

**Borough of Garwood
REORGANIZATION MEETING
OF THE MAYOR AND COUNCIL
MINUTES
January 2, 2024**

Time: 6:10 P.M.

Please stand for a Moment of Silence

Salute to the Flag

Adequate notice of this meeting was provided to the Union County Hawk advertised on December 14, 2023. Notification was sent to the Star Ledger, and is posted on the Municipal website, the Municipal public bulletin board, and filed in the office of the Municipal Clerk informing the public of the time and place according to the Provisions of the Open Public Meeting Law (Chapter 241, P.L. 1975).

This meeting is called pursuant to the State Statutes for the purpose of organizing the Governing Body for the year 2024, to make appointments and to transact any business pertinent thereto.

Mayor Blumenstock stated Councilman Lazarow will participate via ZOOM in the opening Roll Call for the purpose of a quorum.

ROLL CALL:

Mayor Blumenstock	P		
Councilman Lazarow	P	Councilwoman Salmon	P
Councilwoman Nolde	P		

Mayor Blumenstock announced the first order of business is to administer the Oath of Office to:
Councilman Elect Vincent Kearney – for a three-year term
Councilwoman Elect Karina Boto – for a three-year term
Councilman Elect Sean Foley – for an unexpired term (11/07/2023-12/31/2024)

Mayor Blumenstock requested that Councilman Elect Vincent Kearney be escorted to the rostrum. The Oath of Office was administered by Sherriff Peter Corvelli. Councilman Kearney took his seat on the dais.

Mayor Blumenstock requested that Councilwoman Elect Karina Boto be escorted to the rostrum. Mayor Blumenstock administered the Oath of Office. Councilwoman Boto takes her seat on the dais.

Mayor Blumenstock requests that Councilman Elect Sean Foley be escorted to the rostrum. Mayor Blumenstock administered the Oath of Office. Councilman Elect Foley took his seat on the dais.

ROLL CALL:

Mayor Blumenstock	P		
Councilwoman Boto	P	Councilman Lazarow	ABSENT
Councilman Foley	P	Councilwoman Nolde	P
Councilman Kearney	P	Councilwoman Salmon	P

At this time Mayor Blumenstock announced anyone in the audience wishing to make a presentation may do so now.

Andy Blumenstock congratulated the newly elected officials on behalf of the Garwood Democratic Club.

Mayor Blumenstock requested the Borough Council to nominate and elect a Council President.

A motion is made by Councilwoman Nolde, second by Councilman Foley, to elect Councilman Kearney as Council President.

ROLL CALL:

Councilwoman Boto	AYE	Councilman Lazarow	ABSENT
Councilman Foley	AYE	Councilwoman Nolde	AYE
Councilman Kearney	AYE	Councilwoman Salmon	NAY

4-AYES, 1-NAY Councilman Kearney was elected Council President.

CONSENT AGENDA PARTS A, B, C, D

(Adoption upon Roll Call)

Mayor nominations followed by roll call vote

“Consent agenda items are considered to be routine and will be enacted with a single motion; any items requiring expenditure are supported by a Certification of Availability of funds; any item requiring discussion will be removed from the Consent Agenda; all Consent Agenda items will be reflected in the full minutes.”

CONSENT AGENDA PART A

24-001 Awarding professional services for Municipal Attorney to Adam S. Abramson-Schneider, Esq., of Cleary, Giacobbe, Alfieri, Jacobs, LLC.

Mayor Blumenstock requests a motion and a second to adopt Consent Agenda Part A.

A motion was made by Councilman Kearney, second by Councilman Foley, to adopt Consent Agenda Part A.

ROLL CALL:

Councilwoman Boto	AYE	Councilman Lazarow	ABSENT
Councilman Foley	AYE	Councilwoman Nolde	AYE
Councilman Kearney	AYE	Councilwoman Salmon	AYE

CONSENT AGENDA PART B

24--002 Awarding professional services for Municipal Labor Attorney to Matthew J. Giacobbe, Esq., of Cleary, Giacobbe, Alfieri, Jacobs, LLC

24 -003 Awarding professional services for Municipal Tax Appeal Attorney to Robert F. Renaud, Esq., of Renaud Colicchio LLC

24-004 Awarding professional services for Municipal Engineering to Michael Disko of M. Disko Associates Consulting Engineering

24-005 Awarding professional services for Municipal Prosecutor to Russell J. Huegel, Esq.

