



Urban Mayors Press

The Official Publication Of The New Jersey Urban Mayors Association

Spring 2025 / Vol. 14

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Creating A Healthier Borough **6**

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Parking & Reaffirming Its
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& Many More ...



ABOUT THE NJ URBAN MAYORS ASSOCIATION

The New Jersey Urban Mayors Association (NJUMA) is housed in the New Jersey Urban Mayors Policy Center at the John S. Watson Institute for Urban Policy and Research at Kean University.

The New Jersey Urban Mayors Policy Center coordinates all activities of the NJUMA and provides policy and legislative analysis. Established in 1991, the New Jersey Urban Mayors Association works with state and federal lawmakers and officials to develop appropriate and effective public policy measures that benefit the state's urban centers and help lawmakers understand how public policy affects New Jersey's municipalities.

As an organization, NJUMA is comprised of **32 New Jersey urban and rural municipalities**. NJUMA serves its members through meetings, policy retreats, and annual conferences, which keep them informed on issues affecting their ability to provide adequate services to their residents. NJUMA also assists its members in interpreting legislation and state policy and works with the Governor's Office to define an urban policy agenda. It uses a 7-Point Plan for Strengthening Cities, Families, and Communities as a guide for addressing the critical issues of its member cities.

This plan is designed to aggressively address the areas of crime and public safety, education and positive youth development, environment and public health, family and community welfare, housing and economic development, tax reform and intergovernmental relations, and unfunded mandates.

NJUMA is a proactive organization that pursues opportunities from the government and the private sector to advance the interests of members. We are consistently exploring opportunities that will strengthen our communities and, ultimately, the state of New Jersey.

NJUMA Executive Committee

- **Hon. Adrian O. Mapp, Mayor** • City of Plainfield, President and Chair
- **Hon. Hector C. Lora, Mayor** • City of Passaic, Vice President
- **Hon. Marty Small, Sr., Mayor** • The City of Atlantic City, Vice President- (Southern)
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Editors' Note

We appreciate the year's first quarter and are equally excited about this new season. As we move forward into the year, we are grateful for the chance to present the Spring 2025 edition of the Urban Mayors Press to you.

We hope you enjoy reading it and find it as valuable as previous editions. This publication highlights the important contributions of the New Jersey Urban Mayors Association (NJUMA) members and provides valuable resources for municipalities across the state.

Submissions to the Urban Mayors Press are edited and distributed by the John S. Watson Institute for Urban Policy and Research at Kean University.

A very big thank you to all our contributors, as your continued support makes this publication possible!



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URBAN POLICY & RESEARCH

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

A TIME FOR VIGILANCE, A CALL FOR UNITY

As we step into spring, a season symbolic of renewal, clarity, and growth... we find ourselves at a pivotal moment for urban leadership in New Jersey. Recent events have reminded us, in stark and sobering terms, of the enormous scrutiny and responsibility we bear as public servants. The recent arrest of our colleague, Mayor Ras Baraka of Newark, has sent shockwaves not only through our cities but through the communities that have placed their trust in us.

Mayor Baraka has long been a prominent and passionate advocate for Newark and for urban centers across our state. While we do not yet know how this legal process will unfold, this moment compels us... not to cast judgment, but to reflect seriously on the magnitude of the roles we occupy. As Mayors of urban communities, many of us govern cities facing profound challenges and leading unprecedented transformation. We are stewards of public trust, and the margin for error in that stewardship is razor thin. That's why today, I invite all of us... my fellow Mayors and municipal leaders, to reflect on the immense responsibility we carry and the honor it is to serve our communities. Leadership in urban centers comes with unique challenges and profound expectations. In moments like these, it's important to reaffirm the shared values that unite us: a deep commitment to our residents, a drive to uplift our cities, and the humility to keep learning and growing through every stage of service.

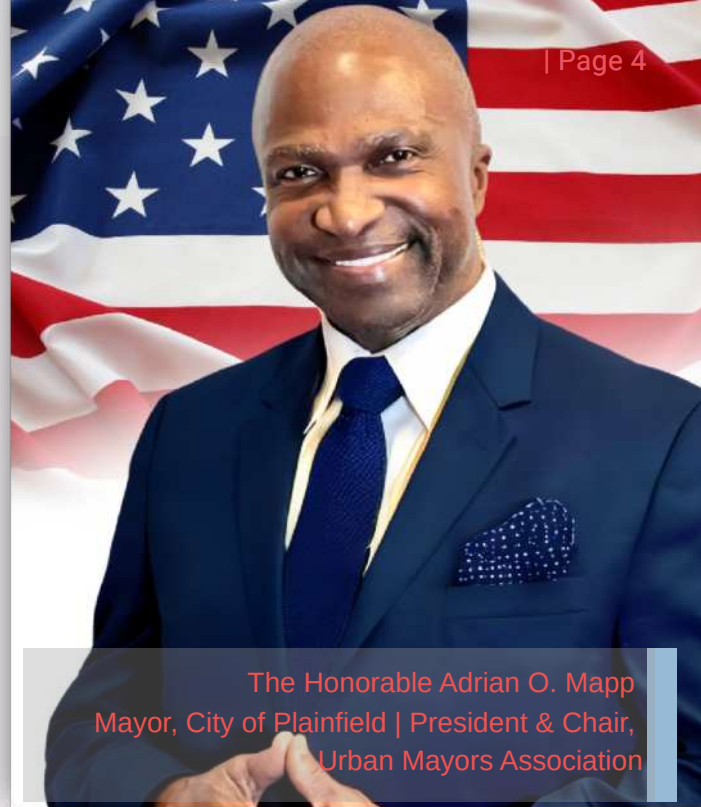
This is not about perfection, it's about intention. It's about leaning on one another, sharing wisdom, and building teams rooted in trust and mutual respect. Together, we can model what strong, steady, and compassionate leadership looks like, especially when the path is difficult and the stakes are high. Now, more than ever, we must stand in unity. The Urban Mayors Association exists because the unique realities of our cities demand collaboration, shared strategies, and mutual support. We are stronger when we lead together, when we share not only best practices but burdens. We must not let the pressures of leadership isolate us, and we cannot afford to allow public doubt or political chaos to fracture our sense of purpose.

Let this spring be more than a change in weather. Let it be a time of renewal in how we lead, how we govern, and how we show up for our cities and for one another. Let us recommit to being leaders who not only rise to the challenge but also elevate the trust placed in us through humility, integrity, and shared purpose.

In solidarity and service,



Mayor Adrian O. Mapp
President, New Jersey Urban Mayors Association
Mayor, City of Plainfield



The Honorable Adrian O. Mapp
Mayor, City of Plainfield | President & Chair,
Urban Mayors Association

Passaic's Urban Enterprise Zone: Empowering Local Businesses And Enhancing Community Life



The Honorable Hector C. Lora,
Mayor of the City of Passaic

From the office of the Mayor



Passaic's Urban Enterprise Zone (UEZ) program drives economic growth, offering local businesses a suite of incentives designed to foster expansion, job creation, and community revitalization. Administered by the Passaic Enterprise Zone Development Corporation, the program provides various benefits that make it easier for businesses to thrive in the city.

On April 9, 2025, the City of Passaic proudly hosted its second business exposition after almost 10 years. Drawing in more than 300 businesses from Passaic. Attendees had the opportunity to network, share ideas, and gain valuable insights into the wide range of resources.

UEZ-certified businesses benefit from a reduced 3.5% sales tax on most tangible goods, enhancing competitiveness and affordability. They can also purchase equipment like air conditioners and computers, tax-free. Businesses under \$1 million receive point-of-sale exemptions, while larger companies qualify for tax reimbursements. Hiring eligible employees may also unlock corporate tax credits, encouraging growth and job creation.

To encourage business expansion, the UEZ offers a forgivable loan program that provides up to \$50,000 in funding, with the creation of one full-time job required for every \$25,000 awarded. Complementing this initiative, businesses can also apply for low-interest loans between \$20,000 and \$200,000 to upgrade facilities or invest in equipment. These financial tools are designed to be flexible and impactful, covering a broad range of operational improvements, though property acquisition is excluded.

Under my administration, my goal is to make it easier for people to access business districts. Introducing a free UEZ shuttle bus service operating weekdays from 10:00 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., connecting major commercial zones and the Broadway eatery corridor. Riders can track the shuttle using the free "Passio GO" mobile app. Additionally, launching in Spring 2025, the City's new Bike Share Program will provide residents and commuters with an affordable and sustainable way to navigate the city. Using the "On Bike Share" app, riders can easily add their payment method and connect to a bike via Bluetooth for a smooth and convenient experience. A total of 25 bikes are available across the city, with 35 bike racks located at five key locations for easy access and drop-off.

As mayor, I believe workforce development remains a key pillar of the UEZ's mission. The City collaborates with training institutions to offer certification programs that help residents enter high-demand industries. Among the highlights is the Commercial Driver's License (CDL) program, which proudly celebrated its first UEZ-supported graduate in April 2025.

