

GLEN RIDGE 2019 YEAR-END REPORT

January 6, 2020

Good evening – I would like to welcome everyone to this the 125th reorganizational meeting of the Glen Ridge Council. I am also pleased to note that 2020 marks a significant milestone in the history of Glen Ridge as it is also the Borough's quasiquicentennial anniversary of its secession from Bloomfield.

Tonight, after 21 years of exemplary service to our residents, our Administrator Michael Rohal is embarked upon his terminal retirement process. Michael began his career with Glen Ridge in 1998 as a consulting engineer. After approximately 6 months in that position, Mayor Steve Plate appointed him to the position of Borough Administrator and he has been reappointed by every Mayor since. At this time, I would like to take a few moments to briefly summarize some of Michael's most notable achievements.

Prior to coming to Glen Ridge, Michael worked on a project that has had a great impact on our Borough ever since. As Montclair's township engineer, he worked with NJ Transit and the town's Mayor and Council in negotiating the Montclair connection project. This major rail project modified the route of our commuter trains, electrified the tracks and ultimately provided a one seat ride into Manhattan, which today is one of the major attractions for living in Glen Ridge.

Michael's first major task as Administrator was to work on improving Glen Ridge's infrastructure and he initiated this chore by developing a Borough-wide street paving program. Up until 1999, the Borough maintained its streets by covering them with tar and stone chips. Michael successfully applied for Municipal Aid Road Programming funds through NJDOT and has been managing and funding the resurfacing of our twenty miles of streets with these grants ever since. We were recently notified that our 2020 aid will be \$525,000.

Next, he turned his attention to improving our water and sewer systems by securing essentially zero-free loans from the Environmental Infrastructure Financing Program. Over a quarter of our sanitary sewer system has now been rehabilitated and by the end of 2020, our water delivery infrastructure will be totally free of lead pipes.

While improving the Borough's infrastructure, he also substantially improved our financial condition through stringent management of Borough funds, better tracking of cash flow and enhanced financial reporting. In fact, each year Michael takes great pride in presenting the Borough's annual audit report to the Mayor and Council, free of any significant comments. He also successfully shepherded the Borough through the economic downturn of 2008 when our surplus dropped well below \$20,000. In comparison, today our Borough surplus is approximately \$2.7 million even though over the past 10 years the average Borough property tax increase on a median-priced home was approximately \$60 annually. I believe it is also worthy to note two other clear indications of our current strong financial management and condition. First, as a result of the budgeting measures adopted in past years, the State has now authorized the Borough to affect an internal examination of its own annual budget rather than having to submit it to the State for approval. Second, in October 2019, Moody's upgraded our general obligation bond rating to Aa2 from Aa3.

Michael has also worked tirelessly to reduce the cost of providing services to our residents, while improving the quality of the product delivered, through the negotiation of currently eleven shared service agreements mainly with our neighboring municipalities. Most importantly, he was an integral member of the team that negotiated our current ten-year fire suppression contract with Montclair which is one of the largest, if not the largest, shared services agreement in the State.

In conclusion, Michael is very well respected by his colleagues and many seek his guidance. Where our employees are concerned, they know his door is always open and that he will listen to them with patience and understanding. He is truly a gentlemen's gentleman.

On another note, both Michael and his wife Jan have been involved, as resident volunteers, in numerous community organizations over the past 20 years. Additionally, they participate in scores of community events and charities each year and through such participation have set an example that epitomizes the definition and spirit of volunteerism which is such an important aspect of life in Glen Ridge.

On behalf of the Council, Borough administration and residents of Glen Ridge, I wish Michael and Jan a very long, happy and healthy retirement.

While we will all miss Michael, we are extremely pleased and fortunate that our Deputy Administrator, Mike Zichelli, who has been with Glen Ridge for almost 20 years, has now been sworn in as our new Administrator. As Deputy Administrator, Mike was responsible for the design, budgeting and execution of all our capital projects. Additionally, he served as the Borough's land use planner, working with the Planning Board, Board of Adjustment, Historic Preservation Commission and Shade Tree Commission. Mike also managed the Borough's Information Technology infrastructure and has overseen the day-to-day operations of the DPW and Building Department. As a result of his previous assignments, practical experience and day-to-day interactions with Mike Rohal, we have no doubt that this Administrative transition will be accomplished seamlessly.

