

Speech by Stefanie Gara

December 15th 2015

It has been a sincere honor to have served my community. I sincerely thank you for all the trust and support you have given me over the last six years. We have dealt with so many challenges from Cap laws implanted by Trenton, failed school budgets, hurricanes, unprecedented snow storms, major power outages, fires, flooding and yet we have always pulled together “Raritan Strong”.

Looking back I am extremely proud that I fulfilled the promises I made to the residents of this community. In 2010 we promised to: amend the Housing Ordinance, which ordinance was fully amended in November 2010; we refurbished and revitalize the Dog Park which was opened for business in April, 2011.

Over the last 6 years I am very proud of the work that we’ve accomplished towards our Riverfront Corridor. We knew we had an area that was a potential diamond in the rough to this community. We had a vision of what this area could be and soon realized to accomplish this vision it was not going to be a six month venture. It was going to be a long term commitment that required many hours of meetings, planning, discussions and cutting through the proverbial red tape. We had many meetings with our Planning Board, Environmental Commission and the County as well. We also knew along the way we would meet a host of criticism, brick walls, and nay sayers that would refer to our genuine efforts as pie in the sky. We knew the first thing we needed to do was clean up Canal Park and thanks to the efforts of Councilman Lobell and the hard work of our Public Works

Department the entire park was cleared and opened for everyone to enjoy this was step one in drawing attention to the area.

In 2012 we set our sights on a new community event with the Economic Development Committee and held our first RiverFest Event to help draw attention to this area on a much larger scale. With the help of Steeplechase Cancer, former Councilman Donald Tozzi, the Raritan Volunteer Fire Department, EDC Members and countless volunteers the first Raritan RiverFest and Rubber Duck Race was formed. This venture alone was a huge commitment in time and effort between coordinating the event, gathering vendors and numerous hours spent selling the famous rubber duck tickets. Our first year the event was a huge hit drawing close to six thousand people to our Community.

Following that event Councilman Lobell and I hosted the Raritan Borough Riverfront Summit in the Coach Barn at Duke Farms. We had not known it at the time but an investor that attended our summit realized the vision our beautiful riverfront had to offer and not only has purchased the properties on Orlando Drive but has already received approval from the Land Use Board and Somerset County and is now in the process of moving forward with the transformation we envisioned. It is my hopes upon my retirement from Council that the remaining Council as well the Council elect and Mayor elect not only study the framework that has been already laid out for them but study and actively pursue the Boroughs Master Plan that we have spent thousands of dollars and countless hours working on to help move this community forward.

I leave this Council meeting tonight with my head held high, no regrets and satisfaction that I not only talked the talk I indeed walked the walk. It was more

work to be an accountable representative then I had ever imagined, the time away from my family alone was very hard. However, I made promises and my integrity would not allow me to be one of those candidates that promise you the world and not fulfill the campaign promises they make. It was difficult but I refused to allow the workload and criticisms stop me. Six years ago I ask you to join me as I journey through Raritan well tonight Mayor Liptak, Council, Chief McCormick, Professionals and Residents I thank you all for being part of my journey.

Dan, Maggie, Lisa, Karen, Connie, Linda, Annie, and Anne and the entire administrative staff thank you so much for all your hard work. Thank you for helping me over the years. I will truly miss working with each and every one of you. Chief McCormick thank you for your dedication to Raritan. It has been an honor working with you and your department over the years. We are very fortunate to have someone with your knowledge and skills in charge. Greg, what a ride. I can't help but laugh because you are my political partner in crime. You have been there by my side helping me every step of the way. Thank you for everything!

I have truly enjoyed serving our community, thank you all again 😊 I wish everyone a very Merry Christmas and a safe, healthy and Happy New Year.