

Are we Frantic in Atlantic Highlands?

Are we more worried about the future of our country and our nation's place in the rest of the world than our own community? Do you feel that County and State governing bodies truly represent you? Do you pay attention to their voting records? Have you let them know how you feel about their votes on proposed legislation? My guess is that most people are only actively engaged with members of their own municipal governing bodies, whom they are more likely to encounter in person since they are our neighbors.

Congratulations to Mr. Dellosso on your re election, and I welcome Mr. Murphy, my next door neighbor, and Ms. Hohenleitner whom I've know for sometime to the Council. I look forward to your input as we start this new year.

After an election, I like to remind the Council, especially the new members, that in Atlantic Highlands, no one can be elected just by the voters of one's own political party. Unaffiliated voters out number the registered Republicans and Democrats, so your victory is the result of voters believing in you as a person who shares their vision of how our town should be progressing. Try to keep that in mind when you are voting on an ordinance or a resolution. And for those of you running for re-election this year resist the urge to be cautious or miss a meeting so that your vote won't be used against you in campaign literature. Have the courage of your convictions and vote for or against something because you feel strongly about it, not because it's politically expedient. Try to put people before politics. And remember you will rarely please everyone.

You must also develop a thick skin, because things will be said about you which may be untrue, and even hateful, by people that don't even know you, when they disagree with your decisions. Why is it that people question all the good things they hear about you, but believe all the bad without a second thought?

Because of the popularity of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, what you say is instantly and often anonymously shared, liked, followed and repeated amongst like-minded people without ever knowing if what is posted is true. Few bother to fact check if they agree with what is said. For some it can even be comforting to know that someone else shares your views, however extreme they might be. Resist the urge to respond in anger to these posts.

I like this quote from Warren Buffett: “You will continue to suffer if you have an emotional reaction to everything that it is said to you. True power is sitting back and observing things with logic. True power is restraint. If words control you that means everyone else can control you. Breathe and allow things to pass.” (@WarrenBuffettHQ)

Despite what seems like a sudden burst of building activity in our town, most of the construction along First Avenue has taken a decade to come to fruition. In the 30 years since I moved here, the Hesse building, the Blue Bay Inn, the Edwards-Rast building, the renovation and expansion of Borough Hall and the Rao building all improved the appearance of the First Avenue corridor. But some building fires and a downward economic spiral left us with several unsightly vacant lots and empty storefronts for far too long.

Convincing a builder to invest in our town was no easy task, but former Mayor Fred Rast knew that a thriving downtown was crucial to the future of Atlantic Highlands, and he was able to attract people who were willing to invest in our town. It is a long and costly process from acquiring the land to completing a building, but we have several projects underway. The completion of 2 Hennessey Blvd. and 35 First Avenue has spurred apartment renovations by the owners of several existing residential units along First Avenue.

Last year we welcomed these new businesses to First Ave: Nicholas Creamery (84 1st), TC Nails & Spa II (183 1st) Evolution Salon & Spa (17 1st), and Craft House Salon (87 1st) The amazing transformation of 76 1st Ave. by O’Brien Realty was revealed at their Nov. 3rd grand opening. We await the finishing touches of another transformation of the space next to Gianni’s Pizza. I was allowed an early peek by the owner and look forward to the official grand opening of this unique home furnishings boutique in the coming months. Completion of The Atlantic House, formerly The Memphis Pig Out, at 67 1st, is progressing more rapidly now and I look forward to their grand opening.

Some previously approved projects have generated controversy and objections by residents: the expansion of Carton Brewery, the new residential/commercial development at 158 1st Ave, and the Seven Eleven at Highway 36 and First. This will no doubt continue as future development is proposed for other properties that are up for sale.

One thing is certain: real estate sales continued steadily last year as new families have chosen to make Atlantic Highlands their home. This is progress, and I hope all of us make the effort to be friendly and welcoming when we see unfamiliar faces in town.

My apologies to Father Fernando who will be giving the benediction to end the meeting, but I am ending my message with a Franciscan Benediction that I heard in church during Advent that I felt was relevant.

May God bless us with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that we may live from deep within our hearts.

May God bless us with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of God's creations, so that we may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless us with tears to shed for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger, and war, so that we may reach out our hands to comfort them and to turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless us with just enough foolishness to believe that we can make a difference in the world.