

REMARKS BY

CY WEKILSKY, MAYOR
TOWN OF BOONTON

JANUARY 1, 2012

Welcome, everyone! It's good to see such a strong turnout for this annual reorganization meeting of our town's governing body.

Today marks the beginning of my third term, and my seventh year as your mayor. I want to take this opportunity to extend my sincere thanks to all the voters for their support in the recent election. It is an honor and a privilege for me and for my colleagues on the Board of Aldermen to serve the citizens of this town.

The year that just ended was, to say the least, challenging. I'm sure we all can remember the long-running Rockaway Valley Regional Sewerage Authority pipeline relining project last spring and summer. It produced an ugly situation just outside this Town Hall that featured road blockages, traffic tie-ups, sewage spills and home evacuations – and it's still not over!

In August, a notorious murder made Boonton a front-page news dateline throughout New Jersey and points beyond. Two weeks later, we were back in the headlines as a result of Hurricane Irene, which turned the Rockaway River into a raging torrent that collapsed part of Route 287 and wiped out two Boonton hillsides, threatening several homes. This natural disaster has left the Town of Boonton with a serious problem that, unfortunately, will remain with us for a long time.

The washed-out hillsides must be stabilized and reinforced in order to mitigate the danger they pose for our residents living near the edge of the new "Boonton Canyons". That will require a lot of money – meaning millions of dollars. We have been working closely with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in an attempt to secure assistance from that agency in funding this work. We also have been dealing with Jersey City, which owns the eroded property at the base of Harrison Street that poses the most immediate threat, urging officials there to recognize their responsibility and act accordingly. As of now, however, the prospects for major assistance and the potential impact on Boonton taxpayers, remain grimly uncertain.

On the brighter side, 2011 did produce some positive developments. We are pleased to note the disappearance of an eyesore that had been quite evident for 35 years when the dilapidated old railroad cars lining the tracks between Myrtle Avenue and Division Street were cut up and hauled away. We are hopeful that this will lead to further improvements in the rail corridor area.

Also in 2011, in response to concerns expressed by some of our citizens, this board amended the town's residential property rental ordinance to reduce the frequency of required inspections. The code enforcement program created by this ordinance continues to be effective in addressing the issue of overcrowding in residential properties.

As with the strengthened Main Street parking enforcement program, our rental code enforcement program is being carried out at no net cost to the municipality. The fees and fines collected more than cover the costs incurred; so the program is self sustaining.

In our ongoing effort to control operating expenses, a few months ago we completed a project to lower our energy usage in all town-owned facilities. Utilizing a grant from a state-sponsored conservation program under the leadership of our administrator, Terry McCue, we replaced lighting fixtures, switches and boiler controls, and installed motion sensors, all at no cost to the town. This has resulted in annual savings of more than \$20,000 in our bills for electricity and natural gas.

The new year we begin today, will continue to require vigilance and a sharp focus on the part of this governing body. Although there are some signs that the general economic outlook is starting to improve, we are a long way from recovering to the level of prosperity that we enjoyed five years ago. For municipal governments in New Jersey, the task of managing during this difficult economic period, while maintaining the level of services our residents require – has been made more difficult by the substantial reduction in state aid and the imposition of limits on property tax increases.

As I said here one year ago, however, I am an optimist. And being an optimist, I am confident that those of us who are here to serve you, as members of this board as town officials and employees, working together, can deal successfully with whatever comes our way in 2012.

Happy New Year, and thank you very much!