

**BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG
MAYOR AND COUNCIL
MINUTES
OCTOBER 17, 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 MOMENT OF SILENCE FOR OUR SERVICE MEN AND WOMEN, SERVING HOME AND ABROAD.

Members of the Watchung Fire Department led the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

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

Also present were Administrator Jim Damato; Attorney Albert Cruz; CFO Bill Hance; Engineer Tom Herits; Clerk Michelle DeRocco; and Deputy Clerk MaryAnn Hance

There were 40 members of the public present.

SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS:

Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten read A proclamation for Fire Prevention Month – October; and Mayor Balla presented it to Fire Official Chris Czuba and the members of the Fire Department.

Mayor Balla read the proclamation for Marie Carmela Scaturro’s 100th Birthday, and declared Friday, October 18th as “Aunt Kate Day” in her honor. Mayor Balla said he will be presenting it to her in person tomorrow at 2:00 PM.

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REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEES:

1. Administration & Finance – Councilman Sopko thanked the Watchung Volunteer Fire Department members for their Open House on Sunday, in recognition of Fire Prevention Week. He said it was a very nice and well attended event. He reported there will be a meeting next week to review the RFP’s for Professional Services that have been received and said Mr. Hance is preparing these for Committee review.

Councilman Sopko reported that after the Valley Road incident he received permission to go to the Somerset County Engineer regarding the incident. He said he drafted a letter on October 10th to the Engineer, Matthew Loper who will be providing the Freeholders with the relevant information for traffic safety on our roads, which could be considered in their upcoming budget. Councilman Sopko stated he wanted to send the letter on October 10th but was told it had to be voted on first. He then made a motion to read the letter into the Minutes. The motion was seconded by Councilman Nehls. Councilmembers Gibbs, Black, Nehls, Sopko, “aye”; Councilmembers Goodloe and Eisenberg Knegten, “no”. Mr. Cruz said the “ayes” approved it. (Copy of letter attached.)

Councilwoman Goodloe made a motion to include a response in the minutes with a second by Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten. Roll call vote was as follows: Gibbs, Black, Nehls, Sopko, “no”; Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, “yes”.

2. Police – Council President Gibbs had no report but is trying to set up a meeting possibly next week. Some of the topics they will be discussing are pedestrian safety along all Borough roads. Council President Gibbs also reported there will be a meeting conducted by Somerset County at Borough Hall on October 21st to discuss planned improvements to Hillcrest Road. The County has performed preliminary volume studies; collected crash and site data; and done a needs assessment.
3. Public Works / Buildings and Grounds – Councilman Nehls reported leaf bag pickup will begin on November 4th and continue through November 29th in biodegradable bags only. He also reported catch basins were repaired on Nottingham Drive and Knightsbridge; and pot hole repairs are still ongoing. Councilman Nehls said dead trees were removed by Predator on Deer Run, Stanie Brae, Ridge Road, and Brookdale Road; and Finne removed a broken pipe in a culvert behind 21 Lakeview Terrace. Councilman Nehls also reported Texier House signs have been repainted; and Public Works

employees trimmed bushes and mulched at the Firehouse in preparation for Fire Prevention on Sunday. He also said there is a presentation for the new “Watchung” signs on the agenda this evening.

4. Public Affairs:

Environmental – Councilwoman Goodloe had no report but said the next meeting is scheduled for October 28th at 7:30. She then remarked that neither she, nor Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten had seen the letter Mr. Sopko sent to the County prior to the vote and that is why she voted no to have it entered into the minutes.

Recreation - Councilman Black reported the Harvest Festival is this Saturday, October 19th at Mobus field from 1:00 – 4:00 PM. In the event of rain it would be held Sunday, October 20th.

Historical – Councilman Black asked Mayor Balla for permission to have Amber Murad of the Historical Commission give a report at this time. Ms. Murad reported the Historical Museum participated in the Weekend Journey through the Past which was well attended with about 93 people. County representatives also attended and were very impressed with the Museum as was Warren Township who said the Watchung’s museum was much better than theirs. Ms. Murad also said the Grant application was approved and a check has been received.

Board of Health – Councilman Sopko reported the October 16th meeting was cancelled by President Ruck since there was no new information on the topics for discussion. The next meeting is scheduled for December 11, 2019 at 7:00 PM.

