

**BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG
RE-ORGANIZATION MEETING
MINUTES
JANUARY 3, 2019
6:00 P.M.**

OPENING STATEMENT: Clerk Michelle DeRocco welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 6:00 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 MOMENT OF SILENCE FOR OUR SERVICE MEN AND WOMEN, SERVING HOME AND ABROAD.

Ms. DeRocco asked Judge Bury to come forward to administer the Oath of Office to Keith S. Balla.

Judge Bradford Bury administered the Oath of Office to Mayor Keith S. Balla as his family stood by his side.

Mayor Balla took his place on the dais and asked Assemblyman Jon Bramnick to come forward to administer the Oath of Office to the newly elected Councilmembers.

Lindsay Goodloe– Councilmember as her husband held the Bible

Daryl Eisenberg Knegten– Councilmember as her husband held the Torah and her family stood by her side.

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

ROLL CALL

Gibbs [P] Black [P] Nehls [P] Sopko [P] Goodloe [P] Eisenberg Knegten [P]

Also present were Administrator Tom Atkins, Attorney Albert Cruz, Chief Joe Cina, Clerk Michelle DeRocco, Deputy Clerk MaryAnn Hance, and Administrative Assistant Regina Angelo.

There were 121 members of the public present

Mayor Balla thanked everyone for coming out especially our other elected officials and the dignitaries who were present: Governor Donald DeFrancesco, Assemblyman John Bramnick, former Mayor Al Ellis, Former Mayor Stephen Pote, North Plainfield Mayor Mike Giordano, Freeholder Pat Walsh, Brian Gallagher, Senator Thomas Kean, and a special thanks to Judge Bradford Bury.

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE AND OFFICE

Mayor Balla administered the Oath of Office to:

Fire Chief – Charles Pivnichny
Assistant Fire Chief – Albert DeSandolo

Rescue Squad Captain – Angel Quiros
Rescue Squad First Lieutenant – Nicholas Grieco

NOMINATION FOR COUNCIL PRESIDENT

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

NOMINATION OF CLASS III PLANNING BOARD MEMBER

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

APPOINTMENT OF STANDING COMMITTEES

Mayor Balla announced the following Committee assignments:

Administration & Finance

Chair Sopko
Gibbs
Eisenberg Knegten

Public Works

Chair: Nehls
Black
Eisenberg-Knegten

Laws & Ordinances

Chair: Black
Gibbs
Goodloe

Public Affairs:

Board of Health (Sopko)
Environmental Commission (Goodloe)
Recreation Commission (Black)
Historical Committee (Black)

Police

Chair: Gibbs
Nehls
Goodloe

Fire

Chair: Eisenberg Knegten
Nehls
Sopko

Rescue Squad Liaison: Sopko

Youth Services Commission Liaison: Eisenberg Knegten

Library Advisory Committee Liaison: Eisenberg Knegten

Planning Board, Class III Member: Sopko

Wildlife Advisory Committee Liaison: Gibbs

Municipal Alliance: Goodloe

Board of Education Liaison: Eisenberg Knegten

CONSENT AGENDA RESOLUTIONS

Council President Gibbs moved the following resolutions with a second by Councilmember Black and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Gibbs, Black, Nehls, Sopko, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, “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 /
 Attorney – Albert E. Cruz, Esq.
 Auditor – Suplee, Clooney & Co.
 Labor Attorney – Ruderman & Roth, P.C.
 Prosecutor – Richard Guss, Esq.
 Public Defender – James Loewen
- R8: Appointment of Fire Chief, Assistant Fire Chief / Charles Pivnichny,
 Albert DeSandolo
- R9: Appointment of JIF Commissioner / Tom Atkins
- R10: Authorize Borough Attorney to File Tax Appeals and Petitions on Behalf
 of the Borough for 2019
- R11: Authorize Submission of Strategic Plan - Watchung Hills Municipal Alliance
 Grant 2019 / 2020
- R12: Appointment of Plumbing Sub-Code Official/Plumbing Inspector – Daniel Niro

NON-CONSENT AGENDA RESOLUTIONS

Councilmember Sopko moved the following Resolution with a second by Council President Gibbs and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Gibbs, Black, Nehls, Sopko, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, “aye.”

