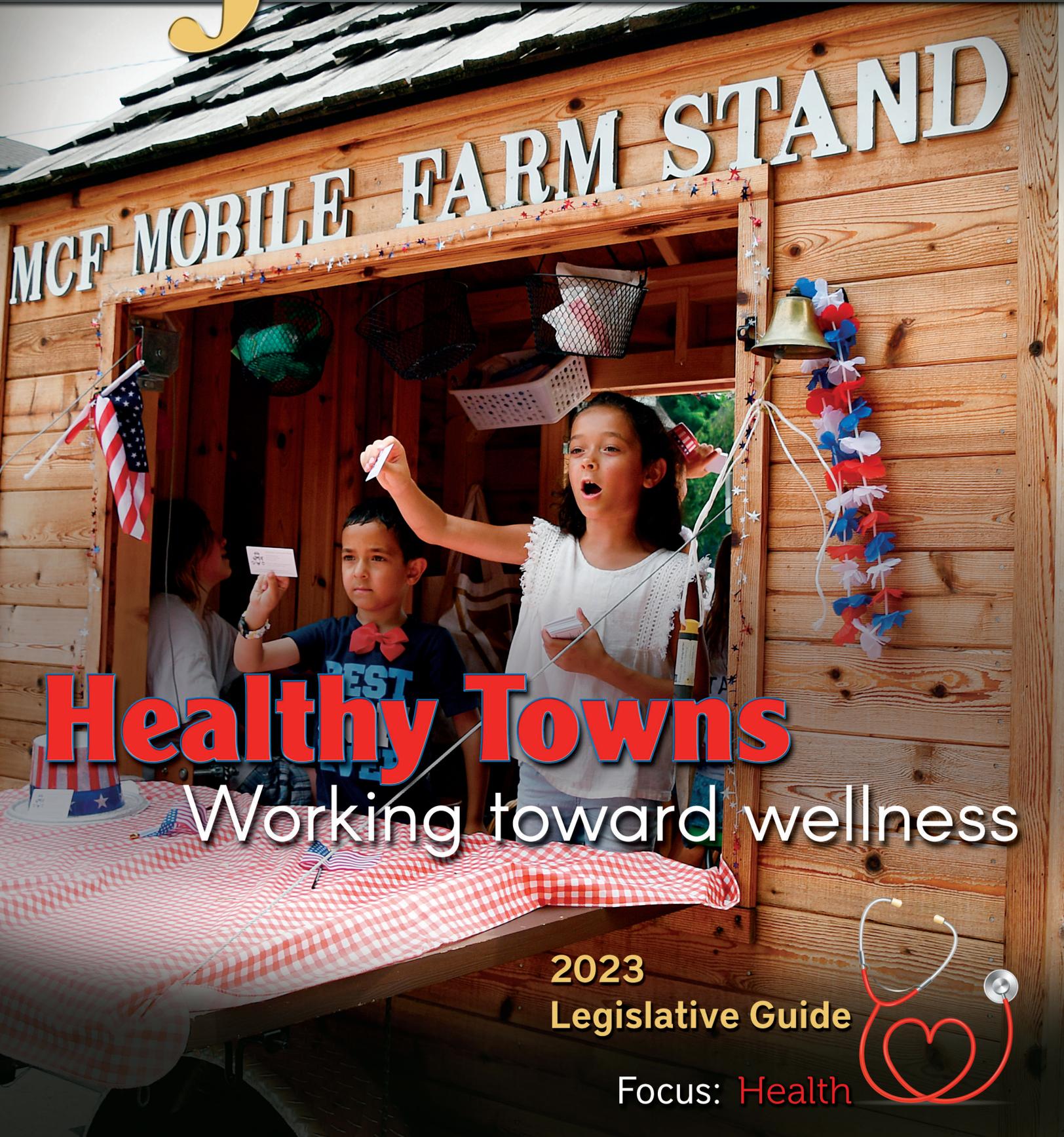


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2023

Legislative Guide

Focus: Health



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Focus:

Health



# njcontents

Volume 100 | Issue 2 February 2023



UpFront Focus  
Community is Key

6

## IN THIS ISSUE

- 4/** 222 West State  
Michael F. Cerra
- 10/** NJ Now
- 14/** Washington  
Mikie Sherril
- 16/** Trenton  
Kim Eulner &  
Marilyn Piperno
- 66/** Business Card  
Directory
- 68/** Local Governing /  
Supporters

