

Mayor Janice Allen  
State of the Borough 2007  
North Plainfield Borough Council Meeting  
January 7, 2008

The Borough continued to progress in 2007, moving ahead on projects that were started and commissioning many new projects and activities, receiving many grants and even some awards.

The Police Department was pleased to learn that Chief Parenti was selected for the 2007 Leadership Award, given by the National Latino Peace Officers Association. Chief Parenti was selected for his excellence in law enforcement leadership. During his tenure in North Plainfield, Chief Parenti has strived to bridge the gap between law enforcement and the immigrant population. In regard to community policing, he has supported multiple bilingual outreach programs, targeting the immigrant population in which over 900 participants have been taught the legal, cultural and social aspects of life in the United States.

While protecting our residents is foremost, our department is highly involved in building a better community. They are active with our youth through DARE, GREAT and STEP (Summer Teen Evening Program). They again held their annual National Night Out. They participate in school activities, teaching courses, doing finger printing, attending functions. Congratulations go to Detective Eric Fowler and Detective Alex Kuga, both members of the Municipal Alliance Committee (MAC) and Youth Services Commission (YSC) for their tireless efforts to improve the lives of children who are at risk.

In 2007, the Attorney General mandated each Police Department train in a program called "Active Shooter in Schools". The NPPD was one of the first to institute this training back in 2004 and continues this training today. North Plainfield is unique in conducting the exercises as a team consisting of the Police Department, the Board of Education, the Fire Department and the Department of Public Works.

Enforcement continues to rise and in 2007, 2000 more summons were issued. This figure has doubled since Chief Parenti has taken office.

The Police Department continued its partnership with the Somerset County Gang and Narcotics Task Force. Together they monitored several loosely formed gangs. The unit accounted for approximately forty arrests for a Controlled Dangerous Substance (CDS) in the Borough with several of them being known gang members. Ten of these were for distribution of CDS. Some of these were for purchases made by undercover detectives and others for arrests in which large quantities of CDS, the method of packaging, and large amounts of cash allowed the Prosecutor to pursue the distribution charges. Patrols added another two dozen arrests for possession of CDS and six for arrest on warrant.

Our Police Dept. has certainly served the community this year while even securing \$209,000 in grant money. Thank you, Chief Parenti and the members of your fine Department.

Our Fire Department continues to serve our Borough. This year they answered 1,732 calls; 882 were fire calls with 85 being actual fires; 850 calls were for EMS. This number is down from last year because we are no longer providing EMS to Green Brook. Our overall EMS billing netted us \$90,000 in revenue in 2007.

The Fire Department received a SHARE grant last March for \$70,000. They have been collecting data and holding meetings in the hope of coming up with a shared service agreement with Watchung and Green Brook. The final report for this feasibility study should be done in January or early February.

Our Fire Department continues to be active in the community providing our senior citizens with blood pressure checks, planning and participating in Health and Safety Day and as always, teaching fire prevention in our schools. In addition to all these activities our department volunteered again to host the annual St. Baldrick's Day fundraiser for the National Childhood Cancer Foundation. In 2007 this fundraiser raised \$67,000 for childhood cancer.

As noted previously, a number of serious fires occurred. The most notable being the Mountain Avenue fire, where Captain Smith, while off duty, risked his life to save

people stranded in the burning building. Special thanks to Captain Smith and all the members of the department who continually risk their lives on behalf of our residents. Thank you, Chief Eaton and your fine department.

Our Public Works Department would like to inform everyone that we will pick up your leaves. We will make one more sweep of the entire town. Thank you for your patience with this late fall season.

This year the department who maintains all our roads, parks and public buildings, bought a new truck and plow to maintain our fleet. We demolished two old houses at Vermeule and will construct a new storage barn.

This year we saw the end of our Downtown Streetscape Project with new signage in our pocket park at the Somerset Street overpass. New signage also welcomed people at many of our borders. Our entire streetscape has been funded with Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP) money from Somerset County. This year we also used EDIP money to purchase the building behind Borough Hall. This year we also received a \$29,000 grant from the same for downtown façade improvements.

