

State of the Borough Address 2018

Good evening, Happy New Year, and welcome to the Borough of Essex Fells' Re-Organizational meeting of 2018.

This is a remarkable night. You all have just earlier witnessed an amazing event. An event that separates our free, democratic world from all others and an event that did not take place on the world's stage, but rather right here in the beloved Borough of Essex Fells: the democratic transference of "the power of the people."

Just now, Edward Davis, John King, and BJ D'Avella took an oath of office that said that they swear that they will "support the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the State of New Jersey; and that they will "bear true faith an allegiance to the same" - and here's the most important thing – "under the authority of the people."

"Under the authority of the people" – that's you good people. That is the power that you have entrusted to them, and to every elected official. We are granted this sacred authority, "by the people" and not by a party, or by friends, or by any other influences, but "by the people" who have chosen us, who have entrusted us to do what is best for "the people" of the Borough of Essex Fells. We have all sworn to it, and it is something that we do not ever take lightly. And if that solemn and weighty oath is not enough, we add the final kicker, credited to George Washington himself when he took his first oath of office as President, "So help me God."

The transference of power is powerful stuff. Thank you all for being here to witness it.

As I remind everyone who takes the oath of office, You have been given a wonderful gift; a gift of trust from your town to do the very best you can for the benefit of all of the residents of Essex Fells. We sit here as trustees of a very precious stone and it is indeed an honor; and with that honor comes tremendous responsibility. Remember that, remember to be faithful to that trust, and you will be successful in the tasks that wait. Also know that serving with you as fellow Council members are extremely talented, dedicated and caring neighbors who, I am happy to say, love this blessed Borough as much as I, and who very much look forward to working with you, together, on those challenges.

Mayor Edward Davis, Council President Patricia Wahl, and distinguished members of the Governing Body of Essex Fells, thank you so much for allowing me the privilege and honor of delivering my last State of the Borough Address for the beloved Borough of Essex Fells for the year 2017.

Once again, I am very pleased to tell you all that the State of the Borough of Essex Fells is strong, vibrant, and very healthy and sound and she stands strong and true. 2017 was a year in which we accomplished many things, and in true Essex Fells fashion, we accomplished so much without fanfare or fuss. We were faced with some of the same year in and year out challenges, such as balancing the budget with the ever increasing state budget mandates on spending, always trying to do more with less when the costs of operating our Borough are ever increasing;

operating the Essex Fells Water Utility, which provides water to not only Essex Fells, but also three surrounding towns, in an economical and efficient manner; providing the resources and training for our Police and Fire Departments so that our commitment to public safety remains of the highest priority; properly maintaining our roads, sewers, and borough facilities and properties; and providing recreational facilities and programs for our Borough's residents.

In 2017, because of an order of the New Jersey Department of Taxation, Essex Fells successfully completed a borough-wide tax re-evaluation. It was accomplished timely and professionally and we thank the residents of Essex Fells for their cooperation. It has always been our goal, in no matter what we do, to always keep in mind our fiduciary obligations to the Essex Fells taxpayer. I am proud to report that 2017 was no different. Council President Wahl will provide us with a more detailed report on the activities of the Finance and Personnel Committee.

Under very capable and confident leadership of Water Superintendent/Operator Steven Banchi, the Essex Fells Water Utility continued making necessary and periodic upgrades to our system ensuring a safe and healthy water supply to the residents of Essex Fells and our wholesale customers on a very cost efficient basis, keeping the Essex Fells Water Utility one of the premier water companies in the State. It is with extreme sadness that I record that on May 2, 2017, after serving the Borough of Essex Fells for 36 years, Jack Pohlman, our previous Water Superintendent, passed away. During his tenure with the Borough of Essex Fells, Jack Pohlman brought the Water Utility so very far in terms of its service to the customers of the Borough of Essex Fells, and he will always be remembered for his love and commitment to not only the people of Essex Fells and the surrounding towns, but also to the Water Utility itself. Via Condios Aquaman! Councilman Sullivan will speak in greater detail as to the activities of the Water Utility.