## DEPARTMENTS

- 44/** Labor Relations  
Joseph M. Hannon, Esq.
- 46/** Gold Dome  
Ben Dworkin, Ph.D.
- 48/** Tech Updates  
Marc Pfeiffer
- 50/** Legal Q&A  
Frank Marshall, Esq.
- 52/** Labor  
Negotiations  
Matthew U. Watkins

## On the Cover

Montclair Community Farm's Mobile Farm Stand is part of a state-wide effort for Healthy Towns, see page 6 for the Mayors Wellness Campaign feature.

## Features

- 6** **UpFront Focus Community is Key**  
Improving health and wellness, reducing inequities in New Jersey  
Linda Schwimmer
- 18** **2023 Outlook: Moving Toward a More Affordable and Equitable New Jersey in 2023**  
Craig Coughlin
- 20** **2023 Outlook: Let's Be Realistic**  
John DiMaio
- 22** **Focus Timely Tips**  
Navigating a tightening health insurance market and skyrocketing premiums  
Joseph M. DiBella
- 26** **Focus Healthy Communities**  
Lead in Drinking Water Primer for Mayors guides local leaders  
Michael Atkins Oliver Update
- 28** **LEAP Grants, Water & Sewer Systems**  
Lt. Governor Oliver provides updates on significant DCA & DLGS programs for municipalities  
Sheila Oliver
- 32** **Public Information Strategies**  
10 rules of dealing with the media  
Joseph E. Ryan
- 36** **Morristown's Foote's Pond**  
Pond restoration brings community together  
Anthony M. DeVizio and Natalie BeCoats
- 38** **2023**  
The Year of Living Dangerously  
James W. Hughes

## NJLM

- 54** Legal Team
- 57** 2023 Legislative Guide
- 65** Meet Your 2023 Legislators

**Recent Topics on the Blog:**

- *EPA Announces New Funding Opportunities for Brownfield Technical Assistance and Research Grants*
- *Assembly Law and Public Safety Committee Hears Testimony on Car Theft Prevention*
- *DLGS Issues Local Finance Notice 2022-24*
- *FY2023 Federal Omnibus Budget*
- *Governor Proposes Liquor License Modernization*

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## A Healthy Future in Municipal Buildings and Beyond

It's February and for many of us, those healthy New Year's resolutions are in an unused gym bag in the car's trunk. But it's never too late to make a fresh start and put health in the forefront of your life in and out of the municipal building.

This month, *New Jersey Municipalities* magazine looks at health from several viewpoints. Local leaders can tap into the power of communities to drive better health and better lives for residents through programs such as the Mayors Wellness Campaign. New Jersey Health Care Quality Institute President and CEO Linda Schwimmer notes, "Engaging community leaders in an authentic way is not simple. Mayors and other local leaders, including public health officers and human service officers, play a critical role here. They are familiar, trusted faces and voices in their communities." (see article, page 6)

Along with vaccines, exercise, and mental health, local officials can help contain, treat, and prevent the more complex health issues, including those created by elevated exposure to lead. The Lead in Drinking Water Primer for Mayors discusses how lead in drinking water hurts residents of all ages ranging from young learners with behavioral and learning problems to adults grappling

with cardiovascular, kidney, and reproductive problems (see article, page 26). It also provides outreach methods and suggestions that municipalities can adopt to benefit their own lead removal efforts.

Within the walls of the municipal building, one aspect of the healthy life equations is health insurance. Through the ongoing struggles with the State Healthcare Benefits Program for a more affordable rate, local governments will be forced to make hard decisions now and in years to come impact their employees and their residents. An article this month (page 22) discusses the realities of insurance costs for municipalities and touches on future outlooks.

Regarding outlooks, we thank the Legislative leaders from the NJ Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin and Minority Leader John DiMaio for their thoughts on what's to come in 2023 (starting page 18) as well as Rutgers' James W. Hughes, Ph.D., for his insights on the dangerous financial times ahead in 2023 (page 38).

