

Remarks by Mayor Liz Lempert

Princeton Council Reorganization, January 2, 2018

This is the sixth year I have had the honor of delivering an address at a reorganization meeting of the consolidated Princeton, and it's always a welcome opportunity to highlight accomplishments from the past year and look forward to the work ahead. However, this is the first time I feel compelled to begin my remarks by looking outside of our municipal boundaries. 2017 was a year marked by protests, marches, and rallies around the country and here in Princeton – on numerous national issues from women's rights to immigrant protection to supporting science and combatting climate change. The events of 2017 were a powerful reminder that we in Princeton are inextricably tied to the world around us, and personally impacted by decisions made in Washington. But at the same time, we have the tremendous opportunity to run a smart, efficient and effective government at the local level that upholds our community values – values of diversity and inclusion, evidence-based decision making, civic engagement, and cooperation and collaboration with community partners and fellow municipalities to make a difference here at home and even beyond our borders.

Despite the turmoil on the national stage, 2017 was a year of continued and steady progress for municipal government in Princeton. Identifying budget savings, increasing affordability options, and shoring up the social safety net for our most vulnerable neighbors remained top priorities in 2017. Princeton maintained our AAA bond rating, a sign of our robust fiscal health; and we continued to look for savings through department reorganizations and shared services agreements. Access Princeton – Princeton's one stop call center – relocated to the Clerk's Office in Witherspoon Hall for an annual savings of approximately \$80,000. Combining the

position of Health Officer and Assistant Administrator has saved \$30,000 annually. In addition, the municipality will save an estimated \$1.7 million over the next five years as a result of the decision to privately contract for dispatch services.

Princeton's professional staff has a reputation for going above and beyond. I wanted to give you a special thank you to everyone in the tax office for their long hours over the holidays. The line was out the door many times with residents wishing to pre-pay their 2018 property taxes, and the response was courteous and professional.

Economic challenges have caused an increase in the number of families facing eviction and possible homelessness, and in response, the Human Services department convened a coalition of housing stability organizations including Arm-in-Arm, Stone Hill Church, St. Vincent de Paul, Home Front, and Housing Initiatives of Princeton. The coalition created a shared intake and referral system so that families in crisis only have to visit one agency to be connected to all available services. Collectively the group was able to help 21 families at-risk of eviction. Princeton's three affordable housing agencies -- the Affordable Housing Department, Princeton Community Housing, and the Housing Authority -- also developed a single intake form. Working with a team of Princeton University undergraduates, they developed an online form that simplifies, modernizes, and humanizes the at times bewildering process of accessing affordable housing.

We still await a decision from the Mercer Superior Court that will determine Princeton's obligation through 2025. In the meantime, we continued to make progress in expanding our affordable housing inventory: Council amended an agreement with developer Bob Hillier to maintain the Waxwood as a rental property and increased the number of affordable units to eight with one very low-income unit, two low-income

units, three moderate-income units, and two middle-income units. The municipality also launched several partnerships with housing non-profits: with Princeton Community Housing to add an additional 40 affordable units at Princeton Community Village; with Community Options to develop a 4-bedroom group home for adults with developmental disabilities; and with Habitat for Humanity on a two-unit development next to Mary Moss Playground. The Council also revised Princeton's cluster ordinance by adding a density bonus if land is set aside for a future affordable housing site.

In addition to creating new affordable units and incentives for future units, the municipality successfully protected tenants from future evictions. Avalon Bay was attempting to convert the 56 affordable rental units at its Witherspoon Street development to regular market rate units after 30 years, but the municipality prevailed in court, preserving affordability controls in perpetuity, and thereby maintaining stability in our affordable housing inventory.

Thanks to a \$20,000 grant from the Princeton Area Community Foundation, the Human Services Department was able to expand the number of spots for students in our popular Summer Youth Employment Program. And in 2017, both the annual back-to-school backpack drive and the holiday gift drive expanded to serve more of Princeton's children in need as a result of the tremendous and record-breaking outpouring of donations. Princeton's generosity has been on full display this week with the tremendous support shown to the families displaced by the Griggs Farm fire, and in particular, the first responders.

Princeton is blessed with community-minded residents embodying a generous spirit. We also greatly benefit from lasting civic investments made by our predecessors over the past decades and even centuries, and it is vital that we do our part to maintain and

upgrade our infrastructure. One of the most demanding projects of the year was the reconstruction of the 225-year old historic stone arch bridge on Route 206. Not only does the bridge serve a practical purpose as a main connector in our road network, but it also serves as a physical link to the early days of our Republic. Our historic commission, engineering department, and police worked closely with the state Department of Transportation in ensuring an historically sensitive reconstruction with minimized traffic disruption. The result is a beautiful bridge –finished one day ahead of schedule -- with 21<sup>st</sup> century engineering encased in artful 18<sup>th</sup> century-inspired masonry.

Some infrastructure is seen by the public every day. Other infrastructure remains behind the scenes, but is still important. Nearly every year, Council spends 100s of thousands of dollars on public works vehicles – that are left outside overnight in the harsh elements because we lack a covered parking facility. After years of planning, Council authorized the construction of a cold storage facility at the River Road property to prolong the life of our valuable public works equipment. Construction is slated to begin this spring.

