

Mayor's Comments from the Jan 4, 2010 Council Re-Organization Meeting

Happy New Year, Everyone!

Congratulations, Mr. Pepe, on being named Council President for this year. I look forward to working with you to continue the work we have begun.

Mr. Wild, congratulations to you as well, on a job well done as last year's Council President. Lincoln Park can be proud of the job you have done in representing our residents.

I would like to thank the Borough Council and the residents of Lincoln Park for giving me this opportunity to report on the state of affairs for the borough at the conclusion of 2009 and looking forward to the New Year and new decade that we are entering.

As we began 2009 we found ourselves in the midst of a global economic crisis. Decreasing property values, evaporation of personal savings and record unemployment hit many of us hard. Compounding the problem on a municipal level were federal stimulus packages aimed more towards big business and Wall Street than small business and Main Street. Worse yet was in our very state, our Governor tried to make up for a myriad of broken campaign promises...most notably, failing to provide property tax relief...by cutting state aid to many towns. This led to inevitable shifting burden of increasing municipal property taxes, or be forced to cut services.

Here at home in Lincoln Park, I am happy to report that in the face of these challenges administration and council were able to provide and pass a 2009 budget that met all state requirements and kept tax increases to a minimum. Through administrative policy of encouraging retirement for eligible personnel, combining positions, not rehiring vacant positions, filling existing full time positions with part time personnel and enacting pay freezes, we had one of the lowest percentage payroll increases in borough history. I feel the Borough Council should be commended for taking the tough action to address longevity and compensation in an effort to insure that we could maintain proper staffing to continue to support the services we provide for our residents.

Unfortunately, most of this hard work and cost savings went unnoticed by many due to the fact that we were hit with yet another challenge in 2009...the dreaded mandated property re-valuation. Coming on the heels of the downturn in the real estate market, our new property valuations were put on the books. There was a tremendous amount of confusion regarding real vs. assessed property values. There was even more confusion regarding property tax increase due to tax levy vs. increase in assessed value of the taxable property. Through the tireless work of our finance department, tax assessor and tax collector...along with a tremendous amount of email and phone correspondence between myself, members of Council and residents...I feel that we did a superb job of addressing the confusion and helping people understand the entire property re-val process.

Challenges often lead to opportunities. The challenges of 2009 have led to a great number of opportunities that will benefit our community immediately and in the future.

Our Recreation Department under the supervision of Janet Cassidy, continues to thrive in creation of new programs and enhancements to existing ones. Membership and usage of our Community Lake, Tennis Courts and adult programs continue to increase each year and especially in 2009.

The Lincoln Park Mayor's Wellness Campaign was featured in several publications in 2009 including CNN.com/Money Magazine which ranked Lincoln Park the 11th best place for a healthy retirement in the nation.

Health Officer Pat Pignatelli and the Health Department had us fully prepared for anything that may have come up with the potential Swine Flu epidemic. Luckily, the event was not as bad as anticipated, but I do have to say that Lincoln Park was among the best prepared communities I am aware of.

One of the most significant developments in the Police Department this year was not policing related, but rather personnel related. 2009 saw Police Chief Sean Canning put in for his retirement. This leaves the day to day running of the PD in the very capable hands of Deputy Chief Tom Andrasic. I know that Chief Canning's service has been appreciated by most of Lincoln Park, including myself. Normally, I would take this time to wish Chief Canning well in his future endeavors...however, since those endeavors included working for my administration as the new Borough Administrator, I prefer to say "Good job," as that is exactly what Sean has been doing so far.

There are three accomplishments that I am most proud of that occurred in 2009 in the Borough of Lincoln Park.

First, is that we have tried to make our building, planning and engineering departments more resident friendly. Sal Marino in the building department, our new engineer Paul Darmofalski, all of our inspectors and the front office personnel in building have done a remarkable job of helping residents. The fact that we finally have all new or repaired sidewalks on both sides of Main Street is a evidence that this "new and improved" department is here to serve the public.

Second, the initiation of the "Citi-Stat" system has made all borough departments more accessible and accountable to our residents. Since rolling out this program in the spring, we have created an easy way for our residents to communicate their needs to us and an even better way for us to report back to the resident on the status of complaints and concerns. Our Department of Public Works has had the bulk of the increased work load and the new 72 hour time frame for addressing concerns. The gentlemen of DPW and Superintendent Tom Piorowski have been outstanding in their performance.

Third, is the changes that we have made to our recycling program. What started as a way to control costs associated with the operations of the recycling center, has progressed to the highly efficient curb-side collection system we have in place today. We have identified and corrected several areas of waste (no pun intended) at the recycling yard. We have instituted a collection system that has removed great amounts of recyclables from the trash stream which significantly lowers our tipping fees. We have created an sustainable and ongoing cost savings for now and the future. Most importantly, we have provided one of the most appreciated and used services in the borough. All this after just three months in operation. We will continue to find ways to make this system more efficient and more cost effective in the coming year.

Also in the coming year, we should see the completion of our Borough Web-site makeover and increased use of technology now available. This will help us to continue to improve our communication with the residents we serve.

My biggest goal for 2010 will be to provide the members of Council with a 10 year capital purchased plan which will cover anticipated equipment and vehicle purchases for all departments of the borough. This is a huge undertaking to present. However, through the preparation and professionalism brought to this project by Administrator Canning and our CFO, Kerry Geisler, I am confident that we will be able to provide a complete road map of the future for the borough council to consider during the upcoming budget process. Planning for the future is more important now than ever. I am certain that a little groundwork done today to steer Lincoln Park into the future will pay big results as we move forward. I am hopeful that the members of Council see the benefit in committing to a plan to the future and the importance of carrying it out.

I would like to thank the Borough Council for their support of my programs and initiatives put in place in 2009. I would like to commend each member of the Council and the Borough Clerk for their efforts and dedication in representing the Borough of Lincoln Park this past year.

I would like to thank Ellen Ross for her hard work not only as the secretary to Administration, but for her outstanding work as my aide. For everyone else who is a member of the Lincoln Park community or an employee of the borough, thank you for your efforts during the past year. I wish each and every one of us an abundance of health, wealth and happiness in 2010 and forward.