I remain committed to keeping our city clean, safe, and vibrant. Under my direction, the Downtown Merchants Corporation (DMC) continues to lead the Clean Sweep and Graffiti Removal Programs, ensuring sidewalks are maintained and graffiti is addressed within our UEZ zones. The Passaic Police Department provides regular patrols, and starting Spring 2025, a new bicycle patrol unit will expand coverage in commercial areas. Surveillance cameras—funded through the UEZ and monitored by police offer real-time responses and added protection. With every initiative, the UEZ is helping build a stronger, more vibrant Passaic, where businesses thrive, communities flourish, and opportunities continue to grow.

References:

- <https://www.cityofpassaic.com/faq.aspx?qid=62#>
- UEZ Business Expo Presentation and UEZ Business commercial (produced with the Media Team in-house)
- UEZ Newsletter

Borough of Roselle Healthy Partnerships, Creating a Healthier Borough

By Mayor Donald A. Shaw,
Mayor of the Borough of Roselle



The Honorable Donald A. Shaw,
Mayor, Borough of Roselle

During my 2024 State of the Borough address, I said, “Roselle can’t be a Borough on the move without being a healthy Borough.”

We are seeing the fruits of our planning for economic development. We begin work on a highly anticipated \$1 million youth center this year. This new facility will provide a valuable recreation space for our Borough youth. Our Arminio Field House was built for \$1.2 million. That investment is being refunded to the borough through our state partnerships. New residential development is underway on Locust Street, near First Avenue. Our collaboration with the NJ Division of Transportation is replacing the old freight railroad tracks with a bike/walking trail stretching from our Cranford border to Linden, 1.9 miles of valuable green space. These developments will continue to attract new residents to our Borough.

We want to see our residents' physical and emotional health follow the same healthy trajectory as our development.

Outdoor music, parades, and family events are popular draws for most communities. Three years ago, we decided that health-focused events and lifestyle choices should be a bigger part of our summer calendar. In 2021, Roselle partnered with Wellness Campaign Coordinator D’Neen Wynne to build a summer-long fitness calendar.

Over the years, the activity calendar has continued to grow with activities such as “Morning Walks with The Mayor”, “Extreme Hip Hop Aerobic Fitness”, and fitness programs focused on Roselle’s senior community.

Roselle is now one of over 400 communities participating in the Mayor's Wellness Campaign.

In the spring of 2024, Roselle cut the ribbon on the grant-funded Roselle Fitness Court®. In a partnership with National Fitness Campaign, the court allows users of all ages to leverage their body weight to get a complete workout. This year, Roselle achieved the Healthy Town-To-Watch designation, demonstrating strong community engagement and a commitment to addressing local health challenges. The borough focused on increasing access to health care, addressing chronic disease, and promoting mental health awareness.

“The Borough of Roselle is proud to be designated as a Healthy Town -to -Watch by the Quality Institute. This recognition highlights our dedication to building a healthier community by developing programs and providing resources that promote active living, mental wellness, and overall well-being for our diverse residents,” said Mayor Donald Shaw. “We have worked very hard on our MWC programs throughout the past few years, and our programs have brought our community members together to achieve one common goal - a life that encompasses all aspects of good health.”

Roselle is celebrating 130 years since the Borough’s incorporation, using the 130 Years and Stronger slogan. Our Borough is becoming a stronger, more vibrant community focused on healthy partnerships at the state and federal levels, while delivering healthy lifestyle options for our 22,000-plus residents.



The Honorable Ted R. Green,
Mayor of East Orange

How East Orange Is Tackling Parking and Reaffirming Our Commitment to Residents

By Mayor Ted R. Green, Mayor, East Orange

Urban life offers both opportunity and challenge, but one issue that remains a persistent frustration in cities across our country is parking. For too long, outdated restrictions, limited space, and inconsistent enforcement have left residents circling blocks, collecting tickets, and carrying the weight of systems that haven't evolved to meet their needs.

In East Orange, we have seen and heard the stories firsthand. Families who return home late from work only to find no legal place to park. Seniors who've accrued tickets simply for parking outside their homes. Veterans, new parents, and everyday working people left feeling penalized for circumstances they cannot control. Parking isn't just about convenience; it touches everything from finances to quality of life. That's why, in East Orange, we're not just talking about reform, we're delivering it.

On April 1, 2025, we launched the East Orange Ticket Review Program, a dynamic initiative to provide residents with real, tangible relief. Through this program, eligible residents can apply to have parking tickets from 2019 to 2024 reviewed and potentially dismissed. This is our way of acknowledging the hardship many have endured and giving our community a much-needed fresh start.

This program is not a blanket waiver, and safety-related tickets, such as violations in emergency zones or handicapped spaces, are excluded. However, for those residents whose tickets have been accumulated under outdated rules or due to limited parking access, this is a long-overdue opportunity for fairness and dignity. But our work doesn't stop at forgiveness. This is the first step in a bold, resident-first transformation of how parking is managed in East Orange.

Alongside the Ticket Review Program, we're proud to announce enhancements to our Residential Parking Permit Program, and the changes that were made were designed with equity, ease, and accessibility in mind. Beginning soon, residents can take advantage of:

- 300+ new overnight parking spaces, converted from formerly restricted 2 a.m. – 6 a.m. zones
- Affordable permit pricing at just \$12.50/month or \$150/year
- Discounted rates for veterans (\$75/year) and property owners without driveways
- 24/7 access to purchase permits online using new QR codes on parking signage throughout the city

These changes are not just logistical; they are intentional and reflect my administration's commitment to designing a city that responds to how people live and move.

And this is only the beginning. We will present the full Park Easy East Orange plan in the coming weeks. This plan includes proposed legislation that will allow us to continue improving parking access, enforcement equity, and infrastructure across the city. What we're building is not just a policy framework, it's a promise to our community.

East Orange is leading by example, and I believe this is how we build a brighter, more just city for all.

In Jersey City, summer youth programs play a vital role in mitigating learning loss, promoting mental and physical well-being and fostering career readiness. While these initiatives have traditionally relied on federal funding, recent budget cuts have put them at risk. To address this gap, we asked the department of Health and Human Services to take a proactive approach—reinvesting the City's cannabis tax revenue to ensure local youth continue to benefit from engaging, structured summer experiences.

The legalization of cannabis in New Jersey offers a unique opportunity to reinvest in communities disproportionately affected by systemic inequities. By directing a portion of this revenue toward youth-focused programs, particularly those that enhance summer enrichment, our administration is ensuring initiatives that will provide safe, educational, and enjoyable activities, while promoting equity and preparing young residents to become tomorrow's workforce.

This summer Jersey City HHS Division of Community Relations and Social Services has opened the Youth Summer Program grants to assist Jersey City nonprofit organizations in offering high-quality summer programs including arts, STEM, STEAM, sports, leadership and life skills for youth ages 7–18. In collaboration with the Division of Food and Nutrition, eligible grantees will also be able to provide breakfast and lunch through our Summer Food Service Program.



Reading time with Mayor Fulop

Investing In The Future: Jersey City Allocates Cannabis Revenue For Youth Enrichment

By Honorable Mayor Steven M. Fulop, Jersey City



Children playing at the Summer youth program



Honorable Mayor Steven M. Fulop
Jersey City

The Department of Health and Human Services Partnership for Healthier JC is at the forefront of this effort, championing a collaborative model created by Department Director Stacey Flanagan, that taps into the expertise of over 500 local organizations. Healthier JC fosters a culture of health and wellness through deep community engagement, ensuring that the voices and needs of residents shape its mission.

The impact on our youth during July and August will extend well beyond summer. By equipping young people with vital life skills, we are helping to close socioeconomic gaps and build a stronger Jersey City for everyone. This innovative use of cannabis revenue offers a sustainable, community-based funding model. By prioritizing youth development, Jersey City is placing its young residents at the heart of its growth strategy, fostering a brighter, more equitable future.

Jersey City's approach represents a forward-thinking model for sustainable, community-driven investment—placing young residents at the core of our progress.



Keeping Paterson CLEAN

By Mayor Andre Sayegh, City of Paterson

Paterson is not a dumping ground. It is a historic city with the potential to be a top-notch tourist destination worldwide. However, achieving international attraction status requires unprecedented diligence and unwavering dedication to keep our city clean.

We are taking a multi-pronged approach entitled "Paterson is picking up" to emphasize how serious we are about cleanliness in our city. We are partnering with a leading national nonprofit organization, Keep America Beautiful, to enhance our endeavor.

Established in 1953, Keep America Beautiful provides expertise, programs, and resources to help people end littering, increase recycling, beautify our country's public spaces, and restore & support resilient communities. Moreover, the organization inspires and educates people to act daily to improve their environment. Two months ago, members of my administration and I went on a fact-finding mission to Camden to learn more about the proven practices their municipality implemented to keep their city clean. Mayor Vic Carstarphen and his team inspired us to take the following actions.

We are launching weekly community cleanups to engage and empower our residents. Our additional efforts will include cleaning our entrance corridors and removing graffiti. Moreover, we plan to recruit students to help us beautify our city and to instill pride in Paterson.

Enforcement is an essential aspect of our ongoing efforts. We are aggressively cracking down on illegal dumping through "Operation Clean Sweep."

At the onset of the operation mentioned above, we used surveillance and public input to issue 12 tickets to violators whom we dubbed "The Dirty Dozen." In one court session alone, over \$15,000 in fines were assessed for illegal dumping.