Renovations and improvements continue to be a vital part of our economy and this year our planning Board reviewed plans for the upgrading and expansions of the following business properties: Mackie Furniture, Sipersteins and McDonalds. Currently the Staples property is being renovated for Circuit City.

Our Economic Development Committee continues to encourage business and has reviewed the Borough's sign ordinance and has held a downtown visioning meeting. They continue to work with our planner and help secure the EDIP grants. Their volunteer efforts are much appreciated.

Recreation is important to our quality of life. This year our Recreation Department applied for and received \$15,000 from the County for improvements to our Parks. This grant helped bring playground equipment up to code and over the years has completely upgraded the Vermeule Playground as well as made improvements to Green Acres Park. The improved facilities will allow us to expand and improve our current recreation programs.

To preserve our suburban neighborhood, we need to take care of our trees. Our Shade Tree Advisory Board again received a \$25,000 grant from DEP Cool Cities Program to plant trees. Trees will be planted again this spring. Our thanks to this committee of volunteers.

Our Environmental Commission continues to meet and push the continued clean up of the Lockheed Site. They have worked with the Property Maintenance Committee to fulfill the educational and outreach part of our storm water management plan. I'm encouraging them to put together a Natural Resource Inventory, which is a project that has lain dormant for years. Hopefully they will also educate us on how to become an Environmentally Sustainable Community.

Our Borough has a rich history and a wonderful historic district. The Historic Preservation Commission, this past year, put together Guidelines for all residents of the district so that everyone will know how and when they should come to the Commission. The coming year they are planning on working on the Historic Preservation Element to the Master Plan and also plan to review the Historic Preservation Ordinance. They are a group of volunteers who are committed to preserving our past for future generations.

Education and communication were important elements of activities in 2007. We reached out to our residents in an effort to provide them with needed information. We put our codes and a list of businesses online. We updated our tax maps. We used our website and newsletter to make residents aware of upcoming activities and important information. Going forward we hope to expand our website and continue our newsletter.

We always have the taxpayer in mind, and therefore we try to do as much as we can with grants.

This year we continued to use our \$1,076,000 NJ Infrastructure Trust Fund to video-inspect and repair our sewers. This year we received \$75,000 in CDBG money for a sewer replacement at West End Avenue.

Finally, this year we paved Lewis Street and in the spring will pave Vermeule Place and repave Columbia Avenue. We received a \$150,000 DOT grant in 2007 to pave Oneida Avenue.

This year we also secured \$90,000 Homeland Security, \$90,000 Safe & Secure Communities – PD, \$75,000 FEMA Assistance to Fire Fighter Grant and thanks to our legislators \$150,000 in Extraordinary Aid. I want to thank all our professionals who handle these and other grants.

Thanks to all our volunteers we were able to provide recreational activities and special events again this year. Our Memorial Day Services, Street Fair and Chili Cook Off, July 4<sup>th</sup> Parade and Fireworks, Senior Citizen Picnic and Santa Comes to Town were all a huge success and well attended. It's activities like these, where people work together, that build a sense of community.

To our Council, a sincere "Thank you" for your countless volunteer hours. Thank you too, for putting money aside for our Round 3 COAH obligation. Working with the Friends of the Carpenter and the County, we hope to meet our COAH obligation.

I would also like to thank some other of the many volunteer community groups that help us in so many ways. A few of these include the Latino Coalition, Friends of the Library, NP Rescue Squad, NP Lions Club and the NP Forum.

I have three goals for 2008:

- 1) To finish renovations to our municipal building.
- 2) To communicate better with our residents.
- 3) To thank all of you who continue to work, professionally or as a volunteer, to make the Borough of North Plainfield the proud community that it is.

It's been a great year, and the next one promises to be even greater.

Thank you!