



Mayor David Runfeldt
January 4, 2021

I would like to begin by welcoming everyone to what very likely may be the 99th annual re-organization meeting of the Borough of Lincoln Park and the first ever done on a virtual platform. Thank you to the elected officials from throughout the county and state who may have joined us this evening or have contacted us this week. And, of course, a special thank you to all the residents of our great town who have taken the time to watch and possibly participate tonight.

As I enter my 15th year as Mayor, I remain honored to serve the people of Lincoln Park. This is a privilege that I continue to take seriously and I am grateful for the support and trust this community has shown to me. More importantly, I feel this Council, administration and I continue to make a difference in providing financial stability while promoting the growth, progress and future of our great town.

I would like to take a moment to thank Councilwoman Thompson on the efficient and effective job you did as Council President in 2020. I believe that you and I have had a very good working relationship over the years and I look forward to continuing that in the coming year with your successor, Councilman Seise. Andrew, congratulations on being named the next Council President. I am looking forward to working with you to continue to make Lincoln Park an attractive and exciting place to live and do business.

I would also like to thank outgoing Councilman Ray Kerwin for his time serving all of us here in Lincoln Park. Ray had been a consistent and committed member of this council for parts of 4 decades. In his 26 years as an elected councilman, Ray has admirably help lead Lincoln Park through good times and bad and has been a huge proponent of quality-of-life issues such as recreation and senior services. Ray has been a tremendous guide to me and I appreciate all that he has done.

It has been a pleasure working with our remaining Council members Wild, Ross, Gemian, and Moeller this past year. I would also like to mention our newest addition to the Council, Councilman Patrick Antonetti. Congratulations on your election win and I look forward to see what you will bring to the table. I would like to ask you, as I continue to challenge every Council member, and myself, that with every decision made, to do what is in the best interest of this community now and for its future. I would encourage that all of us in this community do the same. As I stated in the past, it is important to look past what is good for “each” of us and look towards what is good for “all” of us. I have also said that “party” politics in small towns like Lincoln Park has no place. Those of us involved in town government should be concerned with providing our residents the most amount of service, in the most efficient manner, while saving the most amount of money.

Speaking of money, 2020 continued to be a successful one financially for the Borough of Lincoln Park. For the 13th consecutive year, the total budget expenditures have remained relatively stable and minimal. Total municipal tax increase once again, was less than \$100 for the average home in Lincoln Park. Cost containment continues to be a primary goal of mine and has likewise been an aim of the Borough Council. With this direction, we have attained a very positive result and I commend Council for their steadfastness to this objective. Another annual goal has been to present a fully compliant budget to Council with regards to the State’s financial regulations. The 2020 budget was nearly \$100,000.00 below the increase which was allowed by the State.

Additionally, we were able to *increase* our Fund Balance in last year's budget. A strong Fund Balance provides tax stability and contributes to the orderly provision of services from year to year. A healthy Fund Balance also protects taxpayers from unexpected changes in financial conditions such as cuts in state aid and/or a natural disaster emergency.

We are now several years into our plan to have Lincoln Park be debt free. We continue to be firmly on track have zero debt by 2030. Our success in financial matters begins with the watchful eye that our CFO Fabiana Mello and Business Administrator Perry Mayers keep over our budget. The cooperation and willingness of all of our department heads to be as economical as possible also aids us in providing great service at an effective cost. I am confident that these actions will help us in a positive way with future year's budgeting and continue to insure that the future of Lincoln Park is a vibrant and prosperous one!

The borough has also assisted our residents with attaining significant savings in their own homes. Our participation in the Energy Aggregation Program continues to provide our residents with savings in their personal energy bills. More impressive, our reentry into the Federal Community Rating System collectively saved our residents who rely on flood insurance over \$320,000.00 annually. I am happy to inform you now that we have just recently received our recertification in the CRS system and the savings will continue into the future at a 25% rate which is over \$600.00 per policy per year on average. I am also proud to let you know that Lincoln Park now is one of the 3 highest rated non-coastal communities in the entire state of NJ.

As we all know, however, 2020 was not all good news. Global and National issues have affected us locally socially, economically and with regards to our health and wellbeing. A summer storm left a large part of our community without power for several days. This shows the need to be continually vigilant with our energy providers to insure they are taking all possible measures to be able to provide us with continuous service. One of the most important remedies we are exploring is to have the electric company provide the Deer Run section of town with a line to a local grid, rather than rely on service from a Montville grid. As more and more residents are working or schooling from home, we are now more dependent on reliable internet service. We continue to appeal to Optimum to improve the speed and continuity of our internet connection and will look into other options as they are made available.

Without doubt, the biggest event of 2020, and unfortunately continuing into this year, is the COVID-19 pandemic due to the coronavirus that appeared in our community late last winter. Lincoln Park is home to one of the largest nursing and long-term health care facilities in the state. We were hit hard and fast with positive cases and unfortunate fatalities early in the course of the pandemic. Our Health Department and the administration of these facilities worked quickly and made important decisions which helped limit the spread of the disease while other similar facilities in the state continued to have problems. As we moved into the summer, we led a very successful campaign to slow the spread in our community. Unfortunately, as much of the nation experienced, we began to see large increases in positive cases following Thanksgiving. Although the numbers began to rise quickly and by large amounts, luckily, we did not experience any additional deaths as a result. I am optimistic that Lincoln Park residents will continue to follow the recommendations of our various federal, state and local health agencies as we do our part to stop the spread of this horrible disease.