We have towed abandoned boats and jet skis. In one of our effective operations, we apprehended a malefactor attempting to dump 16 bags of construction debris and seized his vehicle. In a separate incident, we identified two women caught on camera engaging in the unlawful disposal of their garbage.

My administration has also coordinated with the New Jersey Department of Transportation to clean up properties owned by the state. The NJDOT installed a barrier to prevent further dumping at one of its sites. Additionally, a railroad company erected a wall to deter dumping on the train tracks.



The Honorable Andre Sayegh
Mayor, City of Paterson

We reached out to New Jersey Transit to either replace or renovate their bus shelters. Internally, we are purchasing additional trucks for our Department of Public Works to collect bulk trash. Moreover, we are installing more cameras to address illegal dumping.

We are expanding our clean commercial corridor program through our Urban Enterprise Zone to beautify our business districts. Furthermore, we are ordering additional solar-powered trash receptacles to enhance our efforts to keep our community clean.

Keeping any community clean is not a spectator sport. In fact, in Paterson, everyone needs to get in the game, and the key elements to our success are education, engagement, and enforcement.

In our efforts to be a clean community champion, we are looking for internal and external team players to help Paterson pick up, literally and figuratively.

If you would like to join our "Keep Paterson Clean" campaign, don't hesitate to contact my office at 973-321-1600





City of Elizabeth Strong Roots Bold Future

By the City of Elizabeth, Public Information Office
Ruby Contreras, Press Officer & Janay Martinez

The City of Elizabeth is dedicated to fostering a strong, thriving community by providing resources and support for all residents. Through our health and resource fairs, individuals have access to vital services such as vaccinations, direct engagement with healthcare professionals, and essential supplies, including hygienic products, cleaning materials, and informational pamphlets, ensuring both physical well-being and peace of mind. We are also committed to supporting our LGBTQ+ youth through specialized resource fairs, where they can explore mental health services and connect with organizations that cater to their unique needs.

Beyond caring for our residents, we are equally devoted to protecting and enhancing our environment. The City of Elizabeth has approximately 46 parks, 20 playgrounds, seven spray fountains, two spray parks, and one pool throughout the city, all free of charge and accessible to all. Located across from an elementary school, Brophy Field offers a vibrant and safe space for children and families to enjoy year-round outdoor fun, featuring modern play equipment and imaginative play.

There are ADA accessible fixtures to ensure those with disabilities can enjoy the field. The site also includes a baseball/softball diamond and a basketball court, making it a dynamic recreational hub for the community.



This upgraded space enhances neighborhood engagement and supports healthy living for residents of all ages.

Our annual Earth Day Cleanup is one of our most impactful initiatives, bringing together teams of volunteers who take pride in beautifying their neighborhoods and making a tangible difference. Additionally, Groundwork Elizabeth was created in 2003 to develop sustainable and equitable communities. Their mission is to bring about the sustained regeneration, improvement, and management of the physical environment.

Groundwork Elizabeth made this possible by developing community-based partnerships that empower people, businesses, and organizations to promote environmental, economic, and social well-being. Through this non-profit, we develop programs to educate and improve local urban challenged environments and address quality of life issues. We will continue to uphold our commitment to community well-being, inclusivity, and sustainability.





The Newark, NJ Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB) is Now Visible

Photo: Kean University Public Safety Policing symposium Team

By **R.H. Robinson III, Manager** | Newark, NJ CCRB

On behalf of Newark, NJ Mayor, Ras J. Baraka, the Newark, NJ CCRB extends its appreciation to the John S. Watson Institute on Urban Policy & Research at Kean University for the invitation to showcase our entity. Your March 1, 2025, Public Safety & Policing event that featured national leaders, governmental officials, legislative members & law enforcement individuals spearheaded a statewide conversation on the relationship between public safety organizations and their residents. This groundbreaking initiative has stimulated the need for accountability, transparency, and fairness solutions between the two parties, which we believe will result in better policing.

The Newark, NJ CCRB participated as a vendor with a banner & information table that provided general surveys, we passed out data & we networked with many for later correspondence. Moreover, we listed organizations/individuals of different jurisdictions who are interested in the set-up process, have people concerned about relevant legislative bills & we have Kean University's students inquiring about internship possibilities with our entity. In addition, we took pictures with NJ Assemblywoman Shavonda E. Sumter (D) of the 35th District and Mr. Jiles H. Ship, Commissioner of the NJ Police Training Commission. Assemblywoman Sumter was a panelist and stressed the importance of supporting the CCRB and its legislative actions in Trenton, NJ. Mr. Ship, an esteemed National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE) member, also served as a panelist speaker & a breakout room instructor.

We are also thankful to Newark, NJ Deputy Mayor, Lakeesha Eure, who also served as a breakout room instructor & brainstormed with many attendees to generate solutions to the many problems involving Public Safety & Policing. Last, but certainly not least, we were privileged to have Newark Municipal Councilwoman-At-Large, Rev. Louise Scott-Roundtree, who attended the event and blessed our table with her presence. As a result, the Newark, NJ CCRB has been invited back for two more events, concerning our youth and the women in our society, involving the topic of Public Safety & Policing.

Lastly, we thank Newark, NJ CCRB Board Members, Staff & Volunteers who attended and assisted in making our presence noteworthy.



Newark, NJ CCRB with ASW Hon. Sumter and NJ NOBLE President Jiles Ship



Assembly Woman Hon. Shavonda Sumter

Health Care Access: We Need To Do Better

From the office of Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson



**Assemblywoman Verlina
Reynolds-Jackson (D)**



A single woman raising her grandkids and working two hourly jobs to make ends meet. A retired veteran who relies on public transportation to get to medical appointments. A small business owner who works 12+ hour days to keep the business running. Three very different lives – yet they all share a need for access to health care, especially as we age. Unfortunately, finding time to see a health care provider can be a challenge in all of these scenarios, and even more so if these individuals live in urban areas like the City of Trenton.

Everyone deserves high-quality health care, and no one should have to go without because of where they live. As a member of the New Jersey General Assembly, I have experienced health inequities firsthand, and I expect better for the more than 80,000 people who live in Trenton, one of the areas I represent. That's why I'm serving as the prime sponsor for important bipartisan legislation to improve health equity and access to vision and medical eye care this session.

Millions of Americans suffer from glaucoma and cataracts, and New Jersey residents who have these conditions will benefit from improved health care access afforded by this legislation. In fact, according to the National Eye Institute, there are more than 24 million Americans with cataracts, a number that is expected to double over the next 30 years. Glaucoma affects more than 3 million Americans over age 40 and is expected to increase to 4.2 million by 2030.

A-920, which has an identical bill in the Senate (S-354), is designed to allow optometrists to perform certain in-office, non-invasive, minor laser procedures to treat glaucoma and after-cataract surgery care. Earlier this month, I visited Salus University in Pennsylvania. I watched a demonstration of one of these procedures, learned more about the optometry curriculum, and met the next generation of optometrists. Salus, like all U.S. optometry schools, teaches students to perform these procedures, which have been safely performed in other states since 1998 and are approved to be performed within the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs in states that allow full scope practice.

Under current New Jersey law, if a patient requires one of the procedures included in this legislation, their optometrist must refer them to an ophthalmologist for care. This typically includes three appointments – one for the initial consultation, one for the procedure, and one for follow-up care. For many of my constituents, taking time off work or finding transportation to these appointments can be impossible, especially if they have to travel outside the area. By not receiving treatment, they risk living with blurry vision and experiencing future complications, including blindness.

Optometrists practice in all communities throughout New Jersey, including in urban and underserved communities like Trenton. This legislation allows residents to receive care when and where they need it without having to wait or travel to additional appointments. This is especially important in Trenton, where nearly 28% of residents struggle with poverty-related issues, including health care access, transportation, housing, food insecurity, unemployment, educational disparities, substance use, and mental health issues, and where approximately one in three people are insured by Medicaid.

By passing progressive and human-centered laws, New Jersey can join other states in taking proactive measures to address health equity and access. Passage of this legislation will also help attract and retain highly skilled, qualified optometrists to live and work in our state.

It's time to modernize New Jersey's optometric scope of practice laws to increase access to quality vision and medical eye care and ensure health equity for all citizens.

Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson (D) represents the 15th Legislative District.

Building Inclusive Cities

Through Diversifying Real Estates

By **Taneshia Nash Laird**, Executive Director, Project REAP



Taneshia Nash Laird
Executive Director, Project REAP

For over 25 years, the nonprofit Project REAP (Real Estate Associate Program) has helped transform the commercial real estate landscape by empowering professionals of color to participate in this \$20 trillion industry. When residents of color become active participants in their city's growth, communities thrive from the inside out, creating the equitable economic development that urban mayors strive to achieve.

The REAP Academy addresses a critical gap in the industry, where only 2% of commercial real estate professionals are people of color. By providing intensive training across all commercial real estate sectors – not just office space but multifamily housing, retail, hospitality, and industrial development – **REAP prepares professionals for diverse roles throughout the industry.**



Pictured: REAP Academy graduates Allan Suarez (left), Siree Morris (right) with Newark Mayor Ras Baraka (center)

Success Story

Newark has benefited from multiple REAP success stories. Siree Morris, a 2011 REAP Academy graduate, has become a driving force in Newark's renaissance through his company, MCI Collective. His latest venture is with LMXD and is called Museum Parc, a \$94 million mixed-use project delivering 250 apartments and a new gallery for the Newark Museum of Art.

