

## LEMPERT – REORG SPEECH 1.5.15

Last year at this time, we marked the one year anniversary of consolidation. Snow was falling, and we were headed into one of the worst winters in memory – the Polar Vortex! We had more than 40 inches of snow, mass power outages, school cancelations, and road salt shortages up and down the East Coast. The relentlessness of the storms tested our collective mettle and the endurance of our staff. Police, public works, fire and EMS, engineering, recreation, and administration worked around the clock to clear the streets, reopen roads, and keep everyone safe. We made good use of our emergency notification system to keep residents informed. And as with superstorm Sandy, we partnered with the library, clergy association, schools and University to ensure everyone had a place to recharge and get warm. Together, we weathered the storm.

In the fall, our emergency management director, Bob Gregory, hosted officials from FEMA, who led staff and elected officials through a series of training exercises. Today, we stand even more resilient and prepared than before, and we are unquestionably better positioned to deal with severe snowstorms as a consolidated community working as one.

The bringing together of the former Borough and Township has helped put Princeton on the map as a model municipality. This past November, the New Jersey League of Municipalities awarded

Princeton with the prestigious Innovation in Governance Award for our successful implementation of consolidation. Our reconstitution as a single government continues to pay dividends – and has helped us to reshape ourselves as a more affordable, diverse, and sustainable community. Our boldness in breaking new ground goes beyond consolidation, and Princeton has received statewide, national, and even international recognition in 2014 for many of our innovative initiatives.

Sustainable Jersey presented Princeton with the 2014 Leadership Award for our strong commitment and dedication to community education and outreach initiatives, including Sustainable Princeton's Great Ideas Breakfasts and the Sustainable Leadership Awards. Sustainable Jersey also elevated Princeton to silver status, and we now join the top tier of sustainable communities in the state.

We won the 2014 Outstanding Municipal Partner Award in conjunction with Princeton Community Housing for our leadership and commitment to building affordable housing, presented by the Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey.

We won a NJ Smart Workplaces Gold Award for our summer Flextime program, awarded by Greater Mercer TMA.

Our fabulous municipal engineer, Bob Kiser, was named Government Engineer of the Year by the Central Jersey branch of the American Society of Civil Engineers.

Princeton was even recognized as a leader in the international arena – as we were the first municipality in the state to be designated by the World Health Organization as an Age Friendly Community for our walkability, available transportation options, variety of housing choices, and access to social interactions.

We emerged as a leading community on other fronts as well. The Health and Human Services Departments teamed up with the public library to put together workshops to educate residents about their options under the Affordable Care Act, and facilitate health insurance sign ups in the newly created marketplace. These efforts were held up as a model at a national health care conference in Washington DC.

In 2014, we officially ushered in a new era for our police department with the promotion of Nick Sutter to Chief. Under his leadership, our police department has been recognized several times over this year for their professionalism and exemplary community outreach efforts. The department earned its accreditation in March, not an easy feat under normal circumstances, and all the more remarkable given the dramatic changes brought on by consolidation. The combined police department has truly become better than the sum of its parts. We saw during the recent protests over the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner a profound and earned respect between our officers and the community they serve, and I have received many unsolicited emails

and calls praising the work of our officers and communicating to me a collective pride that they serve as the face of our town.

The police department has made tremendous strides. Back in 2013, as one of their first initiatives, the newly formed Safe Neighborhoods Unit conducted a survey on the community's expectations of the department. 500 residents responded, but despite significant outreach, including going door to door and translating the survey into Spanish, the police received no responses at all from our Latino community. The department took that as a wake up call and redoubled their efforts at outreach, hosting a series of community meetings led by Spanish-speaking officers. Chief Sutter issued a directive, clarifying that our local police do not enforce federal immigration laws and can assist immigrant members of the community without being concerned about their documentation. The police, in conjunction with the Human Services Department, also stepped up their enforcement of wage theft, a crime that surfaced as a major problem during the community meetings as immigrants are often targeted.

This summer, thanks to the efforts of Councilwoman Howard, Human Services, and the Public Works Department, the Princeton Council strengthened our stance against wage theft by passing an ordinance regulating landscaper registration. 20 Latino residents came to the public hearing, and several testified about their experiences. It was a powerful moment – members of our community who had previously

felt afraid to speak now felt empowered to participate in the democratic process and make their voices heard.

Our police department's efforts at outreach were featured by the NJ League of Municipalities at its annual conference and praised by members of the Obama administration.

