

## The Mayors of Englewood

If you look at the wall on your left as you enter Englewood City Hall, you will see a plaque listing all of Englewood's Mayors since we became a City in 1899. There have been thirty of them. The plaque was installed and is kept up-to-date by the Englewood Historical Society.

The role of the Mayor in Englewood is different from what many assume – he or she has under our charter no executive authority and no vote on the City Council except in case of a tie. The Mayor has, however, significant appointive powers and acts as ceremonial leader and the public spokesman of the City. Mayors over the years have utilized the position in different ways.

The Mayor runs for election along with the Councilperson-at-Large. Prior to 1971, they were both elected for two-year terms. In 1971 and 1975, mayors were elected for four years because of a new State law. Thereafter, under a new City Charter, both officials, as well as the four Ward Council members, have been elected for three year terms. The Mayor's important power to appoint members of the Board of Education was eliminated as the result of a local referendum in 2000.

One of our early mayors was Donald Mackay, who was President of the New York Stock Exchange. He is remembered today because of Mackay Park, which is on land donated by him to the City. He also donated the building which was our first public library on East Palisade Avenue.

Another notable early mayor was Dan Fellows Platt, at thirty years old our youngest mayor, and the only Democrat to be elected until 1967. Platt was a collector of paintings and built the substantial house at the northeast corner of Booth Avenue and Lydecker Street to house his significant collection. The collection was given to Princeton University on his death.

During World War II, our Mayor was Donald Quarles, who later served as Deputy Secretary of Defense in the Eisenhower Administration. An expert in rocketry, he bore the brunt of criticism of our military after the Soviet launch of Sputnik. The early childhood school on Davison Place is named after him.

In the fifty years I have lived in Englewood, I have known ten mayors. Each has had a different take on the job. Those who have had consistent support from at least three out of five members of the City Council have been able to maintain a semblance, if not the actuality, of being chief executive. Those who have not had the respect of their council colleagues have been largely relegated to ceremonial roles. The following comments reflect my personal assessments:

Mayor Austin Volk, who served two separated terms, is remembered as the Mayor who confronted the unruly crowd at the time of Englewood's "racial disturbance" in July, 1967. He was a loyal member of local Republican organization led by State Senator David Van Alstyne Jr.

Volk was succeeded in 1968-69 by Robert Miller, a Presbyterian minister who was elected in the pivotal election of 1967 which brought Democratic control of the City for the first time. He defeated First Ward Councilman Peter Abel by a narrow margin. The main issue in the campaign was a Democratic proposal to locate new public housing on a site in the Second Ward which is today Rock Creek Terrace.

Miller was succeeded by Ned Feldman, a Republican, who nonetheless defied his party leadership to support the new housing. Denied renomination by his party for reelection in 1971, Feldman ran anyway as an independent, thereby enabling the election of the Democratic candidate, Rev Walter Taylor, with only 38% of the vote in a three-way contest. Feldman's defection from the Republican establishment effectively ended the relevance of that party in Englewood, and Englewood has been Democratic ever since. Today the Republicans don't even bother to nominate candidates.

Taylor received much publicity as the first African-American Mayor in Bergen County. He had been a leader in the fight for new housing, and, during his four-year term extensive new low-rise public housing was completed in the Fourth Ward and at Rock Creek Terrace. The membership of African-Americans on City boards and agencies increased, as did the number of minority City employees.

In 1975, Englewood elected its first, and so far only, woman mayor, Sondra Greenberg. Sandy served for seven years and brought a unique style to the office. She focused heavily on quality of life issues. The John Harms Center, later renamed Bergen PAC, was started in an old movie house during her mayoralty, and, based on this, the City made an unsuccessful effort to be designated official Bergen County cultural center. Utilizing federally-funded CETA employees, she organized a major art exhibit. In her statutory membership on the Planning Board, she focused heavily on encouraging good architecture. A new board was created to enforce design standards for the downtown storefronts. She took her Board of Education appointive power very seriously, appointing a citizens' committee to review candidates.

Also during Sandy's mayoralty, the voters approved a new City Charter, creating the post of City Manager. The new Public Safety building on Van Brunt Street was opened. During a portion of her mayoralty, a majority of the Council members were women, leading wags to refer to "the city mothers."

Sandy was succeeded by Steve Rothman, an ambitious young lawyer who later served seven terms as United States Congressman from the Ninth District. Rothman's major accomplishment was encouraging his friend Fred Fish to undertake the major renewal project which became the Palisade Court shopping center.

Rothman was succeeded by Donald Aronson, who was Mayor for nine years, the longest tenure in our history. Aronson was a fire insurance adjuster who became a highly successful local property developer and owner. His first election in 1988, saw the last effort of local Republicans to mount a City-wide campaign. Aronson, nonetheless, defeated Republican Parker Coates easily. A strong personality, he worked closely with City Managers Jack Drakeford and Robert Benecke and tended to dominate the members of the city council. Politically ambitious, he made an aggressive, but ultimately unsuccessful, effort to replace Byron Baer as State Senator for the 37<sup>th</sup> District. His divisive actions led, when running for his third term in 1994, to a major Democratic primary challenge from Suzanne Platoff, which he barely survived. One of his major successes as Mayor was to resist and eventually prevent an effort of the Marriott Corporation to build a large assisted living facility on property purchased from the First Presbyterian Church in a residential zone on East Palisade Avenue.

Aronson was followed by Paul Fader, another lawyer, with good connections at the State level. His six years were marked by a rising tide of opposition to local school taxes, leading to a referendum which in 2000 ended the Mayoral appointment power over the Board of Education. Since then, Englewood has,

as is common in neighboring communities, elected the members of the Board and voted on the annual Board of Education budget. Fader was instrumental in luring highly regarded educator Dr John Grieco to come to Englewood as Schools Superintendent. Grieco founded the Academies@Englewood, attracting students from across the County and providing more challenging options for our own students. He also developed a comprehensive plan for improvement and expansion of our school facilities, and in 2004 achieved passage of a sizable bonding referendum to fund the proposed changes.

Michael Wildes, a lawyer specializing in immigration, became Mayor in 2004, serving for six years. He maximized the publicity opportunities offered by his role, and made no secret of his ambition for higher office. He formed an alliance with Bergen County Democratic Chair Joseph Ferriero, and used his influence on the Planning Board to aid a major property developer also allied with Ferriero. When running for reelection in 2006, he faced a serious but unsuccessful challenge from retired dentist Robert Stern running as an independent.

Wildes was succeeded by our current Mayor, Frank Huttie, who was elected for a third term in November, 2015. Huttie has functioned as a strong leader of the City Council, even serving for two years as Council President, probably the only Mayor ever to hold both offices. He is largely responsible for hiring highly regarded City Manager Tim Dacey. Under his leadership the Planning Board has completely overhauled the City's Master Plan, with its guidelines for the future of Englewood. He and the Council have achieved an impressive plateau in our previously rising local property taxes. They have been able to sell for a good price the defunct Lincoln School, along with the adjoining firehouse, to a developer, which will put these properties on the tax roll. Huttie has heavily promoted the long-awaited advent of light rail to Englewood, with the current plan calling for a terminus at Englewood Hospital.