

**STATE OF THE TOWNSHIP 2015**

**Mayor Shing-Fu Hsueh**

**April 13, 2015**

Thank you for coming to my 14<sup>th</sup> state of the township address. For me to be able to serve you, I have to thank my wife and my family for all their support and sacrifice over the past 22 years.

The original habitants in West Windsor were the Lenape Indians. The first immigrants from Europe settled in this area about 1682. West Windsor was part of New Windsor, then Windsor and officially became West Windsor and elected the first West Windsor Township Committee in 1797. During this period of time, the Schenck and Conover families, who emigrated from Holland, were the two major property owners in West Windsor.

My family moved to West Windsor in 1985. Soon after I physically moved in, I served as a volunteer first on the Board of Health and later on the Environmental Commission. With many years of service in the public sector and academia, I developed a vision for West Windsor and decided to run for the first Council seat in 1993 along with others who shared the same vision and we won.

On July 1, 2001, I became the third elected Mayor of West Windsor since we adopted the Mayor-Council form of municipal government in 1992. My first challenge was the tragedy of 9/11. My second challenge was the final affordable housing decision rendered by the State Supreme Court in October 2001. At the same time, we also faced a severe penalty from the OSHA if we did not fix the work environment downstairs in the municipal building. In addition to these three challenges we had to deal with, I made my promises to the residents of West Windsor, all of which I have kept: reconstruction of the Alexander Rail Bridge; restoration of the Grovers Mill Pond; creation of the Farmers Market; creation of a history museum; adoption of a master plan for a bicycle/pedestrian friendly design in West Windsor; creation of an Arts Center; upgrading the Senior Center; enhancing recreational opportunities for the youth; promoting arts and cultural activities; expanding the open space and farmland preservation program; turning the brownfields into more productive properties; developing a new downtown around the train station; improving traffic circulation and public infrastructure.

To promote a sense of community and a more clear sense of place called West Windsor is the goal of my Administration. Diversity is truly the strength of this community. We are very proud of the fact that in the process of dealing with the September 11, 2001 tragedy, we also learned how to support one another as a community. Interfaith Community Bridge, an independent organization of all religious leaders, is an outgrowth of this unique experience and it continues this effort to bring us together with many more community events.

Last year, our major accomplishments included: 1). A successful recruitment of three (3) new officers to the police force; 2). A complete reconstruction of the Big Bear Brook Bridge along Princeton-Hightstown Road and the Assunpink Creek Bridge along Old

Trenton Road; 3). Completion of Hill Wallack Headquarters; 4). Upgrading and addition of recreational facilities at Duck Pond Park; 5). Renovations and upgrading at the Marketfair (Corner Bakery, Eastern Mountain Sports, Barnes & Noble and Season 52, etc.) 6). Completion of the extended Vaughn Lot for 600 cars cutting the wait time for new permit holders from many years to a couple weeks; 7). 2014 Collaboration Award from the Sustainable Jersey Program; and 8). Recognition of the Environmental Education Center which is part of the History Museum, by the State Association of Environmental Commissions as one of the six significant environmental projects in 2014.

Today, as one of the highest silver level certified sustainable communities in the state, West Windsor received the Collaboration Award from the Sustainable Jersey Program and the Annual Award from the State Association of Environmental Commissions in 2014. This distinction demonstrates where we are at the state level with respect to our accomplishments in the social, economic and environmental areas.

In the forthcoming year, we plan to accomplish the following:

1. Connecting South Post Road through Conover Road with a bike path into the Mercer Community Park
2. Resurfacing of Alexander Road
3. Improving Canal Point Boulevard
4. Improving traffic movements at the Alexander Road and Vaughn Drive intersection
5. Widening North Post Road around the curve in front of the library
6. Constructing a Cricket field in the Community Park
7. Constructing NRG Energy National Headquarters
8. Acquiring additional 4 properties for open space preservation
9. Re-grading Princeton Junction Pocket Park to improve its hydrologic pattern
10. Obtaining architectural design and cost estimates for the Fire and Emergency Services Building
11. Turning Cranbury Road into a pedestrian-friendly roadway

No subject disturbs New Jersey residents more than their property taxes – the highest in the nation. There are three components to property tax bills: the municipal budget, used to operate local government; the school budget; and the local share of the county budget. Of these, we only directly control the municipal budget.

Yes, our property taxes are high, but the municipal portion of our property tax rate has been very stable. My first proposed budget was prepared in 2002. That year the Administration and Council had a joint retreat to develop common goals in different areas of municipal issues. That year, we had a municipal surplus of 1.54% of the total municipal budget. Through the evolution of many years of dialogue, we established the following principals for the municipal budgeting process: having an annual increase in the total budget less than the CPI; obtaining a AAA credit rating status; providing full municipal services including garbage collection, recycling, leaf and brush pick-up, and public safety responders; and supporting and maintaining a sustainable budget.

Some may ask: “Why increase taxes at all? Times are tough.” And they would probably receive a sympathetic response from most residents. While maintaining a flat tax rate will always be popular, it is not always the best policy – not when so many economic challenges face us. Based on our own household experience, expenditures go up every year. If the municipal tax rate is flat, we pay for those increased expenditures with surplus. West Windsor earned a AAA credit rating in 2007, and we had the highest percentage of reserve surplus to municipal budget 10.39% in 2008. It is estimated to be only 4.14% in this year’s introduced budget. Reserve surplus represents money to be used in cases of emergency.

When this year’s budget was proposed to the Council on February 12, of course no one knew anything about the New Jersey Supreme Court decision on March 10 regarding the fair share affordable housing. The decision requires municipalities like West Windsor to file a “Declaratory Judgment Action” with the court by July 8, 2015 to protect us from interested parties bringing legal action against the Township through a “Constitutional Compliance Action.” This could result in a “Builder’s Remedy” law suit such as Toll Brothers Estate at Princeton Junction where West Windsor could be ordered to allow developers to build denser housing projects with few amenities, less affordable housing, and more lax site plan design standards; in the long run, costing the taxpayers more. Once we file with the court a “Declaratory Judgment Action,” we have five month (up to December 8, 2015) to submit a Housing Element and Fair Share Plan supplementing what we already submitted to COAH for Round 3 in 2008. As Mayor of West Windsor, I’d like to make it very clear that we will do whatever it takes to protect the best interest of this community. All your support will be critical to this effort.

Now, I’d like to recognize our outstanding volunteer of the year – Dr. Ronald J Slinn, for his contribution to the community.

At this point, I would like again to thank the municipal staff and volunteers of the Township of West Windsor for the cooperation and hard work. I look forward to working with Council and all of you to improve our community.

Thank you for coming to this event. Have a good night.