Finally, we are fortunate to have hired Erik DeLine as our Director of Planning to replace Mike Zichelli. Through his employment with H2M Associates and his work on the Mountainside Hospital MOB and the Borough's latest Master Plan Erik got to know Glen Ridge and we got to know him. His previous work experience, especially in the development of Master and Strategic plans, municipal land use and

redevelopment, dovetails well with our ongoing needs and requirements. I should also note that Erik is an elected councilman in the Borough of Pompton Lakes.

I would now like to extend an official welcome back to Councilor Peter Hughes, who has served Glen Ridge with prodigious commitment and passion for a total of 19 years on the Council, 8 of them as Mayor. Peter will continue to ably and energetically Chair the Finance and Administration Committee. I would also like to extend my congratulations and welcome to our newly elected Councilor, Richard Law. Rich will Chair the Parks and Recreation Committee. Finally, on behalf of the Council and residents of Glen Ridge, I would like to extend our thanks and appreciation to Councilor Lefkovits who has served this Council with distinction over the past 9 years. I am also extremely pleased that David, who has also served for the past 4 years as a Trustee of the Library as my alternate, has graciously agreed to remain on the Board in that capacity.

Next, on behalf of myself and the Borough Council, I wish to acknowledge and commend the following 3 members of the community who have completed their valued services in the public interest:

Jan McNally Rohal – who is leaving the Library Board of Trustees and her position as President of the Friends of the Library, and

John Way of the Historic Preservation Commission and Shalini Mohan of the Board of Adjustment, both of whom sadly passed away during the past year

Finally, it is my pleasure to welcome three new appointees:

Rebecca Ratnow Meyer to the Planning Board

Jeanna Velechko to the Library Board of Trustees, and

Scott Velechko to the Board of Adjustment.

While 2019 was, as usual, a busy and challenging year for the Council and Administration, it was likewise a year of significant accomplishments and progress on many fronts. I will highlight some of the foregoing developments as well as some of our goals for 2020, by municipal department and subject, beginning with Finance and Administration.

FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

Moody's Investors Service

As previously mentioned, on October 18, 2019 Moody's Investors Service upgraded Glen Ridge's general obligation rating to Aa2 from Aa3. Moody's noted that the Borough's financial position is healthy and is expected to remain stable after several years of conservative budgeting that have rebuilt its once slim reserves. Our debt burden is considered modest, with limited plans for new issuances, while the pension liability remains average.

Although the borough is largely built out, there has been extensive redevelopment and enhancement of properties which has led to growth in our ratables. The borough has a five-year average annual growth rate of 3.7%. Additionally, there are several redevelopment projects underway, most notably a new block of medical offices partially leased by Hackensack UMC and a 110-unit apartment complex.

Borough Administration expects the apartment complex will provide roughly \$500,000 in payments in lieu of taxes beginning in the second quarter of 2020.

Moody's notes that while the borough's finances have improved and are satisfactory, its flexibility is somewhat constrained on the revenue side by the 2% statutory tax levy cap. On the expenditure side, the borough's flexibility is less constrained than usual in New Jersey as the borough does not offer post-retirement benefits. Fixed costs for debt service and pensions are below average at \$1.6 million or 12.0% of revenues.

Moody's concluded that the borough's financial position should remain healthy as management continues to budget conservatively and continues to benefit from tax base growth.

Capital Expenditures Budget

During 2019, our Borough administrators, department heads and Council undertook an exhaustive review of all Borough-owned and managed capital assets to determine what actions are required to maintain our land, buildings and equipment in an acceptable and ready state of repair. This review disclosed a need for total capital expenditures of approximately \$8.8 million. Subsequently, the Mayor and Council prioritized the required capital expenditures and passed an initial \$3.8 million bond issuance to fund our most pressing and immediate needs. As this debt will replace expiring debt from a 2007 bond issuance, no additional property taxes will be required. Finally, we anticipate an investment of an additional \$5 million over the next 4-5 years will be needed to complete the aforesaid identified capital improvements and acquisitions.

