

Mayor David Runfeldt
State of the Borough Address – January 2, 2011

I would like to welcome everyone here today for the Re-Organization meeting of the Lincoln Park Borough Council. Along with my remarks today, I will be offering the annual “State of the Borough” Address that the Mayor is required to make annually. There are quite a few dignitaries here in the Audience and I am going to defer the Introductions of the dignitaries to Council President Pepe when he gives his address.

Congratulations Councilman Pepe on your re-election and re-appointment to the position of Council President. Congratulations too, Councilwoman Thompson on your re-election and to our newest Councilman, Robert Cardillo on your first foray into town government by winning your election to Council. I hope you find the position and responsibilities as challenging and rewarding as I did.

I would like to thank Pastor Rittenger for delivering the Invocation today.

I want to welcome and thank the County and State Representatives of ours who have made the time for us today. Your commitment to the residents of the Borough of Lincoln Park is always noticed and very appreciated. I personally look forward to furthering our relationship. As I have said many times in the past, we may be a small town on the edge of the County; however, as far as I am concerned Morris County starts here. We are worthy and deserving of all of the State and County resources available to any other town. The efforts of our County Freeholders, State Representatives and recently, the Governor’s office, to provide these resources is greatly appreciated by myself, everyone up here today and most importantly by all the residents throughout town. I expect you will continue to do your best to deliver the great representation that we have come to expect from you.

I would like to acknowledge Councilmen Wild, Kerwin, Petracca and Gemian who are in the midst of their terms. We have had a solid core up here and we have worked well together to do much good for the Borough of Lincoln Park. I know that Administration and Council will continue to work together to meet any challenges that lie ahead of us. I expect that you feel the same way.

Four years ago I pledged that Lincoln Park would be the “best, well managed, ethical and exciting” community. Over the last four years we have weeded out and prosecuted corruption. We have installed complete and updated employee practices and policies. Lincoln Park has been named the 5th best town to live in New Jersey and the 11th best town in the Country for a healthy retirement.

Our Police Department was one of the first in the County to achieve State Accreditation. We have achieved Sustainable Jersey certification, something only 12% of the towns in the State have been able to accomplish at this time. Our Mayor’s Wellness Campaign has played a significant role in improving the health of our community from the Annual 5K run that we hold to the facilitation of generous private donations to help make our recreational facilities more accessible and more exciting to more of our residents. We have formed an Economic Development Committee who has been tasked with exploring ways to promote, attract and retain businesses. While these are just a few of the many achievements administration and Council have made over the last four years, I would like to go into a little more detail on the events of this past year.

2010 started much as 2009 had and unfortunately much as 2011 is already. Which is that we continue to find ourselves in some of the most economically challenging times many of us have ever seen. By the end of February last year, the Borough Council had made their final changes to the Municipal Budget I presented. At the time we had a budget that not only met all of the requirements of a fully compliant budget, but was actually less in spending than the year before. At that time we were notified that the State was reducing the amount of financial aid they give us by nearly a quarter of a million dollars. This was the 3rd year in a row that the State had reduced the amount of financial assistance they provide to us. In order to remain compliant we were forced to make additional cuts.

Immediately, each department was given an amount they needed to cut and the department heads were trusted to dole out the cuts in the way they felt would achieve the necessary reduction in spending without sacrificing the services they provided to residents. I commend each of the department heads, their staffs, and everyone involved for helping to absorb these additional cuts. I am happy to report that even with this loss of revenue we have not been forced to sever any personnel nor cut services. Of particular note, thanks must be given to the Union membership from our two unions in town. They both partnered with the Borough to find a solution to the cuts. The unions' willingness to work with us allowed us to find a way out of the additional mess.

March 2010 in Lincoln Park was a month I am sure many of us would like to forget, but will always be remembered. It was then that we witnessed some of the worst flooding in our town's history. Events such as this put a community to a test. As high as the flood waters rose, I feel that we as a community climbed even higher. The amount of concern, care, support and positive attitude from the vast majority of town was evident throughout the storm and its aftermath. While we must all reflect on the damage done and the disruption to our friends and neighbor's lives, there is much we must be thankful for. Most important is the fact that in an emergency which affected nearly 600 homes in town, many times that number of residents – and a response from over 200 emergency personnel, we had no loss of life or even a major injury.

Our new Governor, Chris Christie, showed great concern for the residents of Lincoln Park and elsewhere along the Passaic and Pompton River Basins by his opening clear channels of communication with members of his cabinet and his personal appearances in our area. Unlike 2007 when Lincoln Park was shut out of FEMA Public Assistance, Governor Christie and his staff complimented our efforts to insure that Lincoln Park received the resources it needed and deserved. In fact, due the recommendation of Congressman Frelinghuysen, FEMA set up their Regional Disaster Assistance Center right here in Lincoln Park. I thank Congressman Frelinghuysen, Governor Christie and our State and County Officials who assisted during and after the flood. More Importantly I look forward to the commitment that all of these individuals have made in helping explore ways to mitigate future flooding in the area.

