

**BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG
MAYOR AND COUNCIL
RE-ORGANIZATION MEETING MINUTES**

**JANUARY 5, 2017
6:00 PM**

OPENING STATEMENT: Mayor Stephen K. Pote called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM and made the following statement: Under the provisions of N.J.S.A.10:4-6 et seq., notice of the time and place of this meeting was given by way of annual notice to the Courier News, Echoes Sentinel, and Star Ledger, and posted at Borough Hall.

SALUTE TO THE FLAG and a MOMENT OF SILENCE FOR OUR SERVICE MEN AND WOMEN, SERVING HOME AND ABROAD.

Mayor Pote welcomed the dignitaries who were present: Senator Tom Kean, Assemblyman Jon Bramnick, Assemblywoman Nancy Munoz, Freeholders Pat Walsh, Peter Palmer, and Brian Levine, Steve McDermott of Suplee Clooney, Somerset County Clerk Brett Radi, Municipal Republican Chair DJ Hunsinger, North Plainfield Councilwoman Keiona Miller, Chief Joe Cina, and former first ladies Fran Ellis and Diddy Addario.

INVOCATION – The Invocation was given by Reverend Barbara Peters, Wilson Memorial Church.

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE AND OFFICE

William Nehls – Councilmember

Senator Kean administered the Oath of Office to Councilman Nehls as his daughter Savannah Glaser-Nehls held the Bible.

George Sopko - Councilmember

Mayor Pote administered the Oath of Office to Councilman Sopko as his wife Peggy held the Bible.

ROLL CALL

Joren [P] Black [P] Nehls [P] Gibbs [P] Mobus [P] Sopko [P]

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE AND OFFICE

Mayor Pote administered the Oath of Office to the following Borough Officials:

Fire Chief – Charles Pivnichny

Mayor Pote administered the Oath of Office to Chief Pivnichny as his girlfriend Ashley Solan held the Bible.

Assistant Fire Chief – Albert DeSandolo

Mayor Pote administered the Oath of Office to Assistant Chief DeSandolo as Chief Pivnichny held the Bible.

Mayor Pote announced that Rescue Squad Captain Alison Diecke and First Lieutenant Michael Vala were not able to attend this evening's meeting, however, he administered their Oaths of Office at their meeting earlier this week.

NOMINATION FOR COUNCIL PRESIDENT

Councilman Nehls nominated Councilwoman Joren for the position of Council President, with a second by Councilman Black. No other nominations were made. Nominations were closed and the motion carried unanimously on roll call. Council President Joren thanked the Mayor and Council.

NOMINATION OF CLASS III PLANNING BOARD MEMBER

Council President Joren nominated Councilman Sopko as the Class III member of the Planning Board, with a second by Councilman Gibbs. No other nominations were made. Nominations were closed and the motion carried unanimously on roll call.

Councilman Sopko thanked the Mayor and Council for this appointment and their trust in him.

APPOINTMENT OF STANDING COMMITTEES

Mayor Pote announced the following Committee assignments:

Administration & Finance:

Chair Gibbs
Mobus
Sopko

Public Works:

Chair: Nehls
Joren
Mobus

Laws & Ordinances:

Chair: Joren
Black
Gibbs

Public Affairs:

Board of Health (Black)
Environmental Commission (Sopko)
Recreation Commission (Mobus)
Historical Committee (Mobus)
Open Space (Sopko)

Police

Chair: Joren
Nehls
Gibbs

Fire

Chair: Black
Nehls
Mobus

Special Liaison to Rescue Squad: (Sopko)

Youth Services Commission: (Joren)

9/11 Memorial: (Mobus)

Library Advisory Committee: (Black)

Planning Board Class III member (Sopko)

CONSENT AGENDA RESOLUTIONS

Council President Joren moved the following resolutions, with a second by Councilman Nehls and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Joren, Black, Nehls, Gibbs, Mobus, Sopko, "aye."

