

Mayor Liptak's 2012 State of the Borough Speech

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, family and friends welcome to our annual re-organization meeting for the Borough of Raritan. Thank you for joining us today. 2011 was not only a year of major weather events but also a year of major activity within the borough. I am so proud of the fine work that all the departments do and the people who accomplish each and every task. We are, you are, so fortunate to have such dedicated people working for and on your behalf.

In our tax assessor's office 349 building permits and certificates of occupancy were outstanding for this year. The office accomplished 23 inspections, which included additions, decks, pools, patios, and renovations. These inspections translated into 15 added assessments that have a total assessment value of \$1,118,800. This additional assessed value for the town should help with next year's tax rate.

The Tax office, once again, has a property tax collection rate of 99% as of 12/30/11. This consistent rate year after year speaks to the integrity of our property owners.

Beginning on April 1, 2011, the revised housing ordinance took effect requiring all rental apartments in the Borough to be registered and inspected by the property maintenance department. We have registered 1071 apartments and have collected \$53,550.00 in registration fees. We have collected \$4,720 in penalties with several cases still pending in Municipal Court. The most notable constructions projects in 2011 were the renovation of Toy-R-U's; the installation of the Solar Energy System at Janssen Pharmaceuticals and Johnson and Johnson Information Technology facilities on Route 202; and the permits for the building in the Stone Bridge at Raritan development (formerly known as Willow Walk) are under review. Permits have been released for footing and foundation of three buildings consisting of a 24 and 36 unit three story apartment buildings and the 5800 square foot club house with sales office and model. We are also very proud of the handicapped adaptable building that will be on the site to house disabled veterans.

Our engineering department, lead by Borough Engineer Stan Schrek, has had a banner year. The following items were either begun or completed this past year:

1. Third Street curbs and sidewalks were reconstructed. Favorable bidding allowed remaining funds to enable milling and resurfacing of the roadway. This project was funded through a CDBG grant with an added off-tract contribution from Stone Bridge at Raritan. No borough capital dollars were invested.

2. Design was completed for improvements to Johnson Drive. Work was started in late fall and has ceased for the winter. The project will proceed in March 2012. This project was partly funded by NJDOT Transportation Fund grant.
3. Design was completed for improvements to LaGrange Street. This project will be bid over the winter months and construction will proceed during the spring. This project is also partially funded by NJDOT Transportation Trust Fund grant.
4. Design was completed for improvements to Ashton Street, Avon Place, and Marson Place. This project has been bid and a contract has been awarded. The project will proceed in early spring.
5. Design work is progressing on the reconstruction of Orlando Drive. This project will bid in late winter for an expected construction window over the summer months. This project is expected to be partially funded by a NJDOT Transportation Trust Fund grant.
6. A major trench failure was repaired on Roderer Drive and the cul-de-sac was resurfaced. This corrected a long standing problem due to initial improper construction techniques.
7. Sanitary sewers were video inspected, the area mapped and repairs were completed to the system in Cardinal Woods. This corrected a long standing inflow and infiltration surcharge to the Cardinal Woods Pump Station. This project was fully funded through a Regional Center Planning Grant.
8. Design is progressing for the reconstruction of the Route 28 Pump station. The equipment at this PS has reached the terminus of its useful life and must be replaced.
9. Design is progressing for improvements to the sanitary sewer system on Old York Road and Orlando Drive. This area is prone to surcharge from river flooding. This project is intended to relieve backwater infiltration to the low lying sewer connections. This project is fully funded by CDBG grant money.
10. The Borough was the recipient of the Complete Streets Grant from North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority for towns to plan the reconstructions of street for pedestrians and bicyclists. We are one of 15 municipalities in New Jersey to be awarded this grant. By having this policy in place we are ranked higher than other towns that have not adopted a plan and we are more likely to receive future grants from NJTPA.

Work is presently proceeding with security improvements to the Municipal Building. These improvements coincide with the transfer of Police Dispatch Duties to Somerset County Dispatch. The security improvements will enable partial and full lock down of the building. We anticipated moving over to County dispatch by January 1st. The entire configuration of the interior of the Police Department is in the process of being completed. Major items that needed to be addressed for the migration to County Dispatch were the purchase of new police radios and we began operating on the Somerset County Radio trunking system in September 2011. Our police department continues to be a proactive organization that is community oriented. A bike rodeo was sponsored by the PD in June and National Night Out was held at the

Washington School Field in August. Foot patrols continue as did bike patrols is the warmer weather.