We wouldn't be receiving any of these accolades or be able to function at a high level day to day without the hard work of our exceptional staff. I wanted to take a moment to recognize some of the changing faces this past year. In 2014 we said goodbye to several longtime employees. Bill Urian – who worked in the public works department for Princeton Borough and then the consolidated municipality for a total of 30 years; Director of Public Works Wayne Carr, who retired after 25 years; Greg O'Neil, our town arborist; Christine Lewandoski, historic preservation director, who retired after 25 years; Sgt. Mike Bender, Sgt. Joann Malta, and Sgt. Mike Cifelli; and of course, Bob Bruschi, who served as administrator of the former Borough and saw us through the critical transition year and the first two years of consolidation. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to each one of them for their dedication to our community.

We are thrilled to welcome several new faces. Marc Dashield, our new administrator, came to us from Montclair at the end of October, and has hit the ground running.

Jeff Grosser, our new health officer, had barely set up his new office when he was faced with handling New Jersey's first Ebola quarantine.

With the size of the active police force dipping below 50, we hired the first new police officers of the consolidated department: Dashawn Cribb and Donald Mathews. We also welcomed another new officer, who has in a short time already become one of the most beloved, and definitely the furriest member of the force – K9 officer Harris.

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Now that it's been two years since we consolidated, it seems an appropriate time to ask: Are we realizing cost savings? Have we improved services? Do we have a more responsive government? In short, is consolidation working? You might guess what my answers are, but I'll take the questions one-by-one:

Have we realized cost savings? Yes! We've shrunk the size of our staff from 235 employees in 2011 down to 208. If you look around, nearly every other Mercer County municipality has raised its tax rate and most have imposed double-digit increases since 2010. In contrast, Princeton actually has a *lower* municipal tax rate than we did 5 years ago. Collectively, Princeton residents paid over \$500 thousand less in municipal taxes in 2014 than in 2008. This past year, with the help of the Citizens Finance Advisory Committee, the Princeton Council adopted policies on debt service and fund balance levels, developed a long-term capital plan, and maintained our AAA bond rating. Council President Bernie Miller, working with Councilman

Patrick Simon, led successful negotiations with Princeton University for a seven-year agreement totaling over \$21 million dollars. All of these efforts work to stabilize our finances and cushion the current and future tax burden on our residents.

Have we improved services under consolidation? Yes! Even with lower municipal taxes, we've extended residential trash pick up across the entire town. We've increased police services including community policing and traffic enforcement despite having a smaller force.

As a single municipality, we have been better able to harness technology to enhance the services we provide to residents, improve communication, and be more transparent. We now use the phone notification system for leaf and brush pick up announcements. Municipal job openings are now posted on the website for all to see. We've created a public dashboard to provide information and data to the public in an easy-to-read format.

In September we launched Access Princeton, a one-stop call center for all municipal inquiries. It's a transformative technology that assists the town in providing superior service to residents by making it easy to connect to the government-- whether it's to report a pothole or to ask how to get a copy of your marriage license or anything in between. Residents can report issues directly to the call center by phone, or by email or mobile app. In November and December alone,

739 complaints were logged, and 732 of them have been resolved. It's a service that neither the former Township nor Borough would have had the available resources to provide, but with consolidation, we were easily able to convert the vacant Borough police dispatch space into the new Access Princeton call center. Special thanks goes to Deputy Administrator Kathy Monzo for conceiving of and spearheading this great new service, to Christina Iliff and Deb Rodgers for continuing to find ways to improve upon it, and to all the residents who have discovered and are using the service to help make our community cleaner, safer and better.

Do we have a more responsive government? Yes! We are more responsive and better positioned to partner with other community institutions to find efficiencies and improve service. The school district, library and municipality hired a joint networking specialist at a savings to all three institutions. The schools, library and town also formed an energy working group in 2014 to jointly explore energy savings and renewables. In 2015, we expect to issue a request for proposals to install a solar array farm on the old River Road landfill site, making productive use of otherwise unusable land. And just last month, Sustainable Jersey awarded Sustainable Princeton a \$35,000 grant to help our business community save money by saving on energy costs.

As another sign of strengthened community relationships, the municipality signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Princeton First Aid and Rescue Squad. The squad will build its much-



needed new headquarters at the site of the former Township's public works facilities, which had been sitting dormant. In exchange, the town will acquire the squad's existing buildings and property near the Princeton Shopping Center for possible use for affordable housing.

There was a fear that with consolidation we'd lose our identity, compromise our values and fail to support the downtown. If anything, as one community, we are a stronger voice for our values and have been able to deploy extra resources for center of town improvements.

