

Mayor Liz Lempert's Remarks
2016 Reorganization Meeting

I'll begin with what is likely foremost on everyone's mind – consolidation. Three years ago, Princeton took a giant leap to consolidate the Township and Borough. Today, I'm happy to report that it's working, and working well – in fact, better than expected on many fronts.

The timing is especially significant because the Consolidation Commission predicted that full consolidation would be reached at the end of three years' time. While it's true that most of the nuts and bolts work of merging the two governments is behind us, there is still more to be done. We still have the bulk of our land use ordinances left to harmonize. And we are still paying off some of the one-time transition costs associated with consolidation because these expenses were amortized over five years.

The good news is that the savings from consolidation have met and even exceeded expectations. Last month, the Citizens Finance Advisory Committee delivered a report to Council comparing projected savings based on the 2011 Consolidation Commission Report estimates with actual savings. The report calculated the difference between the 2015 and the combined 2011 salary and benefit budgets, adjusted for inflation. I want to particularly thank Councilman Patrick Simon and the CFAC Chair, Scott Sillars, for their painstaking work in analyzing the numbers. The estimated gross savings from consolidation in 2015 was \$3.92 million. After factoring out expanded services, including trash collection, Access Princeton, and increased IT and Corner House staffing, net savings for the year equaled \$2.77M. That is over \$600,000 more than the Consolidation Commission estimated, and does not include savings in operating expenses, such as the need for only one audit and a single maintenance garage instead of two. It also does not factor in savings on major capital expenses, including the need to only upgrade equipment at one police dispatch center instead of two.

In the coming years, we expect further savings from the police department as personnel in higher rank positions retire and are replaced with entry-level patrol officers.

The consolidation was a massive undertaking by elected officials, municipal staff, and dedicated citizen volunteers. It will forever be a seminal event in our town's history, and has cemented the municipality of Princeton's reputation as a place for government innovation. In fact, this community's incredible spirit of innovation is the theme that unites our recent past and future, and the theme of my address to you this evening

That spirit was perfectly exemplified in Princeton's first civic hackathon this past June. The Code for Princeton Hackathon and the ongoing Hack and Learn nights at the public library have brought together local software developers, designers, and other interested residents, along with municipal staff who have helped provide publicly open data sets to use technology to help improve local government. Together, they've developed innovative solutions for a wide range of municipal issues – from an app that displays election results district by district, to a ride sharing app that makes it easier to carpool, to a local jobs posting app for residents looking for work. Later this month, Code for Princeton's hack night will focus on creating an app that will simplify the process of applying for affordable housing, so that an individual can see what is available without have to visit each of our town's three affordable housing providers.

Along with making information easily accessible to improve the quality of life in our town, this collaboration is helping to change the culture of government by enabling us to work more effectively and creatively with our residents. Across the board, we have made strides in opening the workings of our town to residents. By embracing the amazing talent and expertise we find here, combined with the

generous spirit of volunteerism, wonderful things are happening to improve our community's health and safety, and to make us a more inclusive and sustainable town. I'd like to highlight some of them for you now.

For example, thanks to the work of the Recreation Department with the support of the Recreation Board and Councilwoman Jo Butler, the Community Park Pool set its all time attendance record this summer with over 115,000 visitors. And, though the board cannot take credit for The Bluefish Swim & Dive teams both winning the Princeton Area Swim/Dive Association championships, I wanted to be sure to mention how proud we are of that success, and about the CP Pool being selected to host the 2016 championship meet. It will be the first time Princeton has hosted the event in more than 30 years.

The Princeton Health Department also set a record. It completed its first ever 5-year Strategic Plan in 2015. It also submitted an application for national public health accreditation – and became one of only three health departments in New Jersey to reach this step in the accreditation process.

Meanwhile, The Princeton Board of Health led the way in improving the health of our community by passing a tobacco ordinance raising the purchase age for cigarettes to 21. Councilwoman Heather Howard, the former Health Commissioner for the state of New Jersey, has been instrumental in working with the Board of Health to have Princeton lead the state in these efforts.

