

Mayor Patricia Graham

Looking to the year ahead, there are many exciting and challenging projects to be undertaken this year. Our most significant challenge will be, as it has been in years past, our budget. In the past several years we have worked very hard toward closing our structural budget gap while keeping spending below 2005 levels. In 2015 we paid off over \$3.9 million in debt. And, we have continued to hold down taxes and to stay below Governor Christie's 2% cap. This has been and will continue to be my number 1 priority. As residents of New Jersey, Montgomery residents are among the most taxed people in America -- in good times and bad. As members of local government, it is our obligation to hold the line on municipal taxes without sacrificing essential services, including police, public health and safety and public works. I will continue to work hard to accomplish those goals.

Those essential services include our Police Department, which, under the direction of Captain Bob Palmer provides excellent service to the Township. The Township Committee recently passed a resolution honoring and thanking our police for their excellent work, and that honor is certainly well-deserved. Indeed, in 2015 Montgomery was named as one of the safest cities in New Jersey. We were happy to hire additional officers this year -- replacing retiring officers -- and to maintain the very high degree of professionalism in our department.

The Township Committee will also address significant land use issues this year. We will continue to work, for example, on the improvement and redevelopment of the area of town at the 206 - 518 intersection, which, when improved, will provide more and better services to our residents and serve as a "gateway" to our town. We must strive for smart development, increasing ratables wisely, while always considering the needs and values of the township.

The continued preservation of our town's rural character and open space also remains a priority for me. Over 35% of the land in Montgomery is now preserved, and 2015 saw the preservation of an additional 36 acres -- the Firmenich Farm on Mountain View Road and the Styles Property in the Sourlands. We will continue to use our Open Space Trust Funds wisely.

And, even with our budget constraints, 2015 saw the improvement of many roads throughout town -- far too many to list -- as well as improvements in our parks, improvements in our open space properties and improvements and additions to our recreation, health department and other services. We expect to continue all these improvements as we strive to better serve our residents.

Finally, Montgomery has a strong spirit of volunteerism. I continue to be impressed by the talents and hard work of the many residents who serve on the various boards, committees and commissions of the town. I have been privileged to work with many of these volunteers and I thank them all for their service.

I am excited to begin the new year ahead!