

**BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG
MAYOR AND COUNCIL
MINUTES
SEPTEMBER 5, 2019- 7:30 P.M.**

OPENING STATEMENT: Mayor Keith S. Balla called the meeting to order at 7:30 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.

ROLL CALL:

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

Also present were Administrator Jim Damato, Attorney Albert Cruz, Clerk Michelle DeRocco, and Administrative Assistant Regina Angelo.

There were 25 members of the public present.

REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEES:

1. Administration & Finance – Councilman Sopko said at the Finance Committee meeting Hallee Cramer and Craig Sutherland of Meeker Sharkey & Hurley, representing JIF (Joint Insurance Fund) gave a presentation providing a layout of services currently offered by their organization. He explained our current 3-year contract expires 12/31/19 and a commitment to renew is due by the end of September. It was the consensus of the Council to place the Resolution on our next Agenda. Councilman Sopko said the need for IT services were also discussed and we will be exploring shared services options for that. He also said the audit report from Suplee, Clooney was received and it will be reviewed and discussed at the next meeting.
2. Police - Council President Gibbs said he had no official report but advised the public the County is working on publishing a public notice regarding an engineering project on Hillcrest Road.
3. Public Works / Buildings and Grounds - Councilman Nehls said he had no report for this evening.
4. Public Affairs:

Environmental – Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten provided an update on Councilwoman Goodloe’s behalf regarding the joint committee made up of Traffic and Beautification, Historical and the Environmental Committees. She said the joint committee has met all summer to continue to improve and beautify Watchung. She said the first project the Committee took on was coming up with a new design for the signs placed around Watchung. The Committee has submitted their recommendation and is waiting on approval from the Public Works Committee. She thanked Gail Bennett Tafaro and the Committee for all their hard work involved in this process.

Recreation – Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten mentioned the movie and ice cream social event scheduled for Friday the 13th. She said the ice cream event starts at 6:30 p.m. and the movie scheduled is Moana starting at 7:30 p.m.

Historical - No report.

Board of Health - Councilman Sopko had no report but said the Board of Health is scheduled to meet next on September 18th.

5. Fire – Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten said in August the Fire Department responded to 14 calls. A breakdown of some of the calls she mentioned were for fires, motor vehicle accidents with injuries, public service, and gas leaks.
6. Laws/Ordinances – Council President Gibbs spoke as part of the Laws and Ordinances Committee. He said there was a meeting held and discussions continued in regard to updating the fencing ordinance. He said the Committee has not reached a consensus in regard to changing the height and also if the fencing should be solid or remain wire fencing. He said the committee is working on all of our residents’ concerns regarding this topic.

REPORTS - OTHER:

- 7. Engineer – No report.
- 8. Police Chief – No report.
- 9. Fire Department – No report.
- 10. Rescue Squad – No report.

11. Emergency Management – OEM Coordinator Carolyn Solon said September is national preparedness month. She said each week of the month will focus on a different preparedness topic. She said she teaches disaster preparedness at the County and she feels this is very important for our residents. She said all of the information is on the Borough website and Facebook page. She said there are readiness brochures available for all residents. She said the new CERT class is anticipated to start October 8th. She said she is still working with the Salvation Army to develop a written agreement between them and Watchung. She said NJ OEM awarded Watchung Cert team a generator. Council President Gibbs agreed that many people not truly prepared for a natural disaster.

12. Attorney - Mr. Cruz said last Wednesday, August 28th Judge Miller granted the Borough of Watchung a Judgment of Compliance in the affordable housing litigation. He said the Judgment is valid through July 1, 2025 which protects the Borough against lawsuits from builders. He said the Borough will have to start planning for the next affordable housing round a year before year 2025. He recommended residents contact their state legislators and push for changes to the affordable housing legislation.

13. Clerk- Mrs. DeRocco had no report but reminded residents the Special High School Referendum election is scheduled for Tuesday September 24th. She said the polling location for the entire town will be at the Exempt Hall and the polls are open from 3:00 pm. to 8:00 p.m.

14. Administrator- Mr. Damato thanked everyone for extending him a warm welcome. He said his door is always open for residents if there are any concerns that need to be addressed.

Wildlife Management Advisory Committee – Council President Gibbs said at the next meeting on September 19th there will be two presentations given by Steward Green and Raritan Valley Community College. He discussed the proposed protocol and explained each presenter will speak for a total of 30 minutes presenting their findings. He said we are asking the public to submit written questions by next Friday the 13th via email to Deputy Clerk, MaryAnn Hance. The presenters will address those question during their presentation and after the presentations concludes there will be another 30 minute question and answer segment for any additional questions from the public, who will have one 3-minute opportunity to speak. He said if the public or the Council has any issues to please email him regarding the proposed format.

