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TOWN OF ORANGETOWN
2004 REORGANIZATIONAL MEETING

STATE OF THE TOWN ADDRESS

January 5, 2004

Thom Kleiner, Supervisor

Welcome to the Town of Orangetown's 2004 reorganizational meeting. I want to welcome new Town Board member Tom Morr and congratulate returning Councilmember Denis O'Donnell and Town Clerk Charlotte Madigan. Joining us as well are returning members Marie Manning and Denis Troy.

2004 and 2005 should be very exciting years for the Town of Orangetown. We are feeling very positive about the challenges that confront us and our willingness to tackle them as a team. That doesn't mean that we will not have our differences. We will, and, if necessary, express them and engage the public in the debate. But here are some of the reasons why we are feeling positive about the next two years:

RPC

As it was two years ago on this night, the successful development of the surplus land at the Rockland Psychiatric Center continues to remain a priority. A lot has happened in the past two years. Less than one year ago, the Town acquired 348 acres of surplus land from the State for \$5.9 million. The Board worked together to reach quick agreement on the selection of a superb architectural and design firm. BH&A has now finished designs for the municipal pool and community center on the banks of Lake Tappan.

Pool and Community Center

While we eagerly await the day, about 15 months from now, when both facilities are open, it is worth pausing to again share our excitement about how unusual these amenities will be. No other municipality this close to Manhattan has so many acres of untouched waterfront property to develop for municipal purposes. The pool and community center, long awaited by Orangetown residents, will be among the most spectacular in the entire Hudson Valley.

STEJ, little league and soccer

At the same time, STEJ is about to develop a privately funded indoor sports complex which will also be a taxpaying ratable. In addition, six new South Orangetown Little League fields and new Mighty Midget Soccer fields are being

planned. The Town will provide the basic infrastructure; the leagues will be responsible for constructing the actual fields themselves.

RPC Core Development

Our greatest challenge is determining the fate of the remaining 100 acres at RPC that will be offered for development. We have a unique site and a unique opportunity to attract a high quality developer and inject new, substantial taxpayers into the town. The request for qualifications only awaits the completion of our master plan for the site which will be our focus in the first few meetings of this year

TAXES

Regarding taxes, I am happy to report that Finance Director Charlie Richardson is optimistic that the 2005 budget will not feature the same tax spike we had this year when we faced an unusual combination of mandatory, non-discretionary increases in pension costs, health insurance and a shift in base proportions. I must point out, however, that unlike some other municipalities in Rockland County, we will not bond for these costs. That caused a bigger one time tax increase, but it preserved our bond ratings so that we could better achieve our long term objectives. Seeking new, high quality tax rateables remains a priority.

Other issues that will be taken up in the first few meeting of 2004:

Senior Housing. We will have a public hearing next Monday, January 12th on the adult housing zone. Its purpose is to provide the best possible housing options for our older residents who want to downsize and stay close to family and friends. This legislation, we believe, will result in attractive, high quality residential developments that are also good tax rateables.

Volunteer Housing. Development of housing for our volunteers on Blaisdell Road at RPC is proceeding so that our volunteers can afford to stay here and continue to offer their services to the community.

Route 303 Improvements. Safety improvements on Route 303 are scheduled for this year from Erie Street south toward Orangeburg. The Sustainable Development Study and the Overlay Zone that the Town Board passed have been hailed as models of intermunicipal cooperation and public planning. Now, as we have advised NYS DOT, we need the money to make those plans a reality and transform our most unsightly and dangerous corridor into an example for Rockland County and the entire Hudson Valley.

Quiet Zones. We are working with our federal, state and county officials to create quiet zones so that trains on the West Shore line need not blow their whistles at the crossings. A recent interim ruling from the Federal Railroad Administration allowing quiet zones, hopefully constitutes real progress toward this goal.

Comprehensive Plan Implementation. We were fortunate to achieve a community consensus on our comprehensive plan with little fanfare or controversy. Now we have to insure it does not sit on a shelf. Hamlet revitalization was a key part of our plan. We will continue to work with local business owners to improve the appearance of our hamlet centers through better parking and lighting and through private investment.

Open Space Preservation. Open space preservation is still a top priority and one which continually contributes to the quality of life of all our residents. The Collins property, with help from the County and the Trust for Public Land, must be secured to complete the preservation of Clausland Mountain, and other, smaller parcels are worthy of protection as well. We are working with United Water to secure conservation easements on the Hackensack River watershed land so the second green belt can be protected.

User Friendly Government

Orangetown recently became the first municipality in the nation to offer on-line permitting for businesses. This will expedite and simplify the permitting and building approval processes and will be offered to homeowners in the near future. We will also continue to improve our web site where Town Board agendas are now available.

Appointments. The subject of appointments always brings some controversy. My position has been consistent over eight years but bears repeating as we are about to embark on the selection of a town attorney, director of DEMA and land use boards. These appointments should be based on merit and party affiliation should not be a factor. I am hopeful and, based on my conversations with each Board member, optimistic, that we will work co-operatively to achieve the results that are in the best interest of the Town.

REGIONAL ISSUES

Three Big Issues. We must continue to be vigilant in protecting our residents from regional threats to our well being. These include our opposition to the siting of the millennium pipeline in Orangetown, our continuing efforts, working with

Riverkeeper and other groups to urge the decommissioning of Indian Point, and our continued involvement in the decisions that will determine the future of the Tappan Zee Bridge.

One Community. I generally believe that one's religion is a private matter and should not be injected in public policy discussions. However, when illegal acts against any religion occur, they should be publicly rebuked and we should speak against them with one voice. The New York State Penal Code states that "Hate crimes can and do intimidate and disrupt entire communities and vitiate the civility that is essential to healthy, democratic processes."

Three acts occurred in the last quarter of 2003, one against a Christian religious figure in Ramapo and two anti-Semitic acts. The anti-Semitic acts included a candidate's comments on a Haitian radio station implying that a vote for David Freed should not be tolerated because he was Jewish. The Haitian community and others rose up in defiance and elected Freed to the Rockland County legislature. All the voters of that legislative district should be commended for doing so. The other occurred in Pearl River when the Menorah was toppled. We stand as one in condemning this act and we will work with our police department to find those responsible.

Thanks to all members of the CSEA, PBA, all department heads and all Town employees for your continuing service to Orangetown, and Happy New Year to all.