

MAYORS SPEECH 2014

First, I would like to thank the Township Committee for the confidence you have placed in me to be Mayor in 2014. As Mayor, I will continue to accept the praises as well as the complaints from our constituents. I once again want to remind the public that all five Committee members have an equal vote and share equal in making all municipal decisions. We volunteer for the love of the community. I want to thank David Kennedy for the past three years of serving on the Committee. His knowledge, ideas, and concerns proved to be extremely valuable. I also want to welcome our newest Committeeman, Don Babb. Don brings a great deal of history and knowledge to the Township Committee through his career as a teacher, employee in the DPW, and volunteerism on the Fairmount Fire Department.

2013 continued to be another challenging year. We were fortunate not to have another major storm. Throughout the budget process, the Committee was forced to make some difficult decisions to keep our municipal budget under the mandated 2% cap. I am proud to say that this was accomplished without the permitted exclusions of debt and pension payments. I do want to remind the public that a mere 15% of your taxes go towards municipal government.

Despite an extremely tight budget, the following enhancements took place in 2013:

- Delivery of a new fire truck

- Delivery of a new ambulance

Purchase of additional radio equipment

Pavement of sections of Old Farmers Road and E. Springtown Rd

Oil and chipped approximately four miles of roadways

Purchase/replacement of five police cars

Expanded our conservation monitoring program

Purchase of emergency sign board

Purchased a generator to be used at Long Valley Fire Department

Completed a joint project with the BOE for the bus maintenance

Irrigation at Palmer Park

Creation of a Community Garden

New DPW Heavy truck

Veterans Program (dedication of three streets)

We celebrated our 275th anniversary with monthly events concluding with the parade and festival. This was organized by the CEO (community events organization)

In addition, a fire review study was completed that revealed that our three fire companies were well equipped, well-staffed, and exceed most well established standards.

The budget year for 2014 will prove, once again to be challenging. The effects of the Highlands Act and the sluggish economy resulted in very few new ratables. Over the past five years, we have decreased the municipal operating costs by over \$900,000.00; however revenues have

also decreased significantly. This past year the Township lost close to \$500,000 in commercial tax appeals. A recent publication revealed that Washington Township has the third lowest municipal taxes behind Victory Gardens and Wharton. I can assure you that this Committee will do everything possible to keep the municipal budget flat or to a slight increase. I want to remind you that of a \$10,000 tax bill, only \$1500 goes to the municipality, \$7100+ to the schools, and the balance to Morris County, library, and open space. I invite all residents to come to the budget meetings. They are very informal and your concerns are valued. There are five of us and 18,500 residents; we respect your thoughts and ideas.

I am proud to say that Washington Township has been chosen by the State of New Jersey to be the model community for shared services. Our 18 shared services agreements bring in excess of \$500,000 in revenues. We will continue to work smarter and more efficiently with the surrounding communities. This year, we also find our police department down by three members. We will hire and promote where necessary to maintain a full 28 member efficient force. We were fortunate to have Police Chief Michael Bailey remain with the Township despite being eligible to retire.

Throughout the year, I have attended nine meetings with JCP&L as well as other government agencies. With many enhancements by JCP&L, I feel confident that Washington Township is in a much better position to prevent prolonged loss of power. I once again encourage all residents to take personal responsibility and be prepared for potential emergency situations. Under the leadership of Bob Drake and Bruce Clark we have expanded our CERT (Civilian Emergency Response Team)

to over 20 members. These volunteer are well trained in numerous facets to help in the event of emergencies.

Moving forward to 2014, some of the goals for 2014 include the following:

- Submit a flat budget/minimal increase

- Continue road paving projects

- Oil and chip five miles of roadways

- Build restroom facilities at Palmer Park

- Replacement of police cars as needed

- Apply for grants to complete the downtown sidewalk project

- Look into the possible relocation of the Long Valley Fire Dept.

- Create public access to our trails and open space

- Continue to work for commercial ratables

- Replacement of retiring police officers as needed

- Work with Morris County for repaving Schooley's Mtn. Rd & West Mill Rd.

Finally, I want to thank the hundreds of volunteers in our community. Our emergency responders spend hundreds of hours in training and preparedness and are highly qualified to protect our lives and homes. They are the ones that wake up in the early morning hours, go out in the rain, snow, and cold. I also want to thank their families that allow

them the time to perform their volunteer services. These are not the complainers, but rather the folks that leave their own family to help others. Whether you serve on one of the many boards and committees, a scout leader, an athletic coach, a woman's club member, meals on wheels volunteer, garden club, library board.....you are the volunteers that make Washington Township such a great place to live. Our sincere thanks! On behalf of all the elected officials of Washington Township, I want to wish all of our residents a healthy, happy, and prosperous 2014.