24-006 Awarding professional services for Municipal Public Defender to Michael Simitz, Esq.

24-007 Awarding professional services for Municipal Accounting Services to Suplee Clooney & Company

24-008 Awarding professional services for Affordable Housing Administrative Agent to Community Grants, Planning & Housing

Mayor Blumenstock requests a motion and a second to adopt Consent Agenda Part B.

A motion was made by Councilman Foley, second by Councilwoman Nolde, to adopt Consent Agenda Part B.

ROLL CALL:

Councilwoman Boto	AYE	Councilman Lazarow	ABSENT
Councilman Foley	AYE	Councilwoman Nolde	AYE
Councilman Kearney	AYE	Councilwoman Salmon	AYE

CONSENT AGENDA PART C

24-009 Appointing Kim Salmon as Class III Planning Board Council Member Liaison for 2024.

Mayor Blumenstock requests a motion and a second to adopt Consent Agenda Part C.

A motion was made by Councilman Kearney, second by Councilwoman Nolde, to adopt Consent Agenda Part C.

ROLL CALL:

Councilwoman Boto	AYE	Councilman Lazarow	ABSENT
Councilman Foley	AYE	Councilwoman Nolde	AYE
Councilman Kearney	AYE	Councilwoman Salmon	AYE

CONSENT AGENDA PART D

24-010 Designating official newspapers for 2024

24-011 Depositories for all Funds

24-012 Depository for Developers Escrow Account for 2024

24-013 Depositories for 2024 Municipal Court Funds

24-014 Depository for Savings & Investment Accounts for 2024

24-015 Authorizing mileage reimbursement

24-016 Authorizing the tax collector to conduct a tax sale

24-017 Interest charges on delinquent taxes and assessments

24-018 Delinquent tax penalty rate for 2024

24-019 Rate for duplicate tax sale certificates

24-020 Authorizing cancellation of delinquencies less than \$10.00

24-021 Authorizing Primepoint LLC as payroll service

24-022 Appointing Bond Counsel Steven L. Rogut, Esq.

24-023 Appointing Gary Bundy as Municipal Court Judge for a 3-year term: 01/01/2024 to 12/31/2026

24-024 Appointing Cathy Cameron as Assessment Search Officer

24-025 Appointing Cathy Cameron as Public Agency Compliance Officer

24-026 Appointing Sandra Bruns as Tax Search Officer

24-027 Adopting Certificate of Compliance Employment Practices

24-028 Authorizing Execution of Contract with Phoenix Advisors

24-029 Adopting the 2024 Temporary Budget

24-030 Appointing Accrisure, LLC as Risk Manager Consultant

24-031 Appointing Kyle Harris and Sandra Bruns as Fund Commissioners

24-032 Appointing Kathleen Wierzbinski as Clean Communities Coordinator

22-033 Appointing Bill Nierstedt as Shade Tree Officer

24-034 Approving Council meeting dates for 2024

Mayor Blumenstock requests a motion and a second to adopt Consent Agenda Part D.

A motion was made by Councilman Foley, second by Councilman Kearney, to adopt Consent Agenda Part D.

ROLL CALL:

Councilwoman Boto	AYE	Councilman Lazarow	ABSENT
Councilman Foley	AYE	Councilwoman Nolde	AYE
Councilman Kearney	AYE	Councilwoman Salmon	AYE

The following are Mayor's appointments – Confirmation is not required

Mayor Blumenstock thanked the Garwood residents listed below for their volunteer services.

PLANNING BOARD

NAME	CLASS/TERM	APPOINTMENT DATES
Jen Blumenstock	Class I – 1 YEAR	01/01/2024-12/31/2024
Ken Capobianco	Class II – 1 YEAR	01/01/2024-12/31/2024
Steve Greet	Class IV- 4 YEARS	01/01/2024-12/31/2027
David Beyers	Alt. II- 2 YEARS	01/01/2024-12/31/2025

LIBRARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES **FIVE YEAR TERM** **01/01/2024 – 12/31/2028**

Debra Broski	Maria Nierstedt
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GARWOOD BOARD OF HEALTH **THREE YEAR TERM** **01/01/2024 – 12/31/2026**