- R13: Temporary Budget

RECOGNITION OF EMPLOYEE SERVICE

Mayor Balla read the following employee milestones and congratulated all, stating the Borough could not do without them:

- 25 Years: Chief Joe Cina, Police Department
- 20 Years: Lt. Bill Kelly, Police Department
 Lt. Andrew Hart, Police Department
 Sgt. Ken Boyle, Police Department
- 15 Years: Michelle DeRocco, Clerk
 MaryAnn Hance, Deputy Clerk
 Sgt. James Kimock, Police Department
- 10 Years: Linda Monetti, Administrative Asst./Recreation Coordinator
 Sgt. Peter LaVecchia, Police Department
- 5 Years: Rob Gibbs, Council Member
 Jonathan Erber, Public Works
 Ryan Dunne, Police Department
 Robert Hofmann, Police Department
 Andrew Pero, Police Department
 John Richardson, Judge

MAYOR'S ADDRESS:

The following is Mayor Balla's 2019 address:

Happy New Year and welcome to all of our residents, friends, relatives and elected officials who have come to join us at this reorganization of the Watchung Municipal Governing Body.

I am humbled by the privilege to have been elected to serve as Mayor of Watchung. We as elected public servants have an awesome privilege and responsibility to serve all residents of Watchung.

I look forward to working with my Council colleagues and the administration as we move forward into the future to make Watchung the best it can be.

The greatest resource in our community is our residents, young and old with diverse experiences, expertise and abilities. We have the intelligence, honesty, integrity and experience to ensure that Watchung is a desirable community to live, work, educate and raise families and strengthen the bonds between us.

***Our number one** responsibility is public safety for all of our residents, businesses and visitors. In this regard we will work to strengthen our Volunteer Fire Department and Rescue Squad and provide the needed support. We will encourage volunteerism within our community for all of our residents to recognize the value and importance of unity and helping our neighbors and friends.*

We will seek ideas and resources from our residents and neighbors to strengthen and support our volunteers. We will continue to support our Police department with the needed equipment and technological improvements to enhance our policing needs.

***Second** we are opening the process for timely communications, with transparency of information, and listening to our residents for input, advice and solutions to improve our municipality.*

***Third** we are meeting with citizen groups gathering all the information from their hard work regarding the Library, Community Center, Arts Center, and Recreation to thoroughly plan for the needs of our residents and work together in a fiscally responsible manner.*

I intend to establish a Citizens Team to interact with the Council and School Board and School Superintendent to identify opportunities to improve the education of our children and maximize the operational efficiencies between our Schools and the Borough.

We will meet with residents and businesses now to develop solutions to the affordable housing requirements so that we can be proactive in meeting the mandates well before the deadlines.

We will be diligent in addressing the financial impact and fiscally responsible alternatives with regard to our affordable housing obligations.

We will continue to expand our recreation activities including the Watchung Little League for our youngsters as well as for families and our senior citizens.

We will embrace thoughtful dialogue and communication and input from our residents to share in the molding of critical agendas so that we provide the best solutions by utilizing the experience and talent from within our community.

We thank Mayor Pote and Council President Gibbs, Councilman Black, Councilman Nehls, Councilman Sopko, Councilman Mobus and Councilwoman Alberto for their service in 2018. We thank our dedicated administration, Tom Atkins, our Borough Administrator, Michelle DeRocco, our Borough Clerk, Bill Hance of CFO and Joe Cina our Police Chief and all of our dedicated employees and volunteers who work to make Watchung a great community.

I thank God for granting me this opportunity to serve and share with the community the experiences and blessings that have been provided to me. I thank my loving wife Karen for all of her love and support. I thank my three children, Jonah, Noah and Hannah and my family and friends for being a tremendous help, support and blessing.

I thank all of the people of Watchung, young and old who have encouraged me and helped support and provide their ideas, their valuable time, talents and treasures to make Watchung a great community. I pray I will be given the wisdom to serve you with the utmost honest, integrity and caring for all in Watchung.

I welcome your help and assistance for bringing Watchung to a brighter future for each of us.

