

**MAYOR BIVONA'S ADDRESS
REORGANIZATION MEETING
JANUARY 3, 2017**

Happy New Year to all, wishing you a happy and healthy 2017!

With 2016 behind us, I always like to take time to review our accomplishments of the past year against goals we set out for ourselves and to establish a new set of short term goals for 2017. It is important to do this so that we, and you, can track our performance.

The municipal organization in Franklin Lakes is comprised of about 70 employees and countless volunteers. We provide essential services that include Public Safety, Public Works, Recreation and Parks, Environmental and Community Services, Planning and Development and Finance and Administration. We are here to serve the residents and taxpayers of Franklin Lakes funded primarily by your tax dollars which represent about 15% of your property tax bill. We care for those funds and provide these services, based on a coordinated planning process, knowing that we are accountable to our residents. Franklin Lakes is an extraordinary town in which to live, raise a family, conduct business and enjoy the beauty of our natural surroundings. We are routinely recognized as one of the best places to live in our state and beyond. Our goal is to keep it that way and improve where we can while keeping municipal property tax rates among the lowest in the state.

On behalf of the Governing Body we thank you for your support in 2016 and look forward to serving you in the year ahead. We are excited about the future and have a great team in place to make additional strides in the years ahead.

I want to start by congratulating Councilwoman Ann Swist and Councilman Joseph Cadicina on their reelection. We are very fortunate to have a terrific team of councilmembers who all bring specific areas of expertise that allows us to effectively and efficiently deal with all issues. In my seven years of service to this community, I have been very fortunate to be able to work with experienced councilmembers who govern with a common goal of doing what is right for Franklin Lakes. This approach to governing, combined with continuity and professionalism, allows us to achieve goals over the short and long term that best serve Franklin Lakes.

Here is your team for the year ahead: Councilmembers Joseph Cadicina, Charles Kahwaty, Joseph Kelly, Thomas Lambrix, Paulette Ramsey and Ann Swist. I want to recognize Councilman Lambrix for his service as Council President in 2016 and congratulate Councilwoman Swist on her appointment as Council President for 2017. All councilmembers put in a lot of time and effort attending countless meetings, acting as liaisons to key parts of our organization, attending public events and serving as a constant feedback source in our community.

We couldn't do what we do without the support and guidance of key professionals and their staffs. This includes Borough Administrator Greg Hart, who very effectively runs the day to day operations of the town, Borough Clerk Sally Bleeker who professionally organizes all our meetings and related activities, Borough Attorney William Smith who provides expert legal

advice and guidance, Borough Auditor Dieter Lerch who provides expert financial reviews and Borough Engineer Kevin Boswell who provides expert services to the borough and its residents on all construction and engineering projects. Each is supported by borough employees and professionals that combine make up a great team that serve our residents and taxpayers.

We also are fortunate to have leaders in our public safety areas that are experts in what they do and help keep our residents and taxpayers safe and secure around the clock. Police Chief Pezzuti leads our outstanding police force – men and woman who put their lives at risk to protect us. Fire Chief Ryan Dodd, Ambulance Captain Ken Koehler and Office of Emergency Management Leader Craig Goldman lead an incredible group of over 200 volunteers who give their time and expertise and, at times, put themselves at risk to help our residents. We are so fortunate to have them.

I also want to recognize our Committees and Commissions who are all led by volunteers who serve in the best interest of our community and provide valuable essential services. In 2016 they were led by Olivia Voellmicke, Board of Health; Kim Vierheilg, Planning Board; Robert Bavagnoli, Zoning Board of Adjustment; Michael Tulp, Shade Tree Commission; Tom Perneti, Recreation and Parks Committee; Carole Holden, Environmental Commission; Henry Wasserstein, Municipal Alliance Chair; and Joseph Leone, Library Board of Trustees.

During the past year we had strong contributions from all facets of our Borough operations, and I share some of the highlights below. None of this gets done without a great group of employees, professionals and volunteers – and the leadership of Greg Hart our Borough Administrator.