Sarah Fiasconaro	Karin Kilmartin
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SHADE TREE ADVISORY BOARD

NAME	TERM	APPOINTMENT DATES
Robert Bilyeu	2 YEARS	01/01/2024 – 12/31/2025
Kim Ficarra	2 YEARS	01/01/2024 – 12/31/2025
Jeff Jotz	3 YEARS	01/01/2024 – 12/31/2026
Mark Koch	3 YEARS	01/01/2024 – 12/31/2026
Bill Nierstedt, Shade Tree Officer	3 YEARS	01/01/2024 – 12/31/2026

GREEN TEAM **THREE YEAR TERM** **01/01/2024 – 12/31/2026**

Gabrielle Blevins	Danny Damico	Jeff Jotz	Michael Mindel
Jen Blumenstock	Rich Faustino	Janine Koch	Bill Nierstedt
KC Bree	Kim Ficarra	Mark Koch	Maria Nierstedt
Karina Boto	Carla Gilbride	Edison Lee	Michele Poveromo
Andrea Castro	Claus Holzapfel	Carol Lombardo	Hadas Parag
Jolene Love-Chakraborty	Julie Graham	Charles Lombardo	Laura Steele
Shari Cohen	Russ Graham	Mallery Mangan	Elizabeth Tague
Erin Cruz			

HISTORICAL COMMITTEE **ONE YEAR TERM** **01/01/2024 – 12/31/2024**

Jennie Brown	Helen Laucius	Bruce Paterson
Pat DiFabio	Adele Lewis	Jeff Van Natta
Kim Ficarra	Carol Lombardo	

RECREATION COMMITTEE ONE YEAR TERM 01/01/2024 – 12/31/2024

Debbie Delise	Jenny Goodell	Jeff Van Natta
Amanda DiMaria	Rich McCormack	Krystal Zawoysky
Carla Gilbride	Valerie Utnick	

GARWOOD PARTNERSHIP FOR ARTS AND CULTURE ONE YEAR TERM 01/01/2024 - 12/31/2024

Gabrielle Blevins	James Hart	Leona Seufert
Karina Boto	Trina Junod	Nicole Walsh
Nisrine Boto	Michael Marmora	
Christine Guerriero	Chase Padusniak	

GARWOOD MUNICIPAL ALLIANCE ONE YEAR TERM 01/01/2024 – 12/31/2024

Jen Battiloro, Coordinator	Mary Emmons	Sam Rocco
Jen Blumenstock	Carla Gilbride	Krystal Zawoysky
Jenn D'Elia	MaryAnn Mule	

CITIZENS' ADVISORY PANEL ONE YEAR TERM 01/01/2024 – 12/31/2024

Iolanda Delise	Brian DiMaria	Joe Gola
Linda DeVito	Mark Gernett	Tracey McCarrick
Pat DiFabio	Craig Gibson	Howard Ruderman

SMALL BUSINESS ADVISORY COMMITTEE ONE YEAR TERM 01/01/2024 - 12/31/2024

Lee Frankel	Jim Marano	Stefanie Savino
EJ Gaub	Justin Nicholls	Erick Weiss
Mark Gernett	Josh Rosenberg	
Shari Littman	Vince Spera	

FIRE AND OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Director	Ken Capobianco
Police Chief	Douglas Stoffer
Deputy Coordinator	Sam Rocco, Acting Police Captain
Fire Chief	John Scalzadonna
Superintendent DPW	Clint Dickson
First Aid President	Glen Costello
Engineer	Michael Disko
Ex-Officio	Jennifer Blumenstock, Mayor
	Kyle Harris, Borough Administrator

UNION COUNTY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT REVENUE SHARING COMMITTEE

Jen Blumenstock	Jeff Jotz	Alternate: Kyle Harris
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UNION COUNTY SOLID WASTE ADVISORY COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE: CLINT DICKSEN

UNION COUNTY TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD LIAISON: BILL NIERSTEDT

2024 STANDING COMMITTEES

COMMITTEE	
Finance and Personnel	Councilman Sean Foley, Chair
	Councilman Marc Lazarow
	Councilwoman Kim Salmon
COMMITTEE	
Fire and OEM	Councilman Marc Lazarow, Chair
	Councilwoman Karina Boto
	Councilwoman Kim Salmon
COMMITTEE	
Community Development	Councilwoman Kim Salmon, Chair
	Councilwoman Clarissa Nolde
	Councilman Marc Lazarow