In addition, the Health and Human Services Departments teamed up to hold Affordable Care Act workshops to provide information to residents about their health care choices and facilitate sign ups. The workshops received national recognition and were held up as a model for other communities to follow.

The difficult topic of end of life care received special attention in 2015. Princeton was one of only three communities chosen statewide to participate in the

Conversation of a Lifetime pilot project as part of the Mayors Wellness Campaign. The goal is to provide support and encouragement for individuals to document their wishes for end of life care and to share their wishes with loved ones and caregivers.

Sadly, the growing heroin problem required special attention, and Corner House stepped up its services to provide it. As Corner House continued to offer proactive drug education and treatment programs, in 2015, it became licensed to provide Intensive Outpatient Services through the state Drug Court Program. Staff from Corner House, and the Health and Human Services Departments also received training on administering the heroin and opiate overdose drug Nalozone. This proactive stance has helped save lives.

A final highlight of how we were innovative on the health front has to do with transportation. In 2015, when NJ Transit announced it would discontinue the 655 bus line that took Princeton residents to the Hospital, the Human Services and Health Departments were instrumental in working with hospital officials to put an alternate transportation service in place. As a result, the hospital has been providing free taxi rides to and from the hospital to residents who have no other access to transportation and live within a ½ mile radius from the old hospital. Last month, close to 50 rides were provided to residents. Princeton University also stepped up to the plate when the 655 was cancelled, and expanded the service on their Tiger Transit Plainsboro line to add a stop at Palmer Square.

Innovative partnerships have also served to make our town safer. The formal cooperative agreement between our police department and Princeton University's department of public safety continues to produce benefits. The Command Staff from both departments meet monthly. University Public Safety Director Paul Ominsky also meets regularly with Police Chief Nick Sutter. For the first time, officers from the two departments regularly train together. There were several joint trainings in 2015, sponsored by Princeton University, including

trainings on crisis intervention, traffic management, and leadership to improve employee morale, accountability, and performance.

Another partnership – this one with Mercer County Executive Brian Hughes, Bergen County Executive Jim Tedesco, and Edgewater Mayor Michael McPartland – also resulted in a safer Princeton. After the disastrous Bergen County fire at the Avalon Bay complex in Edgewater, these elected officials joined with us and concerned residents for a press conference here in Princeton. As a result, Avalon Bay agreed to voluntarily upgrade the safety measures in their Princeton development by installing masonry firewalls and a more extensive sprinkler system, beyond what is required by state law.

Those are some of the highlights showing how consolidation, innovation and collaboration are making our town healthier and safer.

Next, I want to say how very proud I am that 2015 also ushered in a more inclusive Princeton. The Human Services Department completed a first ever Community Needs Assessment. The report stems from interviews with scores of low and moderate-income families and individuals in Princeton, asking directly about their greatest needs. Already, the report has already sparked collaborations between the Human Services department and local non-profits to better address the needs of our at-risk populations.

Human Services also partnered with local non-profits to identify the needs of Princeton's day laborer and low-wage worker community, build trust, and get them connected to already existing supports

To help low-income and non-English speaking families, the town and School District are collaborating to deliver family support services. For example, we will share a bilingual parent liaison on a 6-month trial basis. The school district will pay the salary, and the liaison will spend some of their time at Monument Hall in

conjunction with our Human Services staff to help link families to all available resources. This past year, the Human Services department was key in helping unaccompanied minors coming from Central America enroll in the Princeton School district, as well as connecting them to different supports and resources in the Princeton community.

As we all know, housing is paramount to a stable household and life. To help more people in town achieve stability, affordable Housing figured prominently in Princeton in 2015. With state regulations on affordable housing in limbo, the Princeton Council and Planning Board were forced, along with hundreds of other municipalities in New Jersey, to take their housing plans to the courts for approval. We submitted a preliminary list of sites in December. In the coming months, the Planning Board will finalize the revisions to the housing element of the Master Plan, and Princeton will file its final plans with the court. Although the plans are being put together within the context of litigation, the Council has attempted to make the process as public as possible, and has sought public input, along with the Planning Board, throughout.

