



Bristol Township

2501 Bath Road * Bristol, PA 19007 * (215) 785-0500 * Fax (215) 785-2131

State of the Township January 16, 2014 Council President Bob Lewis

Council members, residents, staff, friends and family, thank you for joining us this evening. I wish you all a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year. It is a great pleasure to be able to present my second State of the Township address. I would like to thank my colleagues for electing me as Council President for a third year. As always, I would like to thank our residents for the privilege of serving them. It is an honor for which I am continually grateful.

Two years ago, a new Township Council took office and inherited a financial and operational mess. The organization had \$73 Million in unfunded liabilities from previous Councils giving away lucrative wages and benefits that they could not afford and for which they did not pay. The budget adopted by the previous Council had a tax increase and \$725,000 more in expenditures than current revenues. After spending \$11 Million on a Sewer Plant, they could still not gain compliance with environmental regulations. The Township's infrastructure was a disaster; 88 miles of the 177 miles of Township highways were in desperate need of repaving, street lights were old and expensive, and Township buildings were falling apart. Meanwhile, the Township's payroll was padded with make work jobs for the family and friends of Bristol Township politicians. This was the sad reality of Bristol Township.

When the new Council began their term, we laid out a vision for the Township – a vision to make Bristol Township relevant again, improve the quality of life, and invest in Bristol Township first! This vision has been the guiding force of the Administration as we have worked diligently to achieve our goals. These goals have been and continue to be:

1. Living within our financial means and making decisions in the best interests of all taxpayers.
2. Improve customer service in the Building & Planning Department and reduce all bureaucratic impediments to home ownership and development.
3. Improving the infrastructure of Bristol Township.
4. Encourage economic development to create jobs and grow the tax base.

The old-time Bristol Township politicians have responded to this agenda like a vampire seeing the daylight. They have come to our Council meetings kicking and screaming. I have lived in

Bristol Township my entire life. I can honestly say I have never seen the Township making more progress than it has the past two years. I am optimistic about the future of the Township and extremely proud of my community. The purpose of a State of the Township Address is to look back at the past year and lay out plans for the future.

SO HOW DID WE DO IN 2013?

Fortunately, we had no hurricanes or Halloween storms, or extended days without electricity and water. We did make remarkable progress in moving the Township forward in accomplishing the goals I laid out earlier. Let's review.

LIVING WITHIN OUR FINANCIAL MEANS

After making draconian cuts in spending and manpower in 2012, Council adopted a balanced budget in 2013 for the first time in many years without raising taxes. The rare balanced budgets of the past were usually accompanied by tax increases. For example between 2005 and 2011, the Mayor and Council raised real estate tax millage 64%. This Council values its senior citizens and will work tirelessly to avoid raising taxes to keep seniors in their houses.

The best budget news is that I fully expect that we will finish 2013 with positive fund balances in all of the major Township funds when the books are closed for the year. This is the result of improved budget administration by the Township Manager and his very capable staff.

Another important point to remember is that despite the drastic cuts implemented in spending and number of employees, the Administration has maintained service levels and in some cases increased services! This is truly miraculous.

IMPROVE CUSTOMER SERVICE AND REMOVE IMPEDIMENTS TO HOME OWNERSHIP

In 2012, the Township Council adopted several amendments to the resale inspection process and eliminated the burdensome \$500 escrow for home buyers. How do you measure the success of these changes? Let's take a look at vacant houses. In 2012 prior to these changes, the Township had 223 vacant houses. We ended 2013 with 160 vacant houses. Now this is still too high and there is much work to be done, but a 28.25% improvement in one year is certainly a significant accomplishment.

IMPROVE THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF BRISTOL TOWNSHIP

As previously noted, 88 miles of Township road were in need of resurfacing when this Council took office in 2012. To provide some reference for comparison, the Mayor and Council paved 5.37 miles on 17 Township roads in 2011 at an average cost of \$176,814.58 per mile. Last year, we paved 35.09 miles on 162 Township roads at an average cost of \$122,150.46 per mile.

In two years, we have paved 44 miles of Township highways or half of the inherited roads needing resurfacing. Work is already underway on the 2014 Milling & Paving Program. We

expect to do another 24 miles of roadway in 2014. This will improve 68 miles in only three years. I would point out that this will all be accomplished without raising real estate tax millage!

Looking to improve its expensive and ancient street lights, the Township obtained a grant for \$597,000 in 2012. Last year, the Township was awarded a \$677,000 grant to convert all of its street lights and traffic signals to LED. Working with Philips Lighting, the Township is in the process of installing a state of the art LED street light system that will pay for itself in cost savings within five years.