COMMITTEE	
Public Works	Councilwoman Karina Boto, Chair
	Councilman Sean Foley
	Councilman Vincent Kearney

COMMITTEE	
Police & Public Safety	Councilman Vincent Kearney, Chair
	Councilman Sean Foley
	Councilwoman Clarissa Nolde

COMMITTEE	
Community Engagement	Councilwoman Clarissa Nolde, Chair
	Councilwoman Karina Boto
	Councilman Vincent Kearney

<u>OTHER or SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE MAYOR</u>	
Senior Citizen Liaison	Mayor Blumenstock
Board of Health Liaison	Councilman Sean Foley
Library, Mayor's Representative	Councilman Marc Lazarow
School Board Liaison	Councilman Vincent Kearney
Citizen's Advisory Panel Liaison	Councilwoman Karina Boto
Green Team Liaison	Mayor Blumenstock
Small Business Advisory Board Liaison	Councilman Vincent Kearney
Business and Industry/Chamber of Commerce	Carol Kearney

COUNCIL MEMBER COMMENT:

Councilwoman Boto read the following: Thank you, Mayor. Good evening. I would like to thank everyone for being here. Over the past few months, I often wondered what it would feel like to sit up here. It is truly an honor. Firstly, I would like to extend an immense amount of gratitude to every voter, donor, volunteer, my running mates, and everyone in my team for their unwavering support. I am so humbled by your gracious efforts; this would not have been accomplished without your help. To my daughters, thank you for sharing your strength and reminding me that giving up is never an option. I am looking forward to getting started and working with the Mayor and all my fellow Council members, as well as our Department Heads and Borough staff. I want to thank Mr. Harris who was kind enough to already introduce us “newbies” and give us a thorough tour of all the departments. It is important to me to spend the next few months learning and growing in this new position. To properly prepare for my new role as a Council member, I will be attending several training classes in the next few months to be educated and well-informed on municipal budget procedures, governance, and proper ethics. As your new Chair of the Public Works Committee, I am committed to working with Superintendent Clint Dickson and Foreman Lenny Navarro to keep our great DPW running as efficiently and successfully as always and ensuring that any concerns with our streets or our municipal buildings are properly addressed. On that note, in order to target one particular concern which was much – discussed up here last year, I am excited to work with the Department to initiate an Adopt-a-Drain Program to address flooding mitigation. This program will be a volunteer-led initiative aimed at ensuring our sewer drains remain clear and free from debris during our quick storms. Our DPW does a great job of this already, and adding volunteer strength can only enhance this service and further improve proper flow of stormwater. I look forward to working with our wonderful DPW staff and members of our community to begin this program in the new year. Lastly, once again, Thank you. Whether a voter for me or not, I assure you I will be your advocate. I want to let everyone know I am committed to listening to everyone’s concerns, and I urge you to please get involved, bring your ideas, suggestions, and solutions to all of us. I truly want to work together in a positive way to continue keeping Garwood this amazing close-knit and thriving community.

Councilman Foley read the following: Ladies and gentlemen, as I stand before you today as your newest councilman, my heart is brimming with gratitude and humility. To each voter who placed their trust in me, I extend my deepest thanks. Your belief in my vision for Garwood is an honor and to all residents of Garwood I pledge to perform my duties with integrity and dedication. In my role as your finance chair, I am committed to working tirelessly towards crafting a fair and streamlined budget. These are challenging times, with inflation impacting our economy, and it is imperative that we explore innovative ways to generate revenue while safeguarding our community's financial health. Making tough decisions is part of this journey, but rest assured, I will always value and consider the feedback of our residents, ensuring that every voice is heard and respected. I also want to add that I am grateful to learn with Councilman Lazarow while your finance chair as I know his guidance and support will be invaluable, and I eagerly anticipate working alongside him to further our town's economic prosperity and well-being. I also want to express my sincere appreciation to our esteemed Mayor and fellow councilmembers whose experience and insights will be instrumental as I navigate my responsibilities and work to assist our community. To my running mates, Vinnie and Karina, your camaraderie and tireless efforts throughout this journey have been nothing short of inspiring. Together, we've forged a bond that goes beyond politics, rooted in our shared love for Garwood and its people.

