

## **Annual Reorganization Meeting 2024 January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2024**

I will try to keep this speech as short as possible, so I don't put everyone to sleep!!

Good evening and welcome to the 2024 Reorganization meeting of the Borough of Florham Park. Thank you to all of the dignitaries, elected officials, family members, visitors and friends who have taken the time to join us tonight to help welcome in a new year for the Borough of Florham Park.

I am truly honored and blessed to stand before you this evening as your Mayor. As you now know, I was been recently reelected by the residents of this great town and tonight marks the beginning of my 11<sup>th</sup> year as Mayor.

I would like to first thank my wife Janet and my children, Erin and Christopher, for their continued support allowing me to take time from our family to serve as Mayor. I would also like to welcome our new son-in-law Brandon to the family. Serving as the Mayor does take countless hours away from our family's time together and I do my best to keep them separate. Please know that I, along with the Borough Council, will continue to work every day to do our absolute best for Florham Park's residents as we move forward together in 2024.

I would like to take a moment to congratulate Charlie Malone and Glen Johnstone on their recent Council election victories in November; and to thank Charlie Malone for serving as Council President again in 2023. I would also like to wish outgoing Councilmember Charlie Germershausen the best and thank him for his years on the Council.

As we look back on 2023 and all that we have accomplished, I must highlight that Florham Park continues to be the best place in New Jersey to live and raise a family... that is in my most humble opinion. I cannot convey to you how proud I am to be a part of our continued success. In this community of volunteers, the accomplishments continue to be realized due to the efforts of so many people.

Our Borough employees are a very important key to the ongoing success we have all witnessed as a community over these many years that I have served as your Mayor. I would like to wish my heartfelt appreciation to all the staff in Borough Hall, including our Administrator Bill Huyler and his support staff, our Borough Clerk and her staff, the Engineering department, the Planning and Zoning secretary, our Tax Assessor's office, our Finance department, our new Court Administrator, and our Building department. I would like to take a moment to honor Jim Gibbs of the Tax Assessor's office and Joe Lotorto from the Building department. Both of these employees passed away in 2023 and we thank them for their service to the Borough and share our condolences with their loved ones.

Outside of Borough Hall, I wish to acknowledge and thank our Department of Public Works, Recreation department, Water department and Sewer department.

We have the best Police department in Morris County under the direction of Chief Joseph Orlando and Captain Karl Svenningsen. Our Police department will continue to keep Florham Park safe; our diligent officers work every day to achieve this goal.

A huge thank you to all of the Volunteers in the Fire Department and First Aid Squad. These are the people who are on the front line 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. A big round of applause...

Last but not least, I wish to acknowledge and express appreciation for all of the volunteers who help make this such a wonderful community. Kudos to the Recreation Committee as well as the coaches, parent coordinators and all others who assist in our many sporting activities here in Florham Park and East Hanover for our joint programs. A thank you to all our volunteer board members, commission, and committee members who serve this Borough in whatever capacity they can. I now ask that all members of any of the volunteer groups or committees who are present here this evening stand for a round of applause.

We as a community will be working very hard this year on the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Borough of Florham Park. This is a huge milestone, and a Committee is working to bring some events to our town to note this very special celebration. I don't think that I will be letting the cat out of bag by

saying this year's 4<sup>th</sup> of July theme will be "The 125 years of Florham Park". I would like to thank Chairperson Suzanne Herold and Councilwoman Santoro for their efforts on this.

I would like to thank the entire Historic Preservation Commission for their hard work to secure grants for the next stages of the rehabilitation of the Little Red School House. This treasured landmark will soon reopen with a new look and layout thanks to these volunteers. I can't thank them enough for all their hard work applying for grants and presenting to the Morris County Historic Preservation Grant Committee.

Florham Park had a very busy year as we continued to chip away at lowering our debt and strived to do the best we can with a very small increase in local taxes despite healthcare, pensions, and overall cost increases. I am very proud of our Finance Committee, led by our Chief Financial Officer Patrice Visco. Applause ....