God Bless You All,

Keith S. Balla, Mayor

COUNCIL COMMENTS:

Council President Gibbs:

Good evening and a Happy New Year to everyone here tonight.

First, I want to welcome Mayor Balla and Councilwomen Eisenberg-Knegten and Goodloe to the dais. With the election over and your swearing in complete, you begin the task of governing in the best interests of all Watchung residents. On each issue that comes before you, there will always be two sides to a story, voices for or against, and ultimately a yes or a no vote. For each of these, as I have strived to do, I encourage you to do your own research on the matter, consider both sides, and come to your own conclusion on what is the right result. I, and the rest of this Council, are here to assist you should you ask and help move our town forward.

Second, I want to thank the Council for appointing me Council President for another year. I will strive to lead from the front and work toward consensus wherever possible. Thank you again.

2019 will be a critical year for Watchung's future and we face a series of issues that will define what we look like for many years to come. Although not an exhaustive list, some of these include ensuring the relocation and rebuilding of our aging Library, the dredging and revival of Watchung Lake and its shores, revitalization of the east side of the Watchung Traffic Circle and completing the redevelopment of the old Sears properties off Route 22, ensuring our Affordable Housing obligations are met with practical, thoughtful and integrated planning that provide opportunities for others while respecting those already here, beautifying our town and making sure our roads are in the best shape they can be, and of course, returning our educational system to its place of excellence.

These are no easy tasks, but they can be accomplished with good planning, input from our residents, and a watchful eye on costs to our residents. The need for infrastructure improvements, which we all recognize should be made, must be balanced with protecting the strengthened financial health of our town which this Council has worked hard these last several years to improve. With a AA+ bond rating, one below the coveted AAA rating, we are saving our residents significant money through lower borrowing costs and fees. We must ensure Watchung's path to even better financial strength is not jeopardized.

That is not to say that there are costs we will all have to bear to bring Watchung forward and ensure our competitiveness with our neighboring towns. I recognize it takes money to achieve the vision of a vibrant Watchung that attracts good families. However, higher taxes aren't necessarily the answer to achieve these goals and this Council must prioritize existing tax revenue before even considering raising taxes further. Watchung's position of attractiveness to those looking for a new home is in part related to how competitive we are to surrounding communities and their tax burden. We have a good track record for lower than usual tax increases in Somerset County and we should continue that. While the good use of resident tax dollars can include investments in infrastructure like those I mentioned earlier, we must always be concerned about the ultimate affordability of Watchung.

With those principles and goals in mind, I look forward to working with Mayor Balla and the rest of the Council in creating a bright future for Watchung and our residents.

Thank you.

Councilmember Black:

Councilmember Black congratulated newly elected Mayor Keith Balla and Councilmembers Goodloe and Eisenberg Knegten, and thanked them for their service and the time they will be spending with us and said he looks forward to working with them. He also congratulated Councilmember Gibbs on his reappointment as Council President. Councilmember Black also said a common denominator for both speeches he has heard so far has been about volunteerism, and said many of the people here are key and very important to our community and moving forward in 2019 we can expand our breadth and depth of our volunteerism. He

said we need people and anyone interested in any of the departments should submit their names. He wished everyone a Happy New Year and said he looks forward to serving in 2019,

Councilmember Nehls:

Good evening and I hope that everyone enjoyed their holidays and I wish you a healthy and prosperous new year. I want to welcome our newly elected council members and mayor and I look forward to working with you all in 2019. As council president Gibbs discussed this mayor and council have great deal of work that needs and will be accomplished this coming year. The Ness property, Watchung lake dredging, the construction of the library, and the milling and repaving of roads and other projects

The Ness property has been undergoing some work over the past year with the removal of some of the buildings and the removal of the barn. The barn demolition was completed through the efforts of former council member Alberto at no cost to the Borough. We will be completing the removal of the remaining structures with the exception of the one brick milk house. I am hoping to have that building saved and restored in some fashion. There are portions of the property where remedial actions must be undertaken and I am hoping to start on those actions in this coming year. As part of the purchase of this property by the Borough, money was placed into escrow for the completion of this remediation. The Open Space Committee and the Recreation Committee had recommended a development plan for the property and I am hoping that the Borough is able to obtain funding from the county for this work.

