

April 23, 2018 Township Council Business Session

### Mayor Hemant Marathe's State of the Township Address

Thank you every one for coming. It's a humbling experience to know there are so many people who are interested in what I have to say. Of course I had to bribe some of you to come here tonight. Sharon Young, our township clerk, has reminded me since January 1st that I need to give a state of the township address. As a rookie mayor, I was apprehensive. When I mentioned it to my daughters they rolled their eyes. They send you their sympathies.

Even though it's my first township address, I find myself in a familiar situation. Being watched over my shoulder by seven women as I speak. At home I have six others who do the job admirably. Don't worry -- I got every word of this speech approved by my wife, my daughters, and my mother.

Last November, as I walked door to door, I heard a few concerns from citizens and, in return, made some specific promises to the residents of West Windsor. As mayor, I have governed based on those promises.

The first of those promises is to control growth the best we can. Toward that end, we continue to vigorously defend our township against an unreasonable affordable housing obligation. The original Fair Housing legislation stipulated that in any given round no township should be required to build more than 1000 units. We have filed a motion with the court to cap our obligation at 1000 units based on that legislation. We hope and pray that the court will agree with us as the legislation intended. However, if we don't prevail on that motion, we will be required to submit a plan for a full 1500 units, as stipulated by Judge Jacobson. Although we feel that would be an undue burden on West Windsor, we will comply, while pursuing all available legal avenues.

To help mitigate the negative consequences of that increased housing development, we are pursuing commercial development at all sites along with the residential. Since the matter is in litigation and some negotiations are still ongoing, I am, unfortunately, restricted in what I can say TODAY. But please stay tuned.

To reduce growth, we continue to aggressively purchase open space AND get grants from the county and state to supplement our budget. Since I took office, we have closed on 96 acres on North Post Road, have a contract to purchase 17 acres on Clarksville and are in negotiation to purchase another 123 acres along Village Road. Since January 1st, the township has received \$1,050,000 from the county and will receive another \$260,000 pending approval of the grant agreement by the council.

We will also receive another \$500,000 from NJ Green Acres pending approval by council.

We will use this money to continue to acquire more properties to preserve open space.

With regard to the Howard Hughes site, there is no change in status. We are currently performing the master plan review. As a part of that review process we will decide if any change from the current zoning for the property is in the best interest of the township and the developer. Our second promise was to attract commercial ratables. Toward that end, I have met with owners of all the large commercial properties in town and have had some encouraging discussions with other commercial development experts. Based on the collective feedback, and to make it easier to expand an existing business or open a new one, we are undertaking two initiatives: one operational and one procedural.

On the operational level, this year's budget includes funds to move the permitting and inspection process from paper-based to electronic. Every inspector will get a tablet which will improve both efficiency and service, making it quicker and easier for businesses to move through the inspection process.

On the procedural level, I am recommending to the council that we replace the Site Plan Review and Advisory Board – popularly known as SPRAB – with a Technical Review Committee. Many of our neighboring towns use such a committee with much success.

Some of you may question whether replacing a board with a committee will make a difference. However, if you are a developer you will appreciate how this will significantly reduce expenses and speed up the approval and building process.

I would like to tell commercial developers that West Windsor is OPEN for business.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank two long serving members of SPRAB: Allen Schectel and Ted Begun. Both of them have served the township for over 20 years in that position. Ted has indicated that he is ready to retire after serving on the environmental commission and SPRAB since 1995. To ensure we don't lose all of that experience I have appointed Allen to the planning board.

Finally, I would like to outline two initiatives in the hope of building a sense of community among all West Windsor residents.

Last year during council debate I proposed that we use the township-owned land near the municipal complex to build an indoors ports facility for the residents of West Windsor. Some people thought I was suggesting it just because I didn't like what was proposed for that site at that time. But to quote the great philosopher Dr. Seuss, "I meant what I said and I said what I meant."

My first initiative is to build an indoor sports and recreation facility on that tract if it's determined to be feasible.

I have already spoken to various sports groups and at least one has expressed an interest in funding such a structure and at least five have expressed an interest in using such a facility if it exists. Currently our kids have to go to neighboring towns to use their indoor facilities and adults compete for available school gym space.

In the coming month, I will appoint a committee with experts in various aspects of the project – sports, finance, architecture, construction etc. – to understand the needs of each sports group, to determine whether this is financially feasible without the use of taxpayer funds, and to recommend what such a facility would encompass. I request anyone who would like to serve on this committee to contact me.

We are all fortunate to live in a great community. Sometimes, when you are on Facebook or at a council meeting, it may not feel that way, but we have so much to be thankful for.

We have many reasons to celebrate but we don't celebrate enough. This brings me to my second initiative: to annually pick one group or non-profit in town and celebrate them. As someone who drives over 25,000 miles a year, the first people I am mindful of are the police. I am always watching out for them and they are for me.

This year the West Windsor Police Department will celebrate its 50th anniversary. I propose that the community come together to celebrate its success and raise funds that will be used for a specific project. Police Chief Garafalo has identified the need for a drone that can be used, among other things, to look for a missing person and to speed up accident investigations. He assures me that the drone will not be used to write tickets and more important to spy on me.

I have appointed a committee which has been hard at work for the last couple of months planning celebratory activities throughout the year. The committee is made up of Missy Pirrera, Simin Syed, Sanjana Gulati, Rachna Sharma, Kash Delory, Virginia Manzari and Kristy Kyriakopoulos. One of my main criteria for selecting any committee members is whether I can pronounce their name easily. I don't know how Kristy got past that. On the township side, they are being helped by Gay Huber, Ken Jacobs, Noreen Tenaglia, Mark Lee, Melissa Nagy, Daniel Latham, Danny Mohr and Chief Garafalo. The committee will soon publish information about how you can help. This is a challenge to all of us to come together for a common purpose.

I hope all of you will actively participate in this celebration and support our New Jersey Chief's Accredited Police department.

When they reach out to you during their fundraising appeal, remember that charitable contributions are fully deductible. This is your opportunity to exercise your government-given right to deduct with abandon. Please be generous.

I hope this becomes an annual tradition to celebrate our successes.

When I speak for so long I wonder if anyone is paying attention. A few months back I was reading how the human mind works.

In the first 24 hours following a speech most people forget 50% of what they have heard. In the next 24 hours they forget 50% of the remaining. Math wizards among you will tell you that means you retain only 25% of what you originally heard.

At the end of 72 hours many of you will swear you weren't even here this evening.

So, even if you forget everything else I have said today, please remember:

The state of our township depends collectively on all of us. I have proposed some ideas that I believe will move West Windsor in the right direction. West Windsor has been the perfect place to raise my family. I am asking for your help to make it an even better place to raise a family and to grow old with your friends.