Newark native and 2017 REAP graduate Allan Suarez demonstrates another path to community revitalization. Through his company, All Renovation Construction LLC, Suarez co-founded Newark Foundry Workspaces, transforming a blighted property into a collaborative workspace for entrepreneurs needing affordable office space. "Our goal was to introduce a co-working model in Newark through a unique and underutilized property," explains Suarez, showcasing how REAP graduates create innovative solutions to community challenges.

REAP graduates serve in influential positions across the real estate ecosystem – from Amazon, where London Kemp Boykin serves as Director of Global Real Estate, to Starbucks, where Angele Robinson-Gaylord leads store development in America as SVP. This reach extends to brokers, underwriters, asset managers, and lenders, bringing diverse perspectives to every aspect of the industry. REAP's operations are supported by broad industry sponsorship, reflecting corporate recognition of the value diverse professionals bring to the sector.

Replicating Effect

Urban mayors can accelerate this transformation by appointing REAP alums to planning boards, redevelopment authorities, zoning boards, economic development councils, and other civic boards and commissions. Such appointments leverage specialized expertise and ensure diverse perspectives shape policy decisions.

The economic benefits extend beyond their individual careers. When residents participate in local development, more dollars circulate within the community. Projects led by diverse teams are more likely to include affordable housing components, create local jobs, and incorporate spaces that serve neighborhood needs.

As New Jersey's urban centers continue evolving, ensuring diverse participation in development decisions becomes increasingly crucial. REAP graduates bring professional expertise, cultural competence, and community connections that lead to more thoughtful, inclusive projects.

Urban mayors can help build cities where development serves everyone by supporting meaningful pathways for residents of color to participate in commercial real estate, from education to board appointments. This will create vibrant communities where economic opportunity is truly accessible to all.

Author Bio:

Taneshia Nash Laird is the Executive Director of Project REAP and a REAP Academy graduate. Her prior experience includes serving as Trenton's Economic Development Director in the Palmer Administration, as a Gov. Corzine-appointed NJ Urban Enterprise Zone Authority board member, and until late 2022, as the CEO of Newark Symphony Hall.

Ensuring Fair Housing Practices: The Case for Limiting Application Fees for Rental Properties

By Assemblywoman Linda S. Carter, Majority Conference Leader - District 22

As a member of the New Jersey Assembly, I have the privilege to serve the 22nd Legislative District, representing parts of Somerset and Union Counties. In recent years, we have seen a surge in apartment buildings going up in our communities, and while growth is often a sign of a thriving economy, it also brings with it new challenges. One of the most pressing issues we face today is the increasing cost of living, especially when it comes to housing.

New Jersey has long been known for its diverse and vibrant communities, but the rapid expansion of apartment buildings has led to rising rent. It's not uncommon for renters to face application fees upwards of \$100 or more per property—fees they must pay every time they apply to a new rental. If you're applying to multiple buildings, these fees quickly add up, creating an unnecessary financial burden.

By exploring setting limits to application fees, we can ensure that the application process remains fair and accessible to all. Some may argue that restricting landlords from charging higher application fees could have negative consequences, particularly when it comes to covering the cost of background checks on renters, which are often the largest part of the fee. According to [NJ Criminal History Records Information](#), a fingerprint background check costs around \$46. However, when applying for an apartment, renters are not required to provide a fingerprint, so the additional administrative fees seem disproportionate. Moreover, if the applicant is not selected for the unit, they lose the application fee entirely.



Assemblywoman Linda S. Carter,
Majority Conference Leader - District 22

Let me assure you, this is not about hindering the development of housing in New Jersey! It is about balancing growth with fairness. Apartment building development is essential for increasing housing stock, and municipalities rely on property taxes generated from these buildings to fund essential public services. I fully support efforts to create housing that meets the needs of our growing population.

Small businesses and new residents alike benefit from communities that are welcoming and accessible. We want New Jersey's neighborhoods to thrive—places where families can grow, businesses can prosper, and young people can establish roots. For many, securing affordable rental housing is the first step!

Capping application fees, we can ensure the process of applying for a rental unit is not an overwhelming financial hurdle but rather an opportunity for New Jerseyans to find a place to call home. While I understand that this is not a complete solution to the affordable housing crisis facing our state, it is an issue that I am focused on and I believe could be a crucial step toward making housing more accessible, without overburdening applicants who are already doing their best to navigate the difficult rental market.

Ensuring fair housing practices is essential to creating equitable access to safe, stable housing for all New Jersey residents. If you care about this issue and would like to learn more, please don't hesitate to contact my district office by email at AswCarter@njleg.org or by phone at **908-561-5757**. I welcome your input and look forward to continuing this important conversation.

New Jersey's Urban Revival: Building Equity, Not Just Units

By: Tiffany L. Harris-Delaney, Economic
Development Director – City of Paterson



Tiffany L. Harris-Delaney,
Economic Development Director – City of Paterson

From Paterson to Newark, Camden to Trenton, New Jersey's cities are witnessing a wave of construction marked by cranes, frequent ribbon-cuttings, and a proliferation of "luxury" apartments in neighborhoods historically scarred by disinvestment. Yet beneath this progress lies a pressing question: Are these developments fostering genuine community growth, or merely paving over existing inequities?

Too often, housing initiatives prioritize scale over substance. Developers capitalize on tax incentives and Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) agreements that emphasize unit quotas rather than sustainable living conditions. Municipal leaders, eager to demonstrate rapid revitalization, may greenlight dense housing without complementary infrastructure—parks, childcare facilities, transit upgrades, or grocery access—essential for transforming buildings into thriving neighborhoods. Consider Paterson: Average rents now hover at \$2,275, with one-bedroom units nearing \$1,850—approaching Montclair's \$2,950 and Jersey City's \$3,694. Yet residents in these resurgent cities often pay premium prices without commensurate improvements in safety, amenities, or community cohesion. This disparity perpetuates a subtle but insidious displacement, masquerading as progress.

A Path Forward: Equity as the Foundation

True urban renewal demands reimagining development as a tool for empowerment. Residents should thrive in their communities without needing to relocate. This requires pairing housing with economic mobility through job access, wealth-building programs, and strategic public-private collaborations.

Models like Atlanta's Westside Future Fund illustrate the potential of inclusive growth. Through partnerships with nonprofits, businesses, and institutions, the initiative combats displacement by supporting legacy residents while advancing equitable revitalization across housing, education, and employment sectors. New Jersey must embrace similar strategies:

- **Redefine Incentives:** Tie development approvals to community benefits like green spaces, transit upgrades, small business incubators, and workforce training.
- **Champion Local Employment:** Mandate major employers to prioritize local hiring, apprenticeships, and career advancement programs.
- **Safeguard Affordability:** Expand rent stabilization, promote community land trusts, and incentivize homeownership to protect long-term residents.
- **Leverage Anchors:** Encourage hospitals, universities, and corporations to invest in neighborhood infrastructure and minority-owned businesses.
- **Elevate Design Standards:** Prioritize mixed-use, mixed-income developments that foster walkability, diversity, and social resilience.

New Jersey's cities are not blank canvases—they are vibrant tapestries of culture, history, and resilience. The challenge ahead is not merely to construct buildings but to cultivate equitable ecosystems where communities flourish.

The measure of success must shift from units completed to lives uplifted. Only then can revival become more than a buzzword—and transform into lasting justice.



Resources For Affordable Home Development Diverted In NJ FY2026 Budget

By **Matthew Hersh** | V.P. of Policy & Advocacy, Housing and Community Development of New Jersey



Matthew Hersh | V.P. of Policy & Advocacy, Housing and Community Development of New Jersey

New Jersey's Affordable Housing Trust Fund (AHTF) has been an essential resource for nonprofit developers and municipalities as they meet their affordable housing obligations, tackle vacant and abandoned properties, prevent homelessness, and build stronger neighborhoods. Using this funding, towns have partnered with members of the Housing and Community Development Network of NJ (the Network) to build the safe, quality homes their residents need and want.

As proposed, however, Gov. Murphy's FY2026 budget potentially diverts all of this resource into housing-adjacent programs that serve income populations above the 80 percent AMI income threshold that is required for AHTF use. The Network opposes any cuts or diversions to NJ's most important affordable home production resources. Instead, we should grow essential housing production resources, especially as we embark on the 4th round under Mount Laurel. Laying the groundwork for NJ's affordable housing needs is essential, particularly at times of uncertainty.

What is not uncertain is how unaffordable NJ continues to be for so many residents. Although affordable home development has increased, the NJ Department of Community Affairs' (NJDCA) Fourth Round calculations found a statewide deficit of 65,410 low- and moderate-income homes. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, NJ has 296,565 extremely low-income renter households and only 31 affordable and available rental homes for every 100 of these households. To afford a modest, two-bedroom apartment at fair market rent in NJ, full-time workers need to earn \$38.08 per hour, but the average worker in the Garden State earns \$23.70 per hour, making our state the seventh most expensive place for renters.