Our Department of Public Works, under the exceptional leadership of Roger Kerr, did their usual outstanding job in battling the snows of the beginning of the year, the ever growing grasses on our fields and flowers in our gardens in the Spring, the potholes and storm drains in the summer, and the leaves in the Fall and Winter with steady dedication and hearty spirit! Roger and his crew are an integral part of that what makes Essex Fells such a desired community in which to live. As always, I am very happy to report that we began 2017 with 36.2 miles of Essex Fells roadways, and that we closed 2017 with 36.2 miles of Essex Fells roadways. Well done Roger and the guys. Councilman John King will provide more details on the activities of the Department of Public Works.

In the area of Public Safety, The Essex Fells Police Department came under the leadership of Police Chief, William Theilacker. Darron Volker was promoted to Lieutenant, and we welcomed to our fine force, Jonathan Berger, our newest police officer. We also welcomed our newest junior police woman, Sawyer Leaf, daughter of Essex Fells Police Officer Leigh Leaf and her husband Ryan, born that year. 2017 also saw the completed negotiations for the Police Benevolent Association's Essex Fells Police Four year Contract, and I would like to also thank the department's personnel for working with me and the Borough Administration so professionally and amicably, in coming to a swift and fair contract. Tragically, this year we lost one of our town's heroes and remarkable residents, Dr. Jan Pryor, due to a vehicular accident. The Essex Fells Police Department with Chief Theilacker at the helm has done a wonderful job

in comforting and consoling the Pryor family during this time of anguish. Under Chief Theilacker's leadership, guidance and mentorship, our Police Department is continuing its tradition of being one of the finest in the State, one that keeps us all safe, and one that always deserves our support and respect. On behalf of the entire Borough, Chief, please extend our thanks and appreciation to you and your Department for all they do to "protect and serve" Essex Fells and her people. Further, the members of the Essex Fells Volunteer Fire Department, our neighbors and friends, continue to answer the call of neighbors in danger and distress. The talent and commitment of these members is at an all-time high and Essex Fells is blessed to have each of them ready in a moment's notice. Thank you to Chief James Kearney and the men and woman of the Essex Fells Fire Department. Mayor Edward Davis will provide more details on the activities of the Essex Fells Police Department and Fire Department in 2017.

As I have often stated, Essex Fells is "the town that time forgot" in large part because we keep alive the memories and wonderful character of our town with events like skating at the Pond; holding our Memorial Day Remembrance for our fallen heroes; the Fire Department's Memorial Day Picnic; the Garden Club Christmas Eve Carol sing; the van Brunchers gatherings; the Seniors' Coffee with the Mayor - and I would particularly like to thank Council President Wahl for all her hard work, dedication and efforts in these activities - ; the Veterans' Day Remembrance, where afterward, our veterans meet with the Essex Fells School's Sixth's Grade at the school for a question and answer period, for as one wisely noted, "to be in the presence of American veterans is to be in the presence of American history" - again - thank you Council President Wahl; Councilman Cecere will report on the activities of the Public Affairs Committee.

Under the talented and spirited leadership of Lauren Lombardy Moussab, the Essex Fells Recreation Department is simply doing an outstanding job in providing exciting, well-organized and many recreational activities for our Essex Fells children. Thank you Lauren and thank you to the many, many wonderful volunteers of the Essex Fells Recreation Committee to make these activities and this department so very special. On May 13, 2017, we dedicated our Field House in loving memory of Robert Vincent Lombardy, Sr. who served as our Recreation Director for 17 years, during which time he was instrumental in getting our recreation program to the first rate level it is today. The event was well attended by so many folks, not only from Essex Fells, but also from our surrounding communities in a tribute to Lauren Lombardy Moussab's dad. It was a wonderful Essex Fells moment for this step-son of Essex Fells. Councilman Hindy will provide us with more details on the activities of the Essex Fells Recreation Department.

