

Mayor David Runfeldt's

2014

State of the Borough Address

Each year the Mayor is given the duty of preparing and presenting an overview of the previous year in town. The remarks are then presented to the Borough Council at the yearly Re-organization meeting.

This meeting took place last night, Monday, January 6th.

First I would like to thank outgoing Council President Ray Kerwin for his tremendous leadership during his time as Council President. I enjoyed working with you and the rapport we had.

I would also like to congratulate Ann Thompson for taking over the position of Council President for 2014. Your fellow council members have shown great trust in you and I am very excited about working with you in the coming year.

To the remaining council members, it has been my pleasure working with you the past year. I feel that together, we have represented Lincoln Park very well and I expect we will continue that this year.

Now for the year in review...2013 was the 4th consecutive year that Lincoln Park's operating budget had an overall cut in spending. CFO Kerry Geisler deserves much credit for her efforts on preparing our budgets. Borough Council efforts to keep tax increases to a minimum and to annually decrease the borough's debt should be applauded. Unfortunately these cuts were once again overshadowed by an incredible loss of tax ratables. The decline in the commercial property market continues to bring many and costly tax appeals which not only effect the amount we can collect from commercial properties, but shifts the burden of both the appeal and the resultant loss of revenue to be made up by the residential taxpayer. Further complicating the balancing of spending, revenues and tax rates in 2013 and forward was the amount of Federal and State buyouts of flood properties in Lincoln Park. Many of the over 80+ properties that have been approved for buyouts in have begun to come off of our tax rolls. Once again, this shifts the tax burden to the remaining property owners in town. Several years ago the Governor mandated a 2% cap on tax increases that each municipality had to adhere to. He offered 33 "tool kit" items that he felt were necessary to help achieve the 2% cap. To this date, the legislature has put less than a third of these items into law. In order to truly provide property tax relief in New Jersey, I once again, implore that those in our state legislature continue to take action to provide us on a municipal level with the tools necessary to make this important change.

With regards to the buyouts I have mentioned, I would like to thank the Freeholders and Administration of Morris County for allocating open space funds to help purchase flood prone properties. The true advantage to this program is that we as a town have more control over where buyouts occur. FEMA and NJDEP buyouts are insurance driven and while this does much

to help affected individuals, it does very little to help the municipalities in which the buyouts occur. Without a clear geographic plan of buyouts, one that is nearly impossible with the current federal and state requirements, the town is still responsible for providing services to what have unfortunately become sparsely populated neighborhoods. We must still provide utilities to these areas, plow the roads, and send garbage trucks twice a week and school busses every day. In addition, in times of flooding, we will still be sending emergency services personnel into these areas. The Morris County funds, however, allow us to identify problem areas and make sure that a whole area can be returned to its natural state, providing additional flood storage and allowing the town to save money by being able to discontinue the costly services provided. It is clearly not a great solution, but it does allow us to attempt to prevent the "checkerboard" neighborhoods that have been the result of the FEMA and DEP buyouts.

I would like to thank our state legislators, especially Assemblyman Jay Webber for their support of Assembly Bill A-3362. This bill will give towns such as ours tax relief when there are buyouts of flood properties by not holding the municipality responsible for an entire year of county and school taxes as we have been in the past.

Of course, the reason for all of these buyouts has been the incredible amount of severe flooding this region has been subjected to for several years. Lincoln Park continues to be active in many flood related endeavors. Councilman Gemian and I participate in the Central Basin Regional Flood Board as we have since its inception several years ago. This Board, which is comprised of representatives from Lincoln Park, Little Falls, Fairfield, Wayne, Pompton Lakes and Pequannock, continues to be one of the most active boards committed to exploring flood relief solutions. In 2013 we lobbied to get over 3 million dollars in funds released to perform desnagging and desilting projects. Lincoln Park and Wayne currently have a joint application in for consideration to perform these actions on the Pompton River along our boundaries and we are hopeful of attaining funding in the coming months. Also, wooden boards installed years ago on the dam at the Great Falls in Paterson have raised the level of the Passaic River and contributed to flooding upstream. As a result of Lincoln Park and other local officials' advocacy, those boards have been removed, allowing for lower normal river levels upstream and providing greater capacity for flood storage during storms.

Luckily 2013, as was 2012, was a flood free year in Lincoln Park. In fact, weather-wise 2013 was a welcome change for us. There were some periods of extremely high summer temperatures and cold winter temps which the borough responded to by opening cooling and warming centers. Other than that, Mother Nature was very nice in Lincoln Park. In fact, for the first time in 3 years, our children could enjoy Halloween without snow, ice or the hazard of downed electrical wires.

