

Budget Address by Mayor Bert H. Steinmann
Introduction of the 2025 Ewing Township Municipal Budget
April 8, 2025

Council President Jennifer Keyes-Maloney, members of Council, department heads, and residents of Ewing Township, tonight, I am pleased to present the proposed municipal budget for 2025. As always, I would like to begin by thanking our CFO Joanna Mustafa, our Business Administrator Aaron Watson, and our dedicated department directors for their professionalism, expertise, and focus on fiscal responsibility in putting together this budget. I also thank the members of the Council for your ongoing partnership as we work together to provide efficient and effective services to the people of Ewing.

The proposed 2025 municipal budget totals \$59,392,687.80 and remains within both the 2 percent levy CAP and 3.5 percent appropriation CAP imposed by the State of New Jersey. Despite rising costs across many areas, we have worked hard to minimize the impact on taxpayers while maintaining and even enhancing essential municipal services.

The proposed increase in the municipal tax levy is \$704,338. For the owner of a home assessed at the township average of \$209,800, that means a modest increase of approximately \$52.78 – or about \$13 each quarter -- for a total municipal tax bill of \$2,224.21. While this is only one portion of a property owner's overall tax bill, which also includes school, county, library, and open space taxes, we take any increase seriously and have worked to keep it as low as possible while meeting rising costs and preserving services.

The primary source of revenue to support the budget continues to be property taxes. In 2025, we propose to raise \$35,326,316 through taxation. The total ratable base -- the value of all taxable properties in Ewing Township, residential, commercial, and industrial -- has reached \$3.33 billion, a positive sign of steady growth and development. For perspective, the ratable base has increased by more than \$67 million since 2018.

We also anticipate \$33 million in miscellaneous revenues. This includes income from licenses, permits, hotel and motel taxes, ambulance billing, and cable TV franchise fees. We are particularly encouraged by the revenue generated from our local cannabis retail tax, which will exceed \$280,000 in 2025. While we are seeing a decline in cable franchise fees, down about \$19,000 due to the shift to streaming services, our PILOT revenue remains strong, led by continued growth at the Ewing Town Center.

State aid is expected to come in at \$9.88 million, which is a decrease of just over \$509,000 from 2024. To responsibly balance the budget, we will again use a portion of our surplus -- \$4.1 million -- leaving a healthy cushion for future needs. As of the end of last year, our surplus stood at over \$9.6 million, thanks to prudent financial management and high collection rates.

On the expense side, we continue to face increased costs in several key areas. Inflation, rising healthcare costs, and contractual salary increases, particularly in our union contracts, are all contributing factors. We also see notable increases in solid waste and recycling collection and disposal costs, which affect our day-to-day operations.

Despite these pressures, we are proud to maintain high levels of public safety and public service. The 2025 budget allocates:

- \$11 million for the Ewing Township Police Department
- \$3.1 million for our Fire Division
- \$1.44 million for Emergency Medical Services
- Nearly \$6 million for the Department of Public Works, which includes Streets and Roads, Buildings and Grounds, and Parks Maintenance
- \$1.4 million in contributions to the Public Employees Retirement System (PERS)
- \$3.6 million in contributions to the Police and Firemen's Retirement System (PFRS)

We are also proud to report some very encouraging developments. For the first time since the year 2000, our Police Department is at full complement with 87 officers. Thanks to a federal SAFER grant, we hired 21 new firefighters, bringing our ranks to a robust and capable 31. These investments not only enhance public safety, but they also reflect our ongoing commitment to protecting the people of Ewing.

We are also making real progress in capital improvements and community services. The budget benefits from several key grants, including:

- \$500,000 from the NJ Department of Community Affairs for the rebuild of the Ewing Senior and Community Center
- A \$436,000 NJ DOT grant for Bull Run Road improvements
- A \$70,000 Assistance to Firefighters Grant
- An \$86,000 Recreation Improvement Grant for Higgs Park

Construction has now begun on the new Ewing Senior and Community Center, a project made possible through a combination of grant support and careful long-term planning. When completed, it will be a vital and vibrant asset for our entire town.

In light of federal and state budget uncertainties, I have asked our department managers to begin preparing for the possibility of reduced pass-through funding. We must remain proactive, tighten our belts where necessary, and make sure we are as efficient as possible without compromising services.

Still, I am very happy with the direction of our town. Ewing continues to grow, to invest in its future, and to improve the quality of life for all who live and work here. This budget is another step forward on that journey.

I encourage residents to participate in the upcoming public hearing on the budget, scheduled for May 6. Your voice and your feedback are important as we shape our community together.

Thank you again to the Council for your collaboration, and to our residents for your support. Together, we will keep Ewing moving forward.

Thank you.