

Mayor J. Christian Bollwage

Elizabeth, New Jersey

Now in his thirty-first year as Mayor of Elizabeth, a diverse city of more than 137,000 and the fourth largest city in New Jersey, J. Christian Bollwage has created a more efficient city government while sparking \$800 million in economic redevelopment.

Mayor Bollwage, a native of the city, was elected to his first term in 1992, reelected in November 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016 and 2020.

Mayor Bollwage announced his vision of the future of Elizabeth, which included “Go-Green” initiatives, collegiate corridor concept, remodeling of Midtown train station, and expansion of economic development, recreation, housing and transportation. The Mayor also unveiled a foreclosure assistance program, a Healthy Elizabeth initiative and camera surveillance network.

In past years Mayor Bollwage declared the “Year of the Senior.” Advancements for Elizabeth’s senior citizens that year included the creation of 119 new units of affordable senior citizen housing throughout the City. Other services such as the “Elizabeth Fix-it” program through which eligible seniors can receive free minor repair work on their homes are geared towards assisting the City’s senior citizens and proved to be a success. Mayor Bollwage continues to honor the senior citizens of Elizabeth during the new millennium as he offers assistance through his Office on Aging for various senior programs and concessions and announced plans to build two new senior centers.

Other past initiatives include, “New Hope for Our Children” which included the creation of an Office on Youth, a Youth Advisory Board and after-school and summer LEAP and SOAR programs. His focus on children also resulted in the opening of an additional branch of the Elizabeth Public Library and a children's library located in the Main Branch and the implementation of Project Love, an award-winning curfew program, which combines enforcement with counseling. The Mayor continues to offer our children safe and fun recreational alternatives with the creation of new parks, and additional soccer fields, football fields and basketball courts throughout areas of Elizabeth where they are most needed.

The Mayor has also made a commitment in the area of public safety. His police initiatives included the installation of the state-of-the-art Elizabeth Police Information and Communication System. Adding more than 30 surveillance cameras throughout the City and implementing the E.P.I.C. system which improves police response time and gives responding officers more information at the scene. In 1999, the Mayor coupled the highly successful EPIC with the revolutionary Vehicle Tracking System, which further enhanced response time by placing a microchip in each car to give dispatchers a fairly exact location of all city police vehicles. As we enter the second decade of the 21st century, Mayor Bollwage provides Elizabeth with the most technologically advanced police force in the state of New Jersey.

Mayor Bollwage has also instituted walking patrols in all of the City's business districts, which has assisted in the renaissance of these areas. He initiated and doubled the SAFENET patrol, which is designed to deal with quality of life complaints such as loitering and neighborhood disputes. The Mayor has also put plain-clothes officers in city schools, and dedicated teams of officers to patrol the senior citizen complexes and federal housing projects. In 2004 police presence was increased, street violence

was aggressively combated and at-risk-neighborhoods were targeted. In 2009, the City of Elizabeth received \$4.9 million in federal grant funds through the COPS Hiring Recovery Program, which enabled seventeen new police officers to be hired.

In addition, through his work with the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the Mayor brought home state grant money that was combined with Elizabeth Urban Enterprise Zone revenues to make safety improvements to 50 City intersections. Also part of his “Walk Smart, Drive Smart Elizabeth” campaign was a public safety education program aimed at seniors and children.

In 2016, the City of Elizabeth was awarded \$5,049,612.00 in Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant funds to hire 36 firefighters. The SAFER grant program is administered by the Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). This was the first SAFER grant ever to be received by the municipality. Funding is assisting with bridging the personnel gap that has occurred with attrition as well as meeting industry standards and enhancing overall preparedness through incorporating additional qualified firefighters. Grant funds are further increasing efficiency, effectiveness and services provided by the Elizabeth Fire Department as well as supporting firefighter health, safety and well-being.

The City's ongoing economic redevelopment plans have resulted in The Elizabeth Center at 13A, which is home to IKEA, the chain's most successful North American store, and the Toys R Us/Kids World Superstore. Across the street from this development is The Mills at Jersey Gardens Mall, located on Kapkowski Road. The megamall, which was known as Jersey Gardens Mall when it opened in October of 1999, was constructed on the site of a former municipal landfill and brought 5,000 new jobs and more than \$6.5 million in new ratables to the city. The shopping center was renamed The Outlet Collection - Jersey Gardens and in 2013 embarked on an ambitious \$30 million renovation. The transformation was spectacular and included an elegant new look, along with more amenities and leading retailers.

