

**Somerville Borough
New Years Day Reorganization
January 1, 2009**

**Presented By
Mayor Brian G. Gallagher**

Honorable Members of Council, distinguished guests, friends and family.....Good Afternoon to all and Happy New Year!

This is Somerville's Centennial. 100 years of history for this small Borough but the impacts this Borough has had and continues to have are far reaching. Somerville has been through many challenging times, and I have said before that the people of Somerville are at their best when they are challenged. Our entire nation is now in challenging times, and no where is that felt more than on the local level. Diminishing resources, rising taxes, economic slowdown, concerns for family, employment and community, and a state government in turmoil, inefficiency, and inability to address the real needs of all of our communities. This affects each and every one of our citizens.

This council and I are faced with very complex decisions in the coming year, and it is a task we all take very seriously. While some have said we are slow in making these decisions, I say we are deliberate and careful to make the right decisions....charging ahead without thoughtful consideration of all options spells trouble...steady wins the race...always.

I look forward to working with this council for the betterment of Somerville. I have seen the Borough council shift politically three times during my tenure, and yet we manage to accomplish the work of the Borough without regard to politic. For that I thank those that I have worked with in the past and continue to work with.

In the past year, the economic downturn and stalled housing and retail markets have impacted the boroughs' major economic development projects, but we continue to work with the developers to try and find ways to commence or complete these. The major projects planned for Somerville will inject substantial revenues into the economy of the borough and its downtown area.

First....

The Landfill

The Borough, working with our partner NJ Transit, will have a developer selected by the end of March. We have interviewed all, and are completing the final due diligence on the developers now. We have very capable firms to select from. The Committee will meet in January to review final results and make recommendations to council for developer selection and next steps by early February.

Following developer designation, the Borough will enter into an MOU with the developer while a detailed agreement is negotiated. We anticipate due-diligence and site planning to take 12 to 18 months from time of designation. In addition, the Borough has hired a new environmental engineering team to finalize characterization of the area - paid for through state grants. We expect their field work to begin in late February.

West End

JSM is scheduled for the ARB in early January in anticipation of a revised site plan application to the Planning Board in late January or February.

The Borough has agreed to Phase the project to allow the residential portion to be constructed first. The borough will provide financing for the parking garage to be built under the residential phase, and the developer will make all debt payments for the borough. JSM will continue to pay current property taxes for the site with an increase each year to account for inflationary factors, and Phase two will commence when the markets have recovered.

Kirby Avenue Area

The public defined the needs of the neighborhood and the community for this site, an RFP was issued in August and proposals due in December. Due to market conditions, no responses were received, so the Redevelopment Committee will make a recommendation to council on how to proceed in January.

The D'Allessio Gas Station

After years as an eyesore, the corner of William and Gaston will see a new retail center and 3 new single family homes. This project is almost complete.

DeSapio Building 3

Occupied this past summer, the third building completes the original vision of this project in which the borough entered into a public/private partnership with the developer and invested \$6 million to help finance the parking deck.

This investment is now realizing return and has spurred economic activity in the eastern end of downtown.

Gaston Avenue Bakery

The developer discovered an unexpected fuel oil tank on the site and until the DEP has issued a No-Further-Action letter the developer cannot move forward. We anticipate this project resuming in the first half of 2009.

Somerville Train Station

In anticipation of the development of the landfill, NJTransit will begin a \$20 million rehabilitation and upgrade of the rail station. Bids are due shortly, and construction is expected to begin in the spring of this year.

Davenport Street Tunnel

This tunnel will link the landfill area with our downtown. Preliminary design work has been completed, and was fully funded by Somerset County.

We have applied to the NJ TPA to be placed on 2009 planning calendar.

We also continue to work on a variety of projects to enhance the economic base of the borough...

- Relocation of the Courier News offices to Somerville this year
- Continued Negotiation of property purchase for emergency services complex
- Remediation of contaminated property on Bell Avenue for future green space
- Working with the USBHOF to remain in the borough
- Completion of a detailed inventory of historic areas and the creation of recommended guidelines and ordinances for their preservation.

