

March 4, 2020

Dear Frelinghuysen Resident:

While I was selected Mayor at this year's Township Committee reorganization meeting, I understand many of you may not know me. I've been on the Township Committee since 2012, and served as Deputy Mayor under Mayor Kuhn for two years and as Deputy Mayor under Mayor Desirdero for three years. I also have served on the Township Land Use Board since 2012. I was first appointed to the then Township Zoning Board of Adjustment in 2000 by then Mayor Charles Rydell, and ultimately became Chairman of the Zoning Board until my election to the Township Committee in 2012. Otherwise, I have been a practicing attorney for more than thirty years. Part of my practice is devoted to municipality, zoning, and government related issues.

I've resided in Frelinghuysen since 1997 with my wife Carolyn, who has lived in Frelinghuysen since the mid-1970s with her family. She attended the Frelinghuysen Elementary School and North Warren Regional High School, and was the former President of the Frelinghuysen School PTO. Her mother still lives in the Township. I have two children who attended the Frelinghuysen Elementary School and attend North Warren Regional High School. My family are parishioners at St. Jude's church in Blairstown.

The Township Committee wishes to commend all of the volunteers in our Township who participate in the various committees, commissions and events, as well as our Township employees. Government in 2020 is not what government was twenty years ago. It has become increasingly complex and challenging. We deal with an ever growing number of unfunded mandates imposed by the State and Federal governments, as well as government and environmental restrictions, regulations and requirements (which don't apply to the private sector), ethical requirements, potential legal liability, transparency requirements, and less and less state aid. In that vein, our dedicated Clerk, Donna Zilberfarb, has to attend continuing education classes and continuously keep updated on the new regulations and laws affecting the Township and municipal clerks.

The public should be aware that Township Committee members all spend significant personal time on Township business. Even in a relatively small town like Frelinghuysen there is much to do. Many Committee members spend time on weekends or take time off from work to attend meetings or continuing education classes on governance, municipal budgeting, appropriations, hiring, and human relations. While on the Township Committee every member has ancillary tasks. For example, myself and former Mayor Desirderio also sit on the Land Use Board. Former Mayor Desirderio also serves on the Environmental Commission. Former Mayor Boynton is the Director of Public Works and the Director of Building and Grounds, as well as the Boards of Education liaison and State Police liaison. Committeeman Todd McPeek, who has been involved in recreation activities in the Township almost since their inception, serves on the Recreation Committee together with Deputy Mayor Keith Ramos who has been involved in Township recreation for several years. Deputy Mayor Ramos also serves on the Financial Subcommittee, together with myself, and on the Open Space Committee. Committeeman McPeek also serves on the Personnel Subcommittee, as well as the Municipal Alliance, and the Farmland Preservation Committee. In addition to the Committee's regular meetings, sometimes two per month, in January and February the Township Committee will hold a series of additional public meetings to formulate the 2020 budget. These are just a few of the many chores that the Committeemen take-on

and I commend each and every one of them for the substantial time and effort devoted to Township duties.

Our five person Committee is the rule rather than the exception in New Jersey. The Township went from a three person Committee to a five person Committee after a Township-wide referendum in the early 2000s. The vast majority of surrounding Townships such as Allamuchy, Liberty, Independence, Green, Fredon, Stillwater and Blairstown, share the five person Committee form of government. In my view, a five person Committee permits a better delegation of tasks, diversity of opinion, thought and input, and ease of operation. Under our form of government, as dictated by state law, the Township Committee elects the Mayor at the reorganization meeting in January. I was heartened to see a packed room at this year's reorganization on January 2nd. Since Mayor Rydell's lengthy tenure, it has been an unofficial tradition in our Township that a Mayor serves for a few years. Since I have been on the Committee, Mayor Boynton served two years, Mayor Kuhn served two years and Mayor Desirdero served three years. Our Mayor is an essentially ceremonial position. Generally speaking, the Mayor has no more or less power than any other member of the Committee. As Mayor, among other things, I contribute to setting the agenda at Township Meetings, preside over the meetings, have the power of appointment with the concurrence of the Committee, I can perform marriages, and my vote breaks ties.

Financial challenges are always a problem and will continue to be going into the future. The State has substantially cut school aid to the North Warren Regional School District. So far this has not resulted in an increased tax burden, but that is not guaranteed into the future. I wrote the Governor to address this issue and never received a response. State aid to municipalities and schools, which used to keep property taxes under control, has ebbed. In connection with road repair, we are increasingly dependent on state grants due to the increased expense of road maintenance, the engineering design costs which are required to obtain these grants, and the hard costs of construction. A particularly stormy winter increases non-capital costs exponentially due to overtime, operational costs, and of course, road salt, and then capital costs are increased the next year due to road repair. This is why, among other things, most southern states have much lower property taxes.

This coming year will offer many challenges for the Committee, including hopefully the final disposition of salt shed issue, a new municipal court agreement, capital funding for road repair and maintenance, funding for the various the volunteer fire and rescue squads that serve the Township, paying down our debt, continued attempts to obtain high-speed internet service for many of our Township residents, holding the line on taxes, among other things. Some of the new things you may notice this year is a repaving of a portion of Greendell Road pursuant to a State grant, a new Township website (necessitated by the fact that it has to be ADA compliant, another unfunded mandate), internet sign-up for recreation activities, and new dugouts at the Township recreation field (which were obtained through private donations). We are also hopeful to get the FFP website up and running again.

The Committee encourages residents to come to Township Committee meetings and voice their concerns. If a resident has a particular issue it wishes to address, we suggest he or she contact the Clerk and be placed on the agenda for a particular meeting. The Township Committee cannot and will not govern by social media. We are required by state law to engage in publically noticed meetings permitting discourse in a public forum open to each and every member of the public. If more than two members of the Committee are on a Facebook string at the same time it may constitute a violation of

the Open Public Meeting Act. Any commentary by a Committee member on social media dealing with public issues could make their social media account subject to the Open Public Records Act. Therefore, most Committeemen will not comment or respond to inquiries on Facebook. We hope you understand that is not for lack of interest, it is merely a best practice.

Lastly, we would ask a favor of our residents. The 2020 census is upon us. It is important that everyone participate in the census. The census affects everything from school aid, local municipal aid, as well as legislative and congressional apportionment. It is therefore important that every resident be counted.

We thank the residents of Frelinghuysen Township for putting their trust in the Committee, and I thank the Committee for placing its trust in me as Mayor for this coming year. We all hope to see some of you at Township Committee meetings and welcome your input.

Sincerely,

Christopher John Stracco, Mayor