- R1: Adoption of Rules of Order
- R2: Designation of Official Newspapers – Star Ledger, Echoes Sentinel, Courier News
- R3: Adoption of Annual Calendar of Meeting Dates
- R4: Designation of Depositories – Investors Savings Bank
- R5: Re-establish Petty Cash Funds – Borough Clerk, Police Chief
- R6: Payment of Property Taxes and Establishing Payment Procedures

- R7: Appointment of Professional Service Officials, 1-year terms:
 Auditor – Suplee, Clooney & Co.
 Bond Counsel – Rogut & McCarthy, LLC
 Engineer – Maser Consulting PA
 Labor Attorney – Ruderman & Glickman, P.C.
 Public Defender – James Loewen
- R8: Appointment of Fire Chief, Assistant Fire Chief/Charles Pivnichny,
 Albert DeSandolo
- R9: Authorizing Execution of Professional Service Agreement for 2017 Risk
 Management Consultants/Meeker Sharkey & Hurley
- R10: Appointment of JIF Fund Commissioner and Alternate / Tom Atkins

NON CONSENT AGENDA RESOLUTIONS

Councilman Black moved the following resolution with a second by Councilman Nehls and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Joren, “abstain,” Black, Nehls, Gibbs, Mobus, Sopko, “aye.”

- R11: Appointment of Official, 1-year term / Borough Attorney – Albert E. Cruz

Councilman Nehls moved the following resolution with a second by Councilman Gibbs and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Joren, “abstain,” Black, Nehls, Gibbs, Mobus, Sopko, “aye.”

- R12: Appointment of Official, 1-year term / Municipal Prosecutor- Richard Guss

Councilman Mobus moved the following resolution with a second by Councilman Sopko and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Joren, “abstain,” Black, Nehls, Gibbs, Mobus, Sopko, “aye.”

- R13: Authorize Borough Attorney to file Tax Appeals and Petitions on behalf
 of the Borough for 2017

Council President Joren moved the following resolution with a second by Councilman Nehls and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Joren, Black, Nehls, Gibbs, Mobus, Sopko, “aye.”

- R14: Appointments - Boards, Committees, Commissions

Councilman Gibbs moved the following resolution with a second by Councilman Mobus and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Joren, Black, Nehls, Gibbs, Mobus, Sopko, “aye.”

- R15: Temporary Budget

Introduction of Ordinance OR:17/01 entitled “REFUNDING BOND ORDINANCE PROVIDING FOR THE REFUNDING OF \$9,499,000 AGGREGATE PRINCIPAL AMOUNT OF OUTSTANDING BONDS OF THE BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG, IN THE COUNTY OF SOMERSET, STATE OF NEW JERSEY, APPROPRIATING A SUM NOT EXCEEDING \$9,800,000 TO PAY THE COST THEREOF AND AUTHORIZING THE ISSUANCE OF NOT EXCEEDING \$9,800,000 AGGREGATE PRINCIPAL AMOUNT OF REFUNDING BONDS OF SAID BOROUGH TO FINANCE SUCH APPROPRIATION.” Public Hearing to be held on January 19, 2017.

Council President Joren moved the ordinance be given its first reading. So ordered. Council President Joren moved the Ordinance be adopted on first reading and the Clerk be directed to publish the ordinance and notice of public hearing. The motion was seconded by Councilman Gibbs and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Joren, Black, Nehls, Gibbs, Mobus, Sopko, “aye”. Public Hearing to be held on January 19, 2017.

Prior to the vote Councilman Gibbs explained this is an opportunity to refinance bonds which were issued 10 years ago and over the lifetime of this bond could save the Borough about \$725,000. He said it is hoped the interest rate will be in the mid 2% range.

- R16: Introduction of Ordinance OR:17/01 – Refunding Bond Ordinance

RECOGNITION OF EMPLOYEE SERVICE

Mayor Pote read the following employee milestones and congratulated all:

- 61 Years: Donald Scotti, Fire Department
- 45 Years: Gary Greves, Fire Department
- 40 Years: Sondra Fechtner, Board of Adjustment
- 30 Years: Dorothy (Diddy) Addario, Rescue Squad
Lynda Goldschein, Rescue Squad
- 15 Years: Don Monetti, Rescue Squad
- 10 Years: Brian Emerick, Police Department
Ed Kerwin, Tax Assessor
Carolyn Taylor, Assistant to the Construction Official
Brian Townley, Police Department Administrative Assistant
Michael Vala, Rescue Squad
Roberto Martinez, Rescue Squad
Raymond King, Fire Department
Scott Otto, Fire Department
- 5 Years: Thomas Atkins, Administrator
Jessica Johanson, Assistant Treasurer
Joseph Marretta, Electrical Sub-Code Official
Logan Taylor, Rescue Squad
Noah Monetti, Rescue Squad
Denise Wilson, Rescue Squad
Robert Tucker, Fire Department

Mayor Pote thanked all for their service to the community.

MAYOR'S ADDRESS:

The following is Mayor Pote's 2017 address:

Happy New Year to everyone.

Council members, Borough employees, residents, and special guests, including my family: Greetings, and a Happy New Year again to everyone. Thank you for joining us this evening. I am excited to be here with you tonight and am very proud to discuss with you our accomplishments of 2016 and our plans for the year ahead!

