



Mayor Mark C. Smith

The thoughtful comments and the commitment to continue serving the people of Cranford are greatly appreciated. Thank you to the professional staff for the support that you provide the Committee, and thank you Commissioner Aschenbach, Commissioner Dugan, Deputy Mayor Garcia, and Commissioner Robinson. I am honored to serve with you.

I am honored to be sworn into today as Mayor of Cranford. Thanks to Fr. McGovern, Senator Kean and to Assemblyman Bramnick and Assemblywoman Munoz for their participation in Cranford's re-organization meeting. It is a busy season, and time seems even more precious than usual as families gather and the holidays are celebrated. I know that we all appreciate the efforts made to spend part of New Year's Day 2010 here.

The past year has been eventful for our nation, our state and our town and 2010 will undoubtedly be the same. I gratefully acknowledge the assistance that Cranford has received from our federal representatives, Sen. Lautenberg, Sen. Menendez and Congressman Lance. Several federal grants have been received and one in particular will allow continued progress on the NE Quadrant Flood project. We are also mindful and grateful for the efforts of our state legislators, Senator Kean, Assemblyman Bramnick and Assemblywoman Munoz and look forward to 2010.

I extend best wishes for a successful term to our new governor, Chris Christie and remember a visit he made to Cranford in Feb. 2009 as he considered running for governor. I would say that He made the right decision, and we trust that he can provide the leadership NJ needs to address the issues threatening to overwhelm our state.

I was cautioned by my son Ian last week as we sat discussing this event and what I might say, that after the appointments are over people are anxious to spend the rest of the day with family, and maybe watch a little football (Outback Bowl - Northwestern v Auburn 11AM; Capital One Bowl – Penn State v LSU 1PM; Sugar Bowl – FL vs. Cincinnati 8:30PM). I will be brief and thank my son, Ian, for that gentle reminder.

Sandra Day O'Connor observed that:

We don't accomplish anything in this world alone ... and whatever happens is the result of the whole tapestry of one's life and all the weavings of individual threads from one to another that creates something.

I am grateful for the many threads that have converged and that are represented here today. I especially thank my family for the support and encouragement that they provide: my parents; my wife, Denise; my daughter, Rebecca; my son Andrew and his wife, Jessie; and my son, Ian. To friends and colleagues present and absent I say - thank you.

And I thank the people that I have come to know because of my involvement in this community,

and I appreciate the opportunity that the citizens of Cranford have given me to serve. I have learned much from you and look forward to learning much more in the future.

We began today by recognizing the many years of volunteer service provided to Cranford by longtime resident Mrs. Francis Wismer. I can think of no more appropriate way to begin this reorganization meeting than honoring her. The spirit and dedication of the countless individuals, like Mrs. Wismer, who contribute so much to Cranford embody the spirit of community and the character of this town.

There is an Irish proverb that expresses the idea of community in a simple way and it goes like this: “It is in the shelter of each other that the people live.” Today we are reminded how much we live in the shelter of each other and how much we depend on each other. Members of 40 – 50 volunteer boards, committees and groups were appointed today. They are staffed by your friends and your neighbors who are willing to give their time and energy to preserve the uniqueness of Cranford and to make it an even more extraordinary community.

A few examples...

The Hanson Park Conservancy’s work in creating the unique and beautiful Woodland Theater and their planting of so many beautiful trees there so that the next generation enjoy can enjoy the shade, is part of the spirit of community that one experiences living in Cranford. The Environmental Commission’s efforts and initiatives on behalf of our environment are all about community. The willingness of residents to fill the food bank at Cranford Family Care is another signpost of community and the list goes on...well you know how the list goes on and on and on...Thank you, again Tara.

In this community there is creativity. There are always lots of ideas moving about in this community, whether it’s how to get additional funding for a project, how to improve the downtown, or how reduce the budget. It is better to have a surplus of ideas, some of which may not work out, than to have no ideas at all. The certainties that make us comfortable are the things that make it most difficult to try something new. It requires courage to let go of certainties and it requires courage to be creative. It also requires a willingness to respectfully disagree on the best approach to an issue. Certainly there have been moments of profound disagreement in the past and undoubtedly there will be the same in the future, but it is crucial to preserve the overriding sense of community despite the differences.

A Commissioner is not normally appointed as program coordinator of the Municipal Alliance; however, such an appointment has been made this year – a little creativity. Commissioner Aschenbach has agreed to serve as acting director of the group while an extended search continues for a permanent coordinator. We wish him well in this new and unique role which he assumes in addition to his responsibilities as Commissioner of Public Affairs.