We also suggest that you review the 2023 Legislative Guide (page 57) so you are ready to work with the League throughout the year in Trenton and resolve to ensure the good health of your municipality. 🇯🇵

*Michael Cerra*

**PS:** Save the date for the 2023 Mayors' Legislative Day, March 29. For more information, visit [www.njlm.org/seminars](http://www.njlm.org/seminars).

“ This month, *New Jersey Municipalities* magazine looks at health from several viewpoints. ”

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Montclair Community Farm's Mobile Farm

# Community is Key

Improving health and wellness, reducing inequities in New Jersey

*Linda Schwimmer, President and CEO, New Jersey Health Care Quality Institute*

**A**cross New Jersey, mayors are leading efforts to create healthier communities for their residents. Community is key. During the height of the pandemic, and beyond, municipal leaders saw the value of strong community partnerships firsthand.

The New Jersey Health Care Quality Institute supports mayors in their local efforts through the Quality Institute's Mayors Wellness Campaign (MWC), created in 2006 in partnership with the New Jersey State League of Municipalities. Community is at the center of all MWC programs, from community walks and bike rides to supporting older adults living alone..

**Addressing Disparities**

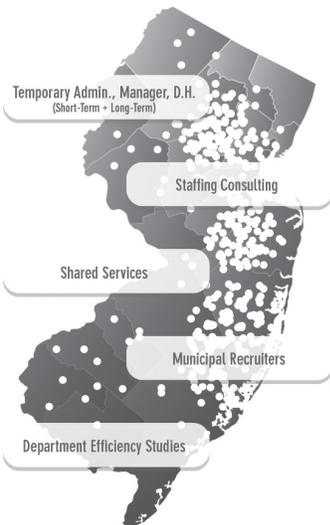
Community will be essential to addressing the significant disparities in health and wellness that continue to exist in New Jersey, a wealthy state with many vital programs. Research shows the value of local partnerships. For instance, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) now funds local partnerships with community organizations and

trusted messengers as part of the Partnering for Vaccine Equity Program. Surveys suggest that these efforts have helped address concerns about flu vaccines within Black and Latino communities.

Moreover, for outreach to enroll people in programs such as Medicaid, researchers found that the most successful efforts were outreach by trained local parent mentors who assisted families in getting insurance

**The Quality Institute has called for greater support to these leaders so they can create focused, community-based engagement to drive health equity**

coverage, accessing health care, and addressing social determinants of health. These parent mentors were more effective than traditional methods of advertising and



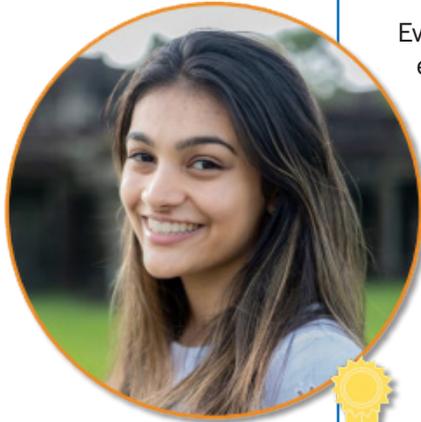
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**Eesha Bhatia,**  
*a high school student and  
Mayors Wellness Campaign  
Co-Chair for her town,  
Old Tappan, is one resident  
recognized by her mayor as a  
critical driver of health and  
wellness in her community.*

outreach (95% vs. 69%), succeeding in faster enrollment in services, higher levels of satisfaction, and improving overall child wellness.

Another example of the power of the local community involves New Jersey's experience with COVID-19 vaccine distribution. The New Jersey Department of Health engaged community ambassadors who were affiliated with or worked with local partners such as churches and community centers. As a result of these grassroots outreach efforts, vaccination rates among those in Black and Latino communities improved. Trusted leaders in community locations made a difference.

### **The Power of Community**

At the core of the MWC, too, is a recognition of the power of the local community. MWC is now providing New Jersey towns and cities with Mental Health First Aid Training programs as well as tools to address food insecurity and social determinants of health.

Engaging community leaders in an authentic way is not simple. Mayors and other local leaders, including public health officers and human

## **Champion of Health Award**

Every community has leaders, inspirational people from the ranks of elected officials, volunteers, students, employees who must be recognized and supported. That's why MWC created the Champion of Health award.

