

MAYOR BIVONA'S ADDRESS
MAYOR AND COUNCIL REORGANIZATION MEETING
JANUARY 2, 2018

Happy New Year to all, wishing you a happy and healthy 2018!

With 2017 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 2018.

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.

I want to start by congratulating Councilwoman Ramsey and Councilman Joseph Kelly 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 eight 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 Councilwoman Ann Swist for her service as Council President in 2017 and congratulate Councilman Cadicina on his appointment as Council President for 2018. 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 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 2017 they were led by Olivia Voellmicke, Board of Health; Joe Pullaro, Planning Board; Robert Bavagnoli, Zoning Board of Adjustment; Michael Tulp, Shade Tree Commission; Rob Miller, Recreation and Parks Committee; Carole Holden, Environmental Commission; Henry Wasserstein, Municipal Alliance Chair; and Donna Luciano, 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 2017:

- Our Council and Finance team led us to our 7th consecutive year of a less than a 2% tax increase. Because new assessments increased more than spending, property taxes actually declined. We continue to reduce debt and maintain healthy surplus even while investing more in our infrastructure.
- We refinanced \$4.4 million of outstanding debt, saving taxpayers \$316,000. 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 22,000 service calls. Over 8,000 traffic stops and 5,500 summonses. Arrests totaled 300. New hire allowed reestablishment of Juvenile Bureau. Completed police department headquarters renovation. Began accreditation process.
 - Fire – volunteers covering over 530 calls or community events; borough purchased two new fire apparatus to replace older vehicles. Fire Department spending has increased 45% on average over the last 7 years.
 - Ambulance – volunteers responding to over 840 calls, up 12%. Also expanded outreach to community offering CPR training and contact with youth groups to promote Ambulance Corp and community service.
 - OEM – Established new headquarters; drilling and preparing for emergencies that face our residents; Grew force to over 100 and has largest Ham Radio OEM team in state.

- Courts – processed nearly 6,000 criminal, traffic and ordinance violations, up 20%; Changes implemented late this year will streamline processing and add efficiencies.
- Investment in our town continues to rise with over \$45 million of added assessments during the year representing new construction completed and investment in our borough.
- We acquired 12 additional acres of open space adjoining Borough parkland with entire funding coming from State and County grants. This further expands our open space and green acres to nearly 500 acres.
- Franklin Towne Square located on both sides of Franklin Avenue at the Colonial Road intersection near completion representing a significant upgrade to our downtown providing more locations for retail businesses.
- Environmental Commission efforts have resulted in an increase in recycling to 32% and \$192,000 reduced costs and payments. They also led the effort on our annual cleanup day the opening of our Community Garden at McBride Field sponsored by our Methodist Church and Boy Scouts for the benefit of CUMAC – 200 lbs. of vegetables donated.
- Shade Tree Commission secured our 9th consecutive year as a Tree City.
- Closed transaction and began construction on our supportive housing project that will serve 39 adults with special needs while helping meet our needs for affordable housing in the borough.
- Planning and Zoning Boards approved over 20 applications in 24 meetings ensuring enforcement of our codes and keeping our borough development consistent with our master plan.
- The Borough was awarded “Best Website/Social Media” in the State of New Jersey by the League of Municipalities. Also completed community mailing of Handbook and Calendar featuring Historic Home in Franklin Lakes.
- Borough Clerks office processed over 330 requests for public records, and smoothly handled two elections.
- Improvements to Borough Hall were made to enhance security and upgrade facilities with significant support from DPW.
- Construction Department closed over 1,800 open permits in two-year cleanup. Issued over 1,000 new permits and conducted 3,300 inspections, up over 10%. New enforcement programs on nuisance abandoned properties yielded \$120,000 in billings; along with over 1,500 inspections resulted in a 50% decline in foreclosed properties.

- Board of Health and Municipal Alliance held several public programs to address drug addiction and prevention, Stigma Free and mental health training. With our schools we addressed impact of social media on youth and drug addiction. Also conducted CPR training for all 7th and 8th grade students at FAMS.
- Our Department of Public Works kept our infrastructure sound: road paving, patching 63 roads and sweeping. Snow plowing and salting over 800 man hours. Pond dredging, playground upgrades, Parson Pond Park improvements, upkeep of all parks and recreation facilities, new plantings and holiday decorations throughout town and the servicing of 80 borough vehicles.
- 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. We improved safety programs and equipment for all our participants. The Recreation Foundation was reestablished holding the “Rectoberfest” which was a huge success both in fundraising for capital improvements and increased energy in our recreation community.

Shortfalls Things don’t always go as we would like – We reviewed various shared service options with other communities, our schools and library but did not result in any joint ventures. Court delays and prolonged mediation have led to a still unsettled position on borough affordable housing. Good strides were made in recycling but we are still looking for ways to motivate residents to recycle more. Efforts to become more sustainable through solar or electric powered vehicle were researched but no progress as yet. Efforts to support local businesses have come up short but renewed effort may show results next year. We did not complete a safety study for our workers as yet.

We have many goals for 2018 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. We will also revamp our volunteering incentive programs for emergency personnel to promote better daytime staffing and increase memberships.
- **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 work with the Recreation and Parks Committee and Foundation to add new park improvements to promote greater use of our open space.
- **Environment** - We will work with the Environmental Commission to identify areas to reduce our carbon footprint and become more sustainable as a community.
- **Local Businesses** – We will work with renewed Chamber of Commerce to promote local businesses which provides benefits to residents and creates more opportunities for retail business to locate here.

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.