

Welcome to the 2016 Edition of the State of the Borough Address.

Ten years ago, when I made my first of these addresses, I mentioned that the issues of taxes, flooding and development swirl around us in an endless dance.

Over the last 10 years this administration and council have done a superb job of responsibly controlling taxes and spending and 2015 was yet another year in which Lincoln Park had a only a minimal tax increase and was well within the cap limits imposed upon us. I am happy to report that in 2015 the Borough of Lincoln Park was able to continue to provide top quality service to our residents. With just a minimal tax increase last year the borough made improvements to our parks, playgrounds and facilities, hired new police officers, offered well deserved yet modest pay increases to our dedicated employees, provided new equipment for our emergency services and public works and expanded programs through our health and recreation departments.

Luckily, 2015 was another year in which Mother Nature treated us well in this area as there were no flood events. This is not to say that flooding does not continue to be an issue that demands much of our attention. We are experiencing firsthand the difficulty of doing *anything* in the flood plain as we still continue to struggle to be able to maximize the use of the grants for desnagging and desilting that we were awarded two years ago. On a good note, the hard work of our Engineering, Building Department and Administration has paved the way for Lincoln Park to re-enter the FEMA Community Rating System, which will lower premiums paid by our residents for flood insurance premiums. We are hoping that we will gain final approval from FEMA over the next few months and residents will notice a significant savings shortly. New flood mapping has affected us as well. There are a few areas of town which have been removed from the flood hazard area, but there remain significant areas which have been adversely affected by the new mapping. The town will continue to fight for our residents and for acceptance of flood mapping which is fair and just. Lincoln Park, along with many surrounding towns, has continued to lose tax ratables in the form of buyouts of flood prone properties by FEMA, New Jersey DEP Blue Acres and the Morris County Open Space Preservation Trust. On one hand we are thankful that these agencies are able to help the residents affected by flooding and especially thankful we have been able to do it with minimal cost to the borough. On the other hand, however, the remaining residents in our community are faced with the burden of absorbing a larger share of taxes due to the loss of these ratables.

All of which leaves us with development. I think it is important to mention that my comments 10 years ago echoed those of Mayor Michael Harrigan who originally made the “taxes, flooding, development” statement nearly 20 years before me. I say it’s important to note, as it is imperative to realize that the issues surrounding development are not a new one in Lincoln Park at all. Development has not been brought to the forefront just now. It has always been here. It is not on our minds solely because a proposal has been made. Your elected officials, town professionals and volunteer land use board appointees deal with this issue with as much effort and attention as flooding and taxes...and they always have. It is also important to note that development is not just “should we build this?” or “shouldn’t we build this?”. Issues regarding planning, residential development, commercial development, Council on Affordable Housing requirements, residential and commercial tax appeals, upgrades to aging infrastructure such as water mains, sewer lines and storm drains and of course, the aforementioned loss of homes through flood buyouts are all part of the equation regarding development and why the solution is so much more involved than “should we or shouldn’t we?”. In fact, just saying unequivocally “NO” to development is just as irresponsible as thoughtlessly saying “YES”. Development is part of growth. The antonym of growth is decay. We, and not just the people sitting up here, but all of Lincoln Park needs to be acutely aware that if we do not grow, if we do not continue to be a vibrant community, then we risk slipping into decay.

You have elected your town leaders because you trust them. You trust them to make decisions. You trust them to insure the quality of life you are used to. You trust them to make sure Lincoln Park continues to thrive as a community we can be proud of. You trust them to provide services for you. You trust them to keep you and your property safe. You trust them to help raise your children. You trust them to solve problems. Often they have solutions to the problems presented them. Often they ask for professional assistance in solving problems. ALWAYS they listen to what you, the people of town, are saying.

Conversely, some citizens’ groups and various social media sites, are in existence to present problems, usually offering no suggestions or solutions other than direct opposition to the issue they want you to be aware of. The irony is that these groups are given just as much, and often more, consideration as everyone else in town. I personally, and I’m fairly certain I speak for the members of the Borough Council, look forward to working with *anyone* who has an opinion on *anything* that comes up in town. In my first 10 years of being Mayor and nearly 30 years of

community service in this magnificent town, I have met with a great many of you on numerous topics. I have found that when dialog and discussion is geared to solutions and ideas, absent of rumors and untruths, often a mutual solution...a “win/win” if you will...for all involved was the outcome.

The proposed Rehabilitation Zone in our downtown area is one that we have been working on for many years...long before any potential development on any particular piece of property. This is the result of holding many public meetings, focus groups with residents and business owners and with the input of our local planning officials and the New Jersey State Office of Planning. The rationale behind this extensive work is to help make our downtown area a more vibrant and vital part of our community. It will provide a means to help encourage the property owners in the downtown area to make improvements to their investments which will make the area more attractive and aesthetically pleasing to residents, business owners and customers. Improvements in this area of town should help stabilize falling commercial property values. It should create a more pleasing first impression of Lincoln Park to visitors from out of town. This in turn should make Lincoln Park more attractive to people looking for a place to settle and raise a family, and in turn raise residential property values as well. Ideally, even just making our community more attractive to retaining our young people, rather than have them move out of town as they get older or start their own families helps Lincoln Park grow as well.

Lincoln Park has a long history of appropriate planning and zoning in town. It has a long history of making sure that development fits properly in our town. It has a long history of insuring that development looks like it belongs and is not an eyesore. It has a history of making changes to zoning laws when it makes sense or solves a problem. Keep in mind much of our zoning laws go back to the 1950's with some serious changes in the early 1980's. Just like we found in the 80's, planning that is based on situations 35 years earlier may not be in the best interests of the community today. Between 1950 and 1985 there were 2 major floods in town. In the last 10 years we have had over 9 major flooding events. In 1950 we were encouraging people to build in the flat, low lying areas of town. In the last several years we have, or are about to, remove nearly 80 of those homes. Change is not a bad thing...I realize it can be difficult at times, but even difficult doesn't mean bad. I have no doubt in my mind that the officials, professionals and volunteers involved in making these decisions are committed to carrying on the tradition of

excellent planning that has occurred in Lincoln Park in the past and will be in the best interests of the community as a whole.

Speaking of Community, there are so many people that add to the value of our community. Here in town hall Administrative Secretary Dina Valente, our department heads Perry Mayers, Kerry Geisler, Rick Beyer, Janet Cassidy, Sal Marino, Kathy Skrobala, Police Chief Mark West, Court Clerk Patty Fritz, Municipal Clerk Cindi Sloane, and all of their dedicated staff and employees give so much of themselves to make this town function at it's best. Our town professionals Paul Darmofalski, Tom Boorady, Chris DiLorenzo, Ken Rush and all of the volunteer members of our various boards and committees watch out of all of us. Fire Chief Joe Fede and EMS Chief Bobby Ward and their great volunteers and the men and women of our police department have protected us throughout the year. All of the civic organizations that we have in town, the Lions Club, the Rotary Club, the American Legion and all of the others always add to the pride in our community. The parent volunteers and coaches of the PAL and the various scouting troops provide a great opportunity to help make our children the best they can be. Our business owners are very generous to our community whether or not they are town residents themselves. As you can see, a lot goes into the makings and the workings of this great community.

Happy New Year to all and I look forward to another year of working for you and with you to continue making Lincoln Park the best community in this great state!