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**SOMERVILLE'S MAYORS, 1909- Present**

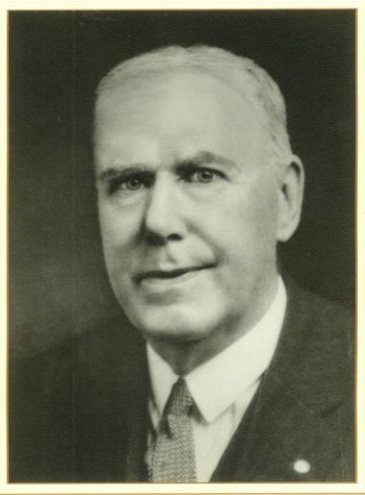
**Their Place in History**



**1. Charles C. Kenyon** (Served: 6/1909-12/1911) was a Somerville native, owner of a local textile manufacturing firm (D. R. Kenyon and Son), and holder of a patent for textile machinery invented at the plant. He served as President of the Board of Commissioners in 1906-07, Somerville's form of government from 1863. As President, he appointed the Citizens' Committee charged to study the Borough's proposed incorporation. He declined to run again, instead leading the campaign for reform under the banner "Time for Change". The referendum of May, 1908 passed 450 to 138 and was approved by the State legislature 4/16/1909. Victory was celebrated according to the *Unionist-Gazette* "until a late hour of the night with brass band and fireworks." He took the helm of the newly incorporated

Borough in June 1909, elected by a margin of 9 votes. He also was a Trustee and President of the Board of Somerset Hospital for 19 years and was instrumental in fundraising for its new Rehill Ave. construction in 1925. He died in 1937 at age 65 and is buried in New Cemetery.

**2. William V. Steele** (Served 1/1912-12/1919) according to the the 1907 Business



Supplement of the *Unionist-Gazette*: "No one identified with the public life of Somerville is more favorably known than W. V. Steele, counselor at law." Five years later this Somerville native would serve as the Borough's second mayor. A graduate of Columbia Law School, he was admitted to the bar in 1878. An excellent criminal lawyer, in 1884 he was appointed Prosecutor of Common Pleas for the County. He also served as NJ Supreme Court Commissioner. His record of public service also includes: 10 years as Prosecutor, Battalion Adjutant for the local NJ Militia Company, and founding member of the People's Reading Room and Library Association. During his eight-year tenure as mayor, the Somerville Public Library was incorporated and became part of the Borough. Mayor

Steele was a supporter of women's suffrage during New Jersey's state suffrage campaign in 1915. He had good reason; his sister, Mary M. Steele, is famous in her own right as the first woman admitted to the Somerset County bar. The Steele family plot is in New Cemetery. The former mayor was buried there in July 1924 at age 70.

\*The *Unionist-Gazette* was a forerunner of the later *Messenger-Gazette*, a newspaper published in Somerville until 2008.



**3. Thomas A. Flockhart** (Served 1/1920-12/1929) was an Ohio native who relocated to Somerville with the Cott-a-Lapp Company (later Calco/Cyanamid). He subsequently owned and operated a roto-engraving company in Bound Brook. Mayor Flockhart is best known for establishing Somerville's park system, which is named for him. A memorial stone on Summit and Mercer Streets bears his name. He was instrumental in obtaining municipal title to land parcels along Peter's Brook--mostly through donation. His ten-year tenure saw many other firsts for Somerville. Main Street was widened and overhead electrical lines as well as trolley tracks were removed. The Rescue Squad was organized. December of '28 saw the grand opening of Somerville's Public Free Library in new quarters at the former Schwed Mansion on High and Bridge, Somerville's first municipal headquarters. Besides service to the Borough, Mr. Flockhart served Somerset County for 3-terms as state assemblyman in the early 30's. The mayor was fond of travel and was a student of primitive cultures, having visited the Mayan ruins in Yucatan. He also visited the Indians of the Hudson Bay region of Canada. In the 1920's this was major adventure! He died in July 1955 at the age of 81. His wife, Lolitta L. W. Flockhart, an active contributor to the Borough's cultural life, authored an art column for a newspaper of the period, *The Times* of New Brunswick. Both are buried in New Cemetery.



**4. Edward P. Johnson** (Served 1/1930-12/1931) said he took the job of mayor because "Nobody else would take it ". A Brooklyn native (born March 27 1878), his ancestors were early settlers of New England. He was a lawyer (Albany Law, class of 1898), a bachelor and avid horseman. A fan of ancient history, he traveled to both Greece and Egypt in 1921. He presided over the Borough in the aftermath of the stock market crash. He died Aug 3, 1937 while vacationing in New Hampshire, and is buried there in the family plot.