I would be remiss, if at this point, I did not mention and commend the outstanding work that our Public Works Department, our Fire Department, and Office of Emergency Management did during Hurricane Irene in August. Hurricane Irene caused catastrophic damage to our Public Works Garage. Our DPW not only worked day and night to clean up their situation but also continued to do the day to day work that you expect from them. Just when they were finally getting everything back in order we were hit by a freak Halloween snow storm which devastated some areas of town with trees and power lines down. Again, out they went to take care of the necessities while still doing their day to day jobs. Our Fire department must have pumped out nearly half the basements in town. It seemed as if we had three or four different Fire departments because you saw them all over town at the same time. Emergency Management led by Bob Lisa, whom I might mention is a volunteer, did an outstanding job of keeping lines of communication open between the PD, FD, DPW, and the Mayor and also sending out necessary NIXLE messages to keep the public informed.

As we embark on 2012, budgetary items are foremost in our minds. We will continue to tighten our belts and continue to be as fiscally prudent as possible. We are slowly beginning to overcome the “we’ve always done it that way” mindset and, as a municipality, we must begin to look beyond our municipal boundaries in order to preserve the services you’ve come to expect. If that means more shared services or inter-local agreements then we will do that. One new policy adopted this past year was that we set our capital budget before our operating budget and we will continue to do our budget in that way. One can only assume that the 2% budget cap will remain for this coming year. I commend all departments for the budget cuts that they made last year.

President Reagan said that “America is too great for small dreams.” Well, I am going to paraphrase his saying and say “Raritan is too great for small dreams.” The Bloustein School of Public Policy and Planning has been working with the borough and the Economic Development Committee on a concept plan for our historic Nevuis Street Bridge and the waterfront in general. The river was the focal point of our community years ago with all the mills and factories along its bank and it should and will become the focal point again for us. We are the northern terminus into Duke Farms Foundation and we need to take advantage of that. DFF is anticipating hundreds of thousands of visitors to the property once it’s renovated and we should take advantage of the trade and commerce that that many people will bring to our area. We can have just as much to offer as any town along the Delaware.

No community can function without its volunteers and we are grateful for their service to our town. It is their altruistic desire to serve their community which compels them to public service.

They give their time and talents to help plan our community and preserve our quality of life. This year for the first time we honored a husband and wife. Pat and Katherine Mastice were honored as the 2011 Nicholas Esposito Volunteers of the Year. Congratulations to Pat and Katherine and the sincere thanks from the community.

Abraham Lincoln said that "I like to see a man proud of the place in which he lives. I like to see a man live so that his place will be proud of him". I know that each and every one of the Council members shares that sentiment with me. We are here at your service. Community must come first. Effective government represents diverse opinions and works toward informed, conscientious decisions and compromises for the good of the order and not personal gain or self aggrandizement. We are here to make Raritan the best it can be and the finest community in Somerset County and the State of New Jersey.

In the four plus one year of this administration we have seen the following accomplishments:

1. A newly designed website that is still being redesigned and fine tuned.
2. A bi-annual newsletter that is transmitted electronically and by hard copy here and at the Library.
3. Recognition of our volunteers with an annual award and a buffet dinner with a true "Taste of Raritan" compliments of our fine restaurants.
4. Youth on Main Street...a group of high school aged people doing community service projects.
5. Economic Development Committee to encourage business and make Raritan a business friendly community.
6. Cultural and Historic Committee which has really made its mark on town with videotaped oral histories discussions with our older residents. They also sponsored the Warren G. Harding historical re-enactor last September at the library.
7. First combined Council meeting with Somerville Borough to discuss shared services.
8. Establishment of a Communications Committee comprised of one member each of the Raritan Council, Bridgewater Council, and the Board of Education to foster open dialog between the three entities.

It has been very gratifying to work with so many dedicated and enthusiastic people. What does the future hold? I would like to anticipate that in the next four years we will have a new area of commerce along the new smoothly paved Orlando Drive. I would like us to have a market similar to Rice's Market in Pennsylvania operating along Orlando Drive during the warm weather. I'd like to see the castle near the Nevius Street Bridge operating as a visitor's center and borough museum. I'd hope that we now have a new focal center for our community and the riverfront is now a major tourist attraction. We can with your help accomplish those objectives.

We would like to welcome back to council Denise Carra and welcome our newest councilmember Don Tozzi. Thank you for your commitment to our town. I would also like to thank Paul Girdali, Anthony Soriano, Greg Lobell and Stefanie Gara for their help and commitment to making Raritan a great place to live and work. You have an extraordinary group of talented people on the Council who are eager to get down to business and continue to move Raritan forward.

May you and your loved ones enjoy good health and happiness in this New Year. Please God Bless all our young men and women in our armed services wherever they may be. Keep them safe and return them quickly to their families. God Bless Raritan and God Bless America.