The Borough has continued to receive a AAA bond rating from Moody's. Florham Park is one of only sixteen municipalities in New Jersey to hold this rating. Considering that there are 564 municipalities in New Jersey, this is a great accomplishment. Thank you again to the Finance Committee and all of the Council members that worked so hard to achieve this goal.

The Council has been working on ways to improve communication with the residents of Florham Park. We have continued to put together a great newsletter and the information is also available on our Borough website as well as on Facebook and Instagram. Please follow us on one of these platforms if you are not already. We are also pleased to announce that we will be launching a new Borough website over the next month.

We continue to see new projects in town and the latest project, Vreeland Road "North Gate", is nearing completion. I may add that it has been reported that all units in this project have been sold. The 147 Columbia Turnpike Project is progressing and now that some of the exterior finish work has been installed, the buildings are looking a lot more like the architect's drawing. We are hoping that some of these units will be available this spring to rent.

While on the subject of development, I must bring up the Fair Share Housing issues as of late in Trenton. Florham Park was assigned a huge amount of Affordable / Market rate units as a result of our settlement in 2017. Only some of the 624 Affordable units have been built for a varied number of reasons.

Now, State legislator Yvonne Lopez and Speaker Craig Coughlin have introduced a new Bill for the 4<sup>th</sup> round of Affordable Housing. This new Bill would force municipalities to adopt their 4<sup>th</sup> round plans for affordable / market rate housing by January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2025 for the next round of obligations. The Council on Affordable Housing (COAH) would be permanently abolished under this new Bill and municipalities would be obligated to build even more Fair Share / Market Rate units. The Bill also calls for an additional 16 million dollars in appropriations to fund this plan, none of which goes to municipalities.

I encourage each one of our residents to reach out to Speaker Craig Coughlin's office or his co-sponsor of this Bill, Yvonne Lopez, to let them know how this Bill would cause more overcrowding, more school-aged children, more traffic in our downtown and surrounding areas, and more strain on emergency services and infrastructure in our community.

In response to the tremendous amount of buzz I have seen on social media, concerning the issues of development and affordable housing, I am here to tell you that the Governing Body does our very best to mitigate these projects after the Court rulings and as they come before the Planning Board, Zoning Board of Adjustment, and Borough Council for approvals. It is out of our hands and we need residents to voice their opinions to the legislators in Trenton.

We as a community are not against Affordable or Market rate housing. We have formed a Subcommittee of 39 municipalities within the Morris County League of Municipalities that will work towards fighting this next round of affordable housing obligations and I will serve as the Chair of this sub-committee.

Another topic I would like to touch on is that we continue to see rainstorms causing flooding in our region. The construction of more high-density housing throughout New Jersey will only continue to exacerbate

flooding issues. Florham Park along with Hanover Township Mayor Ace Gallagher, East Hanover Mayor Joseph Pannullo, Morris Plains Mayor Jason Karr, Morristown Mayor Tim Dougherty, and Parsippany Mayor Jamie Barberio have all joined forces to form the Flood Remediation Task Force to clean-up long-forgotten local streams and rivers. The group has already secured \$1.8 million in grant money from the federal government. We would like to thank Congresswoman Mikie Sherrill and her team for all of the assistance.

As we begin 2024, I am very hopeful for the future of our Town. I, the Council, and our hardworking Borough employees and volunteers will continue to strive to make Florham Park the greatest place to live, work and raise a family.

In closing, I would just like to say I am proud of this Borough, proud to be your Mayor, and am looking forward to these next 4 years. I would like to thank the entire Council for their dedication to this Borough and for their continued support. I wish to thank our long-time Borough attorney Joe Bell for his service and to wish Alex Parker-Magyar, editor of the Florham Park Eagle, all the best in his next juncture.

God bless the Borough of Florham Park and God Bless America. We stand with Israel. Thank you,