In 2015, The Outlet Collection - Jersey Gardens became a “Simon Mall” and is now known as The Mills at Jersey Gardens. Celebrating its seventeenth anniversary in 2016, the mall is once again reporting increases in sales and shoppers. The AMC movie theater, located next to the mall, has also reported record-breaking numbers in attendance and is the highest grossing in the region. The Mayor's role in redeveloping this brownfield site earned him the American Plan Association's Distinguished Leadership Award for Elected Officials.

Located across the street from this entertainment and shopping location are thriving hotels and restaurants. Embassy Suites was the latest hotel to join Country Inns and Suites, Marriott Courtyard, Residence Inn and an Extended Stay America, which were completed in 2002. Second only to Atlantic City in the number of rooms —Elizabeth has become a destination. At this site are also the International House of Pancakes (IHOP) and Ruby Tuesday restaurants, which provide shoppers as well as visitors additional destinations to dine.

Known as New Jersey’s largest outlet mall, The Mills at Jersey Gardens Mall attracts more than 15 million visitors each year. In 2013, shoppers were up 9%, bus groups were up 11% and international visits were up 21%. Wi-Fi has also been installed throughout the Mall and a Kate Spade store joined premium signature brand stores such as Michael Kors, Coach and Century 21. Furthermore, The Mills

at Jersey Gardens has announced a 411,00-square foot expansion, which is expected to add high-quality restaurants and top retail brands in 2018.

The Mills at Jersey Gardens Mall project is just one example of the Mayor's ongoing efforts to redevelop brownfields in the city. His efforts have resulted in Elizabeth being chosen for a Federal Brownfields Pilot Program and the hiring of a brownfields project coordinator. Mayor Bollwage was appointed to co-chair the U.S. Conference of Mayors Brownfields Taskforce and has worked with other cities to encourage the development of these types of properties across the nation. His Brownfield's initiatives earned him the "Brownfield News Award for Excellence in Brownfields Redevelopment" from Brownfield Magazine. Mayor Bollwage was the first New Jersey recipient of the award, which recognized his leadership in initiating the redevelopment of brownfield sites.

All of these economic developments are encompassed within Elizabeth's Urban Enterprise Zone. Under Mayor Bollwage's administration, Elizabeth's UEZ was named number one in the nation. It has generated \$30 billion in new investments and has created more than 5,000 new jobs, helping residents stay employed.

The UEZ program is an important economic tool to Elizabeth and the 32 other UEZ municipalities throughout New Jersey. Spurred by this success, Mayor Bollwage created the UEZ Mayors Commission in May of 1998. As Chairman of this pro-active Commission, the Mayor brings the UEZ Mayors and administrators from around the state together as a unified voice to Trenton regarding zone issues.

The Mayor's hard work in lobbying Washington D.C. legislators has also paid off as the City received a \$29 million Hope VI grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The HOPE VI grant has been used to revitalize the Elizabethport neighborhood by removing housing projects, erecting new townhouses in their place and empowering the residents of public housing through job training and counseling that promotes self-sufficiency and economic independence.

Mayor Bollwage has been active in the United States Conference of Mayors and currently serves on its National Advisory Committee. He has previously served on the Legislative Committee and currently serves as co-chairman of the Brownfields Task Force and chairman of the Highway Safety Subcommittee where he was a leader on the debate to renew ISTEA (Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act). Mayor Bollwage was appointed to serve as President on the Executive Board of the New Jersey State League of Municipalities and as Chair of the United States Conference of Mayors' Criminal and Social Justice Committee. He also served on the Video Lottery Study Commission.

As an advocate for cities, the Mayor has also led the fight to lower garbage disposal fees in New Jersey, resulting in more than \$2 million in tax savings to the residents of Elizabeth.

In other areas, Mayor Bollwage has worked to open up City government to the residents, holding open office hours and seeking input from residents in planning for the city's future. He created the Info-line, which gives residents one phone number to call to get answers for their questions and to offer suggestions. Created a bi-lingual award winning website and incorporates social media to keep residents better informed.

Currently, the Mayor is an adjunct professor in the Public Administration Department at Kean University in Union, New Jersey, where he teaches undergraduate courses in Public Administration. Also a graduate of Kean University, Mayor Bollwage holds a graduate degree with honors in Public Administration, has received the Distinguished Alumnus Award, and was later inducted into the Pi Alpha Alpha honor society.

Before becoming Mayor, Chris Bollwage was a Councilman for 10 years, serving as Council President in 1989. He was also a member of the Elizabeth Planning Board for four years.

Prior to holding elected office, the Mayor served as sales, marketing and public relations representative for A&J Trading Corporation of Linden and Traffic Coordinator for Kerr Steamship Incorporated, New York City.

J. Christian Bollwage was nominated to the Board of Commissioners of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey by Governor Philip D. Murphy and joined the Board on March 2, 2023.

Mayor Bollwage and his wife, Nancy, have a daughter Jacqueline.