Dear Stratford Residents,

This has been an active and very exciting year for our town! The work that has been done in our Redevelopment Committees with the support of all of Council, over the past three years, is bringing results that come from building a solid foundation. This year has been especially productive as now our carefully managed strategies are coming to fruition. Mayor, Josh Keenan, who took office in January, has been an ardent supporter of Council and the Redevelopment Process.

Stratford is entering into a new era of growth and enrichment. Real change is coming. For the first time in 40 years, we will see significant commercial Development projects coming to our town. This growth will not be without challenges.

I hope as you read this you will understand the difficulties Council has faced as we struggled with Redevelopment and Stratford’s Fair Share Housing Obligation. I apologize for the lengthiness of this letter but in order to understand the process you need to have the information, so here it is...

2014 – Stratford had an incomplete Rehabilitation Plan in place for the Incollingo’s/Laurel Mill site and a Draft Plan for Rehabilitation on the Bradlees site. This work on both sites was completed in 2011, and was just sitting. Nothing had been done by Council since then to advance Redevelopment on either site. Now Council re-examines both Plans. Removes the housing overlay that had been in place for the Incollingo’s Plan. To move the process forward, the concept of Two Economic Redevelopment Committees was proposed, allowing Council to work on each site individually in the sub-committee process. The owners of Bradlees and Incollingo’s were approached to start discussions on moving forward with redevelopment.

2015 – Council votes unanimously to create the two Economic Redevelopment Committees, voting me in as Chair for both Committees. The committees continue discussions with the owners of the two Rehabilitation sites and now include Camden County officials and Representatives from both Kennedy and Rowan as we discuss their future plans for their properties and any potential for working with the town on future development of the Bradlees site. Conversations were started with
interested developers and potential tenants for the Bradlees site. The Bradlees Rehabilitation Plan was completed. The Incollingo’s Committee discussed various development options with the owner. A potential design concept for the site was suggested to the owner. In March 2015, the New Jersey Supreme Court ruled that the Court was taking over administration of affordable housing policy in NJ. Towns were required to file legal documents or risk being sued by builders.

In March of 2015, the New Jersey Supreme Court ruled unanimously to take control of affordable housing policy. The Court became the administrator for NJ towns’ affordable housing obligations, taking the place of COAH or the Council On Affordable Housing. Stratford along with other New Jersey towns filed legal documents and was required to submit an “Affordable Housing Plan.” This Plan would protect the town from being sued by builders. Stratford met this legal obligation and presently has temporary immunity from builders’ lawsuits. Council Solicitor, Albert Olizi has been the lead Counsel for the town’s position.

2016 – Council hires Jim Maley as Redevelopment Solicitor to work with our other professionals on Redevelopment. Stratford files its Fair Share Plan with the NJ Supreme Court, in Camden County. The Plan currently filed with the Court provides for zoning overlays on three sites in town with 20 percent (as per the fair share required obligation) of new residential projects built to be affordable units either for rent or for sale.

The vacant frontage of what is presently known as Woodmere Apartments (now, The Residences at White Hall) is zoned R-4. This allows a 16-unit/acre density on 6.9 acres. The number of affordable units in the Plan for this site is 22.

Laurel Mills shopping Center/ Incollingo’s is a 7.4 acre parcel of which 5.8 acres is designated in the Plan as a residential component with a density of 10 units per acre. The 1.6-acre frontage would be retained for commercial development. The Plan allows for 12 affordable units for this site.

The Bradlees/Juster site of 22 acres (20 acre net), the current Plan allows for a maximum of 240 units in a vertical mixed-use development with an affordable component of 48 units.

Stratford was challenged in Court when the owner of the Bradlees site intervened. Fortunately, with the town’s ability to move a Redevelopment Project forward quickly through our Redevelopment Committees, when Brandywine Financial came forward, ready to meet the owner’s terms to buy the Bradlees property, Stratford avoided a potentially lengthy and costly lawsuit.

At this time, Stratford expects to settle the lawsuit for affordable housing and reach an agreement through the Court to meet our fair share obligation by this November.
Stratford has a constitutional obligation to provide affordable housing. If the owner or developer of any of the sites currently in a Redevelopment Zone, in the Affordable Housing Plan, or on any development site in town comes forward with a reasonable plan to build residential units, the town is legally obligated to consider the plan.

Council is sensitive to resident concerns about building new apartments and town homes. It is the intent of the Redevelopment Committees to request that prior to any Plan being presented for approvals, that appropriate impact studies be conducted to examine demographics; affordable housing, traffic flow, police, fire, emergency services, schools, parking, densities and other factors, such as municipal utilities including water, sewer, and sanitation services. Our zoning standards will have to be met. Research on the impact to police, fire and the schools is currently underway. But, the town cannot deny a project just because it includes multi-family residential units.