**5. Robert L. Adams** (Served 1/1932-12/1933) one of Somerville's youngest mayors, was 36 years old when elected. A Plainfield native, he came to Somerville in 1926 to manage the Vroom Coal and Feed Store, located on South Bridge Street near the train depot. Elected to Borough Council in 1929, he served until becoming mayor. During his term as mayor, he officiated at the groundbreaking of Somerville's new Division Street post office, a WPA project. A National Guard member and WWI veteran, he remained active in politics after his term as mayor, serving first as County Sheriff, Freeholder (25 years) and Director of the Freeholder Board (8 years). The Chamber of Commerce elected him Man of the Year in 1956. He died in 1965.



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**6. Freas L. Hess** (Served 1/1934-12/1943) officiated at the first Tours of Somerville (1940, 1941) and turned the initial spade of dirt to plant the dogwoods along Peter's Brook. (The flowering dogwood is Somerville's official tree). In December 1941, in response to the US entry into World War II, he issued a special proclamation calling for citizens' cooperation with the Local Defense Council and asking local businesses and homes to display the flag in support of the war effort. During his tenure, he improved Borough parks and recreational facilities through federal WPA funds, a "New Deal" program. One of Somerville's more popular mayors, he is also fondly remembered for his starring role in a Civic League Production of J. M. Barrie's "The Professor's Love Story". Mr. Hess came to Somerville in 1916 from Pennsylvania, and served in France during WWI. He began his service to the Borough in 1923, serving 2 years of an unexpired term on Borough Council and was elected again in his own right. He was a 43-year employee of the Johns Manville Corporation and had an extensive record of public service. In addition to 10 years as mayor, he served 9 years in the state Assembly, eventually becoming Majority Leader (1944) and Speaker of the House (1945). He later served as State Senator (4 years) and was elected local "Man of the Year" in 1955. Mr. Hess also chaired the Raritan Valley Sewage Authority for a number of years. He died in November 1959 and is buried in New Cemetery.



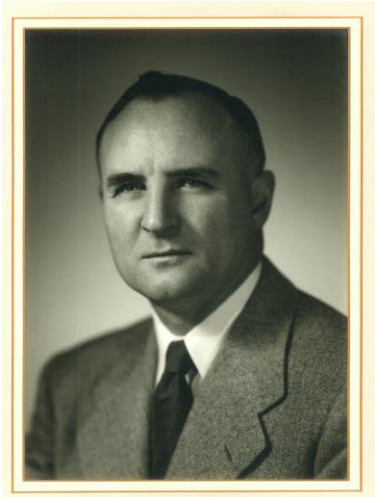
**7. Howard S. Lyon** (Served 1/1944 -5/1951) saw Somerville through the end of the WW II era and the immediate post-war years. A Phillipsburg native and graduate of Princeton, he was a newcomer to Somerville, arriving in 1933. He was a banker by profession, and served as Executive Vice President, and later President of Somerset Trust Company. He served on the zoning board and was a Councilman before becoming mayor. He also served for as President of the Board of Trustees of Somerset Hospital and was a Trustee for 14 years. He was one of the first mayors to have an "open door" policy. At times, the mayor might not be in his office at the bank but riding the pumper of Engine No. 1 as it raced to the latest alarm. According to local columnist, Jessie Havens, "To tell the truth, Howard Lyon, liked people and people liked him". Following a heart attack, he resigned as mayor in 1951 in order to comply with doctor's orders to restrict his activities. Honored as "Man of the Year" by the local chamber of commerce, he was the first to receive this honor. More than 400 persons attended this farewell tribute. His own life, he said in his remarks, had followed his parents' belief that "living in a community involved a duty". The mayor died shortly thereafter. He is buried in his family plot in Pluckemin Cemetery.



**8. Walter F. Scott** (Served 5/1951-12/1961) was the first mayor to conduct the Borough's business from the "Robert Mansion" which was acquired in 1958 from the local Elks organization. Mr. Scott was born in Lamington and attended Borough schools. An insurance agent for 44 years, he chaired the local rationing board during WWII. He also was a former President of the local Rotary chapter and served 4 terms as a councilman before becoming interim mayor upon the death of Mr. Lyon. He led the Borough for 10 years as Mayor, and until recently, was Somerville's longest serving Mayor. He had the honor of officiating at the Borough's proud fiftieth anniversary celebration and placed a personal letter with greetings to the future mayor of Somerville in a time capsule to be opened on during the Borough's Centennial celebration. He died in July of 1974

and is buried in New Cemetery.