We have the 2011 officers of our Fire Department here today to be sworn in. During an incident like the flooding we had in March, it is these men and the incredible volunteers that we have that do much of the work. Our Fire Department ran emergency operations for over 60 straight hours handling evacuation from over 150 homes and taking our over 200 individuals. In addition to the evacuations, LP responded to a house fire on the Wayne side of the Pompton River which Wayne was unable to reach.

Lincoln Park has some of the most well prepared, well trained and most professional Emergency Services in the county if not the entire state.

The Fire Department was supported by members of the Lincoln Park EMS who ran every call for the nearly three straight days of the event with the Fire Department along with medical calls of their own. Our Police Department and our CERT team were called into action early in the event operating throughout the entire time. There are many organizations, individuals and businesses that help out during emergencies like this far too many to thank here, but they all deserve our sincerest appreciation. Nearly all of the co-ordination of response and resources fall on the Lincoln Park Office of Emergency Management. OEM has been run by Mrs. Ellen Harrigan for the last several years. Unfortunately, 2010 is the last year that Mrs. Harrigan will be heading OEM. She has stepped down after leading this all important department for many years, including through the floods of 2001 and 2010. Mrs. Harrigan, and Shelter Director Penny Smith, who has also stepped down, both deserve many thanks for the efforts they have made in helping the residents of Lincoln Park through some truly awful times. Ellen and Penny...thank you...your presence will be missed.

2010 saw the completion of our first full year of curbside recycling pickups. I am happy to report that his program continues to be a tremendous success. Environmentally, we have increased our recycling compliance from around 30% to above 80%. Financially, removing that amount of recyclables from the trash stream has greatly reduced the amount we pay for trash disposal. Our recycling yard is cleaner, more efficient and more productive. Our DPW Superintendent Tom Piorkowski and Recycling Coordinator, Kevin Mackey were both the recipient of awards for changes to improving recycling efforts in Morris County.

Borough Engineer Paul Darmofalski and his staff have been digging through our codes and ordinances in an attempt to find ways to make our building process more resident and business friendly, while at the same time protecting us from overdevelopment and balancing the many flood issues we have in town. We have already begun to see the fruits of these efforts in more streamlined application processes and the greater potential for residents in the flood plain to elevate their homes.

As we approach 2011 there is much to be excited about in Lincoln Park and there is much work to be done.

This year we will be held to a new 2% cap on increases in property taxation. I fully support the Governor's desire to impose this cap and I applaud the fact that he and the legislature were able to put it in place for this year. Unfortunately, many of the "tool kit" items that municipalities will need to help meet his cap have not been passed as of yet. Also the 2% cap has some exceptions which will allow taxes to ultimately increase by more than 2%. The danger in this is that the general public is expecting their taxes to not go up by more than 2%. However, I fear that when they see an increase of slightly more than 2% they will again look at municipal officials as being over taxing and over spending, when this could not be further from the reality of the situation. I personally, would have preferred to see a hard 2.5% cap, with no exceptions, but we will deal with what we have.

That being said, I am happy to report that with regards to our 2011 budget we are fully in compliance with the new cap and requirement as it stands now. This budget will be presented to Council in several days for their comments, cuts, additions and changes. One of the major ways we were able to achieve compliance was once again by partnering with the PBA to help reduce costs associated with overtime and days off. I thank the men and women of the PBA for their desire to help find solutions as we move into 2011.

Before closing I would like to make several acknowledgments and offering of thanks to a few people.

First, it important to note that we have just completed a State of Emergency following last weeks snow and wind storm. I have to thank Tom Piorkowski and every member of the DPW for a tremendous job in keeping our streets clean. This was a particularly challenging storm and our residents noticed the fine job you did. Calls and emails I received were extremely more complimentary of the efforts.

Sean Canning has completed his first full year as our Administrator. I know that Sean is often tough on himself, but if he feels he's done half as well as I think he has, then he should be very pleased. In all seriousness, Sean has done a fantastic job as our Administrator. Not only am I thankful he is there, but the entire town appreciates it as well.

Kerry Geisler, our CFO has continued to bring professionalism, effectiveness and pride back to the financial department in town. I am proud to tell you that we have one of the best CFO's right here in Lincoln Park.

Our remaining department heads, Janet Cassidy from Parks and Rec, Sal Marino from Building and Development, Pat Pignatelli from Health, Tom Piorkowski from DPW, and Tom Andrascik from the Police Department round out what I have found to be the best Administrative staff in not just in my 16 years in town government, but my 40 years as a resident. I thank each of you along with Borough Attorney Ed Buzak, Court Clerk Patricia Fritz, Municipal Clerk Penny Smith and my Aide, Ellen Ross, for being the great team that we are able to put out on the field every day to represent and serve the residents of our great town.

There are many, many more Borough employees that deserve to be recognized for being part of the team. Rather than name each one, I would like to offer a collective "Thank You" to every employee on behalf of myself and all the residents for the great job that you do.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family. My parents Lyn and Dave who raised me with a sense of pride in my community, an awareness of civic duty, and a love of the political process. My brothers Erik and Michael, my beautiful daughters Brielle and Camryn and my wife Andrea, who is the centering force in my life.

Thank you all very much and have a very happy 2011.