

State of the Borough Speech

2006

I wish you all a very special Eastern Orthodox European Christmas (also known as "Little Christmas") today, as I make my sixteenth State of Borough address as your Mayor.

- I am pleased to be able to report that for the sixteenth consecutive year there will be no increase in the local purpose tax.
- Our tax collection rate continues to increase, reaching over 97%.
- Added assessments this year totaled over one million dollars.
- Woodbine is presenting its strongest financial picture ever, as I will note throughout this speech.
- This year we have entered into a contract to reassess property in the Borough of Woodbine, which will be completed by the end of this year, as directed by the Cape May County Tax Board.
- Once again, Woodbine positioned itself very well in getting its fair share of various grants. A grand total of over 4 million dollars in construction and improvements will go to improve the quality of life, both social and economic, in our community. Without the support of our legislators these State and Federal grant programs would not be possible, and we thank them.
- This includes \$300,000 from the Department of Community Affairs toward a new pumper truck for our Volunteer Fire Department, which not only services our entire community including Woodbine Developmental Center and the Coast Guard Uniform Distribution Center, but also assists in Fire Control for the expanded State Forest.

- Our Firehouse, which was recently renovated using DCA funds, received an honorable mention from the Cape May County Chamber of Commerce for Beautification.
- The Ambulance Corps Building will now also serve as our Public Safety/Emergency Management command center.
- Woodbine's Emergency Management coordinator Manny Gonzalez has been working steadily to upgrade our emergency management programs.
- Five local residents have been trained by the County as Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) members.
- Woodbine's collaborative relationship with the State Police continues, with expanded Drug Free Zones for our school and recreational areas.
- The Municipal Utilities Authority and Port Authority were established by the Borough to expand the Borough's capabilities in terms of municipal services and economic development under the able leadership of the respective Boards' members. Thus the Authorities created opportunities for the Borough to achieve Borough-stated purposes and to carry on certain activities and functions of the Borough in a more flexible, less restrictive environment. The time has come for the potential of these agencies to be more fully realized.
- Exemplifying the opportunities available through our Authorities, the Municipal Utilities Authority has reorganized its operations and is now wishes to offer its services to the Borough under an interlocal agreement whereby the Authority can offer "Public Works" supervisory services for the Borough's existing Public Works Department and additionally lend its services to the Borough's new sewer facility. The Authority will be establishing its own Division of Public Works to comprehensively manage and operate Public Works within the Borough of Woodbine.

- This newly organized Division of Public Works will have two sections, one dealing with water and sewage and the other with supervising Borough work on streets, roads, public buildings, and public parks and grounds.
- We have discussed an MUA/Public Works consolidation for some times, and have now been successful in obtaining DCA SHARE (Sharing Available Resources Efficiently) funding in the amount of \$20,000 for a study to determine the feasibility of combining services, vehicle maintenance, and storage facilities of the Public Works Department, Municipal Utilities Authority, Port Authority, and School District in a new common facility.
- The first phase of the review of sharing and consolidating public works facilities and services is now underway.

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- From the Department of Transportation this year we received \$150,000 for street improvements, and expect to continue applying for infrastructure improvement funding.
- At long last, we have received final approval from the county engineer for our streetscape project for Washington Avenue. The Borough originally received grants approved for \$775,000. With the recent approval of an additional \$250,000, the project now totals over a million dollars. This will have an enormous impact on our downtown revitalization program.
- The Borough's first sanitary sewerage plant, located at the Airport, is now a reality, with construction virtually nearly complete. With financing in the amount of \$2.5 million in total from the United States Economic Development Authority and the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, we now have a facility that, in the first stage, can process up to fifty thousand gallons per day.

- As a result of the collaboration between the Woodbine Port Authority and the Federal Aviation Administration, we have the sewer plant strategically located along John Penn Boulevard to be managed under the auspices of our Municipal Utilities Authority. With service lines extending throughout that portion of the airport property that borders John Penn Boulevard and Henry DeCinque Boulevard, and Route 550, we are perfectly poised for the establishment of a high quality light industrial/commercial park.
- We are receiving numerous inquiries from developers concerning this property and it all bodes well for realizing what was the dream behind establishing the Woodbine Port Authority in 1974. **Woodbine's Airport Business Park is open for business!**
- The airport's property had until 1974, been in continuous ownership by the Borough, subject to military use during World War II. Then in 1974, the Port Authority was formed by the Borough for purposes of providing an organization that would have more flexibility than the Borough itself in maximizing the beneficial use of its extensive acreage. While, of course, the airport would maintain its aviation facilities, there remained a core and ongoing mission of the airport to serve as an economic engine for the Borough and its residents.
- The ordinance that established the Port Authority states, at the outset: "The purpose of this authority is to foster and promote the welfare of the citizens of the Borough of Woodbine." Additionally, the ordinance provides specifically that the Port Authority is to acquire, hold, use and dispose of its property, in the name of the Port Authority "but for the Borough of Woodbine."
- Having been established by the Borough with Borough of Woodbine property, the Port Authority, by its ordinance, is specifically designated as an "agency and instrumentality of the Borough of Woodbine." Thus, the Port Authority has had a long and meritorious history of working hand-in-hand with and as a function of the Borough of Woodbine, with its membership

being duly appointed by the Mayor and governing body of the Borough.

