



## City of Lambertville

State of the City Address

January 31, 2020, 6:00 p.m.

All Purpose Room, Lambertville Public School

200 North Main Street, Lambertville

### MINUTES

#### **STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE WITH THE OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT.**

Mayor Fahl called the meeting to order at 6:09 p.m. and asked the City Clerk to read the statement of compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act into the record.

The City Clerk read the following statement into the record.

*“Adequate notice of this meeting was provided on Monday, January 27, 2020 to the Democrat, the Times, the meeting agenda was posted to the bulletin board at City Hall, the website at [www.lambertvillenj.org](http://www.lambertvillenj.org), and noticed various people on the list serve, inclusive of department heads, city attorney and city engineer.”*

#### **ROLL CALL.**

Present: Councilman Sanders, Councilwoman Taylor, Council President Asaro, Mayor Fahl.

Absent: Councilwoman Urbish.

#### **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Mayor Fahl led the public in the Pledge of Allegiance.

#### **MOMENT OF SILENCE**

Mayor Fahl led the public in a moment of silence in honor of those serving in the United States Armed Forces in Country and Abroad.

#### **INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS**

Good evening everyone, and thank you for spending your Friday night with me.

I am so honored to have our Congressman with us tonight as he takes on the madness of Washington. I know I speak for our community when I say that we appreciate your tenacity, we appreciate your holding up of the truth, and we value your continued commitment to this country.

With that, happy New Year, happy 2020 and welcome to the City of Lambertville's State of the City.

Thank you. We have some distinguished guests in attendance who I would like to acknowledge.

Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson; James Cally – Mayor of West Amwell Township, Brad Myhre, Mayor of Frenchtown, and the School Board at the South Hunterdon Regional School District for allowing us to use the room.

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... and recognition to Lambertville's police and fire and all of our first responders, who selflessly serve to protect us each and every day.

Thank you for your public service, and all that you do for Lambertville or in partnership with Lambertville.

I want to acknowledge the City's Governing body with us tonight, Council President Beth Asaro; Councilman Ward Sanders; and Councilwoman Julia Taylor.

These committed residents have given up hours of their time to work for each and every resident to make our City a better place to live. I cannot thank them enough for their commitment, their efforts in our policy discussions, and their desire to serve.

To the staff of the City here tonight, thank you for all that you do every day to ensure the business of the City is performed - including our clerk Cindy Ege without whom I would be lost and our Business Administrator Alex Torpey - who has taken on the task of a transparent budget with incredible ferocity.

Tonight, we also have with us members of our all-volunteer boards and commissions. I want to thank Council President Asaro as well as Sarah Gold for spearheading that reinvigoration of our boards and commissions. Our City thrives because of the volunteers who do the work and I want to take a moment to applaud your efforts and thank you.

With that, I want to bring up our Congressman. Tom Malinowski hit the ground running, and continues to make Lambertville proud, every day. Congressman, thank you for joining us today.

**US REPRESENTATIVE – Tom Malinowski**

Congressman Malinowski thanked the members of the community for attending the meeting and he said he is always happy to come to Lambertville, and not just for serious events. He introduced his assistant, Michelle Drulous. He commented that he has received 1,497 letters from Lambertville residents. He commented that the State of the City is a little better than the State of Washington right now. He reminisced about a time when he was working in Washington, DC for Daniel Patrick and they visited the Senate Bench. Representative Patrick commented that it wasn't so special, but it used to be in the old days. Republicans and Democrats helped each other; people were treated fairly. They were committed to the institution and had a President that brought people together. They had checks and balances, a vision, respected the congress. It was a good thing. As we contemplated all of the things that are making us anxious, we are hard at work on the issues and he said he things the Congress was able to do good work this year passing bills, protecting health care, gun violence, prescription coverage and succeeded by protecting the affordable car act, social security and Medicare. They passed the