2013 was the first year of newly negotiated contracts for each of the unions that cover our employees. I would like to once again thank USW Local 74 and PBA Local 192 for their participation and their commitment to the Borough of Lincoln Park. New terms of contracts, including a restructuring of certain salary guides will allow us to more efficiently and cost effectively hire new personnel in the future with minimal impact to property taxes. As a good deal of our police force reaches retirement eligibility in the next few years, this will surely be helpful moving forward with hiring new police officers that will keep us safe and protected. We

have several impending retirements that are already in the works and some will occur early this year. Although a bit premature, as they will be around for a little while longer, I would like to acknowledge Lt. Michael Hackett, Lt. Steven Zoeller, Sgt. Gary Massaro and Patrolman Ron Wenzel for their hard work and dedication to the Borough of Lincoln Park and every one of our residents. These gentlemen have served us well and as they begin the next phase of their life, I hope you will join me in thanking them and wishing them continued success.

Karen Noonan, our Registrar and face of the Health Department will be retiring in a few weeks. I would like to thank Karen for all she has done for Lincoln Park and for the remarkable service she has provided residents.

I would like to thank Ed Buzak and the attorneys at his firm for representing Lincoln Park so professionally for the last 7 years. It was truly a difficult decision to make this change. However, in keeping with my policy of hiring Lincoln Park residents for borough positions, I have decided to recommend Lincoln Park resident Chris DiLorenzo as our new Borough Attorney. Mr. DiLorenzo has been our Municipal Prosecutor for many years and I am sure that he is up to this new task. Welcome aboard, Chris. Taking over the duties of Prosecutor will be Borough resident Kim Kassar. Good luck to you as well, sir.

It is also important to note that Babs Custer has decided to step down from her volunteer efforts at the Lincoln Park Food Community Food Bank. Mrs. Custer has been a fantastic volunteer for 30 years and we should all thank her for her unselfish dedication to our community.

It is important to recognize the daily efforts of Governor Chris Christie, Congressman Rodney Frelinghuysen, State Senator Joe Pennaccio, and our Assembly representatives Jay Webber and Betty Lou DeCroce. These individuals, along with all of our elected Morris County Freeholders and county administration work tirelessly to make sure that our voice is heard throughout the state and county and that our needs are met.

Although there were no major emergencies in town in 2013, there is a constant need to keep connected. I encourage every resident of town to visit our web site and follow the different links that are there to help you connect with the town. There is a link for a notification system that can call your home, your cell phone, send you a text or an email with important emergency information. I also encourage everyone to sign up for at least one of the social media applications that the Borough uses for not only emergency information, but also local events and news.

2013 saw the Borough of Lincoln Park achieve its recertification in the Sustainable Jersey program. This level of certification has been attained by less than one third of the registered municipalities. Going forward, we are going to be exploring the different grant opportunities this certification opens up to us.

The Mayor's Wellness Campaign continues to be strong. We held our 7th Annual 5K and our 3rd Annual Triathlon this year. Thank you to the many people, organizations and businesses who have helped run or support these events. I would especially like to acknowledge the volunteers of the Triathlon Committee for their effort in creating a first class event in such a

short period of time.

Sports continue to thrive in Lincoln Park. In addition to the Recreation and PAL programs for residents of all ages, Lincoln Park had some very successful PAL travel programs in 2013. Championships or finals appearances were had in some of our baseball, softball, boys' and girls' soccer, boys' and girls' basketball, football and cheerleading programs. Congratulations to all of the children involved, the volunteer coaches of each of the teams and everyone at the PAL for running such a great program for the benefit, health and wellness of our children.

I would like to recognize outgoing LPEMS Chief Donna Moeller and LPFD Deputy Chief Joe Fede for their dedication to their organizations and our town this past year. I wish the best of luck to incoming EMS Chief Gary Anderson and Deputy Fire Chief Shawn Mackey. Also, congratulations and good luck to newly elected LPEMS Deputy Chief Kevin McNiell and Hose Co. #2 Battalion Chief Nick Cifelli. To all of the other officers and volunteer members of the First Aid Squad and the Fire Department, thank you for all that you do to keep us safe and protected.

Lincoln Park is truly blessed with great employees. Police Chief West, Fire Chief Nick Pappas, Health Officer John Wozniak, Sal Marino of the Building Department, Rick Beyer from DPW, CFO Kerry Geisler, Janet Cassidy from Parks and Recreation, Patty Fritz in the Court, Borough Clerk Cindi Sloan and in my office Borough Administrator Perry Mayers and my Aide Dina Valente. Each of these people and every employee on their staff give so much of themselves to make Lincoln Park great. They each have my appreciation and they all deserve yours.

I would particularly like to thank my wife Andrea, my daughters Brielle and Camryn and all of my friends that give me the strength and the time needed to perform the duties of this position.

In closing I would like to say to every Lincoln Park resident, employee, volunteer, business owner, elected official and member of a civic organization..."Thank You for all you do, and I wish you a Happy, Healthy and Wealthy 2014!"

David Runfeldt, Mayor
Borough of Lincoln Park