I also want to mention acknowledge everyone who assisted in our campaign. Your commitment, from knocking on doors to spreading our message, played a pivotal role in this victory. Your passion and hard work are the backbone of our success, and I am eternally grateful for your support. To my family, your unwavering love and guidance have shaped the person I am today. Your sacrifices and belief in me have

been my constant source of strength and motivation. Lastly, to my beautiful wife, Lina, words cannot express my gratitude. Your support, patience, and love have been my anchor in this tumultuous journey. You are not just my partner but my confidante, my rock, and my biggest fan. As we embark on this new chapter, I promise to serve with honesty, listen with empathy, and act with the best interests of Garwood at heart. Together, let's build a brighter future for our beloved community. Thank you all, once again, for your trust and support. Let's get to work! Thank you.

Councilman Kearney read the following: Good evening and Happy New Year to everyone! There are many thank-yous to give tonight, beginning with one to the residents of Garwood who have entrusted me to represent them for another three years. The next thank you is to my family; without the steadfast support of Veronica, who is both my wife and my best friend, and my boys Anthony and Vincent, I wouldn't be able to serve in this role. A big thank you to our Sheriff, Peter Corvelli, for being here to swear me in earlier tonight. It's an honor every time he's administered the Oath of Office to me both here and at work, but I have to agree with something he told me the other day that the one after a re-election feels very good! Thank you to my running mates, Councilwoman Boto and Councilman Foley, both of whom I am so thrilled to see up here tonight and really look forward to working with, and our whole campaign team. Thank you to all of my colleagues on the Council, past and present, but particularly to Mayor Charles Lombardo and Councilman Russ Graham, who are both in the audience tonight, and Councilman Rich McCormack, who couldn't be here tonight. You left a big seat up here to fill, Russ, and I'm not just saying that because you're about 7" tall. And finally, thank you to Mayor Blumenstock, for your support, and most importantly your patience, over the years. I said often on the campaign trail last year that Garwood was at a crossroads, not literally at The Crossroads, but I'm always up to catch a show on Friday nights so please reach out if you want some company. You said I get one dad joke per meeting, Mayor! All kidding aside, we do have some big things to discuss and make decisions on coming up in 2024 and 2025. I'm looking forward to having those discussions openly and honestly with the public, while working together with Borough Administrator Harris, our professionals, our dedicated Borough employees and volunteers, and of course this Council, to make the best decisions possible. It's our job as Council Members to maintain Garwood as a great place to live, work, and to raise a family. So, let's not just talk about it; let's be about it, and make sure Garwood continues as "the place to be" in Union County. Thank you.

Councilwoman Nolde stated the following: Good evening everyone and Happy New Year! I am thrilled to see Councilwoman Boto joining us here tonight as well as congratulations to Councilman Kearny as he begins his second term. I just want to share a couple of highlights from 2023. In October of 2023, we welcomed Katya Lysak as our full-time recreation director, and have begun to see the positive changes she is bringing to our town-wide celebrations and recreation offerings. The Garwood Partnership for Arts and Culture installed its inaugural art show in November with drawings, watercolors, digital art, and the photography of Garwood artists at businesses around town and at the Garwood Public Library. We are looking forward to growing our network of collaborators for new art and culture initiatives. I am looking forward to all the work ahead with this Council. Together we will gather fresh perspectives, work collaboratively on committees, and strive to make Garwood a better place to live and work in 2024.

Councilwoman Salmon congratulated the newly elected officials.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Is there anyone in the audience who wishes to address the Mayor and Council please step to the microphone, and state your full name and address. Please limit your comments to five minutes.

Russ Graham, 12 Liberty Court, congratulated the newly elected officials.

Bruse Paterson, 325 Willow Avenue, congratulated the newly elected officials.

Mayor Blumenstock requests a motion followed by a second to close public comment.

A motion was made by Councilman Kearney, second by Councilwoman Salmon, to close public comment.
All in favor.