5. Fire – Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten had no report but said she is in agreement with Councilwoman Goodloe regarding the letter Councilman Sopko sent and said she felt he is “grandstanding” since he is running for re-election.
6. Laws and Ordinances – Councilman Black reported a meeting will be scheduled soon. Councilman Nehls said he has submitted a link to the DEP website regarding contaminated fill. There is a “model” ordinance on the site and he is recommending that the Laws and Ordinance Committee discuss it. He mentioned there had been a case in Watchung a few years ago of a resident having contaminated soil brought to their home. Councilman Black said he will put on the agenda for Laws and Ordinance to discuss.

REPORTS – OTHER:

7. Engineer- Tom Herits reported the advertisement for the 2019 Bid project was in the papers and the bid packages are in the Clerk’s office. Bids will be due on November 1st and it is hoped to award a contract at the November 7th Council meeting. He also said the Watchung Lake surveys are complete and the Borough can now apply for permits for dredging. Mr. Herits also said there is a County presentation at Borough Hall Monday evening at 7:00 PM to discuss roads, including Hillcrest Road, in the Borough. Mayor Balla asked about the progress on moving the tower and Mr. Herits said he has been speaking with Weldon on this and once ready they will install the foundation for it. Council President Gibbs asked about the cost for the Lake dredging and Mr. Herits said they don’t have an estimate yet, this is only for the Borough to go forward with applying for the permits.
8. Police Chief – No report.
9. Fire Department – Assistant Fire Chief DeSandolo reported statistics for the month. He also thanked all those involved in the Fire Department’s Open House event and all members of the Council who attended. There were many positive reviews of the event. He further reported they also visited the children at the Giving Nest, Bayberry and Valley View Schools.
10. Rescue Squad – No report.
11. Emergency Management – No report.
12. Attorney – Mr. Cruz reported information was given to Mayor and Council and there is no reason at this time to have an Executive Session this evening.
13. Clerk – Ms. DeRocco had no report.
14. Administrator – Mr. Damato said the Best Practices inventory is on the Agenda tonight for discussion.

Wildlife Management Advisory Committee – Council President Gibbs had no official report. However, since Resolution R4 on the agenda was to ratify the prior resolution from the October 3rd meeting and there have been additional suggestions, he is moving that the Resolution be tabled until the November 7th meeting. Council President Gibbs said they will be proposing moving some of the Borough owned sites back to the 450’ distance for approval and asked the public to send him any input they would like. The motion was seconded by Councilman Sopko and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Gibbs, Black, Nehls, Sopko, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, “aye”.

Youth Services – Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten had no report.

Planning Board – Councilman Sopko reported the Planning Board met on October 15th at which time BNE had their first preliminary hearing for the Bonnie Burn Road project. The next Planning Board meeting will be held on November 19th.

Board of Education – Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten reported the Board of Education met last evening and 2 new members were sworn in and there will be one more new member to be sworn in at the next meeting. She said there will be a special Board of Education meeting on October 30th at 7 PM to review the recent test scores. Councilman Sopko said on October 9th he attended a Somerset County Governing Officials meeting with Dennis Bakos, a member of the Watchung Board of Education. He said there was a presentation by an educational group called Students to Science and explained that they partner with school districts and they have programs such as virtual laboratories, and many others.

Municipal Alliance – Councilwoman Goodloe reported there will be a ‘run’ sponsored by the Alliance on Saturday morning before the Harvest Festival and also a walk during the Festival.

Library Advisory Board – Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten reported the Advisory Board received the plans from Architect Anthony Iovino for the new library and they are being reviewed. She also said the Friends of the Library raised \$1,500 at their town Garage Sale at the Best Lake parking lot.

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PUBLIC PORTION / AGENDA ITEMS ONLY

Tina Kelly, Dogwood Lane, thanked the Mayor and Council for their help celebrating Aunt Kate’s 100th Birthday. She especially thanked Councilman Nehls and Clerk DeRocco for their assistance in making this possible and Mayor Balla for presenting the Proclamation to Aunt Kate on her birthday tomorrow. She said the entire family greatly appreciated everything the Borough is doing.

Ray Barratt, Valley Road, said he brought up the Valley Road speed limit concern and said he came here three years ago to ask to have the speed limit lowered and it took an incident like this recent hit and run for any action to be taken by the Council.

Councilman Nehls said we have been pro-active for years and the County has been contacted numerous times and the Borough’s requests have been ignored. He said he resents the remark that the Borough has done nothing until now. Councilman Sopko said he will pursue a coalition with neighboring towns to put more pressure on the County to lower the speed limit.

Mayor Balla said the Resolution on the agenda is asking to have the speed limit reduced to 35 and he suggested residents start a petition to send to the County requesting this also.

