

## WANAQUE MAYOR'S 2013 NEW YEARS ADDRESS

Good evening and Happy New Year. Welcome to the annual reorganization meeting of the Wanaque Mayor and Council.

I would like to start by remembering Councilman George Theoharous who passed away suddenly last March. George was serving in his 28<sup>th</sup> consecutive year on the Wanaque Council, which included 10 years as Council President. In 2010 he was inducted into the New Jersey League of Municipalities Hall of Fame for his service to Wanaque. George was an integral member of our governing body and he will be missed. At our January 2013 Council Meeting I will be presenting a resolution to the Council to name the park near the intersection of Conklingtown and Cannonball Roads in honor of Councilman Theoharous.

I would like to congratulate Councilman Tom Balunis on his re-election to the Council. Tom is starting his 13<sup>th</sup> year on the Council and has continued to work hard for our community. I would also like to congratulate Councilman Eric Willse on his first election to the Council. Eric was appointed to the Council last year to fill the remainder of Councilman Theoharous' term. He has done an excellent job in his short term on the Council and we look forward to utilizing his talents over the next three years.

As of January 1, 2013, Wanaque is now in the 11<sup>th</sup> Congressional District. Our new Congressman Rodney Frelinghuysen was scheduled to be here tonight. However, he is still in Washington doing his job and dealing with the House vote on the fiscal cliff. Congressman Frelinghuysen had visited Wanaque several times last year and we look forward to working with him in the future. He expressed his regrets at not being able to attend tonight.

I would like to thank Judge Joseph Perconti for being here tonight on short notice to swear in our Councilmen.

In December we were all shocked at the senseless killing of 6 teachers and 20 small children by a deranged individual in Newtown, CT. Our prayers are with the parents, relatives, survivors, first responders and all those directly affected. Here in Wanaque we have been very proactive regarding a police presence in and around our

schools. In 2000, Wanaque was the first Municipality in Passaic County to implement a School Resource Officer program in both Lakeland Regional High School and in our grammar schools. We have continued to maintain this program in spite of budget restrictions. In addition, our police department maintains patrols in the vicinity of our schools on an ongoing basis. Protecting our children is a top priority.

Last year I spoke of our intentions to proceed with our vision of a new municipal building to replace the current 110 year old building which is in need of major repairs and which does not conform to numerous federal and state mandates, including the Americans with Disabilities Act. The plan last January was to move the Municipal and Police offices to a temporary location and to construct the new Town Hall on the current site. Subsequently, two properties just to the north of Borough Hall became available. The acquisition price of these properties approximated the relocation costs. As a result, these properties were acquired which will enable the new Town Hall to be constructed along Ringwood avenue just north of the current facility. We will maintain our Municipal and Police offices in the current building until the new building is completed. Upon completion the offices will be moved into the new building and the old building will be demolished and made into a parking lot. During 2012, we hired an architect and formed a committee to complete the design of the new building. After a long tedious process, the plan was presented to the public at both the December Planning Board and Town Council meetings. The plan was approved at both meetings and the architect is in the process of preparing the bid specifications for February 2013. We anticipate beginning construction in mid 2013 with completion in 2014. At the December Council meeting the Economic Development Consultant estimated the annual cost of the new building to be approximately \$60 per homeowner when complete. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the other members of the committee: Councilman Cortellessa, Councilman Willse, Administrator Tom Carroll, Building Inspector Jeff Brusco, Chief Reno, Captain Norton, Captain Fackina, Lieutenant Kronyak, Economic Development Consultant Bob Benecke, and Borough Planner Ken Albert.

Phase III of the Ringwood Avenue reconstruction project continued in 2012 and is expected to be completed in 2013. This is a joint project with Passaic County that includes new sidewalks and curbs, road resurfacing and a new water main from Father Hayes Drive north to the Ringwood border. During 2012 the road reconstruction was completed up to Railroad Avenue and the water main was completed past Conklintown Road. The project is

scheduled to start up again in the spring and be completed by September 2013. The ability to detour some traffic on side streets north of Railroad Avenue should alleviate the heavy congestion on Ringwood Avenue which was encountered during 2012.