Working with our fair budget coalition, For the Many, we have advocated for the expansion of the Realty Transfer Fee, the funding source of the AHTF, to best address the state's rapidly growing affordable housing needs as well as to position NJ to meet its 4th round housing obligations. While the governor identified this revenue raiser in his budget address, he did not propose to use it to grow the AHTF at a time when we have an ongoing obligation and the political will to make NJ more affordable. NJ should follow the lead of other states and expand the Realty Transfer Fee to cover a higher range of luxury home sales and use the additional revenue to support innovative programs to help address NJ's racial wealth gap.

NJ has made progress towards creating more healthy, affordable opportunities for our residents, but we clearly have a long way to go, and we cannot afford to lose momentum. The AHTF is an investment we need in our communities, and it is crucial we close the housing gap to make sure everyone has a safe, affordable place to call home.

Matthew Hersh is the Vice President of Policy and Advocacy at the Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey.

Visit Us - hcdnj.gov



Confronting Homelessness in Newark: A Call to Action By Amina Bey

In recognition of World Homeless Day, the organization that I have led since 2019, Newark Emergency Services for Families (NESF), created a day of service to amplify awareness and provide direct support to those in need. This annual event serves as a reminder of the work still to be done and the tremendous power of community collaboration to bring about meaningful change.

Homelessness remains one of the most pressing challenges in New Jersey. According to the New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency and Monarch Housing Associates, on the night of January 23, 2024, a total of 1,945 households, including 2,451 persons, were experiencing homelessness in Essex County. While efforts to address this crisis are ongoing, the reality is stark: large cities like Newark consistently lead in the number of people experiencing homelessness. There have been several studies and reports that explore the practice known as “homeless dumping,” where cities are the recipients of unhoused individuals who are given bus passes or train passes to seek services in larger cities that are perceived to have more resources. This further highlights the need for sustained, comprehensive action.

Under Mayor Ras J. Baraka's visionary leadership, Newark's administration has taken significant strides to address homelessness. In 2022, the city launched “The Path Home,” a three-year plan to end chronic homelessness. A year into the plan, Newark saw a 57.6 percent reduction in its unsheltered population, an encouraging statistic that underscores the importance of targeted, strategic interventions.

During the NESF 5th Annual World Homeless Day event last fall in Lincoln Park, our team, community partners, and volunteers provided critical resources to individuals facing homelessness. Attendees had access to mental health support, substance abuse treatment, housing assistance, and job placement services. Additional offerings included health screenings, HIV testing, clothing, free haircuts, and care packages. Partnering with U.S. Rep. LaMonica McIver (NJ-10) and other community organizations, NESF exemplified what holistic, community-driven support looks like by partnering with 63 agencies serving over 1,000 people.



Homelessness is a multifaceted crisis that requires solutions at every level. Nationally, we must advocate for policies that address and fund affordable housing shortages and expand social safety nets. Locally, we must eliminate the root causes, such as housing affordability, job instability, and systemic inequities.

This is not a problem that any single entity can solve—it requires collective action. Newark's progress is promising, but it also highlights the immense work that remains. By coming together as a community, we can ensure that every individual has access to the stability and dignity of a home. Let's honor the spirit of World Homeless Day by committing to this cause every day.

For Newark residents, there are tangible ways to help:

- **Support organizations like NESF:** Donate money, clothing, or essential items, and volunteer your time at events, outreach programs, and monthly food distributions.
- **Advocate for affordable housing:** Push for policies that increase access to affordable and transitional housing and vote for politicians who vow to support these efforts.
- **Raise awareness:** Share information about the homelessness crisis and increase awareness of the resources available to those in need.



Amina Bey, Local Expert in Workforce Development, Social Services, and Community Engagement



Homelessness Ends With Housing Not Criminalization

By Kyra Mortensen, Associate, Monarch Housing Associates

On the night of January 23rd, 2024, 12,680 individuals were experiencing homelessness in New Jersey, the highest number the state has seen in a decade. Of these, 1,700 people were unsheltered—sleeping outdoors, in cars, or in other locations not meant for human habitation.

Recent year-over-year increases in the number of households experiencing homelessness are the direct result of the ongoing affordable housing crisis. Rather than acknowledge it as the effect of a housing system that fails to serve the poorest, most vulnerable members of our community, however, some municipalities treat homelessness as an individual failing to be remedied by punitive measures. This is best exemplified by the recent wave of ordinances banning public sleeping, parking, and/or camping across NJ's municipalities. Outlawing the most visible, unavoidable conditions of unsheltered homelessness effectively criminalizes the existence of those experiencing it. This exacerbates rather than solves homelessness, wastes valuable time and resources, and could expose municipalities to litigation.

Criminalization presents the unsheltered with an impossible ultimatum: find housing or a shelter bed, leave town, or face fines and arrest. Most households fall into homelessness because they can't afford their housing costs; most become and remain unsheltered due to barriers to accessing emergency shelter, including bed shortages, restrictive eligibility criteria, long enrollment processes, and poor/dangerous shelter conditions. Securing housing is a long and challenging process to endure when on the street, especially for those lacking identification/documentation (paystubs, bank statements, etc.) or who have a history of justice system involvement, eviction, and/or poor credit.

Leaving town presents another challenge. Everyone, unsheltered individuals included, tends to live in a community to which they have a connection, whether they grew up there, have children in the school system, or have family, a service provider, or a job in town. Leaving town means leaving behind one's support network, an extremely difficult decision for vulnerable, unsheltered residents to make.

The only remaining option is to enter the homelessness-jail cycle. Repeatedly, the unhoused are fined, arrested, incarcerated, and released back into homelessness, accumulating a criminal record that puts employment and housing increasingly out of reach. Meanwhile, law enforcement, corrections, and judicial systems waste resources that are already stretched thin and outreach/treatment providers lose their clients' hard-won trust, eroding progress towards stability. Ultimately, the impacts of these ordinances will be disproportionately borne by those experiencing homelessness, denying them equal opportunity to use and enjoy public spaces. This could be serious grounds for litigation against municipalities that enact them.

These ordinances ignore the realities of unsheltered homelessness and are not an effective strategy to end it. Fundamentally, they outlaw the central cause of homelessness: being too poor to afford housing.

An alternative strategy, proven to be effective, is available to us: the "Housing First" model. Compared to punitive measures, Housing First has been repeatedly proven to show greater household stability, fewer returns to homelessness, and lower costs. With adequate resources and the right strategy, an end to homelessness in New Jersey is within reach.

The resources below outline the failings of criminalization and detail the Housing First model:

- [The Case for Housing First](#)
- [Punitive Policies Will Never Solve Homelessness: The Evidence is Clear](#)
- [Criminalizing Homelessness Worsens the Crisis, Research Shows](#)
- [What Communities Need to Know About the Criminalization of Homelessness](#)
- [Five Charts That Explain the Homelessness-Jail Cycle—and How to Break It](#)
- [Housing Not Handcuffs Policy Solutions](#)
- [10 Point Plan for Addressing Homelessness in your City, County or State](#)

For more information, [Contact Us at Monarch](#). You can also find additional resources at [endhomelessness.org](#).

Sustainable Infrastructure Solutions for Communities

In today's fast-changing world, municipalities, universities, school districts, and hospitals face mounting challenges in maintaining and upgrading essential infrastructure. Tight budgets, deferred maintenance, and complex funding processes often hinder critical improvements. At LJF Consulting, we partner with a Public Benefit Company to provide sustainable infrastructure solutions and associated funding, ensuring communities can access safe, reliable, and continuously improving assets.

A Smarter Way to Build and Maintain Infrastructure

LJF Consulting and our partner organization simplify the process of infrastructure development through an innovative month-to-month service model. This approach eliminates the upfront financial burden and long-term debt commitments typically associated with infrastructure projects. Instead, institutions can access high-quality infrastructure solutions with flexible funding, including supplementary and match funding for state and federal grants.

We handle project facilitation from start to finish, ensuring that essential infrastructure remains functional, safe, and well-maintained, without straining local budgets. Our comprehensive services cover a wide range of infrastructure needs, including:

- Turnkey water meter systems and wastewater treatment upgrades
- HVAC system improvements
- Energy-efficient lighting and turf installations
- Fleet electrification—converting gas-powered vehicles to electric vehicles (EVs)
- EV charging station installation
- Microgrid development and solar energy solutions

Zero Upfront Cost, Maximum Benefit

One of the most significant advantages of our model is that it requires no upfront investment. Municipalities and institutions retain full control and use of their assets while simply paying a monthly fee for usage. Unlike traditional financing options, our approach ensures:

- No impact on bond ratings
- No profit-sharing
- No markups on capital, products, or services

This transparent, cost-effective model allows organizations to prioritize critical upgrades without compromising other financial obligations.

A Long-Term Commitment to Community Well-Being

Our mission is to remove the burden of infrastructure maintenance from local governments, schools, and other public institutions. By funding, deploying, and maintaining essential assets, we help communities stay ahead of infrastructure challenges without unnecessary financial or operational strain.

Additionally, our model allows for flexibility—should an organization choose to take ownership of the assets, we can arrange a seamless transition.

Supporting Communities Nationwide

From small towns to major cities, we work with communities across the nation to implement sustainable infrastructure solutions. In the aftermath of the devastating wildfires in Hawaii, we have been actively involved in rebuilding efforts, helping to restore essential services and modernize local infrastructure.