Briefly, \$2.2 million of the \$3.8 million initial bond issuance is earmarked for building improvements including roofs for the Library and train station, interior repairs and upgrades to the Police Station and town hall and a new salt shed and storage barn in the DPW yard. Of the remaining \$1.6 million, \$350,000 has been budgeted for recreational facilities and \$854,000 for a new backhoe, heavy duty dump truck, snowplow and jitney bus.

All the building and field repairs and improvements and new equipment replace capital assets that are worn out, and in many cases beyond their useful lives. For example, the new heavy-duty dump truck will replace one that is 17 years old, and the old salt shed is beyond repair.

Finally, it should be noted that Glen Ridge does not, as a matter of policy, bond any operating costs but instead takes the more conservative approach of budgeting such expenses and staying within the 2% cap.

Additionally, we believe that our capital costs should be spread out over a number of years so that both our current and future residents, who will share in the benefit of such improvements, will also share in the cost.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Overview

This year the Borough's two major development projects got underway. The new state of the art medical office building at 311 Bay Avenue has been completed. This 45,000 square foot office building will provide needed medical services to the community and further our partnership with Hackensack Meridian Health.

The Baldwin Street Development project broke ground this year as well. This 110-unit apartment building, which includes 17 affordable units, is expected to be completed in 2020.

In 2019 the Planning Board started its Master Plan Re-Examination. The board gathered public input and is currently examining the data. Additionally, it will also be seeking input from various Borough Boards and Committees. The Re-Examination report will be presented to the Council in 2020.

Finally, I have asked the staff to continue to review our existing ordinances and to delete any outdated codes and clarify any existing ones that demonstrate such need.

PUBLIC WORKS

Sewer & Water Systems

This year we completed a major rehabilitation of our sanitary sewer system. Approximately 8,700 linear feet of pipe have been cleaned and lined and over 80 manholes fully rehabilitated. The overall project has dramatically improved the flow of material through our sanitary sewer system, improved the pipes' structural integrity and reduced the infiltration of storm water into our system.

Our new Director of Planning & Development, Erik DeLine, is overseeing our current major infrastructure project, namely the replacement of over 650 lead line water services throughout the Borough. This project is anticipated to be completed by August of 2020. Once completed, there will be no lead pipes remaining in the Borough owned infrastructure.

Roadways

With much of the underground infrastructure projects completed or underway, we will vigorously address our roadway surfaces in 2020. In the spring, we expect to resurface at least 12 of our roads.

Shade Tree Commission

The Shade Tree Commission continues to work tirelessly to maintain the Borough's urban forest. In 2019 the Commission planted its 1,000th tree. In 2020, it will take an inventory of our existing trees and analyze the data that will drive our future planting and maintenance projects. It will also revisit the Shade Tree Master Plan and continue its highly successful zone pruning program wherein 25% of the Borough's street trees will be pruned annually. Finally, it will also remove our declining trees and thoughtfully plant new ones in their place.

Miscellaneous

In 2019, Glen Ridge once again met the rigorous requirements for achieving Sustainable Jersey silver certification. Glen Ridge is one of only 27 New Jersey municipalities, out of a total of 565 municipalities in the state, that attained certification at the silver-level in 2019. To become Sustainable Jersey certified at the silver-level, Glen Ridge submitted documentation to show it had completed a balance of the required sustainability actions, meeting a minimum of 350 action points. In addition to reaching 350 points, each community had to create a green team and select at least three out of twelve priority action options. Glen Ridge selected 5 of the 12 priority actions and completed 29 actions in 12 categories for a total of 385 points.

Additionally, Glen Ridge was selected to receive the annual Sustainable NJ Collaboration Award, along with Maplewood, Montclair, South Orange Village, and Verona, for the municipality's participation in the Sustainable Essex Alliance Renewable Government Energy Aggregation Program. This award recognizes municipalities that have advanced sustainability by building strong partnerships. This group used their combined purchasing power to increase the renewable content of their residential electrical supply twenty percent above what is required by the state renewable portfolio standard while producing savings for our residents.

The Aggregation Program was also selected by the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions for the 2019 Environmental Achievement Award which was presented at the 46th annual Environmental Congress.