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budget without a shut down. Congressman Malinowski made a commitment to do everything in his power to protect landowners from the PennEast Pipeline; pass a climate bill; but Washington is working on bigger issues right now. He commented that we are a constitutional republic. What happened is very interesting and it began with one side denying the facts and now the same side accepts the facts. Although they proved their case, they argue that it doesn't matter. Bad stuff happens when people behave unethically. Don't despair, we wouldn't be having this conversation if the house was capable of starting this, people all around the word are wondering what is happening in the word. I used to be an American Diplomat and I would always say we are not a perfect world. This process shows we still have institutions that are capable of standing up and doing what's right. It isn't the institutions, it all of us. Be assured democracy isn't going quietly into the night, not in Lambertville, not in Hunterdon, not in New Jersey, and not in America. I believe the vast majority are going to choose leaders that believe in honesty and decency. And when that happens, we are going to relentlessly work to codify into law every single rule so that this never ever happens again. I will close by quoting a famous line from a great republican leader of the United States, Abraham Lincoln, often quoted by John McCain, *"Let us have faith that right makes might; and in that faith let us, to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it."*

### **STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS – MAYOR FAHL**

Mayor Fahl gave the following address:

I have set a high bar for myself to make this City and every single person who calls it home, proud. I ran on openness, transparency, and communication. I hold these values close as we start this new year.

- We have doubled the number of governing body meetings to open up the deliberative process to the community - and will continue to do so.
- I have continued my commitment to monthly office hours; and I am excited to announce a change in City Hall hours this year - with open evening hours on Tuesdays in our continued effort to better serve people's schedules.
- I will continue my FB live sessions as well as the new quarterly newsletter Lambertville Matters!

I think we have made good progress on these goals - but we are going to keep working on them. We have a lot more work to do to ensure that our government reflects the values of our city. Not just in policy around the environment, or our budget, but the way that we treat the people that work for our community.

Over the course of 2020 and beyond - I am going to strive to make Lambertville a better place to come to work every day. That means committing to providing prescription and

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dental coverage and offering competitive wages. This will not happen overnight - but this is commitment is vital to building a happier and healthier workforce - many of whom, are our neighbors.

### **[Vision for 2020]**

One of the greatest joys of serving as a mayor is that the work is really done through open discussion. In the heart of heated debate, even ones where there's seemingly no common ground, in Lambertville - there is. The through line in every conflict, every late hearing, every community meeting is that we all love this city and want what's best for it.

- When community members rallied around preserving the historic Holcombe Farm Land, we heard you.
- When the neighbors of Clinton and Delevan street gathered for multiple community meetings - we listened to your concerns.
- When friends packed into houses and meeting rooms across the city to hear about our city's budget and questioned IF there was a solution. We understood your angst and appreciate your care for the city.

These conversations were challenging. Because they are an effort in listening, providing information, understanding the crux of conflict and to find a solution.

We engaged in these discussions during a year of transition, wherein we took real stock of where we stand - within our infrastructure, finances, and obligations. A huge and laborious feat for our city.

You have heard me say it before.

- We are holding over 13 million dollars in current debt.
- We previously committed ourselves to an affordable housing plan that required a multi-million-dollar condemnation settlement and decades of legal battles.
- We also own and maintain five municipal buildings - each in varying states of disrepair.

Our police department, for example, is sinking into the ground - separating the floor from the building itself. Or take our city hall, half of the building is unusable and the other half is unable to meet the needs of our staff. Finally, our library is bursting at the seams for lack of space and simultaneously dilapidated.

All in all, we are facing close to 10 million dollars' worth of deferred maintenance.

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It goes without saying but these infrastructure issues are holding back our departments from reaching their full potential and in some cases, even providing basic services to our community.

In collaboration and communication within our community - we're at a tipping point in our city's history.

We can no longer pretend that these contentious issues are in a vacuum. All of these issues center around the question: how do we care for our beautiful but aging city.

The status quo is not an option. We need a new vision for the future of Lambertville - one that takes a holistic approach to the challenges that face our city.

That is why tonight I am announcing a bold new proposal for Lambertville's future.