This year's award goes to Eesha Bhatia, a 16-year-old in Old Tappan. Eesha is a junior in high school, a volunteer, and an integral part of Old Tappan's recently rejuvenated MWC initiative. She provided a comprehensive presentation to the Board of Health advocating for the development of a local MWC, which was adopted without hesitation. She advocated for creation of a website to inform community members about the many health and wellness activities being offered; development, implementation, and analysis of a needs assessment survey distributed to residents; and organization of programs such as nutrition and exercise classes.

Eesha, along with the many nominations we received for the 2022 Champion of Health award, is an example of how individuals can make a difference in community health work.

### **Honorable Mentions**

**Township of Woodbridge** Mayor John McCormac nominated Ashley Ristaino, Public Health Educator. A lifelong resident and member of the MWC Committee and Woodbridge Health Task Force, Ashley revamped programs that came to a halt during the pandemic, focuses on advancing quality health care for vulnerable populations, and incorporates a wide range of social determinants of health into programming to support residents.

**Township of Denville** Mayor Thomas Andes nominated Mark Venis, Recreation Committee member. Over the past 15 years, Mark has volunteered countless hours building playgrounds, managing a men's softball league, maintaining community gardens, and organizing "Senior Socials," where older adults in the community come to have a meal and connect with other residents. He also focused on the development, implementation, and analysis of a needs assessment survey distributed to residents. Mark was also key in the organization of programs such as nutrition and exercise classes.

**Bernardsville** Mayor Mary Jane Canose nominated Leah Horowitz, Assistant Recreation Director. Capitalizing on her ability to build relationships and collaborate with partners, Leah spearheaded the first health and wellness fair for the MWC. Her contagious enthusiasm and volunteerism makes her an asset to the community, not only as an employee, but as a committed resident.

**Borough of Oradell** Mayor Dianne Didio nominated Dr. J.C. Mendler, MWC Committee member. Dr. Mendler's role as Medical Director of Sports Medicine at Holy Name Medical Center has enabled him to coordinate important blood screening events in the community, as well as participate in "Walk with the Doc" events to educate residents on important health topics. His willingness to share his expertise with the MWC Committee has strengthened the Borough of Oradell's local programming.

**Cranbury** Mayor Barbara Rogers nominated Dr. Laura Zurfluh, Board of Health Chair and MWC Chair. Dr. Zurfluh initiated the Cranbury MWC during the pandemic and organized monthly virtual programming even before she had a formal team to support her. She continues to push the program forward focusing on a wide range of health topics including mental health, nutrition, and access to health care, enabling the township to become a 2021 Healthy Town winner



Eesha Bhatia, left, Champion of Health Award winner, with other members of the community in Old Tappan. Mayors throughout the state nominated community leaders who are passionate about improving the lives of residents. The program was started in 2002, a time when towns faced unprecedented challenges which were transformed into opportunities for dedicated residents.

service officers, play a critical role here. They are familiar, trusted faces and voices in their communities.

The Quality Institute has called for greater support to these leaders so they can create focused, community-based engagement to drive health equity, whether that's funds for social workers and community health workers, health information in multiple languages, or the flexibility to create the outreach, they believe would work best in their communities. 🇺🇸

@ We encourage mayors and local leaders to reach out to the Quality Institute to learn more about the MWC or to further your existing campaign. Please contact Julie DeSimone at [jdesimone@njhcqi.org](mailto:jdesimone@njhcqi.org) to work directly with you to make New Jersey towns and cities healthier places for all residents.

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## NJLM Leadership in Trenton and Beyond

League President Mayor Ray Heck of Millstone Borough started the year connecting with state and local officials throughout New Jersey. At the State of the State address, President Heck was joined by League Executive Director Mike Cerra to represent local government officials at the event.

In response to the speech, which discussed plans to review and update the liquor licensing laws in the Garden State, President Heck said, “Society has drastically changed since Franklin Roosevelt was president and New Jersey’s ability to issue liquor licenses needs to join the long list of those positive changes. A relic of post-prohibition reforms in the 1930s, New Jersey’s process to obtain a liquor license has been badly broken for many decades and we applaud Governor Murphy’s proposal. The League, and our Liquor License Reform Task Force, is eager to vigorously participate in this process, including the development of new consumption licenses for the growing craft beer, wine, and spirits industry that creates jobs and economic activity in our communities while providing broader access to liquor licenses.”