We've worked with Sustainable Princeton to bring long-overdue recycling containers to Nassau Street. We will continue to add capacity in 2015 and at the same time work together with Mercer County, local businesses and landlords to facilitate recycling by shops and downtown apartment dwellers. Meanwhile, Public Works has stepped up its efforts to beautify the central business district and now sweeps up dirt and debris twice a week.

Moore Street, Vandeventer, Park Place and Branch Alley underwent major reconstruction work – with new sewers, waterlines, sidewalks and roads. The engineering department also oversaw the delicate reconstruction of historic Edgehill Road.

In 2012, the former Borough and Township both adopted Complete Streets policies, with commitments to make our streets safe for all users, pedestrians and bicyclists included, not just cars and trucks.

And in 2014 we started to implement “complete streets” through proposals for the first ever bike lanes close to center of town – proposals that demonstrate a real commitment to creating a more bikable, walkable community.

We have taken a strong stand in support of fundamental issues like affordable housing. Princeton has had a long, proud history of building affordable housing, dating back to the 1930s with the development of Franklin and Maple Terrace and the formation of the Borough Housing Authority. However, in 2014, New Jersey’s Council on Affordable Housing told Princeton we would have zero obligation to build more affordable housing, despite the needs of hundreds of our residents whose names fill the current waiting lists. Council rightly objected. We still await updated numbers and rules from the state, but in the meantime, we continue our commitment. In 2015, Council President Miller and Councilmembers Liverman and Crumiller, along with the rest of the Affordable Housing Task Force, will identify opportunities for converting underused publically owned properties into sites for affordable housing. Staying true to our values by investing in affordable housing is essential to maintaining and enhancing Princeton's ethnic and economic diversity, and underscores our efforts to be a welcoming community for all.

In addition, Council took action to prioritize quality of life for our residents by preserving the character of our neighborhoods. Last month Council passed an hours of operation ordinance, limiting

middle of the night operating hours for stores located next to homes in residential zones.

Is consolidation working? Yes! But we still have work to do.

Tomorrow night at 6pm we will gather here again to sort out our goals and priorities for the coming year. This is an energetic Council and we will likely have another full plate. In addition to some of the ongoing projects I've mentioned, in 2015 we will be:

- Continuing our discussion of the Witherspoon Street corridor and our desire to retain its character.
- Assessing the facility needs of our Fire Department.
- Working with the Police Department on a strategic plan
- Continuing with the ordinance harmonization process – thanks to Council President Miller, and Councilwomen Jo Butler and Jenny Crumiller for their initial drafting of the ordinances
- Working with Princeton University as they develop their new campus plan
- Continuing to look for ways to innovate and use technology to help us do our jobs better. This April, we'll be teaming up with the library and Tiger Labs for Princeton's first ever municipal hackathon. This is a call to all techies of all ages to come out for an all nighter to work on harnessing technology to address municipal challenges.

In looking ahead to 2015, I'd be remiss not to look back at some of the notable people Princeton lost in 2014, men and women who

helped to shape our community and touched many of our lives: I wanted to acknowledge a few of them this evening. Paul Sigmund, beloved professor and husband of former Mayor Barbara Boggs Sigmund; women and children's advocate and exceptional friend, Liz Erickson, Len Newton, who was instrumental in the fight for interracial housing; Ted Vial, who helped create Princeton Community Housing; social justice advocate Ann Yasuhara; community volunteer Penny Baskerville. And Princeton's extraordinary philanthropist, Bill Scheide. Princeton is a wonderful community because of the truly remarkable people who call this town home and are willing to devote their time, their money and their talents to making our community even better and stronger.

I'll conclude my remarks tonight with the story of another person who is dedicating herself to our community and the special store she opened this year. I had the honor of cutting the ribbon for a new business – a beauty salon on Leigh Avenue – with a unique bit of history. Doris Burrel, a name familiar to many Princeton old timers, ran a hair salon out the exact same location for four decades. Now the building is back in the family, and again open as a hair and beauty salon. Doris' granddaughter, Najwa Comeau, is the co-owner and it's called Makeovers Studio Salon. She is carrying on the legacy of her grandmother, but with her own particular spin.

We can all take inspiration from this story as we take stock of where we as a community have come from, the dramatic changes to our government brought on by consolidation, and where we're heading

now. Like Najwa Comeau reclaiming her grandmother's shop, we should aim to honor Princeton's history and maintain our unique and wonderful identity, while making over our community into a better version of itself – more affordable, sustainable, and innovative.

Of course, we may face discord; 2014 certainly had its share. We have weathered those storms and we have moved on. I am ready and eager to embrace all the challenges and opportunities of the coming year – and look forward to working with my colleagues on Council, the staff, our volunteers, and the broader community to make Princeton a shining example of good government serving an exceptional community.