Making Infrastructure Easy

At LJF Consulting, we believe that essential infrastructure should never be a burden. Our goal is to make the process seamless, sustainable, and financially viable for communities of all sizes.



Lissa Jean Ferrell, Esq.
(A Smarter Way to Build and Maintain Infrastructure)

To learn more about how we can support your infrastructure needs, contact us at lissa@ljfconsulting.com. Let's work together to build a safer, more resilient future.

The Case for LGAP: A Local Governance Alignment Process



T. Missy Balmir, Partner at Thorough Planning

Strengthening Leadership, Transparency, And Impact Through Strategic Alignment

Local governments are critical in delivering services and responding to community needs. However, long-term planning often takes a back seat as municipalities focus on daily challenges, like infrastructure, staffing, and public safety. The Local Governance Alignment Process (LGAP) offers a structured, practical framework to align municipal leadership, staff, and community stakeholders around shared goals and measurable outcomes. Though often associated with the private sector, strategic planning is just as essential in the public sphere. LGAP is designed specifically for local governments, offering a disciplined yet flexible process that supports effective governance, continuity, and transparency.

Why Alignment Matters

When municipal leaders operate from a shared set of priorities, the government becomes more responsive and strategic. LGAP helps municipalities:

- Define collective goals across elected officials, senior staff, and residents
- Surface areas of disagreement and encourage constructive dialogue
- Establish performance benchmarks to track progress
- Reduce political volatility by focusing on broadly supported priorities
- Strengthen public trust through transparency and engagement

This alignment ensures that the municipality remains focused on long-term, community-informed objectives even as leadership changes.

Core Components of LGAP

LGAP includes seven key steps:

1. **Stakeholder Engagement** – Gathering input from elected officials, staff, and community members
2. **Data Analysis** – Reviewing key metrics, financial data, and public feedback
3. **Vision & Mission Review** – Clarifying the municipality's purpose and guiding values
4. **Goal Setting** – Establishing short- and long-term goals
5. **Performance Indicators** – Identifying how success will be measured
6. **Implementation Timeline** – Assigning roles and timelines for execution
7. **Monitoring & Evaluation** – Tracking progress and adjusting plans as needed

These steps help governments stay focused, even amidst evolving community needs and leadership transitions.

Promoting Strategic, Inclusive Governance

LGAP reduces the influence of short-term political pressures by building consensus on priorities backed by data and public input. This process improves decision-making and supports staff clarity and community confidence.

Residents want to know their local government has a plan, and staff want to understand how their work contributes to larger goals. LGAP creates that visibility and alignment, helping everyone work toward a common vision.

Conclusion

The Local Governance Alignment Process (LGAP) is a proven model that helps municipalities lead with purpose, focus on outcomes, and build lasting trust with the communities they serve. For local governments looking to be proactive rather than reactive, LGAP provides a path forward grounded in alignment, clarity, and shared responsibility.

Connected Growth

Activating the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem® to Strengthen Urban Economies

By Jackie P. Taylor, CEO, Boost Strategy Group

Founder of the Activating the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem® framework

Jackie P. Taylor, CEO,
Boost Strategy Group

In cities across New Jersey and the country, mayors are working diligently to grow their local economies in ways that benefit everyone. However, they often encounter the same three challenges:

- (1) Programs and resources aren't working together;
- (2) Local talent is underutilized, and
- (3) There is no consistent, measurable way to track outcomes. Even where high-impact programs and strong institutions exist, they frequently operate in silos—resulting in missed opportunities and stalled progress.

A more integrated strategy is needed to move from isolated success to scalable economic resilience. The Activating the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem® (AEE) framework offers a proven and practical solution. Grounded in national research and field-tested principles, AEE helps municipalities align the people, institutions, and strategies that drive inclusive growth. It strengthens collaboration, supports targeted investment, and introduces real-time data tracking to help city leaders make informed decisions quickly.

IAEE defines nine essential ecosystem levers: entrepreneurs and small businesses, workforce systems, K-12 and higher education, healthcare institutions, community-based organizations, corporations, incubators and innovation centers, chambers and business associations, and local government. These sectors are interdependent. For example, a workforce system that doesn't coordinate with small business initiatives may overlook pathways to self-employment. Similarly, schools disconnected from innovation ecosystems may leave students unprepared for evolving



job markets. Data supports this integrated approach. According to Brookings Institution research, cities investing in cross-sector collaboration and entrepreneurship strategies see measurable employment and local GDP gains, particularly in historically underserved areas (Muro et al., 2022). The Kauffman Foundation also notes that new and young businesses are responsible for nearly all net new job creation in the U.S. economy (Fairlie, 2020). Despite this, many cities still rely on outdated models prioritizing corporate attraction without equally empowering homegrown talent and enterprises.

Rather than layering on new programs, AEE helps cities coordinate what they already have and identify where strategic gaps exist. These gaps may be in access to capital, capacity-building programs, workforce alignment, or cross-sector communication. Once identified, AEE ensures new investments are data-informed and responsive to each city's specific needs, rather than adopting one-size-fits-all solutions. Using emerging technology and a structured methodology, city leaders can convene ecosystem partners around a shared vision and generate measurable outcomes.

In practical terms, AEE implementation might include quarterly stakeholder meetings led by the mayor's office, integrating entrepreneurship goals into workforce funding contracts, or establishing shared metrics across community partners. These steps are not theoretical—they are modeled after real practices in cities embracing a more accountable and collaborative approach to economic development.

Urban mayors today are not just conveners—they are system integrators. The Activating the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem® framework provides a ready-made blueprint to coordinate local assets, guide investment, and ensure that no stakeholder is left behind. With bold leadership, data, and partnership, cities can unlock the economic lift their communities urgently need.



To explore how your city can activate its entrepreneurial ecosystem, contact us at outreach@booststrategygroup.com.

Sustaining Businesses, & Empowering Communities: The Mission Of The African American Chamber Of Commerce Of NJ (AACCNJ)

By John E. Harmon, Sr. IOM

At this pivotal moment in American history, the mission of the African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey (AACCNJ), which was established in 2007, has never been more critical.

As our nation grapples with societal, economic, and political challenges, the AACCNJ remains steadfast in its commitment to sustaining black businesses, empowering communities, and advocating for systemic and structural changes, to foster economic advancement in underserved communities, and to strengthen the states competitiveness.

At the AACCNJ's Training and Development Institute (TDI) we have witnessed how strategic initiatives can transform lives and communities. Programs such as Pathways to Recovery (P2R), the NJ SNAP Navigator, and Customized Training programs represent lifelines to stability, economic mobility, and self-sufficiency. These initiatives provide critical workforce development, essential support services, and strategic advocacy, ensuring that our communities do not merely survive but thrive.

The P2R program exemplifies the commitment of the AACCNJ to empowering communities, through the support of individuals impacted by the opioid crisis. We offer comprehensive workforce development that enables participants to reclaim their lives, secure employment, and reintegrate into society with dignity and purpose. The SNAP Navigator initiative provides community members with vital support in applying for essential SNAP benefits, navigating eligibility, offering technical assistance, and assisting with recertification. Recognizing linguistic barriers, we ensure accessibility by providing interpreters, for those who speak Haitian Creole, facilitating meaningful engagement throughout the application and recertification process. Customized Training & Development initiatives further reinforce our mission, by aligning skillbuilding opportunities directly with the evolving demands of employers, creating tangible pathways for career advancement and economic growth.

Parallel to these efforts, the AACCNJ's Mobile Academy has redefined accessibility and innovation in community outreach and professional development. The Mobile Academy's ability to deliver direct services, such as career fairs, youth leadership programs, small business, entrepreneurial and financial literacy programs directly into communities, amplifies AACCNJ's mission driven focus on strong communities.

The work of the AACCNJ, economic sustainability and community empowerment remains fundamentally focused on a narrative of resilience, strength, unity, equity and reciprocity as stated in our value proposition. The contributions of African Americans in NJ, across America and the diaspora are well documented, we seek an active engagement of leaders who represent our constituents, with a similar focus, and agenda.

By John E. Harmon, Sr. IOM

The AACCNJ serves as the vanguard for the 1.2 Black New Jerseyans and the over 88,000 black owned businesses. We remain vigilant in our commitment to unity, equity, and the advancement, and preservation of democratic values. The AACCNJ remains a beacon, illuminating the path toward a future defined by empowerment, and enduring hope.



Visit us at
www.aaccnj.com
to learn more and join us!



Dr. John E. Harmon, Sr. IOM
Founder, President & CEO of the African
American Chamber of Commerce of
New Jersey (AACCNJ)



NJBAC

Answers, Advocacy, Connections

New Jersey
Business
Action Center

Helping Small Businesses Start And Grow In New Jersey Starts With A Plan

By **Jef R. Buehler**, Assistant Director,
New Jersey Business Action Center

According to the U.S. Small Business Administration, there are some 979,000 small businesses in New Jersey. And over 153,000 of them are run by Spanish-speaking business owners. To address the needs of this large and crucial sector of our economy, the New Jersey Business Action Center (NJBAC), working in collaboration with the New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJEDA), the Office of Innovation, and other community-based partners, created the New Jersey Small Business Manual in 2024, and then developed a Spanish version of it shortly thereafter, the Manual para Pequeñas Empresas de New Jersey. Both publications are available for download at no cost at the NJBAC website and for mailing to business owners, a print version using an [online form](#).