With the dredging of Watchung Lake it has been our intention to reinforce and enhance the banks of the lake along Mountain Boulevard and at the former beach area on Stirling Road with some of the dredge material if we can. This project was started this past year with the appropriation of funds for the engineering study that needs to be completed on the lake. The council started to work with an arborist to try and save some of the cherry and other trees along Mountain Boulevard and I am proposing to have the Public Works committee and the Traffic and Beautification committee address this area and to improve on what was started.

Council president Gibbs has discussed the library and I know Council member Sopko will be discussing it some more. This council moved forward this past year with a plan to construction a Community Center/Library and I am committed to starting the construction of the new community center/library this year.

As we do every year our engineer and public works supervisor determine which roads need to be milled and repaved and we will be continuing that process this year. This past year the Borough completed more than \$1 million dollars' worth of road work including those streets that were milled and paved and the reconstruction of High Tor. The construction work at High Tor was almost completely covered by a NJDOT grant that our Borough engineer applied for and which was awarded to the Borough. We will be applying for additional grant money this year for additional road work. We will be starting the process of determining which roads need to be milled and paved and to determine the cost for doing that work.

Watchung has had a program to have the installation of sanitary sewer lines throughout the entire Borough. It has been several years since we undertook a sanitary sewer line installation. We have two major areas in the Borough where households are still on septic. I would like to move forward with work on installing sanitary sewer lines along the remainder of Johnston Drive and then up on Ridge Road. The Public Works committee will be discussing this program with our Borough engineer to see what grant money may be available.

There are other projects that need to be done including the continued work along Somerset Street which the Traffic and Beautification Committee has been working on. We need to have Camp Endeavour looked at by the Recreation Committee and Environmental Committee to determine what are the best uses for that site. We need to continue the process of redeveloping the Watchung circle area as council president Gibbs has stated.

The infrastructure work and other projects will all be exceedingly costly. It is my intention to pursue grants from the state and county for some of the money to complete these projects. The State did have low interest loans for the sanitary sewer installation and this will be something that will also be pursued if

grant money is not available. As Council President Gibbs has stated it is incumbent upon this mayor and council to be fiscally prudent in the spending of our residents tax dollars and this I will continue to do as I have done in the past. What we are proposing to do is very ambitious and I look forward with undertaking this work along with this mayor and council for the residents of Watchung.

Councilmember Sopko:

Good evening everyone, Happy New Year, and thank you all for coming. I hope that everyone had a festive holiday season. Congratulations and welcome, to our newly elected officials, councilmembers Goodloe and Eisenberg-Knegten and Mayor Balla. I look forward to working with you all. Abraham Lincoln famously said "if you once forfeit the confidence of your fellow citizens, you can never regain their respect and esteem. It is true that you may fool all of the people some of the time; you can even fool some of the people all of the time; but you can't fool all of the people all of the time."

I recall President Lincoln's words being a favorite of one of my grade school teachers regarding missed homework assignments. She was not fooled often...and we had confidence in that. I recently asked myself...what does confidence in government mean to me today? I concluded that public confidence in government begins foremost with transparency...and transparency will best be served today, by a full explanation of what I'm looking for this year.

Let me start by telling you what I believe. I believe that the residents of Watchung have been entrenched in opposing camps for far too long regarding a library. I believe that the arguments from each side are valid. One, fears a bloated, tax laden project that will create an underutilized albatross costing too much annually to maintain. The other, fears the loss of an essential service and community identity that will hurt property values and our children's futures. There are educated, well thought out points and the debate should be a worthy challenge for our community. My belief in the ability of our residents to effectuate such a debate is one of the reasons that I moved to Watchung 15 years ago.

However, we are, in effect..., stuck in the mud on this one, and unfortunately, we don't even have a partial list of agreed upon points...We don't have a number that we are going to spend. We don't have a size in square footage. We don't even have a fully agreed upon location...Now, I have heard plenty of good ideas since I've been on Council, especially in the last year with the increased public involvement. This is encouraging...Yet, we are today, still mired in gray and no closer to an actual "in motion" result than we were 20 years ago when this began. In the end, I think that the only thing that we truly agree upon...and want to see after perpetually vacillating on this issue...is for something to physically come out of the ground and get done without any further delay. Something our children can use before they grow up...Something that we can be proud of...when we're talking about our town at the next event. And of course, having something that says, "Hey, Watchung got the best bang for their buck with that library". These are not lofty goals, we just need to come together and get them done...

