## STATEMENT OF COUNCIL WOMAN HEATHER HOWARD PRINCETON COUNCIL REORGANIZATION MEETING JANUARY 4, 2016

I am honored to be here starting another term on the Princeton Council and want to thank all the voters of Princeton for their engagement in the political process. We are blessed to have such a thoughtful community of engaged residents who give of their time and experience to make this town like no other.

I also want to thank my colleagues for their hard work – it's a pleasure serving with you. In particular, I want to congratulate Lance, with whom I had the good fortune to run for re-election this year. I know that with his deep roots in the community and strong connections to our staff, he is the right person to fill Bernie Miller's shoes as our next Council President. Thank you, Bernie, for all your hard work, and for your wise counsel, good humor, and not least, time-keeping skills. I also want to thank Mayor Lempert for her continued leadership and vision for a vibrant and sustainable Princeton.

We are honored to have many distinguished guests here in the audience – former mayors, county and state representatives, and of course our wonderful congresswoman, Bonnie Watson Coleman. But personally, I was most proud to have my family swear me in, and thank Hunter and Nate for their unwavering support.

The mayor has already outlined many of the accomplishments of 2015, so looking ahead to 2016, I would just like to highlight a few priorities.

## **Public Safety**

In the area of public safety, we are so fortunate to have Chief Nick Sutter leading the department. I noted last year that the department had really turned a corner, and in 2015 the department continued to excel. For example, the department collaborated with many stakeholders in developing a strategic plan that maps the future for the force, with an emphasis on data driven enforcement and an enhanced focus on traffic safety and community engagement. While this year law enforcement was in the news almost daily over questions about tactics and strained relations with the communities they serve, in Princeton our department continues to focus on strengthening relations with all members of our community, making us all safer. And, finally, in a proud moment, we swore in six new officers, who represent the very bright future of the department.

## **Board of Health**

Princeton has long been a leader in promoting a healthy community, and 2015 was no exception. The Board of Health enacted a landmark ordinance to raise the tobacco age of sale to 21. This will

help prevent young people from initiating smoking, the number one preventable cause of death. We were able to save the WIC clinic, preserving vital services for moms and families. Under the direction of our terrific health officer, Jeff Grosser, we completed a strategic planning process. And, we are looking forward to completing the process for accreditation by the end of 2016, striving to be the first health department in Mercer County to do so. Throughout the year we were guided in these and other efforts by Dr. Charles Rojer, a tremendous leader and colleague whose loss we continue to mourn.

## **Human Services Commission**

Princeton has a long history of commitment to our most vulnerable residents, and in 2015, the Human Services Commission and our wonderful director, Elisa Neira, completed a community needs assessment. That report documented the significant needs in our community and is helping to guide our programming. We continue to partner with the school district to address the food security needs of children in our community. We have also seen our efforts to address wage theft result in significant wage recoupments for workers, and we have deepened collaborations with the police department to strengthen ties to our diverse communities. Looking ahead, I'm excited about continuing our work on immigration issues and implementing the Commission's proposal to create a Civil Rights Commission.

In closing, I am certain that 2016 will be another exciting year of opportunities and challenges for Princeton. I am proud to have been elected to serve another term and look forward to working with my colleagues, the talented municipal staff, and the many dedicated volunteers who serve on our boards and commissions, to ensure that we are providing the most effective, efficient and inclusive government.