While the large issues and projects take the headlines, much has happened in Somerville in 2008. Some notable points are

The many grants we have received include:

\$700,000 in budgetary state aid at a time when the state has no funding

\$391,000 for Safe Routes To School

\$393,000 for E.Cliff Street Improvements

\$ 20,000 to review zoning ordinances

\$ 55,000 for economic development

\$ 20,000 to study Raritan and Somerville Public Work's to share manpower and equipment

\$ 20,000 for sewer improvements

\$270,000 Centers of Place Grant for Parking Lots and signage

\$ 15,000 to repair Claud Walke Pool

\$ 60,000 for stained glass restoration to Borough hall

We were Designated a "Main Street New Jersey" community by the DCA, we installed audio speakers downtown and completed installation of the new streetlights.

The Vanderveer ballfields project was finally resolved and fields will be ready in 2009

And We start 2009 with better government...your government is becoming smaller and more efficient.

- There are fewer public employees today than at the beginning of 2008.
- Starting January 1 we are extending Borough Hall hours to start at 8:30am,
- we entered an interlocal agreement on Ken Cornell Skate Park with four other municipalities,
- we are enabling On-line purchase of vital records with credit cards,
- and we Adopted Local Pay to Play legislation with more to come.

Yet there is always more work to do...

There has been much discussion on Parking in our downtown with some valid points raised by all. We all agree the time for talking is done. I have directed Mr. Sluka to begin setting up the administration of Parking Management within Borough Hall. The discussion of utility versus department is irrelevant to the management of one of downtown's most vital components, and in either scenario, the administrative structure will be the same.

The new adage that it's not about Wall Street it's about Main Street is no truer than right here right now. Our merchants and landlords are feeling the effects of this national problem. While there are no easy solutions, there are programs the Borough can put in place to help retention of existing merchants and recruitment of new merchants.

I have begun an initiative to create a downtown Somerville Economic Toolbox to help our merchants and landlords weather this storm.....I have reached out to all of the downtown banks and asked them to create packages and incentives for our downtown merchants and landlords, and each has responded positively. I have asked our code office to look at the idea of further expediting reviews of applications and inspections to make it easier for existing stores to rehabilitate

and new stores to relocate.... We are collating information regarding business grants, loans, and employment programs from Federal, State and County agencies to help make our downtown businesses aware of what is available to help them. This will be rolled out in January. We want all to know that downtown Somerville is open, thriving and ready for more businesses to relocate away from the expensive mall rents, and away from the old strip mall retail locations. Downtowns are where business is moving....and Somerville, downtown Somerset County, is the place to be. Even in this economy, we have new stores opening in Somerville. We must all support our own downtown...shop there, eat there and stroll there...it's our downtown.

In addition, the time is now for equitable treatment from the Sewerage Authority. The assured minimum must be eliminated. We must also engage our partners with the idea of regionalizing the billing management and the infrastructure repair and improvements. Every municipality in the Authority duplicates people and efforts in both of these processes. We must find a better way to manage this.

Our 100th Anniversary is upon us, and former Mayor Dave Hollod will convene a meeting of the Committee in January. Information will be going up on the website including a calendar of events, items of historic interest, plans for a community picnic, a parade, a dinner, and other activities, and the time capsule will be opened on Friday, June 12th. For those interested in helping, you can contact Borough Hall.

Winston Churchill said "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give."

It never ceases to amaze me, the volunteer spirit that is alive and thriving in Somerville...we have a Fire Department that is second to none whose resources are called upon daily-sometimes hourly- to aid those in need. They are the envy of Departments both volunteer and paid throughout the county and beyond for the work they do. We have a Rescue Squad who in a few short years has created a team that exhibits a level of knowledge, training and professionalism unmatched in Somerset County. And we have a community base of volunteers that staff this Borough's committee's and commission's and make our programs efficient and well run.

There are few communities that can boast what we have...a diverse population, housing for all income levels, people young and old living next door to each other, a thriving Main Street, volunteer services second to none in quantity and professionalism. Above all else Somerville has a sense of community that thrives when others are in need. The people of Somerville realize that, when their neighbors are in need it is an internal moral responsibility to help, that is what truly matters....and that has been seen time and time againand I now count myself as one of them, and my family and I thank all of you for your concern and support.

Somerville is the envy of many other towns--we have a sense of place like no other....it is a place where people from all walks of life form a community...color,

religion, age, income, all blend to form this great mix of people and place. This is our home...This is our Somerville.

Thank You and God Bless.