

MAYOR BIVONA'S ADDRESS

JANUARY 1, 2014

Welcome, Happy New Year and thank you all for coming. I hope you all had a pleasant New Year's celebration.

On behalf of the Governing Body we thank you for your support over the 2013 year and look forward to serving you in the year ahead. As I enter the last year of my term and fifth year on this governing body there is a sense of enthusiasm for the year ahead. Each year we have new faces that join our team as we say goodbye to old friends who have contributed so much. Franklin Lakes is a great community with residents who care and unselfishly give of their talents. Many are here today as evidence of that commitment to our Borough. With the support of you in this room today and the many others who are here in spirit, we can and will meet the challenges ahead with a goal of doing what is best for Franklin Lakes.

I want to start by congratulating Councilwoman Ann Swist and Councilman Joe Cadicina who each join us as newcomers to the Council. We welcome them both and look forward to a productive three years. Unfortunately we are losing two past members of our Council in Nathalie Lota and Frank Pedone - Nathalie, six years and Frank, three. Nathalie has worked in virtually every area of the Borough in her six years (including two as Council President) and has balanced her support of the employees with a strong dedication to representing taxpayers and residents. Never hesitant to express her views and always easy to work with – we will miss her. Frank brought a practical and logical approach to his role and was driven by the belief that he was representing the views of the residents, which he did so admirably – we will miss him. We wish them all the best and we are excited about the opportunity to continue their areas of progress in the years ahead. I want to congratulate and welcome Councilwoman Ramsey back to her sixth term as Council President. Her experience is a valued resource to the governing body and we look forward to working with her in 2014.

We are very fortunate to have such a great Council. This group has worked very hard this past year. We work as a team and you would be hard pressed to find any friction among us. No, we don't agree on everything and we have healthy debates on issues but we always seem to be driven by doing what is right for Franklin Lakes. We respect each other – we are friends, neighbors and proud residents of the town we serve. I tell every new member that the role of Council is not much work. I fib. I looked back at my calendar for 2013 and noted over 130 meetings. Sorry Joe and Ann!

So here is your team: Our Councilmembers - Paulette Ramsey, Charles Kahwaty, Thomas Lambrix, Joseph Kelly, Joseph Cadicina and Ann Swist. We have a governing body that has all the requisite skills to meet our goals for the coming year. Add in Borough Administrator Greg Hart, Borough Clerk Sally Bleeker, Borough Attorney Bill Smith and Borough Engineer Kevin Boswell who prepare and guide us through this busy

schedule with great expertise. And to all of our other professionals who provide their specific expertise where and when necessary, we are grateful. It's a great team.

In our proclamations we recognized our volunteers. I will be redundant in addressing them again because they mean so much to us. In my four years as part of this governing body I have come to learn the great sacrifices they make to safeguard and enhance our community. Whether it's public safety issues, storms, fires, other emergencies, or the many boards, commissions and committees that help us govern – we have volunteers who give their time and talents so that others can benefit – a truly unselfish and giving group of people which is the backbone of our Borough. There are too many names to list but they volunteer their time for Fire, Ambulance, OEM, Planning, Zoning, Shade Tree, Board of Health, Environmental, Recreation, Library, Nature Preserve, Municipal Alliance, Mayor's Wellness, Public Events and other ad hoc committees. Thank you to all who volunteer so unselfishly.

Governing a town like Franklin Lakes is a little bit like running a business and I learned a long time ago that a business is only as good as the people it employs. I want to spend a moment recognizing one of our most important assets - Borough employees and professionals. These are the people that make this Borough tick. They are led by Greg Hart our Borough Administrator. They are a talented group of people who work very hard and tend not to get the recognition they deserve. For 14% of your tax bill you get a multitude of services including public safety, recreation and parks, environmental and community affairs, public works, planning and development and administration and finance. The employees and professionals that provide those broad services are a lean and efficient group that has a goal of providing the best service at a reasonable price to residents. In my four years on the governing body, I have come to know and appreciate the many special people we have working for us.

I wanted to briefly touch on some key accomplishments during this past year.

Key Accomplishments:

- We provided a broad array of essential service and increased level of “quality of life” services to our residents and taxpayers with a higher degree of responsiveness.
- Worked with our schools and child care centers to improve school safety and security.
- Successful management within the budget limiting tax increase to under 2% maintaining one of the lowest tax rates in the State; maintained surplus level above \$2 million and reduced debt to by over \$500 thousand in 2013 and almost \$3 million the last three years to a level of about \$13.8 million.
- We nearly tripled capital spending on key infrastructure projects like roads while reducing reliance of debt funding.
- We now have a sewer line running through our business district at no cost to residents or taxpayers and no requirement to hook up – optional to residents.

- Effectively managed resources through every day emergencies; DPW, police, fire, ambulance and OEM responded countless emergencies to keep our residents safe and protect our homes.
- Improved upon our award winning communication programs with residents with expanded scope and venues; number #1 communications award in the State!
- Effectively managed a difficult process around the request to change zoning on the High Mt. Golf Course. Held open and transparent process with many public meetings. Much more work to be done but Borough navigated the best solution given limited choices.
- Our Planning and Zoning Boards worked hard to ensure consistency with our master plans and ordinances.
- Our Environmental and Shade Tree worked hard to protect our environment and improve recycling efforts while earning accreditation in each area.
- We purchased property that would have become dense housing and replaced that with a Borough initiative to supply special needs housing to serve those in need, including residents. Developer selected.
- Improved our parks, recreation facilities and nature trails using grants and donations to enhance the natural beauty of our Borough and provide improved recreation activities.
- With the support of our Rec Committee and many volunteer coaches we held recreation and sports programs for over 3,000 participants and added activities to our wellness programs.

We have many goals for 2014 and I will work closely with our Council in the coming weeks to finalize them. My focus in these discussions will be:

Property Taxes- We must continue to find ways to reduce costs while maintaining our service to residents. We must continue to slowly reduce our debt and fund capital items through operating reserves. We must look for innovative ways to share services with neighboring towns to save taxpayer dollars. All of this with the goal of keeping our tax rate among the lowest in the County.

School Safety - We must come together with our schools to share information and ideas that will ensure that our school safety programs are the best they can be and that we leverage all possible synergies to share ideas and applicable resources.

Affordable Housing- We must protect the natural beauty of our Borough through aggressive management of our affordable housing obligations. We must put ourselves in the best legal position to effectively negotiate with developers.

Capital Plan – We must develop a true capital plan with a funding plan that is feasible and meets our financial goals. Essential projects should be judged based upon benefit to taxpayers.

Recreation and Parks – We must continue to develop our recreation fields, facilities and parks through partnerships, funding grants and fundraising – Nature Preserve paths, Municipal field trails, Community Center improvements, Pulis basketball courts/parking, McBride field improvements, to name a few.

Sewers – We must work closely with the NWBUA to provide for voluntary service hook ups and appropriate expansion to meet the needs of the Borough and its residents.

Service – We must continue to develop our systems to track performance and customer service so we can ensure we are delivering outstanding service to our residents and taxpayers.

The New Year will be filled with challenges and I look forward to an open dialogue with residents and taxpayers. I invite your comments, suggestions and involvement. Of course, my door will always be open and my cell phone on. I am usually available, so please stop by or make an appointment but to be assured of getting me.

Finally, I want to recognize the families of the governing body. To my family and those of all the governing body and volunteers, I thank you for supporting us and coping with the added attention associated with being the family of an elected official.

Following on the theme of Bishop Flesey's Invocation, this is a new beginning and with the spirit of teamwork and togetherness we will excel. Thank you and God Bless Franklin Lakes.