Youth Services – No report.

Planning Board – Councilman Sopko said the Planning Board met on August 20th but no action was taken. He said the next meeting is scheduled for September 17th.

Board of Education - Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten said, Today was the first day of school and also the ribbon cutting for the new STEM lab at Valley View. The lab incorporates the existing wood working space, along with writable glass walls, a lego wall, a new 3-D printer, a laminator, a modern, flexible space, and new capinty, along with a new TV studio upstairs. All this along with an entirely overhauled STEM curriculum. She offered thanks to the Bisignano family, WEF, the Watchung Board of Education, school administrators, Nick Naturile, Jon Rocker, Giacomo Cocchiara, Netta Architects, IBM, and all the other individuals and organizations that made this happen. She said the district has had many personnel changes, and asked the school board liaison Joe Barbella who was present, to come forward and speak, adding that she hopes the lines of communication can bring more support to both the town and the district, through shared services, mutual collaborations, and a general understanding of the needs and goals of each individual governing body.”

Mr. Barbella said he would like to create transparency and update the Council and members of the community who don't attend board meetings what is going on. He announced the George Alexis is the new permeant superintendent. He said additionally there is a new business administrator and a new director of special services. He said they have a packed agenda at the School Board and are working on moving those goals forward.

Municipal Alliance – No report.

Library – Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten said there was a Library Ad Hoc meeting August 22nd and that the many suggestions and concerns from this Committee will be presented to our architect. We await feedback and revisions from him. She announced the Friends of the Library is holding a fundraising event on Sat Oct 5 from 9am-2pm *(rain day Oct 6). This will be a Community Yard Sale and held at the Best Lake parking lot. Shoppers from neighboring towns can come to a communal yard sale, spending money in Watchung that can go towards the support of the Watchung library.”

Mayor Balla gave a brief report on some of the activities he has recently attended. He said he attended the grand opening of the new FedEx store in Walmart on August 21st and also on August 22nd he attended the grand opening of the new Sierra store. He also mentioned on August 22nd the third library Ad Hoc meeting was held. He said on September 4th he attended a meeting of the Art Center Board. He also said he attended the ribbon cutting of the stem cell lab at the school and thanked the Bisignano family on behalf of the Borough for assisting the children in our community.

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PUBLIC PORTION / AGENDA ITEMS ONLY

None.

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UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

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NEW BUSINESS

The Consent Agenda items, were unanimously adopted following a motion by Council President Gibbs and a second by Councilman Nehls, and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Gibbs, Nehls, Sopko, Eisenberg Knegten “aye.”

Acknowledging Receipt of the following Borough Reports:

None

Acknowledging Receipt of the following Correspondence:

#31 – JCP&L 9/3/19 Notice of Filing and Public Hearing for Basic Generation Service Charges
c: M & C, Post

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CONSENT AGENDA RESOLUTIONS:

The Consent Agenda Resolutions, were unanimously adopted following a motion by Council President Gibbs and a second by Councilman Nehls, and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Gibbs, Nehls, Sopko, Eisenberg Knegten “aye.”

- R1:09/15/19 Purchases Over \$2,000 – El Coronado – (FD - 2019 Convention)
Round Top Swim & Tennis Club – (Rec. -Summer Camp)
L-3 Communications (PD -Vehicle Camera, Equipment)
Porter Lee Corporation (PD- Software for Evidence)
Applied Concepts, Inc. (PD- Radar System)
- R2: Authorize Clerk to Issue Raffle License – Mercy Guild Mount Saint Mary Academy
- R3: Appointment of JIF Commissioner / James Damato
- R4: Appointment of Municipal Housing Liaison / James Damato
- R5: Authorize Submission of Application to Bd. of Adjustment/Communications Tower

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NON-CONSENT AGENDA ITEMS: Items listed below will be individually addressed and acted upon accordingly. Council reserves the right to refer an item to Committee for further review and discussion.

