

BORDENTOWN TOWNSHIP REORGANIZATION 2015

Distinguished guests, committee members, township staff, friends, colleagues and citizens of Bordentown, it is a pleasure to welcome you to our Bordentown Township 2015 reorganization. I would like to give a special thank you and welcome to Herb Conaway, a long time resident of Bordentown Township and our State Assemblyman. I would like to recognize the members of my family here today, and whose support and encourage is invaluable to me: my mother Nancy, My mother-in-law Roseann McQuoid, my daughters Laura and Erin and their husbands Don and Jared, and my grandchildren Gavin, Brooke, Ryan and Sean. My sister Donna and her husband Joe are here. Most important, I would like to recognize my wife, Carole, whose support and guidance, and occasional criticism is indispensable to me. Finally, I would like to thank the Committee for allowing me the opportunity and honor to be Mayor of this wonderful Township. Thank you!

In the last two years we have seen many positive changes. Jill, Steve and I have a vision of where we wanted lead the Township. We want to bring new businesses and grow our existing businesses. We want to enhance the services the Township provides to the residents and improve the environment. We want to stabilize the Townships finances, restore the budget surpluses, and if possible reduce taxes. We want open and responsive government. We have made a lot of progress, but there is still much to do.

In order to bring businesses to our Township, we needed to change what we felt was negative perception for businesses in this Township. We believed that not only a positive business outlook, but a welcoming embrace of new businesses and appreciation of our existing businesses would create an environment for business growth in this Township. As Mayor this past year, Steve Benowitz, along with the transformation of the EDAC Committee to a marketing arm of the Township, has tirelessly promoted our Township as a place for businesses to grow and thrive. Anyone who has driven down Hedding Road will agree that the new Grainger Distribution Center is a testament to our efforts. If you look on Routes 206 and 130, you will see signs of positive change. The once decrepit Burger King is now a new AT&T retail store. The long awaited redevelopment of the Edgewood Motel into a new Holiday Express inn and restaurant has begun construction. While we all regret the loss of Papp's Bowling Alley, it is nice to see the new owners Cheyenne Mountain Outfitters are remodeling the building adding to what we hope is an ongoing rejuvenation of the Routes 130 and 206. The old Bradley's strip center has a new owner and we hope to see improvements to that site soon. Team Campus is finishing another building and should start soon on the last building in that project. There is more development and refurbishing going on, and we are currently in discussions for development at other sites. Steve's effort, our effort in combination with the enthusiastic support of our Township employees and professionals has yielded positive results. As you know these new businesses will result in a broader tax base and ratables that will eventually help to bring school tax relief to our residents.

While we recognize the ongoing need for economic development and tax relief, we have also worked to improve the quality of life for our residents in other ways as well. When it comes to resident services and environmental improvements, Committee women Jill Popko has not only led

the Committee in this effort, but has spent endless hours into making it happen. Sustainable Jersey has just awarded Bordentown Township Bronze certification which opens the door to more grant opportunities for the Township. Without the leadership of Jill and Roger Plew, Chairman of our Environmental Commission, it would not have happened. We sponsored our first Wellness and Environmental Fair this year, as well as a family Easter Egg hunt. Music in the Park continued to grow in its second year. With major financial support from the Township and the Herculean efforts of the Foundation for Bordentown Traditions, the Fourth of July Fireworks were bigger and better than ever. The community garden provided over 1500 pounds of fresh organic vegetables to the local church food bank, as well as providing a sense of community and accomplishment to those worked on it. Our furry friends are enjoying our new dog park located at Northern Park, where the gazebo now sports newly planted shrubs, trees and flowers to enhance its appearance and resident enjoyment. The improvements to Bossert Park are well under way, with the tot lot and exercise unit completed. The footbridge is repaired and open, and the new pathway that has been put down.