I, with the support of our council, am moving forward with a proposal to sell the City's current police site. We will be using this property to privately develop a mixed income, inclusionary apartment building to address our court mandated affordable housing obligations.

This plan will stop the process of condemnation of academy hill and reduce the churn of legal fees that have surrounded that site for decades. This plan will also end one-off densifying in our neighborhoods that has created real controversy across our downtown and pitted neighborhood against neighborhood. Finally, this recommits us to Lambertville's progressive history of integrating affordable housing in our city.

I am also announcing tonight - a plan to centralize our municipal assets. We will build a new City building that simultaneously is designed for our city's unique needs and respectful of our city's historic nature. This new building will house the police station and city hall employees, the Lambertville Public Library, our court, council chambers and the ACME screening room.

But it will do more - it will also provide new community spaces for teens, seniors, and non-governmental organizations. This building has the potential to be a new community **hub** for our city.

As a part of this process we will discuss the lease or sale of both city hall and our Library at the Lily Mansion. I understand the attachment to these buildings will be difficult to loosen. Many of you here today have spent years, even decades, working, learning, and living your life in these special places. They are the setting of some of your fondest memories, of weddings or of children at play.

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The ethos of our town, set beside the Delaware river, across the bridge from New Hope, filled with historical homes, is predicated on our special attachment to place. These spaces hold history.

Ultimately, nostalgia can't supersede function we cannot let our love of these spaces overshadow the promise of our future.

Imagine providing our librarians, educators, and children with a library twice the size of the one we have now, filled with natural light, study rooms, and dedicated spaces for the community programming our city deserves.

Imagine a City Hall designed as a centralized hub for all Lambertville-government facilities. A building where all floors are accessible, functional, and safe.

Imagine increasing the amount of public meeting spaces, not just for our volunteers, but also our many community groups within our city. Although I will miss the mahjong ladies on Wednesday afternoon who share my current office space.

It is no secret that our residents of Lambertville expect a lot and are willing to invest their time and energy in city projects. We can harness this energy to focus on reimagining what our city government can do. We can invest in strategic long-term decision making now and change the way our Government interacts with its public.

But this plan is more than just about city facilities. We must take direct action to widen our tax base, and create opportunities for redevelopment. This will **ensure** that our city remains an affordable place to live. We can plan for the tax impact for tomorrow - while building a facility that will satisfy our needs for decades to come.

This plan is bold. And it will require a significant effort in education.

This material is dense and we want to prepare our community to engage. The first opportunity, **of many**, is tomorrow - at our community development fair with members of our staff and experts that will be available for one on one conversations and questions around these policy proposals.

This is not a final plan rather a goal and vision built from conversations throughout the last year. We are in the beginning stages of what will be a several yearlong process. At every step of this process, I and our council are committed to building this plan with you. I am rolling these proposals out at the earliest possible point to ensure as many voices and viewpoints can be included.

These are projects that I believe in. This is work that will make our Government better, our city safer, our community happier and healthier. That is work worth doing. Given

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the duration and magnitude of these projects I am committing to do this with you every step of the way.

We could look at the challenges presented to us - structural deficit, looming debt, crumbling city facilities - and walk away feeling overwhelmed, negative, angry. But as I close this speech tonight, I feel none of those things. I am lifted with an incredible sense of optimism, of possibility, hope. Lambertville is a city comprised of neighbors that are active, engaged, and willing to dig in. We have an opportunity to think big and plan for the future we want to see in Lambertville. These conversations won't be easy - but I believe this is how we build a better community, **together**.

Thank you for your time and your attention tonight.  
Let's get to work.

**PUBLIC COMMENT.**

None.

**ADJOURNMENT.**

The meeting adjourned at 6:44 p.m. with a motion made by Councilman Sanders and seconded by Mayor Fahl. An affirmative voice vote was taken in favor of the motion by all members present. MOTION CARRIED.

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia L. Ege, CMR, RMC, City Clerk

*The January 31, 2020 State of the City Minutes were approved at the February 20<sup>th</sup> Voting Session of the Governing Body.*