The Township rebuilt its four biggest sewage pumping stations in 2013 at a cost of \$2 Million. SCADA (Supervisory Control and Data Acquisitions) systems were installed on 12 sewer pump stations to improve the monitoring and control of these facilities. Lastly, the Township performed over \$225,000 in work on its collection system to remove infiltration and inflow. Most importantly, the Wastewater Treatment Plant has been in compliance with EPA and DEP regulations for the first time in years in 2013.

This year, the Township will invest \$2.5 Million in the Township Building and Public Works facility. Both of these facilities have been neglected for years and are in dire need of improvements. This funding has also been secured and will not require any increase in taxes.

ENCOURAGE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TO CREATE JOBS AND GROW THE TAX BASE

In 2013, the Council worked with the Bucks County Redevelopment Authority to develop a certified redevelopment area on Route 13 along where the highway improvement project is taking place. These efforts are expected to be completed in the first quarter of 2014 and make the designated properties eligible for additional grants and funding opportunities. This in turn will encourage new investment and create jobs.

The first portion of the Croydon Streetscape project was constructed in 2013. This is the section from Newportville Road to Dorset Avenue. The remaining project will be completed in 2014 on Bristol Pike from Walnut Avenue to Newportville Road. The scope of the work is new sidewalks, curbing, shade trees, benches, and LED street lights. This project is designed to take advantage of the momentum of the recently rehabilitated Croydon Train Station and revitalize the business district.

The Township welcomed Co-Ax Valves, Pitney Bowes, Bottom Dollar, United Package Supply Company, and Worldwide Medical Products as new employers in 2013. In addition, existing employers, Airgas and Estee Lauder expanded operations in 2013.

There are several land developments and subdivisions in the pipeline that should be constructed in 2014 including Aamco, Wawa, Taco Bell, McDonald's, American Bread Crumb, and Woodbury Grove. Any solution to the Township's financial problems will require growth.

WHAT IS AHEAD FOR 2014?

The sins of the past are like an anchor around our neck. The Township now has \$91 Million in unfunded liabilities and negative assets due to previous Councils not paying for Post-Employment Benefits that **THEY** gave away despite being the poorest Township in Bucks County.

In addition, Middletown Township's recent enactment of an earned income tax will reduce our EIT collections. This loss of revenue could be up to \$500,000.

Despite these inherited financial problems, Bristol Township continues to move forward. The Township is no longer known for bad roads, poor services, and a dysfunctional Township Council whose meetings were once compared to a "Three-Ring Circus" in the Courier Times. By the end of 2014, the Township will only have 20 miles of highways in need of paving. Bristol Township will have the first "Smart" LED street light system in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The new trash and recycling contract emphasizing recycling and the use of natural gas powered automated trucks is the wave of the future.

Instead of being the brunt of jokes, Bristol Township will be recognized as an innovator and leader in local government. Other municipalities will be following our lead and emulating these programs that we were the first to initiate. Due to the inherited financial handicaps, innovation and creativity is the only hope for our Township.

Finally, I would like to say a word to the critics of Council, most of who are old time Bristol Township fixtures. The super-majority of this Council has been elected to implement reform, end the corruption, cronyism, and patronage that have been the hallmark of Bristol Township politics for so many years. Voters have clearly spoken that they want their roads paved, better services and the line held on taxes. The past two years, we have talked the talk and walked the walk. We had a sound plan and delivered.

Now I would like to call on those people who have disagreed politically with the Council in the past to unite for the good of the Township. Lies, rumors, and character assassinations need to stop. They serve no useful purpose. Anonymous online falsehoods and unfounded Facebook postings will not stop this Council from balancing budgets and protecting seniors from being taxed out of their homes. It is time for the incessant bickering and nasty online postings to end.

If you do not want to be part of the solution, and we would like you to be, then please just get out of the way!

In closing, I would like to thank all of the volunteers that serve on the Township's boards and commissions. The countless hours that these volunteers give to better their community make the Township immeasurably better. I would also like to thank all Township employees for their dedication and contributions to our municipality.

The vision that the Council had two years ago remains unchanged. The goals that we set are sound even though yet to be fully realized. 2014 will very likely offer new challenges and opportunities, but we must stay on this charted course. By persevering, we will meet the challenges ahead, seize the opportunities and capitalize on them. We have accomplished much in 2013 and by working together will achieve even more in 2014.

God bless Bristol Township and all of its employees and residents.