I would like to take a moment to publicly thank the many, many volunteers who not only make so many wonderful things happen in our little town, but also truly demonstrate that volunteerism is one of our Borough's greatest and unique qualities. Volunteering takes tremendous sacrifice, time, and commitment, and most often, with little or no thanks, but the heart of those who do so is tremendous, and I know that the entire Council joins me in thanking each and every one who gave of their time and of themselves in 2017 to the committees or organizations for which they served. Essex Fells is a much better place for having each of you care about her, her residents, and her unique character. Thank you.

And so it has come to this. As Henry VIII said to Anne Boleyn, “Don’t worry, I don’t plan on keeping you long.”

I am one of the lucky people in the world. I found myself doing something I have loved to do, and have enjoyed every single second of it. 16 years; 5,840 days; 140,160 hours; 8,409,600 minutes; 504, 576,000 seconds. I have enjoyed every single second of being the Mayor of Essex Fells.

I know there will be much smarter mayors than I, but I believe that no one, no one, will ever LOVE this “glorious burden” more than I. I shall miss it very, very much. Yet, I’ve always prided myself on my sense of timing, and I certainly did not want to stay past my “sell date.”

The respect and thanks I have for each and every resident of Essex Fells is boundless, as you have given me over the years the most wonderful gift any elected official can ever receive - your sacred trust and confidence that I would do the right thing. You were so giving as to elect me to serve as a Councilman almost 20 years ago and then return me to the governing body as your Mayor four times. There are no words I can ever say to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to each of you. Your vote, your trust, your belief in me that I could do this job made me a better Mayor and a better man. Words alone seem so inadequate, but from the very bottom of my heart and soul, thank you. You have allowed me the privilege and I am thankful; you have trusted me and I am humbled.

Some of the accomplishments over the last 16 years of which I am most proud are:

In the area of Police and Public Safety:

- the improved coordination of Emergency Management Operations within town and with the County and State;
- better training and education for our police personnel;
- maintaining “the two car minimum;”
- the improved security and lock-down and evacuation drills at the Essex Fells School; and
- the upgrades to our Police and Fire Department communications and vehicles.

In the area of Recreation:

- the acquisition, restoration, creation of “the Essex Fells Fields;”
- the financing and planning of the Lombardy Field House; and
- the expansion of recreational activities offered.

In the area of the Essex Fells Water Utility:

- the successful renewals of and the amended revisions to the water contracts of our customer towns; and
- the improvement made to water supply and the water infrastructure.

In the area of Finance and Personnel:

- the planning of and completion within budget of this Municipal building;

- the entering into shared service agreements for a variety of services with other municipalities in order to keep to our fiduciary commitment to providing quality services to the taxpayers;
- successfully undergoing several tax revaluations and reassessments; and
- the proper outsourcing of certain personnel.

In the area of Public Affairs:

- the enlarged participation of events like Memorial Day and Veterans Day by veterans, residents and the children of Essex Fells;
- spending time listening to our senior residents in attending, “Coffee with the Mayor” moments;
- successfully negotiating a proper solution to the town’s Mount Laurel litigation; better communication with Essex Fells residents first through creating the quarterly Essex Fells Newsletter, then establishing the Essex Fells Webpage; and
- the creation of one of the State’s most restrictive cell tower ordinances; and

In the area of Public Works:

- ensuring the continued improvement to roads and water drainage via NJ DOT grants; and
- the establishment of close working relationships with County, State and Federal elected officials and with PSE&G regarding storm preparedness and response.

Although I cannot thank everyone that I would like to, and for whom, the accomplishments we attained over the last four mayoral terms would not have been possible, but please know that my thanks are as sincere as I can ever express and they run through every Essex Fells department, club, organization, and volunteer group that blesses Essex Fells with their drive and commitment to do the very best for our town, her residents, and our children. We truly do live in the "Enchanted Forest."