The New Jersey Small Business Manual serves as a written source for learning about how to plan, start, operate, and grow a business in New Jersey. Knowing exactly what their business needs to do to start and grow can be difficult for an owner. This straightforward manual will give owners an overview of registering, hiring, funding, and conducting other activities necessary to start and maintain their business in New Jersey. The manual includes information about state and local permits and inspections, financial assistance programs, lease contracts, commercial real estate transactions, and various other topics related to owning and operating a small business.



“The content of the New Jersey Small Business Manual represents the most common queries and requests for assistance we receive from the small business community,” said Melanie Willoughby, Executive Director of NJBAC. “By compiling the information in a digestible, easy-to-use publication, we are ensuring access to essential information that is designed to make life easier for entrepreneurs and business owners. The manual was truly a collaborative effort across several state agencies.”

City staff and elected leadership can promote the Small Business Manual in newsletters, emails, and on social media for downloading or ordering. They may also order multiple copies (up to 25 in each language) for free, no-cost distribution to local businesses and entrepreneurs as well. Bulk printed orders can be made by [emailing a request to NJBAC](#), and they will be sent to the City directly. To the extent we can work together to ensure that our small businesses grow and thrive by providing this kind of support, our local and State economy and quality of life will be enhanced for all of us.

Many of the forms and applications detailed in this publication can be expedited online. However, if business owners have any questions or concerns regarding any aspect of the manual, they can contact the NJBAC's Office of Small Business directly at **1-800-JERSEY-7** or connect with our team online for a live chat [at business.nj.gov](#) for assistance. NJBAC's Customer Service team can also assist with navigating State agencies, and connecting businesses with training, funding and other resources to support their success in New Jersey.

About the New Jersey Business Action Center

Housed within the Department of State, the New Jersey Business Action Center (NJBAC) carries out a multifaceted outreach and business assistance effort to help existing businesses thrive by focusing on increased relationship-building and person-to-person outreach, coordinated promotion of state incentives and resources, and enhanced assistance for businesses navigating state government programs and processes.



New Jersey Focuses On Environmental Sustainability At Annual Conference

By Jonathan Jaffe

ATLANTIC CITY – March 17, 2025 – Nearly 470 attendees, exhibitors, and sponsors across the tri-state area joined in the third-annual Sustainability in Motion conference, March 5-7, to discuss the latest issues and trends in sustainability, including litter abatement, recycling, sustainable food management, and energy efficiency. It was a record number of attendees for what has become New Jersey's go-to environmental conference that brings together local clean communities and recycling coordinators, businesses, non-profits, and state agencies that are committed to enhancing New Jersey's green initiatives.

One of the most highly anticipated presenters was Brianna Keys, who serves as Director of Human Rights and Sustainability for the FIFA World Cup 26™ New York New Jersey Host Committee. The soccer finals are set for July 19 next year at MetLife Stadium, which will also host seven other World Cup matches over six weeks next summer.

One million visitors worldwide are expected to descend on New Jersey, filling hotels and restaurants during the June to July stretch. Officials said the event will be so large that its impact will be felt statewide, with people driving hours to reach the games.

One million people generate plenty of litter and an enormous recycling challenge, a quandary that people like Keys is already working to solve. The committee is working to plan for sustainable fan events in New Jersey and New York City.

"The NYNJ Host Committee is incorporating sustainability into its procurement, Fan Festival design, and fan education and is looking forward to partnering with local businesses, community organizations, municipalities, and counties to support efforts to minimize waste and protect the environment during FIFA World Cup 26™," Keys said.

The conference's keynote speaker was Adam Zellner, president of Greener By Design, a consulting company that develops and implements energy, environment, and resiliency projects. Zellner discussed the "changing face of power," with more intensive energy usage for AI, data centers, computers, electronic vehicles, etc. He said technology, such as smart thermostats, will encourage household energy efficiency.

"We have an opportunity to make things more efficient, but not requiring more work," Zellner said, adding that energy is the largest economic sector in the state, generating more jobs than any other sector, and can't be outsourced.



The conference ended with a lively and interactive discussion of using AI to develop effective education and outreach campaigns.

The New Jersey Clean Communities Council and the Association of New Jersey Recyclers jointly sponsor the annual event. Learn more at njclean.org. Special appreciation is extended to all sponsors, including three platinum sponsors, Recycle Coach, PSE&G, Bayshore Recycling, and 50 exhibitors.

For more information, email jonathan@jaffecom.com

New Jersey DEP's REAL Rule needs a reality check.

By Debra Tantleff & Jeff Kolakowski



Four aerial maps of various parts of the state illustrate the extent of the new "Climate-Adjusted Flood Hazard Areas" that would be created.

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) recently proposed Resilient Environment and Landscapes (REAL) rule threatens to devalue properties while simultaneously increasing the costs of development, exacerbating New Jersey's housing affordability crisis at the worst possible time. New Jersey is on the verge of making real progress on its housing shortfall with the recent implementation of the fourth-round affordable housing law. Still, without developable land and reasonable regulations, builders and New Jerseyans will be left to wonder if the state has missed its last real chance to make the dream of home ownership attainable for the middle class.

The REAL rule drastically changes how DEP regulates land, with many of the proposed changes likely to have devastating effects on urban areas where dry access and new stormwater requirements will make redevelopment and remediation extremely difficult and, in some cases, impossible. The rule proposal directly contradicts our State Plan, economic, housing, redevelopment, and tourism goals, yet includes no cost-benefit analysis or any estimate of the total economic cost. Based on the rule's impact on everything from affordable housing to municipal tax bases, it was not surprising to see the NJ Urban Mayors Association, the NJ League of Municipalities, NJ Association of Counties, scores of municipalities, and several counties ask for more time to review the proposal or outright oppose it.

DEP is taking the bold approach of being the first state to use future predictions to regulate land. The Department is using scientific extremes with a sea level rise forecast of over 5 feet and only a 17% chance of occurring in the year 2100 to justify these changes. Coupled with DEP's rules that regulate the 1% chance of annual storms, the resulting regulations affect land that has a mere 0.17% chance of minimal flooding in 2100. Despite the massive scale of the new flood area, DEP has not disclosed how many properties will be impacted or the loss in value to homeowners. "A study by the National Bureau of Economic Research found that homes within the 100-year floodplain are valued 4.4% to 13.3% less than similar properties outside the flood zone. This decrease in value is largely due to the perceived risk of flooding and the associated costs."

Restricting our ability to transform underutilized industrial properties into vibrant live-work-play communities and preventing projects that create new jobs and much-needed affordable housing options will ultimately hurt our ability to redevelop and create resiliency, as investment and growth are disincentivized. Under the proposal, even routine home improvements can count towards a cumulative 50% improvement threshold that triggers the rule.

The impacts of climate change are real, but our response needs to be incremental and carefully planned. DEP should immediately withdraw the REAL rule and work with communities to help them craft a resiliency plan that meets their needs, not one that hurts existing residents or disincentivizes the very projects that help redevelop, remediate, and revitalize our communities.

Debra Tantleff is the founding principal of TANTUM Real Estate, a real estate development and advisory firm, and chair of the New Jersey Builders Association (NJBA).

Jeff Kolakowski is the CEO of NJBA. NJBA is the trade association representing the residential construction industry, whose mission is to advocate for policies that create a more vibrant, greener, and affordable housing market in New Jersey.

What Urban Mayors Need to Know About the New Garden State C-PACE Program



By: **Jonathan Cloud**, Executive Director, New Jersey PACE
Possible Planet | Regenerative Financing | Center for
Regenerative Community Solutions

The Garden State C-PACE Program offers municipalities an innovative tool for supporting green building practices, improving energy efficiency, and boosting local economic development. By understanding the program's key components and encouraging participation, municipal officials can help foster a more sustainable and resilient community while attracting investment in clean energy and infrastructure.

Overview of C-PACE:

The Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy (C-PACE) program is a financing tool designed to support energy efficiency, renewable energy, and water conservation improvements in commercial properties. The New Jersey Garden State C-PACE Program provides property owners with access to low-cost, long-term financing for sustainable building upgrades. This initiative enables municipalities to foster green building practices and meet state-level sustainability goals while promoting economic growth and energy efficiency.

Key Features of the Garden State C-PACE Program:

Eligibility:

- Available for commercial, industrial, multi-family (5+ units), hospitality, agricultural, and nonprofit/institutional properties such as hospitals, churches, and schools.
- Eligible improvements include energy efficiency upgrades, renewable energy installations (solar, wind, etc.), water conservation, and other resiliency projects.
- Financing is available to properties and owners that meet eligibility and underwriting requirements.

Financing Terms:

- Financing is repaid through a special assessment added to the property tax bill, typically over 10 to 30 years.
- The amount financed can cover up to 100% of the cost of eligible projects.
- Long-term financing offers lower interest rates compared to traditional loans, which helps reduce upfront financial barriers for property owners.