The pandemic has changed much of how life looks in Lincoln Park. Residents are working from home. Students are attending classes virtually. Sports and recreation activities for both adults and children have been altered, or cancelled altogether. Businesses have been forced to change the way they operate or close completely. Social interactions are limited and even families have been forced to distance from each other. The devastating effects of this pandemic continue to

plague us, but I am confident that the future is bright. It remains imperative though that we all continue to do our part to curb the spread. Please wear your mask, maintain proper social distancing, practice suggested hygiene routines and follow the recommendations of our Health Department. I would like to take this moment to commend our Health Official, Kathy Skrobala and her staff for the tremendous job they have done in the face of this adversity, the amount of hours they have put in, the professional job they have done dealing with various health personnel and agencies and how wonderfully compassionate they have been in communicating with our residents.

As there often is in the times of adversity, there have been some noteworthy positive results that I have observed during the pandemic in this community. First was the willingness to help each other. Offers of helping out or shopping for complete strangers came quickly and often from many in town. As our businesses began to reopen-- especially those in the restaurant and personal service industries that were forced to close for a long period of time--there was a wave of support from the community to help bring these establishments back to life. The few businesses that are not reopening as a result have mostly been replaced by new businesses which will contribute to the vibrancy of our downtown as things get back to normal. Further indication of hope, unity and community spirit are the Peace Polls that you see all through town. There are over 30 wonderful works of art that were contributed by residents of all ages on show downtown and in our parks. I would like to thank Chris Margolis of our DPW and his wife Kim for presenting this idea and helping to make it such a success.

2020 saw the completion of our turf sports fields. These fields were installed using Open Space funds and did not cause the borough to bond any debt or raise extra taxes. In addition to being a tremendous asset to our recreation facilities, the presence of a turf complex makes us a more attractive destination and adds to the value of your home.

The town was very proactive in applying for and being awarded state grants in 2020. We obtained grants for such things as open space acquisition, infrastructure improvements, road paving and a long-anticipated addition to our public library. Successful grant awards are another way that we help to keep our tax rate stable and we are committed to exploring all possible grant opportunities going forward. A special thank you to Perry Mayers, Borough Engineer Tom Boorady and Borough Attorney Chris DiLorenzo for overseeing the technical and legal aspects of all of our grant applications.

This past year had more investment and new business openings in our Downtown Revitalization area than ever before. This shows the faith that businesses now have in the future of Lincoln Park and the smart growth that we are promoting to insure the productive and exciting future of our community.

The Borough, in addition to our web-site and social media presence, now has a mobile app (LPConex) to help keep our residents connected and informed. Thank you to Janet Cassidy for getting the new app up and running and for maintaining our internet presence with news and updates.

2020 saw the retirement of several borough employees. Police Officer Russell Ruggiero, Tax Collector Kristen Runfeldt and Electrical Inspector Harold Endean all have a history of dedication and service to this town and we wish them the best of good fortune as they move into the next part of their lives. I would also like to wish our Superintendent of Schools, James Grube, congratulations on his retirement and best wishes for success to his successor Michael Meyer.

Each department head and quite frankly, every borough employee, had significant challenges this past year in their providing service to our residents. I am absolutely amazed at how well they

were able to face these challenges head on and continued to perform at the level of excellence they did.

Rick Beyer and the DPW and Water Department staff made sure that all infrastructure and utilities operated normally during the pandemic, even though there were a far greater number of people at home putting stress on these systems.

Sal Marino and the staff of our Building Department continued to serve the town issuing permits and performing inspections while properly social distancing and protecting residents.

Court Administrator, Ashley Fritz, and those involved in our court system provided a fair and balanced environment for justice and resolutions of disputes which was done in a virtual setting for the first time ever.

Fabiana Mello and the men and women in the Finance Department went above and beyond in making things like tax collection, paying bills and tax assessment as pleasant as possible for our residents and as convenient as possible during the pandemic.

Although there was a tremendous interruption to our recreation activities in 2020, Janet Cassidy and the staff of the Recreation Department continued to make Lincoln Park exciting. Virtual events, providing meals for the Senior's Club and our holiday decorations kept some sense of normalcy around town.

Perry Mayers and Dina Valente-Stoel in my office and Cindi Sloane and Courtney Fitzpatrick in the clerk's office are always happy to help residents and I thank them especially for the assistance they give me year-round in normal times, and certainly during these trying times.

With regards to your safety, I continue to stand by my belief that we have the best of the best in Lincoln Park. Fire Chief Joe Fede, and incoming EMS Chief Beth Anderson lead a dedicated group of volunteers who leave the comforts of their home and time with their family whenever called to lend assistance. During the pandemic, response to even minor injuries or false alarms needed to be treated as if it could be a deadly situation.

Likewise, the men and women of our Police Department risked the possibility of being exposed to the disease on every traffic stop and routine call to service. Chief Tony Simone and his officers and staff remained dedicated to serving our community and providing safety and protection during the darkest days of the pandemic.

Lincoln Park is a community made of many people...diverse nationalities; different races, genders and religions; young and old. We have people who immigrated to our country and people who were born here. Some have spent their whole lives here; others are new to our town. These differences make up one community...one great, wonderful, thriving, accepting community! I am proud of the part I have contributed to this community. I am thankful to our elected officials for their leadership of this community. Most importantly, I am delighted that each and every one in this community adds their own little part to the abundant richness that makes us Lincoln Park.

Please be safe, happy and HEALTHY!

Mayor David Runfeldt