The public/private partnerships that provided for the restoration of the veteran’s flag pole at Post Office Plaza and the installation of field turf at Memorial Field are creative solutions to long standing challenges. The approach to budget challenges (asking for proposed budgets from departments before the beginning of the New Year and looking for less costly health insurance options) is creative. Creating an instant committee to deal with the withdrawal of funds for 4th of

July fireworks in 2009 was creative and bringing in the YMCA to offer innovative programming in the Community Center was creative.

The partnerships forged between the township and groups like the veteran's flag pole committee, the CAT fund and the YMCA have enabled Cranford to provide amenities and services that would not have been possible apart from adding to the already considerable tax burden that Cranford residents carry. But this is just a glimpse of the creativity at work in Cranford.

The coming year will require even more creativity to meet the budget challenges of existing contractual obligations, pension payments, health care costs, RVSA payments, debt service on the parking garage, flood project funding, community center/library and other expenses. The TC is already working on ways to ensure that Cranford will meet those challenges and the many others facing the township. Each commissioner takes very seriously the responsibility of stewardship of the township's resources. Deferring pension payments is creative, but in my opinion it is not responsible.

With TC assistance and agreement 2010 will see an emphasis on re-examining and re-invigorating the downtown. Nearly 25 years ago the Special Improvement District was established, and to my knowledge there has not been a comprehensive re-examination of its boundaries or the ordinances that govern the SID since. We intend to look at how the downtown works hoping to make it better and even more competitive. A business development campaign will be launched in January with the tag line, "Cranford. We're Open for Business." Hoping to make the ease of locating a business in Cranford a competitive advantage, a comprehensive brochure outlining the steps necessary to open a business in town has been created, and it will be distributed within the next couple of weeks. The hope is to attract new retailers by developing a reputation as a place that makes opening a new business as simple as possible. If Cranford can develop such a reputation everyone benefits.

Efforts by JCAS to establish a fine arts facility will continue to be supported as a way of further distinguishing Cranford from surrounding communities and as a way of strengthening our downtown. A restoration of the Rahway River festival and the addition of more signature events, like the very successful family bike ride held this past November, are pieces of an emerging strategy to promote Cranford.

Deputy Mayor Garcia brings an enormous reservoir of good will to her position as liaison to the DMC and will play an important role in working to create the cooperation vital for success in promoting the downtown. And in her new role as Commissioner of Engineering and DPW she will continue recent progress in completing important capital projects. I am certain that she will continue her track record of success. When Martha ran, I recall her saying that if she were elected the township would be getting a full-time commissioner; she has kept her word and the township has benefitted tremendously.

While the capital budget will again be challenging, I believe that there is consensus to move forward with the Orchard Brook project, and my intent is to obtain the necessary agreements from property owners as soon as possible. The township attorney, Mr. Woodward, has already begun those efforts.

Another goal for 2010 is to begin the creation of affordable housing units as outlined in the Master Plan's Affordable Housing Element. In 2009 the TC met with a number of not for profit organizations interested in partnering with Cranford to build and administer new affordable housing units. Commissioner Robison has agreed to lead that effort as Cranford continues its tradition of meeting its responsibility to provide affordable housing. The Riverfront Redevelopment project will also provide affordable housing units, and it seems likely that work will begin at the site in the first half of 2010.

The municipal budget always looms large at the beginning of a new year. This year, thanks to the efforts of Commissioner Dugan, the township is further along than usual in formulating the budget. Departments have provided initial estimates for the coming year, and it is hoped that a budget can be completed early in the year in order to allow for savings to be realized for more than the usual 6 month period, which is the case when adoption of the budget takes place mid-year or later. The TC is exploring potential savings in the area of Information Technology. Also being considered is reduction of telecommunications expenses by switching to a Voice Over Internet Protocol solution.

Cranford will continue to advocate for its fair share of funds to be returned to it from federal, state and county sources, and to that end the township has issued a Request for Proposals seeking professional grant writing services for 2010. More of the tax dollars paid by Cranford residents need to be returned to Cranford.

Please remember that the municipal portion of your entire tax bill represents slightly more than a quarter of the total. The Board of Education's share is roughly 55% and the county takes about 18%.

Finally, I am certain that 2010 will bring its share of joy and sadness to each one of us and to the township community just as 2009 did. As we strive to work to the best of ability in our different roles the difficulties we face will be overcome. We are committed to cooperation and service and to reaching out to all groups. My hope is that the Spirit of this season, with its message of hope and goodwill can spill over into the rest of the calendar as we each try to help one another and in doing so make Cranford an even better place to be in 2010.

This Township Committee is committed to serving the best interests of Cranford, and I look forward with great anticipation to the coming year.

I wish everyone a Happy and Healthy 2010. And I wish you peace.

January 1, 2010