- As a result of this unique relationship, the Borough has consistently looked forward to the day when the airport property might be put to use not only for the casual enjoyment of recreational pilots but also for the direct and significant benefit that economic development could bring to the Borough's residents.
- The Woodbine Sewerage Treatment Facility at the airport is an asset with a value almost beyond reckoning. It serves as a keystone to economic progress in an area of the Borough that has been recognized by the State of New Jersey, and by agencies such as the Department of Environmental Protection and the Pinelands Commission, as particularly suited for intelligent Smart Growth.
- The MUA, having an interlocal agreement with the Borough to oversee operation of the sewer facility, will be in a position to directly interface with the Borough's other authority, the Port Authority, creating a truly mutually beneficial governmental foundation for economic progress in Woodbine.
- The sewer facility has the potential for servicing the needs of redevelopment in the area of the Borough's former landfill, leading to the capping and beneficial use of what has been until now a liability for the Borough. It will jump start commercial and light industrial development in and around the so-called "horseshoe" of property between John Penn Boulevard and Henry DeCinque Boulevard, as well as service expanded areas of development on properties adjacent to or near the airport, such as the landfill.
- As we speak, developers are actively competing for the rights to develop the landfill area. The Borough has marketing materials and strategies in place to bring the Borough's numerous assets to the attention of business interests.

- The Cape May Seashore Line has already completed new industrial/commercial rail crossings, linkages and lines that will be the nucleus for future reactivated rail freight service in the Borough. The first freight customers will be Modern Gas, which will eventually service our entire commercial/industrial area.
- Businesses moving inland due to the spiraling costs of barrier island properties are looking towards Woodbine as a reasonable alternative. We want to be prepared to take advantage of all these conditions and circumstances in a manner that is both consistent with the established character of the Borough and yet maximizes the economic benefits and prosperity that can be derived from new businesses, jobs, and a healthy tax base.
- Woodbine, with its extensive bikepath, is now on the Southern Pinelands Natural Heritage Trail as a New Jersey State Scenic Byway, approved by the New Jersey Department of Transportation.
- Woodbine is now part of not only this Byway but also of the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail and the Cape May to High Point Bikeway, all of which connect to the Pinelands in some way. This designation will give not only focus for tourists and other visitors but enables each Pinelands community on this route to showcase their particular landmarks. From Woodbine's Mount Pleasant area at County Route 610 to the entrance on Route 550 to Belleplain State Forest (which now incorporates land within the Borough) Woodbine's focal points are now notable by those following the Southern Pinelands Scenic Natural Heritage Trail.
- A mural commemorating Woodbine's history will be unveiled along the bikepath this spring. This is being done in collaboration with the Puerto Rican Action Committee through a regrant made possible by the Cape May County Division of Culture and Heritage and the New Jersey State Historical Commission.

- Local artist Helen Clymer designed and is overseeing painting of the mural, which is being done by community volunteers.
- A number of local banks also contributed towards this project.
- As Woodbine's downtown revitalization continues, an increasing number of antique/collectible/gift shops are locating in the Borough.
- An expanded equestrian presence has also become increasing evident within our Borough as the number of both horse farms and horse-related business have caused us to be known as the equestrian center of Southern New Jersey.
- We intend to maintain the community "feel" we've all come to cherish as expansion and redevelopment efforts proceed
- The Chamber of Commerce has been a valuable resource in representing our business community and promoting economic growth in Woodbine.
- Coming into Woodbine along Route 550 you'll note the "Welcome to Woodbine" sign donated by the Greater Woodbine Chamber of Commerce. We thank them for their support!
- As always, our School district continues to be a top priority. While the Borough is not involved in day to day operations of the school district, which is an autonomous body, we have collaborated in improving the facilities and physical environment.
- I am pleased to report that bids will be received January 13 for our 2.5 million dollar Community/School Gymnasium and Community/School Library projects, which the Borough has spearheaded and which include both a full-sized gymnasium and a library/technology center with a branch of the Cape May County Library system, to be open to all local residents.

- We have just completed work under a \$142,000 Department of Transportation Safe Streets to Schools grant and have received another \$100,000 for sidewalk improvements now under construction, which will benefit our pedestrians, especially children walking to and from the school.
- From the Department of Environmental Protection we received \$35,000 toward indoor recreation equipment, related to the new school gym.
- Boys and Girls Club has been working with 4-H, among other agencies, to bring opportunities to our local school children.
- The Sam Azeez Museum of Woodbine Heritage has been nominated for a 2006 Preserve America Presidential Award in the category of "privately funded historic preservation. It has recently been designated Cape May County's official site by the New Jersey Commission on Holocaust Education.
- As our Borough website (www.boroughofwoodbine.net) expands, please keep checking it for updated services and information about our community.
- I would like to thank the Borough Council, appointed officials and members of our Boards, Authorities, and Commissions, Borough employees, and Borough consultants for their dedicated work for Woodbine.
- Before I end, I would also like to thank the Experience Works Program (formerly known as Green Thumb) by which qualifying individuals over the age of 55 are employed in a variety of settings throughout the municipality, including the Borough, MUA, and St. Vincent DePaul Thrift Shop. One former participant in the program is now employed part-time here in Borough Hall (*wave to Gloria*)
- I again remind you that you have open access to my office and encourage you to come to our public meetings and participate in your local government.

- During the coming month I pledge to work with you and members of the Borough Council Committees and Borough Departments to continue to implement a strategy that promotes managed responsible growth and revitalization and to aggressively seek the funding to carry out our plans at the least cost or no cost to the residents of this wonderful community we know as Woodbine.

**Thank you and I wish you a healthy and prosperous 2006,
and a very Merry Christmas today!**

