AA. Previously in 2023 the City's credit rating had been AA-, with a positive outlook. Before that there had not been a credit rating upgrade in several years. Each rating increase reduces the City's cost for interest payments on capital projects. The clean AA credit rating is a reflection of the City's long-term policy to make sure its financial house is in order. This includes building surplus so that funds are available for emergencies from storm damage and to pay for any tax appeal refunds. The City is also exploring several important, progressive opportunities for Shared Services agreements with other municipal entities to further improve cost efficiencies while improving services. We also look forward to working on potential Shared Services with our school district.

Municipal Services – Our City continues to take proactive steps to improve municipal services that are often far more complex than they appear, and have a substantial impact on our quality of life. Our City Manager, Deputy City Manager, City Engineer, DPW Director, and other City employees deserve recognition for their constant work to improve services for us all.

Garbage Collection – Englewood is pushing forward with technological innovations for delivering our city services. This year the City has received two (2) electric garbage trucks and installed a heavy-duty charging station at the DPW yard. Englewood is the first municipality in the State of New Jersey to receive Mack electric garbage trucks. The truck that was delivered in July has been assigned to the recycling routes. It operates in all four (4) wards. Our Packer truck will be put into service during the first two (2) months of 2025. It's about to be delivered to the City. The truck and the charging station cost \$1.7 million dollars and were completely grant funded. Additionally, for reasons unknown the City let its garbage transfer station license lapse over 15 years ago. The garbage transfer station will be brought back online. City staff has been working on the process of recertification since 2023. Once back online the transfer station will save the City significant sums of money.

Leaf Collection - The DPW recently completed the leaf collection process for 2024. Over the past three (3) years the leaves have been staying on the trees longer meaning they are falling later in the season. On Monday afternoon, November 18th over 60% of the leaves were still on the trees. In many sections of the City residents and landscapers place leaves on the road and cover storm drains. Please make every effort to keep the storm drains clear. The City will be marking all roads to show where the storm drains are located. This will help the DPW find them during a storm. Remember, leaves should be placed at least 10 feet away from the catch basins, and ideally downhill from them. In the fall of 2024, the City began operating a leaf composting facility at our DPW yard. This is less than three (3) acre facility will save the City significant sums of money in future years. It will reduce the transportation costs to take leaves to an approved composting facility. Because we can now grind the leaves on site, the City will be able to send out one trailer of material instead of five (5).

Flooding – The leaf collection solutions are just a small part of a larger regional strategy to combat the severe flooding we have seen in several recent instances. In the past two and a half years the City has committed significant resources to prevent flooding, and plan for Climate Changes and storm resilience. The Overpeck Creek has had over 400 truckloads of material removed from it as part of the desilting, desnagging and obstruction removal process. The City has committed to make stream cleaning and maintenance a 12 month a year effort. Englewood is at the lowest elevation of our regional flood basin. It receives water from our sister municipalities Englewood Cliffs, Leonia, Bergenfield, Teaneck and Tenafly.

Water does not stop at a municipal border; therefore, a regional solution is required. Since March of 2024 several local municipalities have been working together to clean streams and catch basins to prevent flooding. Their hands are tied by outdated State and Federal regulations. It is up to elected officials of Englewood and our sister municipalities to work with our State and Federal representatives to change the laws so that we at the local level can plan for and make the necessary improvements to react to climate change. Our City Manager, City Engineer and their colleagues are to be commended for developing and implementing PILOT Programs to reduce flooding in our area.

Parks and Recreation - In January of 2025 the City will receive a Recreation Master Plan from Rutgers University. This 16-month long project has looked at all the City's parks and playgrounds. It will be used as a blueprint for investment in the Capital Budget Recreation assets.

I cannot express strongly enough my disappointment with the comments made about Denning Park during the December 17, 2024 meeting for its grant application improvement to that park. I applaud the Council members for voting to submit the grant application. However, not one resident during the public hearing spoke in favor of improving the park.

The facts are that if the City does not accept the award of grant funding for improvements to Denning Park, then 100% of the cost to renovate the park will be borne by the taxpayers of Englewood. If the City does not renovate Denning Park then the Green Acres Program has reserved the right to withhold future grant funding to improve any park within the City of Englewood. Furthermore, the City may

be required to return Grant Funds previously received due to the poor condition of Denning Park resulting from the failure of the City to properly maintain this asset. Over the past two and a half years the City has made significant investments in its parks and playgrounds and we must continue to do so. The City of Englewood through its DPW, Recreation Department, Recreation Committee and outside contractors will continue this ongoing effort.

Mackay Park Improvements - The City has two (2) under-utilized jewels at Mackay Park. They are the ice rink and swimming pool. The ice rink should become a 12 month a year facility. This requires that sliding walls be developed and installed so that the rink can operate during spring and summer months. The Mackay Park swimming pool is at the end of its life expectancy. The City has secured a grant to install new piping for the pool filtration system.

Looking to the future, the City's residents deserve an Olympic size swimming pool. This will provide the opportunity for high schools to have swim teams. It will allow for 12 months a year aerobics classes and other opportunities that will help improve the health and wellness of all of our residents. The Fire Department will be able to practice water rescues, an activity for which they now must travel distances to practice.

Mayor's Wellness Campaign - Our Health Department has several activities designed to promote a healthy lifestyle for our residents. It is my intention to participate in the citywide Mayor's Wellness Campaign and partner with our Health Department so that the Mayor's Wellness Campaign can teach our residents about healthy lifestyle options. During the 2024 Police Department hiring cycle thirteen (13) Englewood residents passed the written Police Department exam. Only one of the thirteen passed the physical fitness requirements and will soon be sworn in as a Police Officer. This highlights a weakness in healthy living that should be addressed. Our long-term goal should be a healthy lifestyle for all residents.

