

Farewell Address

Mayor Ellen Dickson

Good Evening Everyone! It has been one of highlights of my life to be your Mayor and tonight I want to focus on some people and accomplishments.

I was cleaning out the Mayor's Office when I came across this pamphlet dedicating this building on May 7, 1995. It includes a letter from Mayor Janet Whitman to the Mayor of Summit in 2094. It was placed in a time capsule to be opened that year and we are not sure where that capsule was placed. Here is quote from what Mayor Whitman wrote. It applies today as much as it did then.

“...I know that volunteer commitment must still be strong in our City as it is the overwhelming characteristic of Summit.

Volunteers run our level of government and volunteers run the myriad of non-profit organizations, churches and synagogues, hospitals and schools which are the strength and fiber of this community. We have outstanding people who donate their time and

talent to their favorite cause and the expertise, resources and services contributed by these dedicated volunteers could never be purchased.”

Tonight is a night to honor some of those retiring volunteers. Two Summit residents I am highlighting tonight are Karen Olson and Kathleen DiChiara. Karen founded a national nonprofit organization here in Summit called Family Promise. It utilizes religious institutions to house homeless families and currently has 170,000 volunteers nationwide. Kathleen founded the Community Food Bank of New Jersey in 1975 in the back of her car. To date, they have distributed over half a billion pounds of food from headquarters in Hillside. These women saw the need and through their vision, effort and determination, they created national nonprofits. They made a real difference.

Here are some interesting facts and figures from my four-year term. There was \$338 million in construction reinvestment, nearly 10,000 building permits in a city with approximately 6,000 homes!

People, residents and business owners continued to reinvest. There was \$164 million in residential construction; 75 new homes built; and 185 additions made at a total investment of \$50 million or just over \$250,000 per addition. There was \$174 million in downtown and commercial reinvestment. There were 38,000 building inspections by the way and home resales were up 10% in 2015.

As Mayor, I served on the Planning Board. Under Municipal Land Use Law the Mayor is encouraged to serve on the Planning Board. As the elected leader of the community you are expected to have an opinion and voice in the City's future. This role became very important with the sale of the Merck campus to Celgene. As Celgene has purchased Merck's property, we now have a Celgene East and Celgene West Campus. Celgene will be dedicating a new building on the East Campus on January 19. Celgene has been very complimentary toward our Planning Board and City staff. We are fortunate to have this rapidly growing bio-tech Fortune 500 company headquartered in Summit.

Our downtown is the envy of most cities. But we know there are struggles to keep storefronts filled. As of yesterday, retail (first floor) occupancy was 93.7%. Regent Bank will fill Citibank's vacancy. The Office reopened to hour long waits for a table over the holidays. Piattino Restaurant will open in the spring where Anna's Restaurant was on Union Place. A high-end nail salon will open in the former Art Studio space on Union Place. Vicki Pop Hair Salon will be opening on Springfield Ave. and two more restaurants to open on Maple St. including Rosalita's Mexican Restaurant. As we know a meal at restaurant, a haircut or exercise cannot be bought on the internet. It is a constant struggle to find the right mix of in store merchandise and the internet, but many stores are doing both. Cowgirl in the Sand and Murray and Finn have a healthy online presence that compliments their store fronts.

In December, Nationwide online sales were up 27%. Our downtown does well despite this trend. Small Business Saturday

and the Holiday Candlelight Stroll run by Summit Downtown Inc. this past fall were very successful events.

Let's talk about the schools. Our new Superintendent, June Chang, is here tonight and will complete his first year in March. Summit schools are thriving under his leadership. A new principal, Damen Cooper, has started at Lawton C Johnson Summit Middle School and shortly we will have a new principal at the High School. Just yesterday, yet another ranking system, niche.com, ranked Summit schools #6 in New Jersey and #68 in the United States.

Lou Pepe, our esteemed School Business Administrator, and head of the statewide organization of administrators said yesterday that our facilities are in the best shape ever. The 2014 decision by the Board of School Estimate, which I chaired, voted to spend \$17 million on school projects and these have largely been completed.

The Jefferson School expansion is particularly stunning as it is tied to the history of Thomas Jefferson and Monticello with its iconic and symbolic rotunda. This campus also ties into the Family Aquatic

Center, the ball field and Hidden Valley Park. This is one of Summit's gems and it will get lots of use over the years. The Franklin School construction ties into the time period of the architecture and blends smoothly into the neighborhood.

Still, our most significant investment is in our teachers. The recent contract adds \$1 million a year for teacher salary increases to the school budget.