**9. "Duke" Claude Walck** (Served 1/1962-3/1962) was the first full-time recreation director for the Borough (1947-1951). Prior to that, he had been a teacher and coach at Flemington and Somerville High Schools. A native of Elizabeth, he was an alumnus of the University of North Carolina and Montclair Teacher's College. He was an advocate and supporter of sports for all ages throughout his life. He left the Borough's employ to work as Supervisor of Employment and Employee Relations for Johns-Manville, but continued to serve the Borough, first as a Councilman (1955-1960) and eventually as mayor. Together with fellow councilman, Richard Lothian, he established Somerville's Little League. He died suddenly at the age of 51 after serving only 3 months as Mayor.



"Duke" was his nickname from his school days at Wardlaw School. The park on Walnut Street is named for him. He is buried in New Cemetery.

**10. Richard Lothian** (Served 3/1962-12/1963), friend and colleague of the late Mayor, served out Walck's term as interim mayor. Together, the two had organized Somerville's Little League and brought semi-professional baseball teams to Somerville's Brooks Field. During his tenure as mayor, the Borough acquired 20 acres of land along Route 206 to serve as the town's landfill, and received federal support for an urban redevelopment survey. Mr. Lothian was born in Bellshill, Scotland, in 1907 and graduated from Bellshill Academy before coming to America in 1924. Mr. Lothian was a banker by profession and a leader in this field for over 50 years. He was a graduate of several schools of banking including Stonier Graduate School of Banking, Rutgers University. After 25 years with the Second National Bank (later First National, then Nat

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West, and Fleet Bank), he joined Somerset Trust (later Summit Bank), a prominent Somerset County financial institution, in 1950, and eventually became its president. He remained affiliated with this institution throughout his life, later serving as Vice Chairman of its Board (1972) and Director Emeritus (1986). Mr. Lothian had an outstanding record of community service to Somerville and to New Jersey. He was a member and officer of New Jersey Bankers Association, the state division of the American Bankers Association. He was appointed by then Governor Brendan Byrne to the state's Fire Engine Museum Advisory Committee. He was a charter member and officer in Somerville's Kiwanis club, served on the local Boy Scout and Girl Scout Councils and



was a Deacon and Trustee of First Baptist Church. He served terms as county Easter Seals chairman, director of the local Chamber of Commerce, a charter member of the local 200 Club, and was active in fundraising for many local groups, including Somerset Medical Center. Somerset Valley Chamber of Commerce honored him as "Man of the Year" in 1960. His love of sports, especially golf, continued in retirement and he became President of the Leisure Village West Golf Club. He died in August 1987 and is buried in New Cemetery.



**11. Leroy W. Jones** (Served 1/1964-12/1965) was a locally prominent industrialist and councilman for many years. He retired to Boca Raton, Florida, where he died in April, 1999, at age 92, the longest lived to date of Somerville's former mayors. He was born in 1906 in New Brunswick, coming to Somerville in 1929 to work for D.R. Kenyon and Son, the company owned by Somerville's first mayor. He eventually bought the plant, assuming ownership in 1945. It remained a family-owned business and the oldest Somerset County manufacturing establishment until recently. His service to the borough as councilman began during the 1950's. In 1960, he was involved in the construction of the Somerset Valley YMCA on the corner of North Bridge and Green Streets. He was past president of the local Rotary Club, and was named a Paul Harris Fellow by Rotary International. He later served

as director of Somerset Savings and Loan (later Somerset Savings) and the Medical Center. During his term as mayor, the ordinance creating the Somerville Redevelopment Agency, controversial in its day, was passed in March of 1964.



**12. Arthur E. Smith** (Served 1/1966-12/1967) was born, raised and educated in Somerville schools. He was an alumnus of St. John's University. He was employed at the New York offices of the Federal Bureau of Investigation where he met his future wife.. He and his wife established their insurance agency in Somerville from 1950 through 2003, raising their 3 children here. He was a member of the Somerville Rescue Squad. He became mayor in his first bid for public office, after having filled out an unexpired term on the Borough Council. He died in 1989 and is buried in Immaculate Conception Cemetery with his wife, who survived him until 2013.

