

BOROUGH OF TENAFLY REORGANIZATION SPEECH

Good afternoon. This is the fourth time I have had the privilege of addressing you following a successful election campaign. The first time, I was the candidate advocating for change; the need to do something different to help our community reach its full potential. Then as an incumbent, I concentrated on our successes, how Tenafly was doing great, and how voters should stay the course. Now, having completed what I considered to be a difficult campaign, I believe we would best be served by combining those two themes.

We must appreciate and acknowledge all of the positives that make Tenafly the wonderful town that it is, but we must continue to strive to make improvements; and to always be open to changing the manner in which we do business.

This past year Cliffside Park lost its long-time Mayor, Gerry Calabrese, who served as mayor for a record 51 years. When asked how he managed to hold on to the mayorship for so long he replied, "I return all calls, I'm accessible to the public, and I try to help people." Well, although I may be 39 years behind Mayor Calabrese's record, my job description for the position of Mayor is identical to his.

The first challenge Borough Hall faces every year is putting together a budget that serves our community by taking into account our needs and the common sense constraints we face. In 2010, Governor Christie signed a bill which created a 2% cap on property tax levy increases. Since that time, Tenafly has met or bettered that measurement each year, unlike many neighboring municipalities that were not as well fiscally prepared, or as well governed. But those involved in the process will tell you that each year staying under the 2% cap has become a greater challenge. There's a limit to how much staff attrition we can endure. Our employees are entitled to a fair wage. We can streamline the services we provide but we do not look to cut or eliminate them. This year's budget process will be the toughest that Tenafly has ever experienced. I wish to share with you some of my concerns.

There is talk of building a community center in Tenafly. It is a grand idea, one that I would like to support, but we need to consider many aspects of this potential

project. First, of course, is the cost. Can a project of this magnitude actually be built without taxpayer dollars? If so, what would be the cost to furnish and maintain such a facility? The concept of a "community center": first needs to be defined. What type of center is envisioned? We are addressing that question by forming a committee whose only charge is to go out and bring back to us, a description of similar facilities in New Jersey. Then, if we choose to proceed, the next step would be to define the type of center that would best fit Tenafly. Members of the Council have recently said that it is not their intention to spend taxpayer dollars building a community center. I certainly agree with that sentiment. However, I would also point out that it is unlikely that you would find a town the size of Tenafly that is blessed with two facilities such as the JCC on the Palisades and the Korean Community Center, which also has a need for a community center.

We are in the process of increasing the amount budgeted for street repair by at least threefold. We can no longer afford to fall farther behind in maintaining our streets. We must charge our Borough Engineer with making sure the money is well spent and the streets we repair are done properly.

Your Mayor and Council is determined to provide our Seniors with a van which will provide those in need with a level of accessibility that until now has been lacking in Tenafly. But we must remember that the purchase of the van is only the beginning of the cost of this service. Seniors are a growing segment of our community and to this point have been under served. But we need to balance the need for senior services and our desire to provide those services with the fiscal restraints we continue to face. We must look to solve this type of challenge in a creative manner, perhaps using shared services.

Current events have been focused on the effects of climate change, not only in third world countries, but also in many areas across the United States. Tenafly has been blessed not be challenged by natural disasters such as flooding, tornadoes, and forest fires, but we have had our share our hurricanes and blizzards. We have been fortunate that the two major storms that have hit our area in the past few years, resulted in only minimal damage, suffering, and inconvenience compared to many other communities. We should not and will not assume that we will always be so

lucky. 2016 must be the year where emergency shelters are created, including generators and basic provisions. Our residents must be educated about these services so that should a need arise, we are prepared to help those who need assistance.

I could spend a great deal of time talking about our downtown. When a Business Improvement District was proposed over five years ago, I was wary of creating a new tax, but I was won over by the overwhelming support that business owners gave to the concept. Now, with the B.I.D. dissolved we must not give the impression that we are satisfied with the condition of our downtown business district. My plan is to create a small committee of professionals to brainstorm about possible initiatives that could be taken to upgrade our business district. A number of years ago a consultant was hired by the Borough to propose improvements to the downtown. Their presentation was not given proper consideration and in my opinion the negative response to their proposal was primarily an aversion to change. Yes, we have too many nail salons and not enough restaurants, but the reason for that is residents apparently support all of those nail salons and do not support the restaurants; several of which have gone out of business.

I will ask the Council to consider some small changes to the downtown which could lead to improved traffic flow. I also hope that our zoning boards consider proposals that may lead to more people coming into our downtown.

It is also time to review our parking plan. Remember proposed changes must be received with an open mind. Change can be scary, but without change problems and issues will remain. Many of us can remember when the avenues in Manhattan were made one-way after years of two-way traffic. This change was not well received at first, the long term impact was very positive. Just a few years ago the traffic patterns in downtown London were drastically changed to much disdain and ridicule by the public. Today those changes have been deemed a complete success. Several years ago, a significant change was made in the traffic pattern in Tenafly but the resistance was so strong, after only a few weeks the change was reversed.

I plan to form a committee to develop Sgt. Nicholas Oresko Memorial Park. This project, approved a year ago, needs to be jumpstarted and completed in 2016.

I will ask the Planning Board once again look at the proliferation of new two family homes in Tenafly. A balanced approach needs to be taken with this issue. The rights of property owners must be recognized, but the character of Tenafly must not be altered by a radical change in density in residential areas.

Two final goals for 2016: I would like to identify another location for a second special needs project. I believe the partnership with the Bergen County United Way on Tenafly Road was a total success. Besides making Tenafly more inclusive, its impact on our COAH requirements was substantial. And second, trees; I am pleased that in 2015 our DPW planted over 100 trees. We need to increase that number in 2016. Our tree fund will allow us to do so without putting the burden on taxpayers. Finally, to answer the many inquiries I received during the recent campaign as to why I would like to continue to serve as your Mayor for the next four years, I can simply say, I love Tenafly. I think you will agree it's a great town in which to live and raise a family, and I look forward to overcoming the challenges we face. Tenafly has the benefit not only of an excellent staff of professionals in Borough Hall, but also a spectacular mix of residents willing to get involved and assist in maintaining the quality of our community. With your help, we will keep Tenafly the great town that it is. I believe that I speak, not only for myself, but also for the members of the Council, when I say, thank you for giving us the opportunity to serve. To each and every one of you, have a very Happy and a Healthy New Year.

Given by:

**Mayor Peter S. Rustin
Saturday, January 2, 2016
Tenafly Council Chambers**