Also at River Road we switched on a solar field on the closed landfill. The three mega-watt solar array, paid for and operated by a private company, is providing approximately 25% of the power needs for the Stony Brook Regional Sewage Authority. Plus, the municipality is receiving a lease payment of \$25,000 a year for the use of the otherwise unusable site.

The solar project is part of an effort to convert to cleaner, more renewable forms of energy that don't pollute our air or contribute to climate change. I am proud to be one of America's nearly 400 Climate Mayors, and to have signed onto the Chicago Charter

on behalf of Princeton, which pledges us to work together with other cities and towns to meet the targets set in the Paris Agreement.

To that end, we expanded options for several lower-impact forms of transportation in 2017. We cut the ribbon on two new electric vehicle charging stations in the Spring Street garage. A revised FreeB schedule, set to launch in January 2018, is designed to better address growing demand. A new translocation device, paid for by the Transit Trust Fund, now allows riders to track the bus in real time to make catching the bus more convenient.

Meanwhile, Princeton's bike share program expanded in 2017 to include stations at the Princeton Shopping Center, 22 Chambers Street, Hinds Plaza, TD Bank, and right here at Witherspoon Hall. There are now 137 bikes at stations on campus and throughout town. Since the program started in March of 2016, there have been over 48,000 trips taken.

The Planning Board formally adopted the Bike Master Plan into the Circulation Element of the Master Plan, laying the foundation for a comprehensive, linked bike network throughout town that makes it safe, attractive, and convenient for people who bike.

Creating viable opportunities for residents to get around without a car is an important component of affordability. But sometimes, cars are essential, and in 2017, Princeton embarked on a Parking Study, funded through a grant, to develop new solutions to our downtown parking and circulation system with the goal of maintaining the economic diversity, vibrancy, quality of life and character of the town.

The Neighborhood Character Rezoning Initiative continued in 2017, and the committee plans to bring several ordinances to Council and the Planning Board early this year. Meanwhile, the Construction Department has issued permits for 30 new homes from January to November in 2017, up 11% from 2016; and permits for 23 additions, up 77 percent from 2016; but demolition permits were down: we had 14 in 2017, down from nearly double that number a year ago.

Council continued Princeton's tradition of preserving land and protecting our waterways for future generations by updating our demolition waste and recycling ordinance and working with the Environmental Commission and Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association to revise our storm water regulations.

Access Princeton helped the municipality use technology to reduce paper and deliver better service by moving more permit and form applications online. We are also working on developing a new modern website that will make it easier for residents to navigate information, find services, and submit requests online.

2017 saw the emergency of new voices, including Princeton's first Youth Advisory Committee and a reconstructed Civil Rights Commission. Some of the newest voices in our community are those of immigrants. This is a time when many feel under attack. Princeton has made an effort to be a welcoming community and a resource for information including "Know Your Rights" trainings, legal services assistance, mental health assistance, information about DACA and TPS, and safety planning.

2017 saw the retirements and moving on of many beloved long-time employees. We said goodbye to Police Lieutenant Rob Toole and Detective Sgt. Christopher Quaste; Joe Marroli in Recreation; and Jackie Schreiber at Corner House.

We welcomed a new Affordable Housing Manager, Maureen Fullaway; Joe Novak, Fire Official; Nicole Paulucci, program supervisor at Recreation; and five new police officers: Adam Santos, Ashley Gaylord, James Eufemia, Michael Miceli, and Ryan McDermott.

We said goodbye to two of our Council colleges at our final regular meeting in December: former Township Mayor, former Council President, and senior Councilman Bernie Miller; and Councilwoman Jo Butler. And we are thrilled to welcome David Cohen and Leticia Fraga. Each of you bring special talents and enthusiasm, and we are very excited to have you join this amazing team.

While we have accomplished much during the past year, there are still challenges ahead. The Council will be meeting this Saturday for goal setting and training, and we will be back here again next Monday for our first regular Council meeting of 2018. I fully anticipate we will have another productive year. Among the many projects I expect we'll be taking on are:

- Approval of a Fair Share Housing Plan, following the court decision
- Installation of smart parking meters and establishment of revised fees
- Continuation of the program to treat or remove trees infected by the Emerald Ash Borer
- Work on a climate action plan to reduce emissions and adapt to changing weather patterns

- Adoption of a policy on the use of speed humps and other traffic calming measures
- Completion of the Mary Moss Playground construction
- And working with community partners to address the mental health issues surrounding youth

In closing, we've seen a lot of change this past year: Princeton University's Campus Plan and the opening of the Lewis Center for the Arts; the Commercial Development at 255 Nassau Street, Rider's decision to sell the Westminster Choir College, and progress on construction of a new PFARS building.

I wanted to remark on one of the images I will take with me from 2017, and that is the proliferation of welcoming lawn signs around town, in particular, the blue "Hate has no home here" with the heart-shaped American flag; and the tri-lingual blue, orange and green sign with the message: "No matter where you are from, we are glad you're our neighbor"! These warm signs are a constant reminder that we have the power to create the kind of community we want to live in, and in this uncertain time, we have the ability to rebuild trust in civic institutions by succeeding locally. Princeton is a remarkable community and we have a terrific team of professionals, skilled volunteers, and engaged residents. I'm ready to once again roll up my sleeves and get to work with you all!