Instead of waiting until the end, let me up front thank my Council for all the time and effort they put into their respective committees. You really did a great job this year. Deb, Steve, Bill, Rob, Dave, and George: my personal thanks to all of you!

I also want to extend my thanks to our employees, who really do most of the heavy lifting. Led by our Administrator Tom Atkins, Police Chief Joe Cina, Michelle DeRocco our Municipal Clerk, Bill Hance our CFO, and our DPW lead Bob Burns, your efforts this year have been outstanding; we could not have accomplished so much without you and your teams.

I also want to thank the wide group of professional services firms who are always there to help us throughout the year. And finally, a special thank you to our residents who, as I have expressed before, volunteer their precious time to make a welcomed difference in our town. This not only includes all of our volunteer committees, commissions, and boards, it also includes our volunteer emergency services, including the Rescue Squad, Fire Department, Office of Emergency Management, and our CERT (Community Emergency Response Team), who in particular have done a great job both in Watchung and working for other towns. You have been an inspiration to many. Thank you all.

In 2016, one thing we luckily did not face was too much bad weather. We had one bad winter storm on January 23rd when close to 30 inches fell, but other than that there was no other snow, and no bad summer hurricanes or storms. And we are grateful for that.

This past year was one of heads-down, roll-up your sleeves work on town projects. Multiple streets were milled and paved, including Knollwood, parts of Sherwood Drive, Dale Road (High Tor to Rt. 78), Spencer Lane (Between Hillcrest & Guinard Drive), High Oaks, Redmont Road, Cardinal Drive, Canterbury Lane, Hyde Circle, Brook Drive, Wetumpka Lane, Deer Run (from Washington Drive to Stanie Brae), Joan Drive (400'), Vail Lane (cul-de-sac).

Earlier in the year the Council and Administration worked to consolidate debt at previously higher interest rates; we consolidated debt of almost \$8.2 million at an interest rate now at 2.23%, much lower than the 4.34% we previously had been paying (which itself was a competitive interest rate back in 2007 when we last bonded).

In this new year, additional old debt will become eligible for refunding and will likely save the town an additional \$600K and \$900K over the life of these loans. In 2016 we hired a part-time grant writer, and we hope with two grant applications pending – one for a fire truck and a second for sidewalk replacement along Valley Road and along the south side of Mountain Boulevard to Warren – that our taxpayer will greatly reap the benefits of these efforts.

In 2016 work was done on the Mobus field pavilion, both in regards to the roof and cement floor, as well the refurbishment of the basketball court. In 2017 we will complete the Mobus Field drainage project, and at Phillips fields we will replace the railings where needed, and the deck at the shack also on Phillips' fields. We will continue maintenance on the Texier House. Last year the two fountains were replaced on Best Lake. In 2017 we will initiate the development of plans and associated costs with possibly dredging and reinforcing Watchung Lake in 2018.

If you are not already aware, over the last two years our long-time neighbor Weldon Materials has acquired all properties along the eastern side of Bonnie Burn Road, in order to expand their quarry operations. In 2016, after a year of analysis, multiple walks of the property, and many productive discussions between the Planning Board and Weldon, the town was successful in working with Weldon Materials to protect an adequate land buffer along Bonnie Burn Road. Weldon has and continues to be a stellar commercial business partner in this town.

The Planning Board will be equally busy in 2017 with the redevelopment of the Sears property, expected to be presented to the Planning Board early in 2017.

This year Watchung continued its active leadership role in the fight to prevent the Pilgrim Pipeline from being constructed through Watchung, along the PSE&G powerlines on the East Side of town. These bi-directional pipelines, if installed, would be carrying highly explosive Bakken crude from Albany NY to Linden NJ, and return as completed petroleum products like gasoline, home heating oil, or incredibly explosive aviation fuel. I and several other Mayors were down in Trenton a few months back to discuss with the DEP (Department of Environmental Protection) the collective concerns of 15 towns, including Watchung, Chatham Borough and Township, Madison, Mahwah, Berkeley Heights, East Hanover, Fanwood, Florham Park, Livingston, Scotch Plains, and several other towns. This coalition is the result of initial information sessions hosted by both Watchung and Madison in 2015. The Department of Environmental Protection has informed us that the Pilgrim Pipeline Corporation has already filed for its permits in NY State, and is expected to do so in NJ later this year. While there are many concerns associated with this pipeline, the single biggest risk I believe are the bodies of water and water aquifers this pipeline will literally be running through or above, along its path throughout the northern part of the state. This battle is and will be a marathon, and not quickly settled. We will keep you posted.