**13. George H. Shay** (Served 1/1968-12/1971) originally taught American History and Problems in Democracy at Somerville High School in the 1930's, but later became Government Sales Supervisor at Johns-Manville Corporation. Born, raised and educated in Somerville, he was a Rutgers University alumnus. He later taught at Rutgers and served on the University's Board of Trustees. After his term as mayor, he served as County Freeholder and in the state cabinet of Governor Driscoll. Described in the local press as energetic, he was a great organizer. During his tenure as mayor, he surveyed and restructured all Borough departments, committees and agencies. He was considered in his day as one of the most forward-looking of Somerville mayors. His farewell address to the Borough, entitled "Is Somerville Possible?" astutely predicted many of the challenges the Borough would face in the years ahead. His up-beat call for a "civic renaissance...reflecting the character, intelligence, and dedication" of all Borough residents is stirring even today. He died in October 1982 and is buried in New Cemetery.





**14. Leroy Gunzelman, Jr.** (Served 1/1972-12/1975) ran unopposed for his first term and was the first mayor to serve under the newly revised term limit (Prior to 1972 the mayoral term had been two years, after it was three; Mr. Gunzelman served four years because of the transition). A business owner, he operated a thriving family-owned grocery on Gaston Ave., founded in 1935. He operated "Gunzelman's Market" until retiring in 1947. Mr. Gunzelman was born in New Brunswick, but moved to the Borough in 1917 at age 4. He was educated in Somerville public schools and lived in the Borough all his life. He died in February 1999 at age 85. "Gunzie", as he was called by close friends, was a former chief of the Somerville Fire Department (1961-1962). He began his

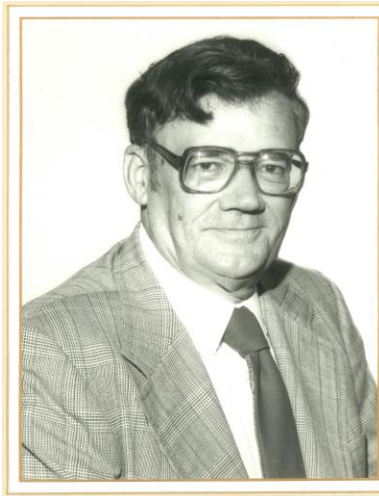
50-year service with the fire department in 1945 as a member of Central Hook and Ladder Company. He was an active member of the United Reformed Church, and served three terms on Council and on the Planning Board before becoming mayor. He was a 60-year member of Tall Cedars of Lebanon, Forest 48, the Solomon Lodge, and also belonged to the Eastern States Numismatic Association. He was an active, unconventional mayor. He used unspent campaign funds to purchase trash receptacles for Main Street and Gaston Ave. The day he was to take office, he swore himself in, as the designated official was ill. He established a special committee of five local clergymen to plan senior citizens' housing in the Borough. He then personally traveled to Trenton, and then to Washington, D.C. to obtain HUD funds and to arrange for a mortgage for Somerville's Senior Citizen's Housing on Mountain Ave. (construction was not completed until 1978). He was instrumental in the Borough's purchase of the defunct Sargeant's Lumber Yard for the development of public parking in downtown Somerville. He also spearheaded the grant for the construction of Urban Drive. He is buried in the family plot in New Cemetery.

**15. Phillips S. Heathcote** (Served 1/1976- 7/1982) served the Borough for 6 years and six months. Mr. Heathcote had the curious distinction of collecting unemployment while Mayor. Shortly after beginning his third term, state cutbacks eliminated his position as Development Specialist for the NJ Department of Environmental Protection. Mr. Heathcote was born and educated in Massachusetts and was a Marine Corps veteran of World War II. A graduate of American University in D. C., he did graduate work at Stevens Institute and Fairleigh Dickinson University. He was a Borough Councilman for one year prior to being elected Mayor. While mayor, he selected Landmark Corporation to develop Somerville's Downtown Shopping Center





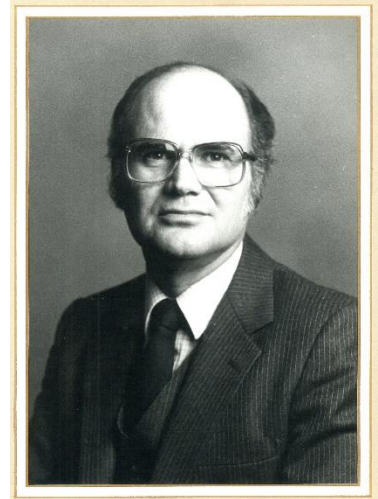
Copyright Borough of Somerville, 2020; Compiled by the Somerville Historic Advisory Committee after the redevelopment project had been stalled for many years. He installed a new, more efficient payroll system, instituted job-training for Borough employees and obtained grants to improve the Borough's sewer system. During his tenure, the county was embroiled in civil unrest due to race riots throughout the state. To promote cooperation and harmony in Somerville, he established the Human Relations Committee which continues to represent the interests and concerns of the minority community in the Borough today. Mr. Heathcote was proudest of his establishment of shared health, engineering, and other services with neighboring Raritan and Manville, a pioneering achievement, later advocated widely in the county. He died in May of 1999.