We completed the purchase of the Public Works expansion property and are already recycling more materials at the site. We are now sheltering vehicles on the site, which will help to reduce maintenance and replacement costs. This winter we hope to kick start the needed improvements to the site and buildings so that the property can truly become a class B recycling center. Our road improvement project is under way. More than four roads will be re-paved and we are looking at additional roads for this year.

The Township is on sounder financial footing. Both surplus funds were increased this past year and in 2013, and we were able to dedicate additional funds to tax appeal reimbursement. The result is the increase in our bond rating to AA with a stable outlook from a AA- with a negative outlook. We hope to continue to improve that bond rating, which lowers the cost of funds to the Township. We lowered municipal taxes last year. Granted, it was not a large decrease but given our past financial straits, it was rewarding to be able to give at least some tax relief to our residents. Our preliminary review of the Township finances for the coming year indicate another modest decline in taxes or at the very least no increase. Debt service has continued to go down and this year will see a reduction of over \$200,000 in debt service. The Public Works contract has been amicably negotiated with a settlement that is fair to both the Township and the employees. Our police department has four recruits in training, which will enhance resident safety and finally bring staffing levels closer to the size needed for our Township.

We have diligently worked to make our meetings open and accessible to all our residents. The web site has dramatically improved. The ordinances for the Township are now available on line and the codification project should be completed this year. Information is now being provided to residents via Facebook and Twitter. This is an ongoing project and we are constantly seeking ways to improve the timeliness, appearance and accessibility of Township news and information. Steve initiated the Mayor's Corner on the web site and provided open hours for residents to come in discuss any issue or concern. Liaison reports have become a valuable tool for providing residents and fellow Committee members pertinent information from other boards, committees and

organizations effecting our residents. We are always seeking new ways to improve communication, so please feel free to provide your input.

However, all is not rosy. There is much work that still needs to be done. As Deputy Mayor Popko has just outlined, we have outside environmental threats to our Township that require us to be diligent and proactive to protect the health and safety of our residents. We have an aging infrastructure. The Municipal building has much deferred maintenance and some structural problems. Our police department is located in a basement, which is a logistical handicap, as well as expensive. The old heating system requires air conditioning to run year round in order to make it bearable. The road program is off to a good start, but we need to expand it, which will require additional and stable funding to successful for the long term. As I have stated before we need to develop a five year financial plan. And there are the normal unexpected problems that arise when governing a township like Bordentown.

We have attempted to make the four major highways that bisect our Township, a positive marketing tool, and that effort is proving successful. However, this will result in additional traffic to these already heavily trafficked roads. The two most problematic roadways are Routes 130 and 206. Over the last two years we have been proactive in trying to get NJDOT to improve traffic intersections and pedestrian safety. As a result of meetings we had with them in 2013 and 2014, we have made some progress. We have just received alternate plans from DOT for the improvement to the Farnsworth Avenue and Route 130 intersection, which is a traffic bottle neck at rush hours, if not all the time. In consultation with our professionals, we selected the best plan and are sending a letter to DOT identifying same. This is a good start, but DOT has already indicated it could take up to two and half years to start construction. At the same time they have provided preliminary plans for pedestrian improvements for the merged section of Routes 130 and 206. Our bypass road to alleviate truck traffic on Dunns Mill, Hedding and Farnsworth Avenue, has been included in the County Traffic Improvement Program and we are told is on or will soon be on the State's TIP. We are searching for and reaching out to our representatives to find funding for this needed roadway. There are other intersections that need improvement that requires State action such as Route 130 and Dunn's Mill Road, and Route 206 and Farnsworth Avenue. Using the principle of the squeaky wheel gets the most grease we will continue our efforts to get much needed state road improvements for Bordentown Township.

Despite these challenges, I am confident that we can keep Bordentown Township moving in the right direction. We are fortunate to have dedicated and highly competent employees that work to make our township better. We have much to accomplish and we will do it together.

I wish everyone a happy and healthy New Year.