The Borough also continues to closely monitor the activity across the state as it relates to judicial decisions concerning low and moderate income housing. Watchung is carefully balancing its need to comply with what we believe is the direction of judicial decisions being made around housing, with the on-going need to protect our residents from an overreaching and unfair burden potentially put on our Borough. We need to, and will continue to both do and fight for what is reasonable and practical for this community.

This year the Council passed ordinances banning both the establishment of stores selling dogs, commonly known as “puppy mills”, as well banning the sale of some baby bumpers for cribs which have been proven to be the cause of infant suffocation. These are important quality-of-life issues, which when possible your Council tries to get in front of. I thank that Council for being “pioneers” and bringing these to our attention. We hope other towns will follow our lead.

Negotiations with the Watchung PBA regarding their new contract have been initiated, and I believe we are off to a good start with a critically important part of our town's workforce.

The Recreation Commission was busy in 2016, hosting both the very successful Memorial Day picnic and the October Harvest Festival, both of which were even better than the year before. Recreation also hosted the Movie Night in the Park, as well the annual Jerry Mobus fishing derby.

Our Watchung Green team, partnering with Warren in 2016, hosted a very successful Green Day fair. The town also received a \$5,000 grant for the town's first automobile battery charging station, to be installed this spring behind Borough Hall. We had a very successful Farmers' Market right off the circle, and in 2017 we will continue to extend the Sunday Market from end of July to October. And we started to clear the Ness property of environmental concerns, and that will continue in earnest this year. And in regards to the Ness property, we would welcome the opportunity to work with the Somerset County Park Commission! We would appreciate your help. In the near future we will need to make some decisions around what to do to improve and maintain the section of rock wall near the DPW facility.

Very late last year we contracted with a firm to perform, early in 2017, an aerial study of the deer population in town. We will analyze the results when they are available, and will suggest next steps as the result of this survey.

This past year we made some significant progress towards two important projects to the town: the 9/11 memorial and the reconstruction of our Watchung Library. In regards to the 9/11 memorial, our site was chosen, and the memorial design was modified to fit that location. As all of you residents are aware through the recent mailing, fund raising is in full swing and we additionally have had several contractors offer materials, labor, and equipment to assist, which we appreciate. We expect the memorial to be finished by late spring.

In regards to the library, at the end of 2015 we had completed the structural analysis of the existing library. In 2016 we hired the architect Arcari and Iovino, who completed both the conceptual design and renderings of the new library, as well the preliminary plans relating to its construction. In 2017 we hope to complete plans for construction, prepare and pass a bond ordinance, all in preparation for construction in late 2017 or spring 2018.

I think last year Iovino and the Council had identified a size of the library that is both appropriate and adequate to meet our town's needs. If one considers the currently low interest rates, our recent and future consolidation of debt, the relatively low construction prices, and the significant reduction in school debt in 2017 that will greatly reduce – in a positive way -- our school taxes by hundreds of dollars a household, this is a great time to incur these costs, which would be a fraction of the savings our taxpayers will get from the significant reductions in school bonding combined with the refinancing of our municipal debt.

As a partner with our local schools, I believe it is now the Borough's turn and responsibility to produce a stellar library that complements the blue ribbon schools we have created.

As I have expressed many times before, as beautiful as our lakes are, and as strong as our schools are, we need to continue to find ways to both remain competitive with – and differentiate ourselves from – other towns, to ensure that the assessed value of our homes in Watchung is maintained. Both my Council and our residents know I firmly maintain that a strong library facility is a critical underpinning of both our town's sense of community and its continued high property values.

Where there is the will, there is a way: In 2017 I hope that the Mayor and Council, with this great opportunity in front of us, can continue to work together to move this project forward. I really would appreciate the Council's support to creatively help make this happen.

Additionally, in 2017 I am proposing that we create two temporary task forces. The first, which we already have begun to form, is a collection of residents, some of whom already have come forward – including those on Traffic and Beautification Committee – who I would like to hear from as it relates to what I am sure will be a varied set of ideas around how to improve the look and feel of our town; possibly in some cases cosmetic changes, additions, focus areas we need to be looking at, to give to our residents and those passing through a feeling that this is a great town (for example, landscaping around Borough Hall; sprucing up Somerset street potentially with plantings and holiday bunting, etc.). Some of the ideas raised I am sure are longer term. Some are just maintenance. Some might be expensive. But we can inventory, prioritize, and pursue some of these in 2017. Again, we look forward to working with Traffic and Beautification Committee, who I want to see play an integral role in this process. The second task force may be created as the result of a meeting I would like to have at the end of the winter to define our town's mission and strategy for the next 5 years. What is it we want to accomplish? What will it take? What must we be thinking about and planning for today so that it can be achieved in the defined future? What are the long-term differentiators we need to establish or refine to ensure that Watchung regains or remains on top of its game? We need to be building upon the Council's plans and actions already taking place, thinking ahead, and have a vision for Watchung.