MAYORS ADDRESS:

First and foremost, I want to congratulate Councilman Kearney, Councilwoman Boto and Councilman Foley. Councilman Kearney, no one can ever doubt your work ethic and you've proven yourself to be one of the hardest working Council members I've served with. I know you will continue that hard work for the residents, and I look forward to many more discussions and disagreements, but also many compromises and new ideas for Garwood. Councilwoman Boto and Councilman Foley, I have gotten to know you both a good deal over the last year and I so I can attest to just how big your hearts are. I know you come into this job simply wanting to do what's in the best interest for Garwood's residents and I am positive that your open minds and willingness to listen to all sides will make you successful and productive Councilmembers. I look forward to this great new year with you. Today marks my second year as Mayor of Garwood. It was a very busy first year, one where we made great strides; and though there have been a few hurdles, we met them by coming together and working together -- making it a successful year for our residents. At the start of last year, I set some ambitious goals for myself, our councilmembers, and for our Borough and I am proud to say we've met and exceeded expectations on most of these initiatives. For the first time, we now have a full-time Recreation Director who has hit the ground running since the end of September. Katya Lysak has been working with the Recreation Committee on several activities and has kicked off a successful youth basketball season. Resident surveys that went out in the Fall will be instrumental in planning activities for the spring and for Garwood's Summer Rec Camp. Next year promises to be filled with fun activities for all ages. Working closely with all of our departments and volunteers, our Rec Director also planned and organized this year's holiday events including our Christmas Tree Lighting and Menorah Lighting. Ms. Lysak was also hired as Garwood's part-time Public Information Officer. Through her work, we've been able to increase engagement on our social media platforms and ensure that more information is dispersed to our residents. From street closures for road work, to Board of Health announcements, to garbage pick-up changes to community events and activities, more information is able to get in the hands of Garwood residents. We've also been able to close the gap between communication with our school and the Borough about the many activities and classes that Lincoln School families can participate in. Communication with residents is key to any flourishing town, and we took a big step forward with the re-instatement of this position. This year also saw a brand-new initiative, the Garwood Partnership for Arts and Culture, a new committee that is the brainchild of Councilwoman Clarissa Nolde and that is run with the help of volunteers and artists of all genres. GPAC kicked off the start of their committee with a photographic art exhibit and partnered with the local business community to display photographs capturing artists' interpretation of what art means to them. You can take a walk around our local businesses and check out the photos on the walls of artists ranging from children to adults. There is more to come in the next year, which of course I'll detail in a bit. As we moved through 2023, the Council also made some big policy changes to protect our residents. Garwood initiated rental registrations and codified rental turnover inspections, to be completed by our new part-time Rental Code Enforcement Officer, Chris Czuba. Not only does this allow Garwood to comply with new state mandates, but it ensures that the safety of our residents who rent is a top priority by ensuring all properties are kept up to safety and fire codes between leases. Improving public safety overall was a top priority for me, as well as