President Heck was also on hand for the reorganization meeting of the Somerset County Governing Officials Association held in Bernardsville on January 11 and conducted the group’s swearing-in ceremony and provided an update on the latest developments in Trenton. 📌



At the State of the State address at the capital building, President Heck met injured Ukrainian soldiers, and also greeted League Executive Board Member Paterson Councilwoman Ruby Cotton.



League President Ray Heck performs the swearing in ceremony for the Somerset County Governing Officials Association. Shown l to r: Somerset County Commissioner Doug Singleterry, Somerset County Freeholder Emeritus Peter Palmer, Raritan Borough Councilman Pablo Oroszco, South Bound Brook Councilwoman Beth Konckle, Bernardsville Mayor Mary Jane Canose, Rocky Hill Councilman Jon Lee, former Bedminster Committeeman Bernie Pane, Somerset County Governing Officials Association Executive Director and former Rocky Hill Mayor Ed Zimmerman, NJLM President and Millstone Mayor Ray Heck.

## NLC Members Elect New Officers for 2023

Newark Mayor and NJLM Executive Board member Ras Baraka was one of the new appointments announced by the National League of Cities (NLC) for 2023. Mayor Baraka will serve as one of seven new Federal Advocacy Committee chairs focusing on Public Safety and Crime Prevention for a one-year term.

The League’s federal partner, NLC, has also elected Mayor Victoria Woodards of Tacoma, Washington, as its new president. She stepped into her new role at NLC’s 2022 City Summit held in Kansas City, MO. Woodards will serve a one-year term with a special focus on partnerships related to affordable housing and workforce development.

In addition to Mayor Woodards, Councilmember David Sander of Rancho Cordova, CA was elected to serve as First Vice President, and Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome of Baton Rouge, Louisiana was elected Second Vice President.

Along with officers, NLC members also elected new members to its board of directors and appointed chairs for its federal advocacy committees. 📌



NLC President, Mayor Victoria Woodards of Tacoma, Washington

# League 2nd VP Gayle Brill Mittler Retires from League, Highland Park Office



New Jersey League of Municipalities' 2nd Vice President and Highland Park Mayor Gayle Brill Mittler has resigned, leaving office at the end of 2022.

Her resignation was announced at a Highland Park Borough Council meeting as well as through correspondence with the League.

"I have had the unique privilege these last 13 years, since 2009, of serving on

the Borough Council for five years and as mayor for another eight years. Over the past few weeks I made the difficult decision to resign from my position of mayor," she was quoted in a mycentraljersey.com report that noted Brill Mittler said she wants to spend more time with her family.

Brill Mittler served as the Mayor of the Borough of Highland Park starting in 2014. Prior to that time, she served as a member of the Borough Council for five years, including a term as Council President (2012-2013). Under Mayor Brill Mittler's leadership, Highland Park built on the Borough's sustainability in the environment, in community building, and in economic development.

Mayor Brill Mittler positioned Highland Park strategically for further redevelopment and to build on the vibrancy of its downtown. Her administration has stabilized real estate

taxes by creating shared services agreements and an innovative redevelopment plan. Highland Park also received a multi-year NJ State Neighborhood Preservation Program (NPP) grant to improve life along the Borough's Woodbridge Ave. commercial district.

Under Mayor Brill Mittler's leadership, Highland Park was named New Jersey's Healthy Community for 2017-2018; received a Complete Streets Excellence Award; was named first Heart Safe Municipality in New Jersey in 2017; was named a Heartsaver and Stroke Hero by the American Heart Association and American Stroke Association in 2017; and earned Gold Level Recognition and Outstanding Achievement award for Safe Walking and Biking Committee, from New Jersey's Safe Routes to School 2017 and New Jersey Smart Workplaces.

Highland Park was also awarded the New Jersey League of Municipalities' Innovation in Governance Award three times for its "Park Partners Community Grant Program" (2014); "HP Gives a Hoot" (2016); and "Civics for the Community" (2018).

"We appreciate Mayor Brill Mittler's service to her community and thank her for all of her contributions to the League as an Executive Board member, Officer, Conference speaker, and committee representative of the League. All of us at the League wish her a very happy retirement," said League Executive Director Michael Cerra. 🇯🇵

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