

A Message from the Mayor

Many Cranford residents have questions about the future of Cranford's three municipal pools as well as the planned improvements at Orange Avenue Pool. To be clear, I am committed to preserving both Centennial and Orange pool facilities, and to seeing new and expanded recreational offerings at the planned Cranford Recreation Center at the former Indoor Tennis Center at 375 Centennial Avenue. I believe pools and recreational facilities that are innovative and attractive to all ages can be successful and contribute to Cranford's appeal. We have a responsibility to consider possibilities and opportunities to be better. I believe the Township Committee is equally committed to these goals.

Our community pools are operated by the Swim Pool Utility and are intended to be self-funding through memberships. For years, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Cranford municipal pool memberships and revenues had been declining while the operating costs had been increasing. Yet, there was no planning at the Township level to address the increasing pool budget deficit. This is unsustainable. We must address the declining memberships and rising costs with a plan that preserves the recreational amenities for residents and is fiscally responsible.

This year, the 2021 operating budget for two pools is \$1,255,835 (Orange and Centennial Indoor). Opening Centennial Outdoor Pool this year would have involved more than replacing a \$25,000 pump and \$20,000 for acid washing and painting. It would have required an additional \$567,495 for operating expenses. Yet, even with the Township's vigorous marketing of our community pools membership levels are still not what is needed to make operations sustainable.

Cranford was fortunate to receive American Rescue Act/Stimulus Funding that is being used to pay off \$1,097,000 pool emergency deficit from 2020. Without this funding, Cranford taxpayers would have seen approx. \$225,000 added to the operating budget every year for the next five years. This deficit of more than \$1 million – 5% of the entire municipal budget – would have had a big budget impact for taxpayers.

It is imperative that our pool facilities are attractive, modern and competitive with other pools in our area to attract members. The Splash Pad was considered for several years as an amenity that would draw new members, especially young families. Funding for the splash pad came from the Capital Improvement Budget, which cannot be used to fund the operating shortfalls the Swim Pool Utility is experiencing.

In May, I appointed a committee that is already at work reviewing the finances, membership trends and facilities in other towns to gather information and prepare options that will be presented to the public in early fall before the Township begins work on the 2022 budget. The committee includes Swim Pool Advisory Board members Luke Paine, Barbara Bilger and Dennis Geier, Township Administrator Jamie Cryan, Township Finance Director Lavona Patterson, Recreation Director Steve Robertazzi, Deputy Mayor Brian Andrews and myself.

As elected officials, we have a responsibility to seek information, evaluate all possibilities, and receive input from residents. I ask your patience while the committee works on gathering information and preparing a presentation on options for operating the pool facilities. I encourage you to sign up for the official Township newsletter to get accurate information

directly about this and other Township news and events. www.cranfordnj.org. If you have questions or would like to meet, please email me at k-prunty@cranfordnj.org.

Thank you,
Mayor Kathleen Miller Prunty