Local Business Promotion - This past July as part of the City's 125th celebration Englewood Nite was brought back. It was a tremendous success. Over 5,200 people attended. This should become an annual event. A fun time was had by all, and it pulled our City together. In 2025 our Englewood Nite will take place on West Palisade Avenue. The City will alternate this event between East Palisade Avenue and West Palisade Avenue so that all of our merchants will be able to showcase their establishment while allowing residents and visitors to discover the unique benefits of shopping and visiting our downtown.

Public Safety - Our City continues to see the merits of investment and support for our Police Department, Fire Department, and other public safety and public health personnel. It is a testament to our City Manager Robert Hoffmann, as well as our City Council, that we continue to prioritize proper staffing levels, leadership structure, training, and equipment to allow these dedicated public safety professionals to

safely and effectively do their jobs in protecting our families and our city. Thank you to Police Chief Thomas Greely, Fire Chief Jeff Kaplan, and every member of our public safety family for your care and commitment for our city.

During the past several years much has been made about the makeup of the Police Department. The City has made significant strides in improving the diversity of the Department. This effort started before the takeover by the Bergen County Prosecutor's Office. The efforts were codified by the Prosecutor's Office. It should be noted that 55% of our Police Department is made up of individuals who are considered minorities. Our Police Department truly does reflect the diversity of our City.

It is noteworthy that our City has on the books a provision for any new applicant to our Police or Fire Departments who can prove at least one year of consecutive residence in our city prior to the application date to be given priority status for hiring over non-residents. This has led to more than a dozen hires of City residents to these important posts in the past two and a half years, with further proactive programs in place in our schools, churches, and businesses to increase the number of local applicants as well as help them prepare for the required examinations.

With these successes, and having exhausted the current pool of resident applicants, I recently vetoed a proposed ordinance to change our requirement from one year to three years for priority status. There was no apparent need, and the information available indicated the change would make it more difficult for residents to attain priority status, while also impeding the hiring of veterans, recent college graduates, and other categories of qualified residents based solely on bureaucratic red tape.

We remain committed to hiring Englewood residents for these posts whenever possible, but regardless of where they rest their head when off-duty, I have zero doubt that any of our police or firefighters would hesitate for a second to enter a burning building or rush to the defense of a resident in danger. I hope everyone will join me in showing our support and appreciation for all our public safety professionals.

Master Plan – We have recently passed a new Master Plan for our city, which lays the groundwork for important actions that will allow our city to keep pace with rapidly changing circumstances for the next ten years and beyond. This document provides us with new strategies for Historic Preservation, Comprehensive Recycling, Smart Growth Principles, Enhanced Public Arts Programming, Modernized Transportation Approaches, and more. I remind everyone that this document sets very little in stone, but rather offers a host of recommendations from which our City Council can choose to move based on current needs and circumstances.

A key component is Climate Resilience and Sustainability, assessing flood risks and addressing stormwater management, in addition to forward thinking measures such as green infrastructure and renewable energy usage. We have also included plans to utilize emerging technologies for improved communications, parking systems, and other smart city initiatives.

A major accomplishment of this Master Plan is the advancement of Social Equity and Inclusion in our City. We can't plan for every situation that might arise, but enhanced community engagement processes and equitable distribution of resources across all four wards will ensure every one of our residents has a voice and that no neighborhood is overlooked. This document does not dictate affordable housing policy, as a Court supervised settlement on that front was reached in 2023, but it does offer expanded affordable housing strategies that are in line with that mandate, to keep Englewood affordable for as many families as possible.

It was necessary to approve this document in 2024 for the City to retain zoning rights and protect the interests of all our residents, particularly vulnerable areas in the 4th ward. Some nonetheless sought to delay this action, just as they did with the legally required, court supervised actions regarding Affordable Housing in 2023, which would similarly have led to loss of zoning oversight for our City and the potential for developers to run rampant with what are known as "builders remedies", which punish a City by allowing broad variances outside of the normal zoning regulations. I am proud that we stood strong against these special interests, and followed the law to protect our City, while still enacting a forward thinking and equitable plan that provides for so many needs for our City.

Liberty School – In planning for our City's future development, a lingering uncertainty still exists with the eventual fate of the Liberty School property. Over a decade ago the City purchased the Liberty School from the Board of Education. Since its purchase it has been used for various functions but has not been maintained. There is no long-term strategic vision for the refurbishing and the use of the building. During 2025 it should be our goal to utilize the studies and community discussions that have taken place to define the appropriate use for the school building and plan for implementation soon.

I thank everyone who took part in the extensive process of brainstorming, dialogue, analysis, and planning that went into the construction and adoption of our Master Plan. From the tremendous public input to the professionalism of our city staff and consultants, this was a massive project, and our city is better off through all these efforts.

Conclusion:

As you can see, there are always numerous moving parts in the functioning of a city such as ours, but with robust efforts to be both proactive and reactive, we are well positioned to deal with the many challenges at hand. I am proud of the professionalism of our City employees in identifying our issues and formulating plans of action, and I am equally proud of our residents for their care and motivation, providing valuable input to these many complex processes to ensure that our City will continue moving in the right direction. I thank you all again for joining us tonight and look forward to continuing to work with you for the betterment of our City and every one of our residents. I have long said that Public Service is a Public Trust, and I believe that to this day. Thank you for bestowing that trust in me for the next four years.