Our most important volunteer position is on the Board of Education. Their expertise and experience is invaluable. They do an exemplary job and deserve to serve two terms. I reappointed former Mayor Glatt's appointees, which guaranteed each Board member two three year terms. The current Board was unanimous in their choice of June Chang and settled the teacher's contract in record time. I think our appointed Board is one of the best in the State.

Our tuition based full day kindergarten is up to six classrooms with the ability to go to eight. This serves the demonstrated need and helps preserve the many private programs in Summit.

CITY ADMINISTRATION IN TRANSITION - Last year we had four major retirements and a resignation. They were Chris Cotter, our City Administrator and former Fire Chief; David Hughes, City Clerk and 40 year employee; Joe Houck, Fire Chief; Beth Kinney, Head of Department of Community Services; and Scott Olson, CFO. I cried with each announcement. Our new team formed over the last six months. Michael Rogers is our new City Administrator.

Rosemary Licatese was promoted to City Clerk. Eric Evers was promoted to Fire Chief. Paul Cascais was promoted to Head of Community Services and Marge Gerba was promoted to CFO. We made it through the transition with a limited number of bumps along the way.

The Police Department is under the leadership of our highly regarded Chief, Robert Weck. During my tenure, community

policing has been a priority of both of us. The Chief continues to report that all the right numbers were up and all the right numbers were down. We have the best police department in Union County.

The Fire Department successfully transitioned to Chief Eric Evers and Deputy Chief Don Nelson who is now the Office of Emergency Management Coordinator. Remember the Fire Department not only provides fire protection but emergency medical care, technical rescue, investigations and fire prevention inspections. The Department responds to over 2,500 calls per year.

The Library has been rejuvenated and under the leadership of Susan Permahos. In 2015, the Library sponsored 1,024 programs for children, teens and adults and close to 20,000 attended. The circulation of library materials, electronic and traditional, totaled 300,300 items last year. A total of 206,000 people visited the Library. On Sunday, March 5, at 2pm; there will be a lecture about Downton Abbey with English tea served. This is the day before the final episode.

Department of Community Services / DCS has had its hands full this year with the Downtown Project and various road projects, including Deforest Avenue.

Department of Community Programs – Due to the warm weather, the Tatlock Field tennis courts replacement project is near completion and should be open this spring. Thank you to the Summit Tennis Association for the very generous \$100,000 pledge.

The Community Center fund raising effort kicked off with the announcement of the Investors Bank founding pledge of \$250,000 and the campaign continues to be well received. The building is in the design phase.

The Memorial Field Stream Project is near completion and the proposal for the Cornog Field House will be presented to Common Council shortly.

I give many thanks to Rita McNany of Parking Services for her continued efforts dealing with parking. We were an early adapter with the park mobile app two years ago. Congratulations to Michael

Rogers and Rita for making Summit the first city in the country to try the virtual parking garage with the help of Uber. The Uber holiday promotion was a success with early reports indicating hundreds took advantage of this special holiday promotion. We hope to continue the service in our trendsetting city. We still to have a parking shortage but are looking to alternatives to a parking garage.

Communications: The shifting nature of communication was very apparent to me over the ten years I have served Summit on Council and as Mayor. Social media has become a powerful force and great communication vehicle. For instance, I have run my own website for the last five years. I have 2500 followers on twitter, 2100 friends on Facebook and I do Instagram for fun. The City has a Chief Information Officer, a website, Swift reach and Nixel alerts, smart 911, we do mailings, etc. Still, some do not receive our messages. However, the City's website had 18,500 visits last month. When the new website is launched, the number of visits should

easily hit 22,000 a month. The City's Facebook page, for the week December 21 to 27, had 19,766 visits and this was before the bear!

Just before Christmas, the Brownie Troop of Jefferson School came to sing to the Mayor and city employees. Amy Cairns Harrison, our Public Information Officer, did a short video, which we posted. "Frosty the Snowman" had 1,800 views. This is the power of social media.

While being Mayor, some of my favorite projects to have come to fruition are:

- The Community Garden, which is thriving thanks to the City, the YMCA and Overlook Hospital
- The Summit Conservancy is ready to be built as soon as the lease with Union County is straightened out. This project involves building a permanent structure for free cycling at the Transfer Station

- Our Trails Projects by the Passaic River spearheaded by many volunteers increase our local opportunities for outdoor recreation

Lastly, I got to bring a lot of couples together. In these past four years, I officiated over 150 weddings during the past four years.

This Mayor and Council have improved the City's infrastructure, invested in the schools and maintained our AAA bond rating from three rating agencies. Summit is the only city to receive such a rating in New Jersey. This has been done with an average 1% tax increase for the last four years to support city services and the schools.

I leave knowing the state of the City is strong and the spirit of its citizens is remarkable. The future remains excellent. I wish the new Council and Mayor all the best.

Happy New Year Everyone!