In conclusion, I want to thank everyone again for their hard work, and passion for this town. I look forward to working with all of you in 2017. I want to wish you all a happy, healthy, and safe new year.

God Bless all of you, and God Bless this great Borough called Watchung! Thank you.

COUNCIL COMMENTS:

Council President Joren said she echoes Mayor Pote's thoughts and the projects for 2017. She thanked the Council for electing her as Council President and looks forward to working with them in the coming year. Council President Joren also said it takes a lot to run a town and this meeting gives the Mayor and Council a chance to thank everyone who makes it a place where people want to live and raise their children. She also thanked the Administrative staff, the Public Works team, the Police Department and the volunteer emergency services of the Fire Department and Rescue Squad and said being the Police Commissioner this past year, she wished to thank the Police Officers, even though we are a small town, every day they get up in the morning and put on their uniform they risk their lives just like every other officer in this country. She also said although the Mayor and Council are of the same party affiliation - if at times it looks like they agree on everything, they do not always agree on everything, they have many discussions and sometimes go through two or three committees before coming to an agreement that is best for Watchung. She said she believes it is a well-balanced and talented council – Councilman Gibbs brings fresh and creative ideas and willingness to bring compromise to the table; Councilman Nehls brings a wealth of knowledge on environmental issues and watches every penny on the budget; our newest member, Councilman Sopko brings his expertise in real estate on property values; Councilman Mobus is following in his fathers' footsteps trying to show Watchung at its best, fixing roads, maintaining our recreational fields and the 9-11 memorial; and everyone knows Councilman Black and his perseverance, ideas and compromise keeps us balanced and his love for the community shines through everything he does. She also said Mayor Pote's determination to get things done and done right makes sure every angle has been looked at for the best solution. She said the Mayor and Council will do their best in 2017 to make the residents proud that they call Watchung home.

Councilman Black congratulated Council President Joren and wished everyone a Happy New Year. He said it has been very exciting to be part of the process here and moving forward with the new members of the Council we have everyone of different segment of the community, to move forward with the many projects Mayor Pote mentioned. He also said the compassion in this room is imperative to keep things going and need more of the community to get involved and the volunteers to the Fire Department is up for the first time in a long time.

Councilman Nehls wished everyone a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year. He thanked everyone who voted for George and himself. He also thanked the Administration and all employees, the Police, Public Works, Fire Department, Rescue Squad and the CERT team they all do a wonderful job and all the volunteers who contribute their time, it helps the town and helps keep taxes down. He thanked Council President Joren for her kind words and the Mayor and Council for putting up with him.

Councilman Gibbs thanked the Mayor and Council and the entire Borough Staff who are the backbone of the town. He also thanked the Mayor and Council for their leadership and particularly Councilmen Mobus and Sopko for all their help on the Finance and Administration Committee with the budget. The Borough has received two very good credit rating reports from the agencies and expect that to continue. He wished all a happy New Year and reminded everyone that participation by the community is critical.

Councilman Mobus wished all a happy New Year and thanked everyone who works at the Borough and the volunteers for the tremendous job they do. He also thanked the Mayor and Council for their patience with him and said he is proud of what was accomplished in 2016, working together as a team. Councilman Mobus said he is very optimistic about 2017. He thanked everyone for coming this evening.

Councilman Sopko thanked everyone for coming this evening and thanked the Administration, staff and all the volunteers. He also thanked all for their patience with him as he completed his first year on the Council, and said he is looking forward to the coming year.

PUBLIC PORTION

No one from the public wished to speak.

Prior to the Benediction, Mayor Pote invited everyone to Water and Wine for some refreshments after the meeting.

Councilman Gibbs expressed to Councilman Mobus that his dad would be proud of him.

BENEDICTION

The Benediction was given by Reverend Barbara Peters, Wilson Memorial Church.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the council the meeting was adjourned at 7:10 P.M. to the Call of the Chair and to the next scheduled Council meeting January 19, 2017 at 7:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

MaryAnn Hance
Deputy Clerk