What am I looking for this year? Being more than halfway to a ribbon cutting by the end of it, that's what. Therefore, I am committed to the following backup plan: Should no agreement be reached to include the Fireman's Exempt Hall in the project by the end of the month, I propose that we move forward with the design of a 5,000 square foot library that will have a construction budget of \$2M and be located between Borough Hall and the Fireman's Exempt Hall, roughly where the parking lot and staircase are situated now. The Fireman's Exempt Hall could be incorporated during the process or later...Notably, this plan allows all structures and used to continue operating during design and construction. I will be attending the next Library Advisory Board meeting in an attempt to garner support. I believe that this is the best way for us not to miss a grant submission deadline for the New Jersey Library Construction Bond. What confidence can you have that this plan is a good one? Well, I do have over 30 years of valuation experience in the appraisal and assessment of public buildings for one. And two, I will see that it gets done right and on schedule. Otherwise, I am primarily looking to work on the budget this year and find solutions to traffic problems in the Borough...especially safety solutions. Finally, I will strive to increase public confidence in government thru transparency. To end on a positive note, I mentioned in last year's comments that three important metrics were moving in the right direction for the Borough and I'm happy to say that they are all still positive. One, our tax rates are stable with the less than .7% increase arguably attributable to inflation...Two, as we continue to pay down our debt, we are on the cusp of obtaining the AAA credit rating that we deserve...and Three, significant new commercial investment and ratables are now being built on Rt. 22 as approved. I'd lastly like to thank the administration, borough employees, and volunteers for all their hard work and I look forward to serving the Borough this year. Thank you

Councilmember Goodloe:

First and foremost, thank you to the residents of Watchung for placing their confidence in me. It is an honor to serve you and I look forward to the challenges and opportunities that lay ahead.

Thank you to Assemblyman Bramnick for swearing us in. Thank you to outgoing Councilman Mobus and Alberto for their service. Thank you to all those who volunteered their time, energy, talents, and resources in support of Daryl, Keith, and I. A special thank you is owed to the entire Coalition to Save the Watchung Library. Last, but certainly not least, thank you to my husband Jim for his unending love, support, and understanding during the many week nights and weekends I spent out of the house this summer and fall.

There are many important issues before us that I am committed to achieving in 2019 including Ness remediation, library construction, beautification of Watchung, lake dredging, increasing transparency, and re-developing the Circle businesses.

I look forward to working with the entire Council on a bi-partisan basis and Mayor Balla to serve all the residents of Watchung.

Councilmember Eisenberg Knegten

Thank you Mr. Mayor

I'm excited to get to work. It's an honor and a privilege to serve up here and I'm excited to give back to the community that's given me so much.

As many up here have said, I will encourage continued transparency and communication from the council. We will seek to have the resolution drafts and agendas made available to all residents online as early as possible, as well as looking to live-stream, not merely record, the council meetings.

I look forward to working with the Watchung Library Advisory Board to keep a full-service library in Watchung, along with applying for matching funds from the state.

As the Watchung Board of Education liaison, I will work to bring our schools back to the level of excellence I was fortunate to experience as a student at Bayberry, Valley View, and Watchung Hills.

I want to thank my family, who is here tonight; I want to thank the Coalition to Save the Library; I want to thank the current and former administration, as well as my co-council members up here who helped us get up to speed during the transition. I look forward to working with you and delivering results for Watchung. Thank you all.

PUBLIC PORTION

Democratic Chair Person Lou Beckerman thanked everyone for attending and invited all to the Cupa Café for a small reception.

BENEDICTION –

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

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Balla thanked everyone for coming out to this meeting.

There being no further business to come before the Council the meeting was adjourned at 7:00 PM to the Call of the Chair and to the next scheduled Council meeting Thursday, January 17, 2019 at 7:30 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

MaryAnn Hance
Deputy Clerk