

2020 Reorg Meeting
January 6, 2020
MAJORITY PARTY ADDRESS – Gordon J. “Mickey” Ostrum, Jr.

Good evening friends, neighbors, family members, colleagues and all my fellow Salem Countians. I had hoped to get rid of these cheaters last Wednesday but I guess the new year didn't bring quite that type of 2020 vision. That said I want to talk to you a bit about the 2020 vision we as Freeholders see for the county.

It is a privilege and an honor to be asked to give this majority overview for your Salem County Freeholder board. As we all know, we function in a two party system with the occasional participation of independent office holders. This system brings us differing viewpoints and philosophies and encourages healthy discourse and discussion so that we as elected officials can draw upon the wisdom of our fellows as we strive to make the best policies and decisions for you the electorate. Your Freeholder board works well together and I am proud to say that while there are some differences of opinions, both your majority and minority members work well together.

I have been impressed this week as I have attended reorganization meetings in a number of municipalities and have seen elected officials of both parties working together in the best interest of their communities. This is Salem County, not Washington and our diversity makes us stronger. I am not aware of any plans from Coach Ware and Freeholder Hassler to impeach Director Laury.

The Board also enjoys a collegial relationship with our state legislators who advocate well for county interests in Trenton. Senator Steve Sweeney and Assemblymen John Burzichelli and Adam Taliaferro are valuable allies in the State Capitol and we thank them for their tireless efforts

Under the able leadership of Director Laury our freeholder board strives to effect meaningful change while keeping a watchful eye toward fiscal responsibility. Tax increases have been kept to a minimum and there is expectation that no significant rise is in the offing. We are well aware of the challenges facing our county and are continually planning to address them. The board remains in discussions with the vicinage to temper the fiscal impact of any courthouse renovations.

We are also well aware of the economics of our declining industrial opportunities. While we note the loss of the concrete plant proposed for the City of Salem, we are enthusiastic about interest for the development of the DuPont/Chemours site by the river. There is also activity to open the Port of Salem to active commerce and take advantage of the Foreign Trade Zone associated with that facility. We are happy to report that the county railroad is now functional and additional improvements are underway to improve the efficiency of that facility. Kathy Mills is very effective in her role in Economic Development and Tourism but she is spread thin due to her responsibilities in other county roles. We are meeting so that we may draw on the experience of other counties to help us move forward in creating a full time position to steward the Office of Economic Development. As we plan this expansion we are again aware of the cost involved but feel it will pay off in results

Energy audits have been conducted at many county facilities and plans are being made to improve efficiency and add renewable energy sources which will result in considerable cost benefits for the county. We have entered into a prescription benefits program that has already resulted in approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ million dollars in rebates to the county with more anticipated going forward. A capital improvement project for badly needed repairs and upgrades to the VoTech High School has been approved and will add to the comfort and safety of our students

While we all miss our historically low gas prices the rise in fuel taxes has greatly benefitted the county by making grants available to fund needed infrastructure

improvements. Many road projects are underway with many more in various stages of the planning and bidding process.

Your Freeholders remain committed to supporting the many diverse agricultural activities in the county. We continue to expand preservation efforts and are anxious to promote Agri-tourism for the social and economic dividends it will bring to our community.

Public safety cannot be overemphasized. We continue to work with Sheriff Miller and Prosecutor Lenahan to ensure the well being of our constituents. The operation of the correctional facility continues to bring revenue to the county enabling us to join our law enforcement professionals to maintain and expand badly needed services.

As positions in the county become vacant we are refining our appointment process to match the prospects to the job. Formal job descriptions are being drafted and applications are rated on their relevance to those requirements. Appointments are to be made based on ability and qualifications rather than party affiliation.

June Siebert has been named to succeed Rita Shade as director of the Department of Health and Social Services. She brings needed expertise and experience to the position. The Department is poised to move forward with emphasis on addressing the growing opioid problem and supporting the care given at the Salem Medical Center, to name just two of the many activities administered by the Department

We would be remiss if we did not acknowledge Joe Hannigan for his efforts bringing the travelling Viet Nam wall to Pennsville in September. What a

wonderful event for the county, bringing praise from all over the tri state area while drawing over 10,000 visitors. Thank you Joe!

This is a year for contract negotiations with our county employees. We value our employees and want them to be happy while we must keep the fiscal ramifications for the citizens in focus. We are also fortunate to have assembled an excellent leadership team to assist in the day to day operations of the county. Clerk of the Board Stacy Pennington, Administrator Jeff Ridgway, Counsel Karin Wood, and Treasurer Kelly Hannigan orchestrate the smooth conduct at the senior level and I am pleased to report that morale in the county offices has increased over recent years

We welcome our new County Clerk, Dale Cross. We are excited as we anticipate the energy, ability, and vitality he brings to the position and are confident he will revitalize the Clerk's office

This is an exciting time in our County and your Freeholder Board is proud of its achievements. We are honored to serve you, the citizens of Salem County and are excited to build on these successes as we go forward into the new decade