**16. George Gurisic** (Served 7/1982-11/1982) was Somerville's third interim mayor and the first not currently serving on Council. He led the Borough for 4 months following Mr. Heathcote's resignation until that November's election when another took the Borough's helm. He later served as an interim Councilman in 1980. His long commitment to public service made him an excellent choice for the interim position. As Mayor, he initiated a "Pride in Somerville Committee". Born in Brooklyn, he resided in Rocky Hill for a number of years where he served on the rescue squad (1947 to 1969) before moving to Somerville in 1969. He was a graduate of Princeton High, and an alumnus of Rutgers University

in New Brunswick. An army veteran with service in both World War II and the Korean Conflict, he held numerous positions in criminal justice, including Principle Investigator for the State's Public Defender's Office. He held this position for 35-years, retiring in 2002). He served as Sheriff of Somerset County (1964 to 1967), and was a former chief of police in Rocky Hill (1953-1964). A former member of the Somerset County Sherriff's' Department (1964-67), he served the Borough as a member of the School and Welfare Boards. He was the President of the Somerville Board of Education for two terms and served on the board from 1981 to 2003. He also served on the County School Board Association, holding office as President, Treasurer, and receiving a longevity award from the County School Boards Association for 20 years of service in 2003. From 2000 to 2003, he served on the NJ School Board Athletic Association. He was a member of the Borough's Rescue Squad and the Somerville Emergency Management team from 1988 until his death. He died suddenly, at age 75, in May 2003 and is buried in New Cemetery.

**17. Emanuel R. "Manny" Luftglass** (Served 11/1982-12/1987) completed the unexpired term of Mr. Heathcote and was subsequently re-elected. In his "retirement" he authored more than 20 books and numerous articles about his favorite hobby. Entitled "Gone Fishin", his articles appeared in the Messenger Gazette, the Courier News, and the News Tribune. He also hosted radio shows on local stations. His last column was in December, 2018, two years before his death. A native of Brooklyn, he dropped out of high school, but later received his G. E. D. from Stevens Institute of Technology. He started his own insurance agency and sold real estate for a number of years. He was proud to have been Somerville's first and, thus far, only Jewish mayor, and of his efforts, begun as a Councilman, to establish recycling in the Borough, the first public recycling program in New Jersey. During his term as mayor, he was instrumental in re-routing the carrying of the 1985 Olympic Torch to travel down Main Street and in having Borough Hall named as a Peace First Site. His concern for the future of the Earth lead him to be come an honorary chairman of the Citizens Against Nuclear Arms. During his tenure, the Borough proudly celebrated its Seventy-fifth Anniversary with a parade and town-wide picnic. On the following day, Somerville's first Street Fair was held, beginning a new Borough tradition. He died February, 2020 in Florida at the age of 84.



**18. Michael J. Kerwin** (Served 1/1988-1/1990) served as mayor for 2 years. He ran for Freeholder in November 1989 and won, resigning the mayoralty to assume county office. Mr. Kerwin was born and educated at St. Joseph's High School in Metuchen. He is an alumnus of Georgetown University and Vilanova Law School. He practiced real estate law in the Borough and served on the Council before becoming mayor. During his term, a new master plan was developed for the Borough, and the downtown Special Improvement District was established by ordinance. Mr. Kerwin was involved in starting the Somerset Alliance for the Future, a nonprofit, regional planning organization. He also served on the board of directors of Somerset County Chamber of Commerce, the American Heart Association of Somerset County, the CCO Development Corporation, Somerset Economic Development Enterprises. As President of the Somerset County Business Partnership, he worked for and promote business and tourism in the Regional Center until his retirement in March, 2020.