Finally, our major 2020 goals will be to continue to focus much of our attention on improvements to the Borough's infrastructure as well as the Capital Expenditure projects which have been previously mentioned.

PUBLIC SAFETY

NJSACOP Accreditation of the Department

The NJSACOP Accreditation process within the Glen Ridge Police Department began in August 2018. Accreditation is a coveted award that symbolizes professionalism and competence within the Public Safety division. This status acknowledges the implementation of policies and procedures that are conceptually sound and operationally effective. As trust, transparency and credibility in law enforcement organizations is paramount to the establishment and maintenance of good Police-Community relations, this achievement will be significant for the Borough. It may also result in a reduction in the cost of the Borough's insurance premiums. The police department is currently completing the proof and evidence

portions of the accreditation process which are its final outstanding requirements and anticipates receiving accreditation from the New Jersey Chiefs of Police in the first half of 2020.

Creation of a Traffic Unit

Concerns about speeding, pedestrian safety and motor vehicle accidents within the Borough are the focus of the Department's newly formed Traffic Unit. During 2019, the command staff assigned numerous details within the patrol division to educate and enforce motor vehicle laws with both drivers and pedestrians. The details targeted speeding, distracted driving and stop sign and pedestrian crossing violations.

Although the entire patrol division participates in this initiative, there are five officers who have shown a special interest in traffic safety who also work on self-initiated traffic details during their regular tours of duty.

In 2019, the Department was awarded the *AAA Gold Award* which recognizes its participation in traffic safety programs, specifically in education, enforcement, and engineering. For example, members of the Traffic division worked with the Borough Engineer to review and modify parking ordinances within the Borough. The goal was to maximize parking space, while restricting parking in areas that created a safety concern or were experiencing an increase in accidents. Working alongside the Department of Public Works, crosswalks were identified that needed enhanced vehicular visibility. These were repainted, had striping added, and pole mounted neon yellow crosswalk signs were installed at several intersections, including Sunset Street and Ridgewood Avenue and Dodd Street and Ridgewood Avenue, in order to enhance such visibility.

Citizen's Police Academy

in 2019, the Glen Ridge Police Department, in conjunction with the Montclair and Bloomfield Police Departments, held its first joint Citizen's Police Academy. During this nine-week program, residents of Bloomfield, Montclair, and Glen Ridge met once a week to get an inside look at how their respective police departments operate. Topics included Motor Vehicle Enforcement, Criminal Investigations, Crime Scene Processing, Domestic Violence, Use of Force and De-Escalation Techniques, Narcotics Enforcement, Police K9 Operations, Police Sketch Artist Implementation, as well as Police Recruitment and Retention. The academy was deemed a success with 41 total graduates, 13 of whom were Glen Ridge residents, having completed the program. Plans are already under way for Citizen Police Academy 2020 which will be expanded to include both the East Orange and Verona police departments.

Ring Doorbell Crime Prevention Initiative

In 2019, the Glen Ridge Police Department joined the Neighbor Portal by Ring. This innovative crime prevention program essentially serves as a digital Neighborhood Watch program. Registered users can quickly alert law enforcement as well as their neighbors of criminal activity. Additionally, photos and/or video can be uploaded to the portal to aid in the identification of criminal actors. During its inaugural year with the Glen Ridge Police Department, the Neighbor Portal led to the identification and apprehension of three criminals who were ultimately charged with various crimes including theft, burglary, and conspiracy.

Patch to Patch

In 2019, the GRPD worked closely with the East Orange Police Department during a crime spree that included vehicle burglaries and thefts on our bordering streets. During this joint effort, a criminal actor was identified and subsequently taken into custody. As a result of that arrest, the crimes abated, and the

residents of Glen Ridge and East Orange, in that area, experienced enhanced enforcement from both police departments.

2020 Program Goals

In 2020, the Crime Prevention Officers within the department will design a program to reduce both thefts of bicycles and thefts from motor vehicles. Larceny is a crime of opportunity, which can be combated with awareness. History has shown that programs designed to thwart a specific crime have led to an increase in satisfaction with police services within Essex County.