Key Accomplishments 2016:

- Our Council and Finance team led us to another year of a less than a 2% tax increase while keeping within our 6-year capital and debt plan with the goal of reducing debt and stabilizing surplus at a healthy level. We improved our tax collection process for better cash flow and efficiency. We continue to be rated Aaa by Moodys, their highest rating.
- Our Public safety professionals provided outstanding service with a mix of employees and dedicated volunteers.
 - Police – 24-hour protection responding to over 19,700 service calls including 500 medical emergencies. Arrests totaled 185. Received AAA Traffic Safety award. Completed Phase I of police department headquarters renovation.
 - Fire – volunteers covering 478 fire calls; borough purchased two new fire apparatus to replace older vehicles.
 - Ambulance – volunteers responding to 750 calls; 14 new EMT members joined.
 - OEM – Established new headquarters; drilling and preparing for emergencies that face our residents; recognized for Best CERT Trailer by State.
 - Courts – processed over 4,000 criminal, traffic and ordinance violations; streamlined processing and added efficiencies.
- Investment in our town continues to rise with over \$50 million of added assessments during the year representing new construction completed.

- We acquired 84 acres of donated parkland now named Parsons Pond Park and laid out preliminary plans; completed a net lease on the day care center located in the park which now provides revenue to the borough.
- Franklin Towne Square located on both sides of Franklin Avenue at the Colonial Road intersection – approved applications for development and renovation representing a significant upgrade to our downtown and providing more locations for retail businesses.
- Signed contract to purchase over 12 acres of residential property with the funding assistance from the county and state to preserve land as parkland forever.
- Instituted a new communication program “Latest Buzz” to help fill void created by cutbacks in news reporting by Record, Suburban and Villadom Times.
- Borough Clerks office processed over 350 requests for public records, up 30% and smoothly handled the Presidential Primary and General Election process that saw a 73% voter turnout.
- Construction Department overhauled process and filing; closed over 1,500 open permits and installed new software to help manage abandoned properties and property maintenance issues.
- Our Municipal Alliance team, assisted by the Board of Health, put on three high profile programs at our high schools attended by hundreds of parents and residents focused on drug and alcohol abuse; hired a community liaison to serve those who need help and want confidential source; established police amnesty program.
- Our Department of Public Works kept our infrastructure sound: road paving, patching and sweeping, updated evaluation of all roads, new bus stop, McBride Field plantings; Parsons Pond Park signage; Kings Pond dredging, playground upgrades, recycling center upgrades, upkeep of all parks and recreation facilities, new plantings and holiday decorations throughout town.
- Our Planning and Zoning Boards worked hard to ensure consistency with our master plans and ordinances.
- Our Environmental and Shade Tree Commissions worked hard to protect our environment, shade trees and improve recycling efforts.
- With the support of our Recreation Committee and many volunteer coaches we held recreation and sports programs for over 3,000 participants and added activities to our wellness programs, including employee wellness. Enhancements included “Guardian Caps” for football players, lightning detections systems, concussion testing for all student athletes, new batting cage for safety, new golf program, positive coaching alliance program instituted and professional training programs offered for soccer.

Shortfalls Things don't always go as we would like – We attempted to refinance our debt to take advantage of lower rates but the market moved in the middle of the sale; delays pushed our supportive housing project start to the new year; courts delays (even though we filed our COAH plan on time) have led to a still unsettled position on borough affordable housing; great strides made in recycling but we are still looking for ways to motivate residents to recycle more.

We have many goals for 2017 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 will continue to find ways to control costs while maintaining our service to residents. We will continue to slowly reduce our debt and fund recurring capital items through operating reserves. All of this with the goal of keeping our tax rate among the lowest in the State.
- **Public Safety** – We will enhance public safety capabilities with enhanced training, equipment and use of technology. Proactive focus and communication on problem areas, including drug and alcohol abuse, to ensure positive trend lines continue.
- **COAH** – We will fight to uphold our affordable housing plan, preserving our immunity against lawsuits by aggressive developers while maintaining the quality of life in our borough.
- **Construction** – We will work hard to ensure that new construction projects, such as the Toll development, supportive housing and the new downtown business district redevelopment, comply with plans and ordinances and are beneficial to residents and surrounding homes.
- **Recreation and Parks** – We will further develop our strategic plan for parks and recreation facilities and begin to implement key initiatives to better utilize our abundant resources.
- **Special Needs Housing** – We will work with our developer to construct our 40-units supportive housing project that meets a huge demand from those with special needs and helps the borough meet its affordable housing obligation.

The New Year is 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 to be assured of getting me.

Finally, I want to recognize the families of the governing body, who support us throughout our long tenures serving this borough. And, I thank you, taxpayers and residents, for supporting us which allows us to better serve our community.

Thank you and God Bless Franklin Lakes.