I would like to thank all of the Councilmen and women that I have served with over the years:

Rupert Hauser; James Blake; James Irwin; Karen Kovacs; Thomas St. John; Lynda Youngworth; Julianne Rose; Alan Rubino; James Sweeney; David Boyd; Ann Denehy; Jack Taylor; Thomas McCaffrey; George Peck; Jane McWilliams; Glenn Koechling; Mayor Ed Davis; Councilman Michael Cecere; Councilman Greg Hindy; Councilman John King; Councilman William Sullivan and Councilwoman Patricia Wahl, and Councilman BJ D’Avella.

Over the course of those years, I have worked with, and dare I say in some instances, “outlasted” five (5) Police Chiefs; four (4) Fire Chiefs; three (3) Administrators; two (2) Water Superintendents; one (Borough Attorney); and one (1) Superintendent of the Department of Public Works.

This is the hard part. And I really don't have the words to express my gratitude, admiration, respect, genuine fondness, and absolutely love for the people who work for the Borough of Essex Fells – Francine Paserchia, our Borough Administrator, Brittany Thunell, and the absolutely amazing team that runs this town so smoothly; Roger Kerr and the men of the Department of Public Works; Steve Banchi and Brian Schatzel of the Essex Fells Water Utility; Chief William Theilacker and the officers of the Essex Fells Police Department; Lauren Lombardy Mousaab, our Recreation Director, and my “Brother in Law,” Martin Murphy who come to work for the Borough every day, and for each of those 5,840 days of my mayoralty, have made the fulfillment of my duties and responsibilities such a pleasure, and made me look so damn good. I am extremely grateful to each and every one of you and your outstanding teams for the hard work and dedication, and the people of Essex Fells are incredibly lucky to have you bringing your talents to our little town. I met you all as your Mayor; we instantaneously became forged as colleagues; and then and forever, dear friends for life. You are all literally family to me.

In speaking about family, I owe a very special thank you to my wife Jill, my son Ted (who never thought this day would come) and his wife, Dana, my daughter Kelly and her Tim, for allowing me the opportunity and privilege of public service. None of you signed up for this, but you all knew it was something that is my passion, and you allowed me this, to your own detriment. I love you all, and could never have done it without your love and support.

In the words of (and with apologies to) President George Washington made during his farewell address:

Though in reviewing the incidents of my Administration, I am unconscious of intentional error – I am nevertheless too sensible of my defects not to think it probable that I may have committed many errors. Whatever they may be, I fervently beseech the Almighty to avert or mitigate the evils to which they may tend. I shall also carry with me the hope that my (Borough) will never cease to view them with indulgence; and that after (twenty) years - one third of my life - dedicated to the service of Essex Fells, with an upright zeal, the faults of incompetent abilities will be consigned to oblivion...”

With the wonderful event of tonight, I become a member of a very exclusive club, one that only has 18 members – with only three of us living. For remember, “Old mayors never die....” We now just get hung out there in the hallway.

All right then, let us to the task at hand. The time has come to pass the torch to a new generation, with new ideas, and a new outlook, but one that will always remember that which makes Essex Fells, so Essex Fell-y. I am so excited for our Borough's future! For our town's spirit will never die; it thrives and lives on! Mayor Davis, the right person at the right time, and my Beloved Council – Please know that I shall always be there for you and I “stand like [a] greyhound in the slip, straining upon the start” should you ever need me. Please know that you have, not only my, but also every resident of Essex Fells' respect and trust in your judgment and your desire to do the very best for the town we all love. And please know that I will always be your cheerleader, your advocate, and your biggest supporter as you go forward to face the challenges that await. Continue on with the well established goal and mission of bringing Essex Fells' services and programs up to date; Continue on with establishing a plan for our future,

while honoring our past; and Continue on with preserving the unique character of our town. So it has been, so it is, and so it shall continue to be.

I bid you all a very heartfelt Peace, Farewell, Godspeed and Adieu.

God bless these United States, God bless Essex Fells – this Borough upon Hill, God Bless Mayor Edward Davis and this Honorable Governing Body, and God bless you all.

Edward P. Abbot
Mayor
Borough of Essex Fells
2002-2017