
TOWNSHIP OF FRANKLIN
TOWNSHIP MANAGER
MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Township Council
FROM: Kenneth W. Daly, Township Manager
SUBJECT: Township Manager's Annual Report: 2007
DATE: March 31, 2008

This past year has been full of challenges for the Franklin Township community and its local government. Two tragic murders of young men in the Somerset section stunned the community, but also galvanized action in the form of the Franklin Youth Initiative described below.

Like people all around the country, Franklin Township residents are feeling the effects of the downturn in the housing market, followed by a slowdown in other sectors of the economy.

As anyone who reads the newspapers knows, there have been deep disagreements in the community lately, particularly over the State-mandated affordable housing. These disputes came to a head in 2007 with an election resulting in the recall of a Council member. Another indicator of the challenges to running the municipality in this period is that there was a 56% turnover in Township Council members in 2005-2007. Of the 14 people who held Council seats during these three years, only four remained throughout the period. It is a testament to the virtues of the council-manager form of government and a tribute to the commitment of the elected officials and the community to this form of government and to public service that the dynamics of these changes have not had a negative impact on the continued provision of services to the public, nor impeded the inauguration of new initiatives.

This report summarizes the Township's major initiatives and accomplishments during 2007.

1. **Franklin Youth Initiative.** Following the tragic murders in 2007, the community organized itself to work diligently to change the circumstances that contributed to the loss of these young lives. Under the leadership of Mayor Levine, Councilwoman Francois, and Councilman Glicklich, eight subcommittees have formed: social services, safety, recreation, outreach, faith-based, education, business, and youth. This Spring some of the first

But by far the greatest and most beautiful part of wisdom deals with the proper ordering of cities and households,
and that is called moderation and justice.

中庸其至矣乎

-Plato, Symposium 209a

events and programs developed by these committees are happening. Administrative support for the Franklin Youth Initiative is being provided primarily through Alice Osipowitz, Director of Recreation, during the prolonged illness of Bruce Medley, who was named FYI coordinator. In order to make room for more youth programs in the Social Services Building on Hamilton Street, the Health Department is moving to the Municipal Building, with the exception of the nursing clinic, which will remain. The Township realigned staff, added a full-time social worker position, and added funds to the FY 2008 budget to provide security for County social service programs to move into the Hamilton Street building. It is expected that the County will start providing more counseling and other services from this site this Spring.

2. **Public Safety.** Twelve (12) new police officers were hired in 2007. Authorized strength has increased from 116 in 2006 to 125 in 2008. We are currently at 120 officers, with five new hires in process. In addition to filling new positions, we will have to replace four retirements, three resignations, and one death during this period. Also, for the first time in many years, we maintained a steady cadre of eleven (11) tele-communicators throughout 2007, with only one turnover. The Office of Emergency Management also conducted an extremely successful exercise in late November using a pandemic scenario. With respect to neighborhood quality of life and safety, the Police Department worked closely with residents in the Landers-Clifton area, and Council adopted the recommended ordinances restricting parking and establishing resident parking permits. A neighborhood watch program was also established with Police assistance and guidance.
3. **Economic development.** Staff turnover in this department was managed. The function was re-organized and re-aligned to report to the Assistant Township Manager. Nevertheless, it was a productive year. The Shop Rite on Elizabeth Avenue opened in the Fall. Other major retail/office projects in the Retail Overlay District have broken ground. SteinMart has located in the long-empty former Stop and Shop space in the Towne Centre at the corner of South Middlebush and Route 27. Other organizational and policy improvements to our economic development program during 2007 include: completion of the move of the Engineering Department near Community Development. With the move of the Health Department to the Municipal Building in 2008, we will achieve the vision of a true one-stop where businesses and other applicants for development can get information and get done what needs to be done without having to wander a labyrinth in the Municipal Building and then travel back and forth to Hamilton Street. Ordinance 3675 was adopted during 2007 to provide for a tax abatement for improvements to older commercial properties, as well as renew the abatement program for certain residential improvements. To promote business expansion and attraction, economic development staff have cooperated with the real estate community to prepare our first comprehensive list of

commercial/industrial building vacancies and site availability. They have also prepared a resource guide for new business inquiries.

4. **Environment/quality of life.** Achievements include: new stormwater ordinance, rezoning Weston Road properties bordering Colonial Park from ROL to A, finding fields for emerging requests for cricket leagues, successful completion of annual road overlay program and Easton Farms re-surfacing, contract to study feasibility of solid waste utility, construction office working closely with Somerset Run residents to resolve heating issues with developer, Shade Tree ordinance finally amended (# 3681) to establish funding mechanism for tree replacement fund.
5. **Open space.** Contract signed in 2007 for preservation of largest remaining farm (Suydam) with closing in April 2008. 127 acres of farmland preserved during 2007 and January 2008 (Madden, Chrin, Lake, and Riya). Tenant finally found for the Kingston School to provide for continuing maintenance and community access. Higgins Farm (70+ acres) preserved at no cost to Township through EPA settlement.
6. **Redevelopment/affordable housing.** Redevelopment plan amended to include RPM and Leewood projects, which include more than 200 affordable units and more than 100,000 s.f. commercial/office space. Properties acquired and contract awarded to start sewerage pump station necessary for Leewood and Somerset Douglas redevelopment projects. All planning approvals in place for Berry Commons, first phase of RPM redevelopment project. As mandated by COAH and HMFA, Township committed \$1 million each to RPM'S Franklin Commons and Leewood's affordable housing developments for site acquisition and infrastructure costs. Funds also allocated to Habitat for Humanities houses to be built on township properties conveyed to Habitat during 2007. At the end of 2007, the Fair Share Plan was also amended to remove the controversial Bennetts-Veronica project.
7. **Fiscal planning and management.** For the Fiscal Year 2007-2008 budget, Township Council implemented an improved budget process, which moved Council work sessions closer together and closer to decision-making meetings. The FY 2008 budget continues planned expansion of police department, funds FYI initiatives, and reduces future debt while holding potential tax increase to less than half allowable. Council achieved its goal of holding increase in tax levy to 4% without resorting to layoffs. During calendar 2007 the Township furthered Council's goals to hold down personnel costs in four collective bargaining agreements (senior managers, blue collar supervisors, white collar, blue collar). These agreements end longevity, cap the amount of sick leave payout on retirement, and change health benefits to a plan that is projected to cost less over the long-term. Also, in a break-through for public sector collective bargaining, for first time the senior manager and

blue-collar supervisor contracts tie part of compensation to actual performance and results achieved. In 2007 Franklin Township negotiated an agreement to share construction code services with Bridgewater, Montgomery, Hillsborough, and Branchburg. This agreement provides Franklin with revenues to support code staff during a decline in permit revenues, as well as the ability to get staff from other towns at lower cost when needed. Also during 2007 construction code staff supported the assessor's office when vacancies in that office were slowing down the annual assessment inspections.

In the year ahead, the Township faces a heavy workload and many critical decisions that will affect the community for years to come:

- revision of the affordable housing fair share plan as required by new COAH rules,
- addressing the structural deficit in the Township's current fund,
- a decision on how solid waste services are provided,
- a decision on increased property maintenance standards and enforcement,
- collective bargaining with the law enforcement unions,
- effective implementation of the Franklin Youth Initiative,
- effective resumption of the annual property re-assessment program to reflect new market realities.

In closing, again I thank Assistant Township Manager, Donna Vieiro, and my assistant, Janie Dong, for their continued dedication to serving the public and making it possible for the Township Manager to get his job done.