In late October New Jersey was struck by Hurricane Sandy. There was extensive damage throughout the entire state. In Wanaque, a number of downed trees caused the entire town to lose electrical power. Thanks to the efforts of our Emergency Management team and the Wanaque Police Department working closely with JCP&L, power was restored to over 95% of our homes within 5 days and the balance of the homes were restored within 10 days making Wanaque one of the first communities in the JCP&L service area to be fully restored. While it was a difficult period and no one likes being without power, we were much more fortunate than those in Moonachie or Little Ferry in Bergen County or those communities at the Jersey shore. I would also like to complement our road department which did an excellent job of quickly picking up the debris created by Sandy. They worked hard to get most of the brush, tree limbs and grass picked up before Thanksgiving.

Before the hurricane hit we were scheduled to send two retired police vehicles and a retired fire department SUV to auction. After seeing the destruction caused by the hurricane, the Council decided to donate these vehicles to three of the towns hit hardest by the storm. Both Moonachie in Bergen County and Union Beach in Monmouth County lost over half of their police vehicles due to flooding. A 2006 police cruiser was delivered to Moonachie in late December and a 2001 police cruiser is scheduled to be delivered to Union Beach next week. The fire department SUV is being donated to Sea Girt in Monmouth County.

The 2012 road resurfacing program which included Fourth Avenue from Ringwood Avenue to the Boulevard, and portions of Oak, Shady and Elm Streets was scheduled for the first week of November. Due to Hurricane Sandy these projects were temporarily suspended and will be completed in the spring of 2013. The Fourth Avenue reconstruction was primarily funded with state grants.

The townwide revaluation was substantially completed during 2012. The independent firm hired by the borough reassessed every property in town and mailed out letters in late November informing property owners of their new property values. Under state law, these values should represent the fair market value of your property as of October

1, 2012. The revaluation company is currently in the process of reviewing property values with any owners who disagree with the valuations. The company expects to finalize these valuations by the first week of February 2013. If you do not agree with valuation assigned to your property I strongly suggest that you contact the revaluation company immediately.

I would also like to remind everyone that the revaluation is revenue neutral to the Borough. This means that although the increases in property values resulted in some properties paying more taxes and other properties paying less taxes, in aggregate the total amount to be raised by taxes by the Borough of Wanaque does not change. In March 2012, a new 5 year garbage contract was awarded resulting in a \$50,000 per year reduction in costs without reducing services.

On Easter evening 2012, a fire in the center of Haskell destroyed two buildings and rendered two others in need of repair. Quick action by the Wanaque Fire Department and fire departments from several surrounding towns prevented the entire block from burning. The redevelopment zoning for this area was finalized soon after and we are actively seeking a developer to take on this redevelopment project.

The candle factory redevelopment project was back before the Planning Board in 2012. The new owner of this project agreed to reduce the number of units from 114 to 88 in exchange for removing the age restriction on this project in accordance with the legislation signed by former Governor Corzine before he left office. The new developer has renamed this project "Parkside at Wanaque" which is now under construction. A sales office has been opened on Route 23 in Pompton Plains and they are taking deposits on units. The developer anticipates having the first units ready for occupancy in the fall of 2013. This project should result in a \$20,000,000 ratable when completed.

In December 2012, the borough began the combination of the water and sewer billings which will result in the cost savings of not having to mail and process over 12,000 bills on an annual basis. The Borough has been able to maintain the current sewer rate by eliminating the local sewer authority and combining services with other Borough operations. Plans are currently underway to replace the 80 year old sewer lines and connections on Monroe Street,

Jackson Street and Jefferson Street. This project is partially funded by a \$250,000 grant obtained from the Passaic County Community Development Block Grant program.

In December 2012, the Borough completed the purchase of the property at 10 Warren Hagstrom Boulevard and entered in an agreement with the United Way of Bergen County for the construction of a special need housing facility. The Municipality utilized dedicated funds from the state housing trust fund for this purchase. These funds did not come out of the Municipal tax levy.

We are hard at work preparing the 2013 budget which will again be within the 2% CAP. Unfortunately, we continue to see increases in pension and health benefit costs which are outside the CAP

In closing, I would like to thank the Council members, all of our Borough employees, police, volunteers, veterans, and friends who have worked hard to make 2012 a successful year. We have plenty of work ahead of us in 2013 and with your help, we can keep Wanaque moving forward. I would also like to thank my wife, Marie and my family for their continued support in allowing me to be Mayor of this great town. Thank you and God Bless America