GLEN RIDGE PUBLIC LIBRARY

2019 was another banner year for the Glen Ridge Library as it was voted NJ's favorite library by the readers of *NJ Family Magazine*. This honor was only made possible by the residents of our community who took the time to nominate the Library and to share the reasons why it is their favorite library.

Programming

Programming is something that is continuously expanding at the Glen Ridge Library. More and more residents are participating in various clubs, events and special programs. In 2019, over 11,000 people attended more than 650 events. During the summer alone, there were 160 programs for children, teens and adults. These included a visit from the 501st Legion, a group of Star Wars costume players; a curated telescope viewing night with members of the Morris Museum Astrological Society; and the fourth summer of the Pop-Up Library at the train station.

Speaking of telescopes, the Library now has a telescope that patrons are encouraged to borrow. This telescope, purchased with a generous Rotary Club donation, is an Orion StarBlast 4.5" reflector telescope. This telescope may be borrowed for up to 7 days at a time.

Lastly, 2019 witnessed the return of the hit public radio program *Selected Shorts*. This event, partly funded by the Glen Ridge Film Fund and the Friends of the Library, was a sell-out evening at the Women's Club featuring actors Robert Sean Leonard, Kathleen Chalfont and Michael Cervis. *Selected Shorts* is a unique evening of literature in performance.

Strategic Plan

Throughout 2019, the Library worked with a committee of its Trustees, staff and residents to develop its 2020-2025 strategic plan which will establish its future path. The plan sets goals that will provide residents with more access to the Library in new and innovative ways, place a strong focus on programming, and further establish the Library as "the most vibrant and diverse public space in our community." A copy of this plan is available for viewing on the Library's website.

Library Use

2019 is on track to establish yet another record year for circulation. The previous record was set in 2017 at 125,752 check-outs and renewals of material, both physical and digital. The Library estimates that it will meet or exceed that number in 2019 with an anticipated circulation increase of 10%-11% to 139,000 such check outs and renewals. The Library also anticipates it will close out 2019 with nearly 125,000 patron visits, representing an increase of 4.5% over 2018.

Looking Ahead

In 2020, many changes will take place in the Library that align with the goals outlined in its strategic plan. The first significant change is that the Library will be going fine-free, joining the more than 500 libraries in the United States that have already done so.

Library experts have found that charging overdue fines inhibits access to library materials and services. Studies indicate that even modest penalties deter people from registering for a library card due to the risk

of incurring fines. Rather than motivating borrowers to return items on time, fines act as an inequitable barrier to service, disproportionately impacting minors, students and community members with limited financial resources.

In addition, the Glen Ridge Library, as a member of BCCLS, will be providing library users with the new auto-renew system. This service will be available starting Valentine's Day 2020.

Finally, I am pleased to announce that beginning today, Monday January 6, 2020, the Library will be open an additional 6 hours per week, by adding an additional 3 hours to each of the current Monday and Wednesday scheduled hours. Henceforth, the Library will be open at 9:00am Monday-Saturday to better serve its patrons.

CONCLUSION

After serving for the past 4 years as Mayor, with the tremendous support of the Council and Borough administration, I am constantly reminded of just how privileged I am to work with some of the most committed and passionate people I have ever had the pleasure to be associated with. As a community, we are indeed fortunate to have a council that is comprised of a group of extremely experienced, knowledgeable, focused and dedicated individuals. In fact, as of 12/31/2019, our Mayor and Councilors have served our community for a combined total of 67 years. This team has consistently demonstrated its ability to work effectively and collegially together to advance and promote the interests of the residents of Glen Ridge. We are also tremendously fortunate to have an Administrator, Deputy Administrator, Borough Attorney and Department heads who so effectively oversee every aspect of the day-to-day management of Glen Ridge, assuring that our residents receive all of the services that they have come to expect, as well as assuring that the Borough's infrastructure is properly and timely maintained.

On behalf of the Council and Borough administration, I wish you all a very happy, healthy, prosperous and successful New Year.

Finally, at the conclusion of this meeting, I urge everyone to join us at our annual reorganization reception at Fitzgeralds, not only to celebrate the start of Glen Ridge's quasiquicentennial anniversary year, but also to bid farewell to Mike Rohal and David Lefkovits and to welcome Mike Zichelli, Eric DeLine and Richard Law to their new positions.