As the Council Liaison to the Joint Land Use Board for the past three years, I have been able to work closely with both the Council and the Land Use Board to keep projects moving. JLUB Planner and Engineer, Steve Bach worked with the town Redevelopment Solicitor, Jim Maley on the projects related to the Bradlees site, including the Redevelopment Designation and Redevelopment Plan for Bradlees.

The JLUB began work on Stratford's Master Plan Re-exam, last year, and it was completed in March of this year, on schedule. This project has a direct relationship to the work on Redevelopment. The timing on all these projects has been crucial. As the town proceeds with Development Projects, these projects will be required to maintain the spirit of the town’s Master Plan.

This year has also seen a change to the JLUB with some new members at the table. This includes the professionals, Steve Bach, Engineer and Planner and JLUB Solicitor, Stuart Platt. As with the Council, the JLUB has acted together with a new zest and direction. We are all working toward the goal of Redevelopment on the Bradlees and Incollingo’s sites. And, we anticipate working with the developers who will be coming before the Board with applications, as they seek to develop other sites in town.
Stratford is experiencing a surge of interest from developers, who are ready to move quickly to bring new life to our deteriorating commercial properties and other large vacant properties in town. The Council has committed the necessary resources over the past three years to put in place the right team of professionals to work with our Economic Redevelopment Committees and the JLUB. This commitment will help guarantee the success of our Redevelopment effort and allow us to provide some measure of control over the amount of housing to be built.

Council has been pro-active in the Redevelopment Committees. In March of this year, Jim Maley was hired as Redevelopment Solicitor. He has extensive experience as the Mayor of Collingswood and the Solicitor for Glassboro where he helped structure their Redevelopment Projects. With Jim’s guidance, the Council has moved from Rehabilitation to a Redevelopment Plan with the concept of eminent domain, on the Bradlees site. Our Council Planner this year, Pam Pellegrini of Maser Consulting, has been involved in all aspects of our Fair Share affordable housing obligation. She has provided extensive background for the planning we have been putting in place on many fronts for the past two years, including for the Incollingo’s site.

We are very fortunate to have the Developer, Brandywine Financial in place and about to close on the Bradlees property. The Bradlees Economic Redevelopment Committee met with numerous developers. Brandywine was the only developer who approached the Committee and proposed a concept plan that was primarily commercial. They have moved very quickly to secure the property, completing their due diligence in record time after entering into a contract of sale in May of this year with the expectation of closing on the property this November.

Brandywine Financial presented two potential Concept Plans at the Regular Council meeting on Tuesday, September 13, 2016:

- One plan is completely commercial with some pad sites in the front for possibly a gas convenience and automotive store, retail boxes in the rear, (the Developer is still exploring the possibility of a supermarket anchor), small retail, medical offices and restaurants as just some of the possibilities.
• The second plan has the same commercial component in the front with a mixed-use concept, it includes some residential in the former Bradlees store portion of the site. The residential component would sit 200 feet back from the WH Pike. It could include 212 units of one or two bedroom apartments, of which 20% would be affordable housing to comply with our pending affordable housing obligation.

**Incolingo’s/Laurel Mills** Redevelopment Committee has reached a final stage with the Plan for this property. Currently, the Plan is under review by the Rehabilitation Solicitor and Planner. The Plan is still in sub-committee. We look forward to having a final meeting and review with the owner, by November. The committee will then make final recommendations and requests for additional information, if needed, at that time. Once the committee has finished its work, the next step would be to introduce the Incollingo’s Plan to the Council in a public meeting.

The former **Christian Academy** is under contract of sale to Heartland Development. Since our initial conversations with the Developer, both Mayor Keenan and I stressed our interest in keeping the Tomlinson mansion intact. Many of our concerned residents and town historian also spoke with the developer about this beautiful icon of the past. I can assure the town that as the due diligence process has progressed on this property, the design for this beautiful piece of land will incorporate the mansion as an integral part of the new structure. The developer intends to build an Assisted Care and Independent Living facility that incorporates a memory retention program as part of a collaborative effort with Rowan.

When Heartland takes ownership of this property, Stratford will have a new tax ratable in addition to a wonderful new neighbor in town.

The long and short of this letter is that it has been a long road filled with bumps and potholes but the one consistent theme over the past 3 years, is that the members of council have worked together on an Agenda for Redevelopment. This year there was no roadblock in the path forward. All the hard work by Council is paying off and Stratford is finally getting
Redevelopment off the ground. This means we can expect significant new tax ratables with development and new businesses in our future.

2016 has been a year for change! We look forward to bringing in the end of this year with two potential Redevelopment Projects and one Development project in the pipeline. We may see at least one of the projects ready to put a shovel in the ground sometime in early 2017. Council and the JLUB are ready to take our town into the future.

Working together as one Team we can accomplish great things for Stratford... I want to thank you for taking the time to read about the work that has been done by Council and the JLUB on Redevelopment. We are working hard to build a better future for our town, together

My best wishes to all and God bless our town,
Holly