



Upper Darby

*A Home Rule Community
Established 1736*

**Mayor Barbarann Keffer
2023 Budget Address
October 3, 2022**

As we approach the end of 2022 and my third year in office, I am excited to celebrate what we've accomplished so far and look ahead to 2023. This year saw the introduction of our Trash Fee Rebate program for seniors and residents who qualify for the PA-100 rebate. Weekly Yard Waste collections, April through November, are in their second year and show greater participation from our residents and help us lower our trash tonnage. We also created a partnership with the Upper Darby Arts and Education Foundation to cover the cost of Summer Stage programs for any Upper Darby resident between the ages of 10 and 18. The first solar panels have been installed on the township building as well as new, functional solar panels on the Watkins Senior Center. By doing this, we are able to cut future energy costs and work towards a greener Upper Darby.

2022 also saw the allocation of some of our American Rescue Plan Act funds. So far, we've allocated:

- \$3 million to the Community Center, to be located at 7000 Walnut Street, on property that the township already owns,
- \$2.5 million to the Fire Department for equipment and apparatus,
- \$2 million to the Police Department for vehicles and equipment upgrades,
- \$150,000 for gun violence prevention initiatives, and
- \$5 million for flood mitigation and sewer upgrades.
- \$6 million for revenue replacements

Our annual budget is an opportunity to showcase the priorities that will set us on a path to becoming the very best version of Upper Darby that we can become together. Those priorities remain: reinvestment, revitalization and reform. These three objectives are intertwined as we build the future of Upper Darby. As we have since day one of my administration, we aggressively pursue grant opportunities. This year, we received many grants including the following:

- From DCNR, \$250,000 in Community Conservation Partnerships Program grant for Observatory Hill Playground Developments

- \$1 million in Federal Community Project funding for development of the Upper Darby Community Center
- \$75,000 from the DCED Greenways, Trails and Recreation Program grant for Muckinipates Park Expansion.
- The Phase II of the DCED STAMP grant to construct a 5-Year Finance Plan
- \$25,000 PA Department of Education Keystone Libraries Grant for the Upper Darby Township & Sellers Memorial Free Public Library Master Plan.

The 2023 budget will continue to tackle the structural deficits my administration inherited. As Vijay Kapoor and our Auditor, Mallie, have presented to Council multiple times, we have long term unfunded pensions and post-retirement benefit liabilities as well as a low general fund balance that need to be addressed. The Kapoor report can be found on the township website under “Departments”, then “Finance” and then “Special Reports”. The American Rescue Plan Act Funds can help us mitigate this issue. I have proposed to Council an ordinance that would allocate \$11.7 million as revenue replacement; meaning, the allotment would go straight to the general fund to be spent in the normal budget process. This would help begin to alleviate the existing structural deficit and put Upper Darby on the right track going forward. I encourage Council members to vote to introduce and advertise this ordinance at their next meeting, currently advertised as October 12.

Demolition on the site of the first ever Upper Darby Community Center was completed in 2022 and with grant funding and allocations from the American Rescue Plan Act money, headway will be made in 2023 on construction of the community center. Not only will this be Upper Darby’s first community center, it will also be our first LEED certified building. The community center will serve as an amazing gathering place for the community and positively impact the adjoining commercial and residential neighborhood and it is the foundation for creating a robust, dynamic Recreation Department.

The budget also reflects the 2023 realities of utility and fuel prices, contractual salary and benefit costs and inflation. In addition, it includes the success we have seen in increased revenues stemming from improved collection rates from the existing business privilege and mercantile taxes and the newly implemented realty transfer tax. The proposed 2023 budget is the result of our township department directors working with our Acting Finance Director, led by Donna Stilwell and her team from the firm Brinker Simpson.

We are still at the preliminary stage of the budget season. As we work with Council on the allocations of the American Rescue Plan Act funds for revenue replacement, and as we look for the property tax assessment from the county - typically delivered in November - we will be able to provide updates and make adjustments to the tax rates as needed.

In 2023, the trash and sewer fees will be adjusted in accordance with rising costs from the solid waste and sewer authorities in order to help cover the real costs of sanitation and sewage disposal. This will continue to improve inherited structural budget deficits. We have also taken into account feedback on our residents regarding twice weekly trash pick up during the summer and are in discussions concerning extending the dates for this service in order to provide streamlined trash disposal for the community.

As part of our continued efforts to revitalize Upper Darby, we have also created the new Upper Darby One Center. This is a dramatic modernization and improvement to constituent services. Housed on the ground level of the Municipal building, in the former space of the municipal library, this ADA accessible center will make accessing municipal services far easier for our residents. The opening of this center will come this fall of 2022.

2022 saw the launch of our new website, which is a complete overhaul of the previous system, and includes easy to use features, the 311 requests system, all our township press releases, a community events calendar, online forms and payment options and much more. The launch date for the transition of the AS400 to our new OpenGov system is set for January of 2023 as well which is a massive technological advancement for Upper Darby. We are steadily evolving our digital capabilities and making great strides towards increasing accessibility of our services. And our efforts are being recognized. This year, Upper Darby has been featured in multiple well known publications, including a feature piece in the August print edition of the Philadelphia Magazine as well as being named #1 Philly suburb to move to, and many other locally published articles highlighting our projects during 2022.

The operating budget reflects our commitment to reinvest in our workforce with paid professional development, promotion-opportunities and a retooled Human Resources Division; we hired seven new police officers this year, and we have also brought to the team a director of our Licenses and Inspections Department who brings years of expertise to Upper Darby. In addition to engaging with Brinker Simpson as our acting Finance Director we have hired a Controller in our Finance department who is an amazing asset during our transition from the AS400.

We are also excited by the opportunity provided through the American Rescue Plan Act to offer our hard working employees with COVID premium pay and vaccine bonuses for their continued effort working throughout the pandemic to provide world class municipal services to our residents. We also have our proposed grant program to support small local businesses and nonprofits impacted by COVID through use of ARPA funds. These allocations are up for public hearing at the October 12 meeting and we look forward to seeing it approved so that we may reward all hard working individuals in our community the funding they deserve for their efforts.

On Wednesday, October 12, Donna Stilwell - our representative from Brinker Simpson - will present the preliminary 2023 budget to Council and our taxpayers. We look forward to discussion. Thank you.