Princeton will present its case in court with the advantage of having a strong, historical commitment to affordable housing that predates state requirements. In the beginning of the year, we approved funds for a new group home on Hilltop to serve adults with disabilities, and worked with residents and Habitat for Humanity to potentially build affordable housing next to the expanded Mary Moss Playground. Before COAH was thrown to the courts, we also had established an Affordable Housing Task Force, led by Council President Bernie Miller, to identify publicly owned properties that could serve as possible affordable housing sites.

Post-consolidation, the Affordable Housing Department has worked closely with the Housing Authority and Princeton Community Housing to help demystify the affordable housing system and help eligible residents to apply. I want to thank Councilman Liverman for his leadership in helping to bring these groups

together. The Affordable Housing Department in partnership with Princeton Community Housing, the Princeton Housing Authority, Housing Initiatives of Princeton and Princeton Human Services, offered a series of financial literacy workshops designed to provide tools for managing financial affairs.

Again, in the spirit of innovation, the University's Merwick Stanworth development will contain 56 units of community affordable housing once it's complete. So far 16 of those units are built and occupied. This is first time community affordable housing has been built as part of a University development, and it has been a terrific way to grow connections between the University and larger community. 2015 saw a physical manifestation of that connection. A new pathway connecting Merwick-Stanworth directly to the YW/YMCA has created a quick, safe cuthrough for pedestrians, and further cements the bond between the Y, the University, and the community.

Alongside constructing more affordable housing, Princeton has become one of the top 10 municipalities in the state of New Jersey for its volume of construction. Princeton's building department has never busier as it was in 2015. It issued 2,171 permits, 103 certificates of occupancy, 1,731 certificates of approval, and completed 10,519 inspections. While this level of activity is a sign of our economic vitality and attractiveness as a place to live and operate a business, it also calls for strong planning and continued effort to protect neighborhood character. With that in mind, in 2105, Princeton's Historic Preservation Commission recommended creating a local Historic District in the Witherspoon Jackson neighborhood, a proposal that Council will be considering in 2016. Council also passed a package of zoning ordinances that aim to eliminate loopholes in the limits placed on large-sized homes.

To keep citizens more readily informed – and involved -- about the planning process, videos of Zoning and Planning Board meetings are now posted online – in addition to the videos of Council meetings. This comes as part of a package of

recommendations from the Neighborhood Planning District Task Force, headed by Jenny Crumiller.

Being a popular town has its downsides, and in 2015 we finally took control of one -- the tour bus traffic that was clogging the central business district, especially in the summer. With the help of the Traffic and Transportation Committee and local merchants, Council and staff developed a system for managing the parking and loading of tourist buses and limiting their negative impacts to quality of life for residents and visitors alike. The Trenton Times called the plan, which has the buses use the existing bus stops along Nassau Street, a "triumph of creative thinking."

That was an example of how to sustainably balance people, profit, and the planet -- the three stools of sustainability. Another sustainability project -- though not on Nassau Street -- is in the works. Council President Bernie Miller, working with staff, has developed a plan to lease the old landfill on River Road for use as a solar farm. The energy generated will help to power the adjacent sewage treatment plant -- another innovation in our town that I'm very proud of.

In another move towards sustainability, Princeton initiated work on a bicycle master plan in 2015 to help make bicycling through town safer and more enjoyable. The project is fully funded by NJDOT, including professional consulting help from Parsons Brinkerhoff. Princeton also received a Federal Congestion Management and Air Quality Grant for \$196,000 to establish a Bike Share Program in conjunction with Princeton University, and to build covered bike parking. The Engineering Department also secured a \$300,000 Safe Route to School Grant to install new Traffic Signals and Improve the Harrison Street/Franklin Avenue and Harrison Street/Hamilton Avenue intersections. These efforts to make Princeton a more bikeable and walkable town led to Princeton being selected to host the statewide bike-walk summit this February.

