

West Windsor Township

Office of the Mayor

State of West Windsor Township Address

MARCH 12, 2012

Mayor Shing-Fu Hsueh, Ph.D., P.E., P.P.

Good evening and thank you for joining me for my eleventh State of the Township address. As always, I would like to first thank the Township Council for hosting this and for continuing to work together with my Administration to serve the residents of this great community despite the demands of their work schedules and family obligations. In addition to the efforts of the elected officials, it is just as important to recognize the hard work of all of our volunteers who serve on boards, commissions, and civic organizations that guide this Township and its growth.

From the first day that I entered the mayor's office on July 1, 2001, I made "sense of place" and "sense of community" as the primary goals for my administration considering the rich history of West Windsor Township. We should not forget about the deep roots of our agricultural tradition over the past 215 years. My vision of West Windsor will continue to support this heritage. As of today, we have about 50% of township land preserved as open space of which 933 acres are actively being farmed and earning rental income for the Township.

Being the first designated Greentown USA in the State of New Jersey in 2002, we continue to do whatever we can to improve our environmental landscape. The adoption of the Sustainable West Windsor Plan as part of the Municipal Master Plan has provided a blueprint for this effort. It is important to point out that the Sustainable West Windsor Plan integrates environmental, economical and social components all together in our local planning process. To carry out this plan we need to have a long-term vision and financial stability. In following this plan, the Township has already realized benefits.

Today, we have a 27-acre dredged, rejuvenated and fishable Grovers Mill Pond. We are nearing completion of the final remediation requirements which will allow us to turn the 9-acre former municipal dumpsite and compost station into a 650-car parking lot for West Windsor residents. The parking lot project will be completed in cooperation with the Parking Authority late this year.

After receiving recognition from the State as one of the three silver-level certified sustainable communities in 2010, we were selected as one of three municipalities in 2011 to receive funding from the Sustainable Jersey Small Grant Program. This grant will be used to develop an innovative climate action plan to make energy related improvements to the public facilities in West Windsor. The outcome of this study will further strengthen our ability to implement the Sustainable West Windsor Plan.

Last year, West Windsor also received bronze medal recognition as a Bicycle Friendly Community from the National League of American Bicyclists (the only municipality in NJ to have this recognition at any level). This honor could not have been accomplished without the major contribution of the West Windsor Bicycle and Pedestrian Alliance. Encouraging walking and cycling and alternative modes of transportation is also a very important part of the Sustainable West Windsor Plan.

Related to progress in transportation, we have completed more bicycle/pedestrian connections, the Alexander Road S-Curve realignment, the Meadow Road realignment, and more roadway resurfacing in selected areas of the Township. With the joint efforts of the Route One Coalition of Six Mayors in Mercer and Middlesex Counties, we also hope to see traffic improvements along Route One by the State DOT this coming year.

The new home of the Rite Aid Pharmacy opened last summer and, across Route 571, the Windsor Plaza is now actively under reconstruction and will soon function as a vibrant new neighborhood shopping center. With a planned new park across the street near the Gables, future bike/pedestrian-friendly improvements to Princeton-Hightstown Road, and the exciting new Arts Center nearby, a renewed community feeling is being created that will revitalize not only the surrounding neighborhoods but all of West Windsor.

After five years of effort, finally, we have an approved redevelopment plan around the train station. Thanks to support from the Council, we also settled the litigation with InterCap Holdings to move the first planned transit-oriented village forward as part of the redevelopment plan. The official Transit Village designation given to West Windsor last December by the State of New Jersey will guarantee full support from all state agencies in the future development of the site.

This year, we are going to see the completion of the renovation of the Schenck Farmstead including the carriage house, barn, and a replica of the first schoolhouse in West Windsor. Additionally, in the renovated barn, there will be an Environmental Education Center with natural resource items collected throughout the Township. All of these natural historical displays at the Schenck Farmstead could eventually be viewed as the Historical Museum of West Windsor and will help connect the past, present and future for West Windsor residents.

Financial stability drives and supports all our goals. The proposed 2012 municipal budget was submitted to the Council, as recommended by the state, on February 13th and introduced on February 27th. I am pleased to inform you that our proposed tax levy has only increased by 1.86% over last year and will result in less than a penny increase in the municipal tax rate this year. Furthermore, for the first time in 20 years, through reduced staffing and increased efficiency, we are presenting expenditures that are \$13,000 or .03% lower than last year's budget. This is a significant achievement for any municipality and even more significant for a full-service community that has grown in population more than 24% over the past 10 years.