Karen Graboyes, Carrar Drive, said she has witnessed school buses on Valley Road allowing children to get off and cross the road instead of them waiting to get off when the bus returns on the other side. This is not allowed according to the Board of Education. Ms. Graboyes suggested Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten discuss this with the Board at their next meeting. Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten said this is the first time hearing about this and she will bring it up for discussion at the meeting.

Denise Chaplin, Hillcrest Road, said hunting deer actually increases the population and this is a scientific fact. She questioned if the cull is working or is it not about controlling the deer population but to allow hunting.

Rachel Funcheon, Cedar Road, questioned some of the wording on the deer Resolution. She said one word, “large” to describe a property is very vague. Council President Gibbs the zoning in the Borough for a residential area is one and a half acres which eliminates any property that has occupied buildings. The reason for reducing the footage back to 450’ is for Borough owned properties, Ness, Bonnie Burn Road, Camp Endeavor, East Drive and possibly Brook Hill Swim Club, all of these have more than 10 acres.

Ray Barratt, Valley Road, said he thought the objective this evening was to just ratify the previous resolution and asked if this means that the public can again address all concerns again?

Mr. Cruz stated the final decision is voted on by the Council.

Councilman Nehls said a request was made by Council President Gibbs to revert back to 450’ on Borough properties and if there is a suggestion to go back to eight weeks instead of twelve weeks this could also be discussed.

Mayor Balla stated it is the consensus of the Council to reach a final conclusion at the next Council meeting.

Councilman Black said by increasing the distance to 550’ it would eliminate some of the Borough sites.

Gail Tafaro, Beechwood Place, said Stirling Road is a major safety issue and it has been for years. She said cars do not stop at the crosswalks and they do go well above the posted limit. The speeding cars continue along the lake which makes it dangerous for those walking on the sidewalks around the lake. She also said the flashing lights at the crosswalks have been removed. Councilman Nehls said only the lights on the road surface have been removed. Ms. Tafaro said she requested crossing guards years ago.

Councilman Black congratulated Ms. Tafaro on her recent appointment to the Board of Education. He said he had asked the County for speed bumps on Stirling Road but they would not agree, however maybe this should be looked into again.

Karen Graboyes, Carrar Drive, said the Police Department used to have an officer by Water and Wine to stop/slow-down speeders and this worked – she suggested that could be done again if the Department has enough manpower.

Hans Juette, Elsinore Drive, gave some statistics on the birth rate per 1000 deer and stated it far exceeds the death rate. He said New Jersey has culled 50,000 deer a year and there have been no incidents of injury or death by hunters.

Ray Barratt, Valley Road, said there was a death in Barnegate when a hunter was shot by another hunter.

Mr. Cruz clarified that the Resolution to allow for the deer hunt is for permission for hunters to conduct the culling and there is no contract awarded. He explained that years ago, there was a contract with a professional organization for a fee and there is no cost now except for the cost of the fee for baiting the sites.

Margaret Ellis, Valley Road, asked if the Borough’s insurance is increased when we have the culling. Mr. Cruz deferred to Mr. Damato but said he does not believe so. Mr. Damato said he will check with the Borough insurance broker and let her know. Mr. Cruz said the hunt club has their own certificate of insurance and its own policy, which they provide to the Borough every year, and the hunt club would be primarily liable. Ms. Ellis stated that the Borough could be sued and Mr. Cruz responded that this is always a possibility but it would be a matter of if the lawsuit would prevail.

With no further public wishing to speak the public portion was closed.

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UNFINISHED BUSINESS

“Welcome to Watchung” Signs / Presentation by Gail Bennett Tafaro

Gail Bennett Tafaro gave the Mayor and Council a presentation on what the final suggestions are for the “Welcome to Watchung” Signs. She said the recommendation comes after much discussion on the project with input from the Environmental Committee, the Historical Commission, and the Traffic and Beautification Committee. Ms. Tafaro said there would be six signs at the entrances to Watchung. The signs would be 24 x 26 with 2 poles, carved lettering (dark green), and the Borough Seal. There would be a one-time cost for redoing the Borough Seal, and the signs, with 2 posts would be approximately \$1,000.00 per sign. (Ms. Tafaro displayed samples of the two options, and clarified that they will just say “Watchung” and not “welcome” to Watchung.) Councilman Nehls said this was discussed at the Public Works Committee meeting and they recommend moving forward with the signs. Mayor Balla asked how long the decals on the signs would last and Ms. Tafaro responded approximately 10-15 years.