Approval of the following Council minutes:

August 15, 2019- Regular and Executive Sessions

Councilman Nehls moved the following Approval of Council minutes with a second by Councilman Sopko and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Gibbs, Sopko, Eisenberg Knegten “aye.” Nehls, “ab-stain”

Acknowledging Receipt of the following Correspondence:

- #32- PSE&G 8/26/19 Notice of Public Hearing re: (1) Basic Generation Service Charges Procured by PSE&G on Behalf of its Basic Generation Service Customers & Notice of Proposed Recovery Resulting from Statewide Auction for Basic Generation Service Public Hearing to be Held 09/19/19 C: M & C

Council President Gibbs recused himself from the dais.

Councilman Nehls moved the following Correspondence # 32 with a second by Councilman Sopko and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Nehls, Sopko, Eisenberg Knegten “aye.

PUBLIC PORTION - GENERAL DISCUSSION

Ray Barratt, Valley Road, said over the last few weeks a bi-partisan committee was created to plan a candidate debate for this election. He said the one issue they are trying to resolve is the location of the debate. He read a letter the group put together asking to have the option to use Borough Hall or the Court house for this purpose. He said the forum will be sponsored by the League of Women voters and will serve as an opportunity for Watchung residents to get to know the Borough candidates running for council. Attorney Cruz responded that this request had been reviewed from a practical and legal perspective. He said practically the seating capacity in this room is limited and also the limited amount of parking would be an issue. He added that last year and years prior these debates were held at the regional High School auditorium. He said this venue can accommodate a larger amount of people and the school provides ample parking. He also mentioned the High School was willing to sponsor this debate again. He commented from a legal perspective that the room has historically only ever been used for Council related activities. He said once this Council room is open to one group it has to be open to all groups. He believes this Council Chamber should not be used for this purpose and feels the High School is a better venue and would reach a larger number of people. Mr. Barratt questioned his only legal argument being for historical purposes. Mr. Cruz responded legally once you open the room to the public in general you can't shut anyone away. .

Karen Graboyes, Carrar Drive, said she has heard Warren is considering a large development at the top of the Hillcrest area. She said she is concerned how the traffic conditions due to the development will impact the town. She asked the council in the future to think about how they can stop the trucks and traffic from backing up in our area as an impact from other areas. Council President Gibbs said he would speak to Mr. Herits regarding the details of any potential development. Ms. Graboyes also asked if there is any money set aside to repair the Valley Road sidewalk out of the money allocated for Traffic and Beautification. Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten responded she does not believe the sidewalk repair was an item listed for the appropriated money. Councilman Nehls added our ordinance states the sidewalks in front of the homeowners houses are part of their responsibility to maintain. Ms. Graboyes asked who has the authority to get residents to repair their sidewalk. Councilman Nehls said there needs to be actual complaints made and then we would follow up. Ms. Graboyes asked what the bond rating for our town was. Councilman Sopko responded our bond rating was AA +. Ms. Graboyes also asked if we have reached out and applied for corporate grants to fund the library. Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten said this topic was discussed and they are still hoping to get a handle on the final floorplan to help present this in order to receive the grant. She said a lot of the concrete information needed to offer for these grants is still being developed.

Catherine Leigh, Guinard Drive, asked why a camera could not be placed at the bottom of Hillcrest Road. She mentioned last week she saw a huge 18- wheeler come off Route 78 and the driver was not sure which way to go but then proceeded to head down Hillcrest Road. She said the truck drivers do not read the signs coming off route 78 or abide by the restrictions. She feels a camera at the bottom will be helpful to catch these drivers not obeying the laws. Council President Gibbs said he will follow up with Chief Cina on this issue.

Gail Bennett Tafaro, Beechwood Place, said a lot of our ordinances are old and need updating. She feels a lot of people won't have sidewalks put in if they know they have to repair them. She also said there are ordinances for signs that nobody enforces. She would like to see our ordinances followed. Councilman Nehls said most towns require homeowners to maintain their sidewalks but agreed we have ordinances we do not enforce.

Lynda Goldschein, Sherwood Drive, questioned why Camp Endeavor still is not cleaned up. She said the property condition has not changed one bit and if anything more debris has been added to it. Administrator Damato said he visited Camp Endeavor today and agrees the site is overgrown and does need to be cleaned up. He said we will discuss as a committee what needs to be done and get it done. Ms. Goldschein commented on having a visible fence and asked her recommendation sent in to be reviewed.

Denise Chaplin, Hillcrest Road, commented that Hillcrest road has become very dangerous. She said the road is out of control with the large trucks, the cars, and the speeding. She commented on people also littering and playing very loud music up and down Hillcrest Road. Council President Gibbs said we can ask the police to enforce speeding and littering on that road. Mayor Balla said we will reach out to the County regarding improvements since it is a County Road.

