

Remarks by Bernie Miller
Municipality of Princeton Reorganization Meeting
4 Jan 2017

Thank you madam mayor.

I'll begin with a brief announcement ----- just in case any of you were wondering, ----- I have not yet been asked to join the Trump administration.

This annual reorganization meeting gives those of us who are your representatives an opportunity to look into the rear view mirror and summarize what we believe that we have accomplished. We can then look forward and see what we believe the challenges are that we face as a community in the future. My colleagues will do an excellent job of summarizing what we as an elected body have achieved in the four years that we have been a municipality. They will also identify the major challenges that they believe we face in the future our community. In the next few minutes I'd like to follow a different script. What I will address in the time allotted to me are four areas that I believe will require action by council in 2017 if we are to fulfill our responsibility to those who have put their faith in us by electing us to office. Looking forward is always accompanied by a degree of uncertainty. Some of what I'll describe is far enough along that it can be seen with certainty. But most of it is less certain and will require council act to appropriate the funds to get the job done.

In the highly certain category are the municipality's first two alternative energy projects. I can report that our initiative to build a solar array plant on the closed municipal landfill on River Road will have received all of its permits by the end of this month, and we will have a virtual and symbolic ground breaking this spring. It will be virtual as I'm sure that the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection would not look kindly on us piercing the cap that is over this closed brown field site. When it is operational, the River Road solar plant will provide more than 30% of the peak electricity needs of the Stoney Brook Regional Sewage Authority at a cost that is less than what the authority now pays for electricity and will also produce a small revenue stream for the municipality. Our second such project, a solar array plant over the top deck of the municipal garage, will go out for bids this spring and the bids will determine the feasibility of the project. If built, this

project will generate about 30% of the peak electricity demand of the Princeton Public Library at a cost that is less than that now paid by the library, as well as provide a highly visible demonstration of sustainability in the heart of our downtown. Once the bids have been received it will be up to council to determine if the garage solar project is feasible and should be built.

The needs of our Public Works Department have been discussed and studied by our governing bodies going back to the time well before consolidation and yet they are still not met. Over the last decade or longer, the governing bodies of this municipality have commissioned many studies on the need for a new Public Works facility. Yet, unlike our neighbors, we continue to operate our Public Works Department out of two facilities that are obsolete and inadequate for the job. The construction of a new Public Works facility has been frustrated by the high cost of building a new facility and our inability to find a suitable location. The most recent study by our staff recommended that the municipality no longer continue to search for a suitable site for a new Public Works facility, and that the municipality move ahead with the upgrading of our existing John Street and Harrison Street Public Works facilities to correct the deficiencies in these two facilities at an estimated cost of about \$1.8 million. This recommendation was endorsed by the Public Works Committee of council.

Continuing with the needs of our Public Works Department, each year council approves the purchase of specialized and expensive equipment for use by our Public Works Department. For example, council recently approved the purchase of two new specialized public works vehicles costing over \$300,000. Unlike nearby municipalities, Princeton does not have the facilities to store this high value equipment when it is not in use, and the useful life of the equipment is reduced by exposure to the elements. For years we have discussed the need for a facility to store our out of season equipment and have determined that a large, partially heated equipment storage shed could be built on the municipal River Road property for about \$2.6 million. This facility could extend the life of our high value equipment and pay for itself in savings over the life of the building. Council has heard these arguments before but has directed the Public Works Department to further study the cost and has not appropriated the funds needed to construct the out of season storage equipment shed.

The need for an out of season storage building and the need to correct the deficiencies in our John and Harrison Street Public Works facilities is clear. It is now up to council to provide the leadership and the funding to upgrade our existing Public Works facilities and construct an out of season equipment storage building in 2017.

As we are all aware by now, the Emerald Ash Borer has been found in Princeton, and this infestation will probably result in the loss of all of our Ash trees over the next decade. Our Princeton Shade Tree Commission, working with our municipal Arborist, and aided by a few student volunteers, have done an outstanding job of identifying the Ash trees in the municipal right of way and have started the job of identifying the Ash trees adjacent to walkways and trails in our municipal parks. The Shade Tree Commission will also prioritize the Ash trees in the right of way for removal or treatment based on their size, age and state of health. Ash trees are notorious for drying out and being a hazard after they die. It will be the job of council to appropriate the funds for the removal of those trees in the municipal right of way in order that they will not constitute a hazard to pedestrians and vehicles.

During the coming year there will be much competition for the attention of council. I have identified four areas where I believe action must be taken by council in 2017. As always there is uncertainty with anything that requires the commitment of funds by council. For this reason, I ask my fellow members of council to remove this uncertainty and provide the funding to move these projects ahead in 2017.

I would like to close with one thing that I can say with certainty. ----- I will not be a candidate for re-election to council in November 2017. When I leave office on December 31st 2017, it will have been an honor to have served the citizens of Princeton as your representative to local government for more than 15 years. I have never viewed this as a career, but as a vocation, and I thank you for giving me the privilege of doing it.