for our new Police Chief, Doug Stoffer. Chief Stoffer was sworn in as Chief in March following the retirement of Chief Jim Wright. Chief Stoffer and our police Department are working to crack down on speeding with increased patrols and added technology. This year, they also implemented a number of new initiatives meant to improve relations with the community and promote tolerance. From Safe Place, to Blue Envelope to the Arrive Together program, which pairs mental health workers with our police officers, Garwood is working to ensure each resident feels safe and supported and gets the proper care needed. The hiring of Garwood's first female police officer was another big step in that direction, and we are proud to welcome Officer Jada Shucaï to the Garwood team. We also welcomed other important additions to the squad, Officer Schoenberg and Officer Zimbaro, and we worked together to sign a four-year contract for the Garwood PBA Local No. 117. We also saw more businesses flocking to our Borough and opening their doors in 2023, with more grand openings than ever before. Working together with the Greater Westfield Chamber of Commerce, we cut ribbons at Jacava, Elegance Barber Lounge, Alonso's Café, Chas and Chas Pharmacy, Cozy Corner Cuban Bistro, V-Salon and Black Sheep. We also saw a grand re-opening of a longtime Garwood staple, the Garwood Lanes, following a fire that necessitated some rebuilding. Hottworx and the Smoke Shop have opened in town, along with a relocation from Academy Performance and Training which moved into the old Blue Ribbon Cleaners spot. We saw Crossroads dive into the comedy world, becoming a filming venue for stand-up shows, and we will soon see the opening of Everbowl, an acai bowl and smoothie café, right across the street at Vermella. Garwood's own Small Business Association has become a force in Garwood, sponsoring A Taste of Garwood Restaurant Week once again this year and with a new initiative, Wellness Month beginning this new year. Our local businesses have always been vital to our Borough and this past year we reaffirmed our commitment to them and pledge to continue to find ways to connect our residents with the local business community. These were just some of the highlights of this past year and I'm proud that many of the priorities I set forth from this dais one year ago have come to fruition. As we move into next year, we will continue to implement ideas and programs initially discussed in 2023. Our Police Committee and Emergency Management will begin exploring the creation of Community Emergency Response Teams to help improve flood response. These teams will be able assist in pre-emptive tasks such as going door-to-door to remind residents to move their cars or efforts such as assisting in moving barriers to block flooded streets. Many other towns use community volunteers such as this to aid Police in emergencies and as we see more and more quick intense storms, these teams could make a real difference. Last year, I also initiated forums to discuss parking improvements we could make in the downtown center. These forums provided valuable feedback and will help guide us with next steps. To help our downtown businesses ensure there is parking for their customers, Garwood will begin the roll-out of an app-based parking system that will help drive parking spot turnover. We have already introduced new parking rules in the surrounding residential streets and have put into place a structure for some downtown employee parking, which will also be rolled out in the new year. Our new Arts and Culture Committee will also be making some big moves in this new year, starting with a new art exhibit centering around the theme of reflection and new beginnings. They will also be initiating a new speaker series with hands on learning from Garwood's most creative artists. In February, residents from teens up to adults can learn how to better their iPhone photography skills from a professional Garwood photographer, with the spring bringing a poet and a nature artist to add to the series. In line with bringing more arts and culture to our Borough I will be asking our Community Development Committee to look into what we in Garwood can do to welcome the NJ Motion Picture and Television Commission and to make Garwood film ready, including applying for certification and creating the proper ordinances and permit fees. Our surrounding communities have seen the exciting benefits of this new surge in filming in NJ and I am looking forward to Garwood seeing those benefits as well. And of course, the new year brings new budget meetings as well. Mr. Harris and I will begin meeting with Department heads once again this year prior to the department budgets going to the Finance Committee. The Council worked hard last year to bring a budget that continued the services Garwood provides but of course inflation and rising

salaries to meet that inflation did make maintaining the low impact we had seen in previous years a challenge. That challenge continues this year. This Council will have to reflect on where they want Garwood to be, not only this year but five, ten, twenty years in the future. It is necessary to now make some decisions that will need to outlast any of us or our terms up here. When I became Mayor last year, I actually had a conversation with a resident and I hope I'm not speaking out of turn when discussing some of the content of this conversation, but the resident said to me that they don't envy the challenge my fellow Council members and I will have to deal with in the coming few years, that managing and continuing to thrive as a small town with the many forces pushing and pulling on it will be difficult and there will be some fine lines to walk and areas to balance. I am certainly aware of those challenges and I know everyone up here is as well. As we move through budget season and whether we have discussions about sewer fees or salaries or garbage or dispatch, I ask the Council members, and I ask the public, not to shy away from those discussions. The more education, information and feedback any of the topics receive the better off we all are as a community. I know the temptation to often react emotionally to change, I've been guilty of it myself. My job up here, and the job of every Councilmember is to look at everything presented to us from every angle and represent what we think in the end is in the best interests of all residents. We know that sometimes temporary costs can lead to long-term savings. Or that we can sometimes figure out how to share services without losing Garwood's identity. We've figured out ways to keep Garwood running and to make it a place that new families continue to flock to and that longtime residents still feel at home in. We will continue that work this year. There will of course be changes as we go along, that is all but inevitable. But I ask this Council and I pledge myself, to make thoughtful, balanced decisions that will allow Garwood to thrive and continue to be the best value in Union County.

ADJOURNMENT:

The Regular Meeting of the Mayor and Council will be held on **THURSDAY, JANUARY 18, 2024** at 7:00 P.M. in Council Chambers.

Information for meetings is posted on the Borough website: https://garwood.org/gb_notices. Time: 6:53 PM

Respectfully submitted:

Catherine D. Cameron, R.M.C.
Borough Clerk