Speaking of walkability, I'm happy to report that Princeton continues to increase the amount of open space in town. In 2015, we added to our Open Space inventory with the Tash property land next to Mary Moss Playground, in partnership with Mercer County. We also expanded the Princeton Battlefield Park with the 4.6 acre D'Ambrisi tract acquisition. That acquisition was supported with funding from the State of New Jersey, Mercer County, Friends of Princeton Open Space, and the Civil War Trust.

To keep paths walkable in the Billy Johnson Mountain Lakes Preserve avoid boggy, two new pedestrian bridges were constructed through a grant obtained by The Friends of Princeton Open Space.

This year we also turned our attention to maintenance of our passive open space -- over 1,100 acres of it. We created an Open Space Task Force made up of representatives from local land preservation groups, relevant commissions, and staff. Their recommendations as to pressing stewardship needs will help guide allocation of resources.

In the spirit of providing space for relaxation and enjoyment, Princeton created community open space in an unexpected place – by temporary converting two parking spots on Witherspoon Street into Princeton's first "parklet". I hope you had a chance to see it and spend some time in it watching Princeton's vibrant world go by. Built to enrich street life and build community, ours was yet another example of innovation and collaboration among artists, business owners, nonprofits, and staff. In the several months it was up, residents and visitors enjoyed sitting on the handmade benches and sharing time with their neighbors and friends.

I would be remiss not to mention that Princeton received a number of awards this year.

- Greater Mercer TMA Gold level Safe Routes to School
- Greater Mercer TMA Gold level Smart Workplace
- Municipal Engineer Bob Kiser was recognized at the League of Municipalities conference with the New Jersey Society of Municipal Engineers Distinguished Service Award
- Vikki Caines was honored as NJ Recreation & Parks Association Employee of the Year.
- Vikki Caines was also awarded a Sustainable Princeton Leadership Award for her community gardens projects.
- The Police Department's Safe Neighborhood Unit were named Volunteers of the Year by the Mercer County Municipal Alliance

Princeton has also started giving out its own awards. Access Princeton, as part of their effort to create a culture of exceptional customer service, has started a program to recognize staff members who go above and beyond for our residents. The Council has also started a tradition of handing out an award to recognize community organizations and individuals who make extraordinary contributions to the town.

2015 was not without its share of goodbyes. Lieutenant Sharon Papp retired, as did Sgt. Malta. Curt Berry from IT; Bill Urien from public works, Larry Logan, our electrical inspector; and Mark Johnson, our animal control officer all said goodbye. And in a couple weeks, Leslie Burger, who has shepherded our fabulous public library for the past 16 years, will be stepping down. The Princeton Environmental Commission will not be the same without Matt Wasserman as the chair. We are sad to see him step down, and thank him for his years of service on the commission. Former Borough Mayor Marvin Reed stepped down from the Planning Board in 2015. We honored him earlier in this meeting with a proclamation, but I wanted to recognize him again for his longstanding service to the Princeton community and the contributions he has made.

We also mourn the loss of Charles Rojer. Charles served as the chair of the Board of Health, and also as the Board of Health liaison to the Environmental Commission for several years. We remember his strength in the face of adversity, his deep wisdom, and his gentle spirit. Princeton lost one of its great men.

Council will be meeting next week for its annual ritual, started three years ago, of priority and goal setting. We have an active, energetic Council and staff, and I expect we'll have another full plate in 2016. Some of the projects and priorities I see for the coming year include:

- Continuing to harmonize our land use code
- Launching a new municipal website
- Completing our fair share Affordable Housing Plan for the courts
- Considering Witherspoon-Jackson Neighborhood Historic designation
- Completing the Bicycle Master Plan
- Establishing a capital asset maintenance and replacement plan
- Creating a plan for moving recurring capital expenses to operating budget
- Reviewing fire department space and equipment needs
- Establishing a Youth Advisory Council

In closing, I want to thank everyone who had a part in the accomplishments I've mentioned today, and for all the other work that time doesn't allow me to mention right now. I am excited for 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 an even more innovative, welcoming, and sustainable community.