Councilwoman Goodloe thanked everyone for all their hard work and for getting all the Committees to come together and agree on a design.

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NEW BUSINESS

CONSENT AGENDA: The Consent Agenda Items listed below 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, Black, Nehls, Sopko, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, “aye”.

Approval of the following Council minutes:

October 3, 2019 – Regular and Executive Session

Acknowledging Receipt of the following Borough Reports:

Wildlife Management Advisory Committee – 2019 – 2020 Report and Recommendation

Acknowledging Receipt of the following Correspondence:

#37 Township of Scotch Plains 10/7/19 Notice of Introduction of Ordinance; #2019-24
Re: Amending Chapter XX111 “Zoning Map” Ordinance to Rezone Block 5503 from the
R-2 Residential Zone to the B-3 Highway Zone, Public Hearing to be held on
November 12, 2019 C: M & C, JD

#38 Borough of Garwood 10/11/19 Resolution Opposing Forced Consolidation of the Garwood
Public School District c: M & C, JD

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CONSENT AGENDA RESOLUTIONS

Council President Gibbs moved the following resolutions, with a second by Councilman Nehls and upon Roll Call the vote was as follows: Gibbs, Black, Nehls, Sopko, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, “aye”.

R1:10/17/19 Purchases Over \$2,000 – Fanwood Crushed Stone (Capital / Salt Dome)
Office Business Systems Inc. (PD / Record Maintenance Cont.)

R2: Authorize Grant Submission – Watchung Fire Department

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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.

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

R3: Resolution Urging the County to Address Traffic and Safety Concerns in the Borough
and Implement Pedestrian / Biking Improvements along our County Roads

R4: ~~Ratify Motion / 2019 – 2020 Deer Management Program~~ TABLED

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

R5: Payment of Bills

Discussion / Best Practices Check List

CFO Bill Hance explained the process for submission to the State, which has been the same since 2010. He said the State uses this to determine how well we are doing in our municipality. The State requires a score of 30 in order to prevent them from withholding some State aid. The Borough has a total of 43 at this time. He said the Borough has never had State aid withheld.

Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten questioned the “no” response to the question regarding a written policy on Social Media and Mr. Hance said we do not have one at this time. Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten then suggested looking into having a policy in place. Councilwoman Goodloe questioned number 6, the fair labor standard and needed to understand whether or not we do pay overtime to exempt employees. Mr. Hance said the Borough does pay overtime to certain exempt employees and department heads. Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten questioned why we answered no to the questions about technical support if this is being offered. Mr. Hance responded that the State did not give any additional information on these

questions and asked Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten if she would like the answers changed to yes and she said yes. Mayor Balla questioned item number 16 which is a storm recovery reserve and asked if could we have a reserve. Mr. Hance said currently this would come from the surplus but a budget line item could be set up. Council President Gibbs asked Mr. Hance what the current surplus balance is and he responded it is \$4.2 million.

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PUBLIC PORTION-GENERAL DISCUSSION

Gail Tafaro, Beechwood Place, thanked the Borough for having the Library painted. She said it looks great.

Denise Chaplin, Hillcrest Road, questioned the mosquito spraying that was done in town and if more will be taking place. She suggested the possibility of letters being sent out ahead of time to provide notice to residents when this will be happening. Mayor Balla said the spraying was authorized; and Ms. DeRocco added that it was, however, the overhead spraying that was specifically authorized at the last Council meeting by Resolution never took place, and the only spraying that did occur was “spot” spraying in particular areas where the mosquito was found, and that it was her understanding that those residents were noticed by the County.

Rachel Funcheon, Cedar Road, asked when and how residents would be notified?

Administrator Jim Damato said it was stipulated in correspondence he sent to the County that they must provide adequate notice prior to any spraying in the Borough.

Joan Tak, High Tor Drive, said she was informed because she is a registered bee keeper. She said the County did everything by the law.

Karen Graboyes, Carrar Drive, said she is again disgusted by Councilwomen Goodloe and Eisenberg Knegten’s lack of respect shown to their fellow council members. She said it is rude to accuse a Councilmember of “grandstanding” as that act alone can be construed as “grandstanding”. Ms. Graboyes also said the behavior is unbecoming and the insolence is not appropriate in these chambers. She suggested they should embrace the phrase to praise in public and criticize in private.

With no further public wishing to speak the public portion was closed.

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ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Council the meeting was adjourned at 9:25 P.M. to the Call of the Chair and to the next scheduled Council meeting Thursday, November 7, 2019 at 7:30 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

MaryAnn Hance
Deputy Clerk