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**19. John Kobiela** (Served 1/1990-12/1995) was appointed to complete Mr. Kerwin's term and was re-elected in his own right. He had come to Council as an appointee as well, serving the Borough for nearly 10 years in that capacity. Mr. Kobiela was born in 1928 and educated in Somerville. A World War II veteran, he worked for Union Carbide first, as a Lab Technician and later, as a Production Supervisor until retirement. He served for a time on the Adult School Commission, worked actively with Little League, and for over 29 years with 4H, serving as President, Building Chairman, and Counselor at various times. During his tenure, Mr. Kobiela worked with an advocate for the disabled, in developing the "Wheelchair Shopping" project to make Main Street accessible to the handicapped. He began hosting a "Focus on Somerville" cable TV program, developed with TKR station in Piscataway, which predated the establishment of Ville TV. Veterans Memorial Drive was completed during his tenure. He was a member of the Elks and the American Legion. He died in August 2019 at the age of 90.



**20. David E. Hollod** (1/1996-12/2003) was 35 years old when he became mayor, besting Robert Adams by one year for the title of "Youngest Mayor." He served as mayor for 8 years, and was also one of Somerville's youngest councilmen, having first been elected at age 25. Mr. Hollod's status as Somerville's second bachelor mayor changed when he married during his last term in office. Mr. Hollod is a Somerville native and alumnus of Somerville High School where was a member of the Pioneer Marching Band. Rumor has it that he played a mean trombone. He is a graduate of Lafayette College with a degree in civil engineering. One of Mr. Hollod's first initiatives as mayor was a call for increased awareness of and promotion of the Borough's historic resources. Other accomplishments included the dissolution of the contract with a bankrupt developer who failed to develop the old landfill property. Mr. Hollod is currently the Administrator of North Plainfield.



**21. Brian Gallagher (1/2004- 1/2017)** was elected mayor in what may have been the closest mayoral race in the Borough's history, defeating Councilman Dennis Sullivan by a margin of 3 ballots. An Elizabeth, NJ native, Mr. Gallagher is a graduate of Seton Hall Prep and New England College. Husband and father of 5 children and former owner of an advertising firm, he eventually took a state position in Trenton. First appointed to council 2001 to fill an unexpired term, Mr. Gallagher was appointed to Council in 2002 and was subsequently elected to the first of four Mayoral terms, making him Somerville's longest serving mayor. During his tenure, redevelopment plans were created for several areas in the Borough, Ville TV and E-connect, Somerville's electronic newsletter were launched, and Somerville celebrated the centennial of its incorporation. Mr. Gallagher resigned the mayoralty when he was elected to serve one term on the

Somerset County Board of Freeholders.

**22. Ellen Brain (1/16/2018-11/19/2018).** One of three candidates for Interim Mayor submitted by the local Republican Committee. Ms Brain was selected by the Council to replace Mr. Gallagher until the November 2018 election, becoming Somerville's first woman mayor and the fourth interim Mayor. Ms. Brain, a Master of Arts (Kean University) in Secondary English Education and Humanities and an Adjunct Professor of English at Raritan Valley Community College, also had 25 years of experience in corporate communications. During her corporate career, she managed personnel and operations including oversees negotiations and installation of undersea communications. Prior to becoming interim mayor, Ms Brain served on the Borough's Zoning Board of Adjustment, Somerset Regional Animal Shelter, Somerville Borough Public Library Board of Trustees and volunteered in various governmental capacities.





**23. Dennis Sullivan (11/19/2018- )** was elected to the unexpired Mayoral term and was subsequently elected to a full term. A long-serving Councilman, Mr. Sullivan began serving on the Borough Council from 1995 to 2003 and from 2005 to 2018 before being elected Mayor. Born and raised on Staten Island, he graduated from Regis High School in Manhattan and from Staten Island Community College. In 1970, he joined the National Teacher Corps Program at Albany State College, Georgia, as one of only ninety-nine interns nationwide, where he earned his bachelor's degree, graduating summa cum laude. Mr. Sullivan returned home to become a graduate fellow at Rutgers University in the School of Education. After earning a master's degree in Early Childhood and Special Education, he came to Somerville in 1973 as a special needs teacher at Van Derveer School. He also taught at Lafayette School, Central School, and Somerville High School before retiring in 2008. Deeply rooted in community volunteerism, Dennis has been a Little League umpire, founder of a local chess club, and a loyal supporter of the Friends of the Library, the Wallace House and Old Dutch Parsonage State Historic Sites, and the Somerville High School Music Boosters. He was recognized in 2019 by induction into the New Jersey League of Municipalities Elected Officials Hall of Fame.

#### Acknowledgements:

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