Rachael Funcheon, Cedar Road, said she sent three pages of drone questions to the Mayor regarding the drone vendors. She said the committee still sticks with its main points which are Watchung doesn't have an overpopulation of deer now and we do not want weapons discharged in our town. She said regarding the Environmental Commission she is happy the dog waste bags were put around the lake. She said the Commission is starting to collect plastic bags beginning October 1st. She asked residents to save their plastic bags and bring them to the collection areas. She said the town will get a bench from the company if we reach the goal of 500 pounds of plastic in the six- month period. She questioned if we have a paper backup to our voting machines. Ms. DeRocco said Union County is implementing new machines with a

paper backup but we don't have that ability for our machines yet. She said she would reach out to the County and find out more information. Ms. Funcheon also said another recycling program starting soon will be for the collection of Styrofoam.

Ray Barratt, Valley Road, said last meeting he mentioned an incident that occurred last year regarding illegal hunting. He said the chairman of the Wildlife Management Commission denied the hunter was from the Warren Blue Ridge hunting club. He said you all should have received the report from the police chief which confirms the hunter was from the Warren Blue Ridge Hunting club.

Karen Graboyes, Carrar Drive, said she was driving through Watchung and witnessed a six-point buck run right in front of a car. She said the car veered to not hit the deer and almost crashed into a telephone pole.

Lynda Goldschein, Sherwood Drive, said regarding disaster preparedness, we should think about having an ordinance that requires our gas station to have a generator. She also mentioned she remembers the deal reached with the homeowner and the town regarding the original sidewalk was that the town would put in the sidewalk and the town would plow them.

Denise Chaplin, Hillcrest Road, commented on the beauty of Watchung's wild life. She feels there should be a more humane approach to dealing with deer and wild life. She said there is a birth control method some states are using successfully to control the deer population. She mentioned she moved here from New York City due to the wildlife here in Watchung but she knew did not know anything about wildlife before Watchung. She asked the Council to please protect Watchung's wildlife.

Pete Martino, Sunbright Road, brought up a lawsuit regarding a former police sergeant in Watchung. He said he found additional costs incurred by the Borough regarding this case paid to our labor attorney. He went into the details of the invoices from the labor attorney paid regarding this lawsuit. He questioned how this situation got so out of control. He asked why we did not mediate this from within. He said he feels this was a mismanagement and lack of oversight. He asked the two council members named on the invoices if they went through this case. Council President Gibbs questioned if Mr. Martino knew the facts of this lawsuit.

Renu Cheng, Hill Hollow Road, said she moved to Watchung from town of Westfield and is really happy with the decision her family made. She said her family made the decision to move here for the education and beauty of this town, however she was not aware of all the issues going on in the school systems in Watchung. She mentioned she takes out 150 books for her children every two weeks so she is as big supporter of keeping a library here in the town. She said she heard there was a lot of strife amongst the Council members. She questioned whose responsibility it is to maintain the sidewalks. Councilman Nehls responded after residents put in complaints then the sidewalks are inspected. She also said she picks up trash often on Valley Road and her children often question why people litter in their home. Councilman Nehls stated it is not just Valley Road where people litter. Ms. Cheng said she wants this town to be a good place for our children so they know what the value of a good place is. Attorney Cruz said the location of the sidewalk is important and determines who maintains it. Councilman Nehls said he doesn't believe residents should be responsible in replacing an entire section of a sidewalk. He encouraged residents to speak up and this ordinance pertaining to sidewalks be looked at for revision. Ms. Cheng asked how residents can change the ordinances. Councilman Nehls said the laws and ordinance committee would take the recommendation up regarding the sidewalks and look into it. Council President Gibbs said a few years ago the Borough applied for the safe roads program grant and the proposal was to install new sidewalks to make the town more walkable. He said the Borough was not awarded the grant. He also said our grant writers will be on the lookout for similar grant opportunities.

Dorothy Addario, Rock Avenue, commented when the interchange on Route 78 was proposed and built the town fought mightily against having the exchange there. She said they predicted the traffic and accidents that would occur as a result and fought hard to keep the interchange from the top of Hillcrest Road. She said this has been a problem for a long time. She understands some things are out of the Council's control.

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ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Council, the meeting was adjourned at 9:10 P.M. to the Call of the Chair. The next scheduled meeting of the Mayor and Council to be held Thursday, September 19, 2019 at 7:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Regina Angelo, RMC
Administrative Assistant