It has been frustrating to see that the State, while entrusted to collect energy tax receipts from the utility industry for local municipalities, actually kept more than \$968,000 to date from West Windsor to balance the state budget. West Windsor has joined all other local communities and the League of Municipalities to request that the energy tax receipts proceeds be returned to the municipalities based on the collection agreement made with the State in the 1980s. This lost revenue translates to more than 1.5 cents of our tax rate.

When we study property taxes, one of the major components of revenue is commercial ratables. West Windsor has been consistently staying at a 30:70 ratio when it comes to comparison of non-residential to residential ratables. In the past 10 years, we have tried all possible ways to improve this ratio. Now, with a Transit Village designation and more global business headquarters coming to the region, I feel it is time again for us to establish a volunteer group to promote business in West Windsor. I look forward to working with interested community leaders to move this project forward this coming year.

Despite the ongoing economic challenges that we must face, the Township remains a full-service community. Garbage collection, leaf and brush removal, single stream recycling, fire protection and emergency services are all contained in the taxes that we pay. Residents of many other municipalities have to pay separately for their own garbage collection and disposal and shoulder the burden of extra taxes to independent fire districts but, West Windsor has been able to avoid this practice. In each of the past four years, we have been awarded a Triple-A bond rating from Standards & Poor's, an accomplishment of which we are very proud and committed to preserve in the future. Recent statistical data compiled by area realtors continues to show that a house in West Windsor sells on average within three months. This is the fastest turnaround time in the region compared to the eleven-month average for all of Mercer County. I believe West Windsor's central location, our schools, recreational opportunities, environmental quality, financial stability, our broad range of community services and a train station with Amtrak service are among the main reasons for this good news for our property owners.

To continue to stabilize our property taxes; to implement the Sustainable West Windsor Plan; to attract more quality commercial ratables; to improve traffic circulation; to promote alternative modes of transportation; to continue our efforts in support of retirees; to keep West Windsor a full service community, and to provide more recreational opportunities for our youth and all residents are the priorities for my administration going forward.

Before I conclude my address to you this evening, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize two (2) special residents who have been involved in many volunteer capacities for the community in their lifetime in West Windsor. They have dedicated time away from their professional and family life to make West Windsor a better place in which to live. Both of them exemplify the best spirit of volunteerism in the community.

Richard S. (Dick) Snedeker – Mr. Snedeker has been a resident of West Windsor since 1957 and has lived in the same house for 54 years. His community volunteer services include: joining as an active member in a regional organization in the 1960s to handle small animal rescue and control services in West Windsor; elected to the West Windsor School Board in 1968 and served as President from 1974 to 1979; involved in the West Windsor Planning Board Advisory Committee and Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association; appointed to the task forces associated with the restoration of Grovers Mill Pond, serving as chair of the last three in the 1980s and 1990s. He was appointed again as the chair in 2001 for the same Task Force and it resulted in the complete restoration of the Pond in 2009. Until 2007, he had been an active member of the Friends of West Windsor Open Space. Dick designed and built the footbridge at our 9-11 Memorial Twin Pond. He served as a member of the Planning Board from 1998 to 2000, and continued to be an active volunteer for the West Windsor Arts Council until 2010.

Richard A. Harbourt – Mr. Harbourt has been a resident of West Windsor since 1954 and has lived in the same house for 57 years. His community involvements include: Little League and Babe Ruth baseball teams; school PTA; President of West Windsor PTA from 1971 to 1974; served from 1974 to 1987 on Board of WW-P School District and 8 years as its President. He served as a volunteer member and chair for the Economic Development Commission in West Windsor from 1982 to 1987. From 1999 to 2001, Mr. Harbourt served as President of the Hahnemann Chapter Heart Transplant Support Group and became the Chair of the Second Chance Heart Transplant Support Group from 2001 to 2006. In October 2006, he reorganized the Group and continues to serve as its Chairman. Since 2001, he has been actively involved in a local task force to promote discussion and understanding of alternatives for Property Tax Reform in New Jersey. Mr. Harbourt is also a recipient of the 2002 Jefferson Award for Volunteerism.

In just a minute, I am going to ask these two gentlemen to join me at the dais to take a picture with me and the Council as we thank them for their service to the West Windsor community.

As I conclude this annual report, I want to assure you that I will do all that is within my authority to continue to work towards improving West Windsor now and in the future and I would like to thank all of you for your support, suggestions, and words of encouragement throughout the past year.