Program Administration:

- C-PACE financing is facilitated through private capital providers, with oversight from the New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJEDA) and participating municipalities.
- Municipalities play a key role in approving and implementing C-PACE projects by adding the assessment to the property tax roll. This ensures the repayment is collected along with property taxes.
- The top one-third of municipalities (by population) may also establish their own administration programs in conjunction with NJEDA to expedite project approvals.

continuation:

Key Benefits for Municipalities:

C-PACE Promotes Sustainability: The C-PACE program aligns with state and local sustainability goals, encouraging energy-efficient and environmentally friendly property improvements.

Economic Development: By fostering green building practices, municipalities can enhance local property values, attract businesses, and create jobs within the green energy sector.

No Cost to the Municipality: Municipalities are not involved in providing funding for projects. They simply collect the repayment as part of the property tax process. They may also charge specified fees for servicing the C-PACE assessment.

Increased Resilience: The program supports retrofits that make buildings more resilient to climate impacts, improving overall community sustainability.

Municipal Responsibilities:

- **Approval Process:** Municipalities must approve the special assessment lien for C-PACE projects once a property owner has secured financing.
- **Tax Collection:** Municipalities collect repayments through the property's tax bill and remit them to the lender.
- **Outreach and Education:** Local governments should actively promote the program to commercial property owners, contractors, and other stakeholders to ensure broad participation.

How to Get Started:

- Municipal officials can learn more about the program at NJPACE.org, download documents and guidelines from NJEDA.gov/c-pace, and work with the NJEDA to understand the specific process for program enrollment, financing, and project approval.
- The introduction of a model Ordinance and Program Agreement is required and can be started immediately. The approved versions are available at NJEDA.gov/c-pace.
- Coordination with local economic development offices and sustainability teams can help integrate C-PACE into broader community and business support initiatives.
- NJPACE also offers interested municipalities a unique community outreach program on a cost-share basis. [Contact us](#) today for more information.

Jonathan Cloud

Executive Director, New Jersey PACE

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If you don't receive a timely response to your email to me, please call or text me at this number, as I don't always get through my emails on a daily basis.

EDITORIAL
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Accountability And Reciprocity

John E. Harmon, Sr., IOM Founder, President & CEO
The African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey (AACCNJ)

November 4, 2025, is a significant date in the history of New Jersey. This is when registered voters will be asked to select their legislative representatives and the next Governor. Constitutionally, New Jersey's chief executive is one of the most powerful governors in the United States. In addition to overseeing the departments, agencies, boards, and commissions that make up the executive branch, the governor signs a bill into law. He can call the legislature into a special session. Blacks voted overwhelmingly for the democratic party at a rate of 90 percent and voted for the Murphy administration at 94% and 96% respectively for the two-term maximum. Given this significant support for the outgoing administration, it would have been understandable to anticipate that addressing some of the widening economic disparities for black New Jerseyans would have been the top priority of NJ's Executive and Legislative branches of government.

The disparity studies' findings for the state of New Jersey and the County of Essex placed blacks at the bottom in almost all the categories of public contracts awarded. Taxpayer dollars fund every public contract; however, those who received most of the awards were not Black. The County of Essex's public contracting spend was over \$900 million, according to their study. However, Black and Hispanic business owners received less than 1% combined of the taxpayer dollars spent to fund these contract awards. Ironically, Black and Hispanic residents make up approximately 68 percent of the population of Essex County. Similarly, the state of New Jersey's Disparity study covered five years and produced the following outcomes:

- Black business owners received 13 contracts for \$3.3 million
- White woman business owners received 250 contracts for \$277 million
- White men, business owners received 2,500 contracts for \$10 billion

It is my opinion that, year after year, blacks contribute to the election of individuals who purport to represent their interests without a clearly defined agenda that will derive an equitable return for our vote. The data shows that blacks have the highest poverty and unemployment, the lowest median income, and 40% of blacks own homes versus 76% of whites. Lastly, the net worth for blacks is \$17,000 versus \$322,000 for whites in New Jersey.

Based on this information, I urge the voting population in New Jersey to challenge those seeking office to articulate their platforms, one which should substantively help black people, not only on economic issues but education, health, homeownership, to name a few, these issues in my opinion should be the top priority of the next administration.

The African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey (AACCNJ) has been in discussion with legislators in New Jersey since the beginning of 2024 to advance legislation that would address the lack of equitable participation of minority and women-owned businesses and potentially level the playing field in public contracting with greater transparency and accountability.

Another issue in our state that we must address is using Education, Occupation, and Credit Scoring as proxies to determine insurance premiums. The above represents a few policies that New Jersey voters must pursue to get definitive responses from any candidate seeking the support of Black Voters in the November 4th election. I would encourage you not to allow candidates to divert your interest and conversation to what is coming out of Washington, D.C., when the socio-economic disparities plaguing blacks have been systemically detrimental without remedy.

ELECTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES!



San Francisco, CA | April 9 -12

By **Juliana Gardiner**, Membership Engagement Coordinator

The John S. Watson Institute for Urban Policy and Research, Kean University

In an era where public policy and leadership are more pivotal than ever, the John S. Watson Institute of Public Policy and Research at Kean University proudly participated in FORUM 2025 in San Francisco, April 9 -12, themed Today's Choices, Tomorrow's Impact. This prestigious event, organized by the National Forum for Black Public Administrators (NFBPA), serves as a cornerstone for innovation and advancement in public administration, bringing together over 1000 participants from across the United States and beyond.

FORUM 2025 is the NFBPA's premier annual event, bringing together professionals, experts, and thought leaders from various sectors to discuss pressing issues in public administration. This conference serves as a platform for networking, professional development, and engaging in meaningful dialogue about the challenges and opportunities facing Black public administrators today.

Featured Sessions and Workshops

FORUM 2025 featured a variety of sessions and workshops designed to equip attendees with tools and knowledge to excel in their careers. Some of the highlights include:

- **Leadership Development Workshops:** Interactive sessions focused on developing essential leadership skills and strategies for career advancement.
- **Panel Discussions:** Expert-led panels on current issues affecting public administration and strategies for overcoming them.
- **Networking Events:** Opportunities for attendees to connect with peers, mentors, and industry leaders to build relationships and share experiences.
- **Educational Sessions:** The forum facilitated an environment where academia meets real-world applications, offering insights into the latest trends and challenges in public administration, and providing the tools public servants must employ in their roles.

Today's public servants must innovate in real time, demonstrating courage, believing in community partners' abilities to guide policy development and environmental change. By attending this conference, the John S. Watson Institute for Urban Policy and Research reinforced its role as a vital contributor to public policy discourse. This engagement not only enriches Kean University's academic offerings but also positions it as a key player in shaping responsive and responsible governance.

- **Town hall meetings:** for participation and sharing of ideas to enhance local governance.
- **Student scholarship presentation:** Scholarship awards were given to deserving students to help them further their education and for career development.
- **Professional Development Awards:** Highlighting the event, **David Brown, the president of the NFBPA NJ chapter and City Manager of Ocean County, received the 2025 Marks of Excellence Award, marking a significant achievement for the NJ Chapter.**



FORUM 2025 was more than an event; it was a catalyst for progress and innovation in public policy. It represents a significant opportunity for Black public administrators to come together, share knowledge, and work towards a more inclusive and effective public service sector. Through its commitment to professional development and advocacy, the NFBPA continues to play a crucial role in shaping the future of public administration. FORUM 2025 promises to be an inspiring and impactful event, fostering growth, innovation, and collaboration among its participants

As FORUM comes to Philly next year, you don't want to miss it - [Click to join the NFBPA Today!](#)



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The instructor of this course has disclosed no proprietary interests in any product, instrument, device, service, or material mentioned in this training.

Who Should Attend?

Businesses that:

- are new to government contracting OR interested in local govt contracting
- are currently generating revenue
- are serious about selling to government

Are you ready to **ROCK** for a cleaner New Jersey?

Enter the NJ Clean Communities “Rock Star” Slogan Contest and help us spread the message of litter prevention in style!

THEME:

“Be a Litter Rock Star”

EVENT DATE:

October 8, 2025

MISSION:

Inspire your community with a catchy slogan that embodies the spirit of keeping New Jersey clean while embracing your inner rock star!

WHAT WE’RE LOOKING FOR:

A creative slogan that showcases your town as a litter “Rock Star”!

A message aligned with litter prevention, education, and enforcement.

HOW TO ENTER:

- Craft your slogan.
- Submit it by August 21, 2025.
- Attend the Awards Ceremony on October 8 to see if you’re crowned a “Litter Rock Star”!

Submit Online at www.njclean.org or **Enter Here**

Your slogan will be recognized at the annual awards ceremony and featured in future NJ Clean Communities Campaigns.

Let’s make some noise for a cleaner, greener Garden State!





To learn more about NJUMA, visit us at
kean.edu/new-jersey-urban-mayors-policy-center

Submissions for the Fall Edition
are due Sept. 15th. Any
Questions?
Please Email
watson@kean.edu

Thank you for your contributions
and continued support!

Did You Know ?

The New Jersey Urban Mayors Association (NJUMA) represents 33 municipalities with a combined population of 2,339,866 based on the 2020 U.S. Census data! The municipalities in NJUMA are at the forefront of addressing critical urban issues shaping the future of New Jersey's urban communities. Stay connected as NJUMA continues to lead impactful discussions and innovative solutions for our cities and residents!

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