

**BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG
RE-ORGANIZATION MEETING
MINUTES
JANUARY 2, 2020
6:00 P.M.**

OPENING STATEMENT: Mayor Balla welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 6:10 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

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE AND OFFICE / Freeholder Sara Sooy

Mayor Balla asked Freeholder Sara Sooy to come forward to administer the Oath of Office to the newly elected Councilmembers.

Wendy Robinson – Councilmember with her husband Robert and son Reese by her side.

Pietro Martino – Councilmember his wife Rosebud and their four children by his side.

INVOCATION – The Invocation was given by Rev. Msgr. William Benwell, St. Mary’s Church – Stony Hill

ROLL CALL

Black [P] Goodloe [P] Eisenberg Knegten [P] Jubin [P] Robinson [P] Martino [P]

Also present were Administrator Jim Damato, Clerk Michelle DeRocco, and Deputy Clerk Regina Angelo.

There were 65 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, North Plainfield Mayor Mike Giordano, former Watchung First Lady Dorothy Addario, former Councilman Tom Franklin, former Councilman George Sopko, Freeholder Elect Melonie Marano and Freeholder Sara Sooy.

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE AND OFFICE

Mayor Balla administered the Oath of Office to:

Deputy Clerk – Regina Angelo

Fire Chief – Albert DeSandolo (Not Present)

Assistant Fire Chief – Charles Pivnichny (Not Present)

Rescue Squad Captain – Jeiner Betancourt

Rescue Squad First Lieutenant – Denise Wilson

NOMINATION FOR COUNCIL PRESIDENT

Councilmember Black nominated Councilwoman Wendy Robinson for the position of Council President, with a second by Councilmember Jubin. 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 Jubin

Goodloe

Robinson

Public Works

Chair: Black
Jubin
Martino

Laws & Ordinances

Chair: Eisenberg Knegten
Robinson
Goodloe

Public Affairs:

Chair: Goodloe
Black
Robinson
Board of Health (Jubin)
Environmental Commission (Robinson)
Recreation Commission (Black)
Historical Committee (Goodloe)

Police

Chair: Robinson
Black
Martino

Fire

Chair: Martino
Eisenberg Knegten
Jubin

Rescue Squad Liaison: Robinson
Youth Services Commission Liaison: Robinson
Library Advisory Committee Liaison: Goodloe
Planning Board, Class III Member: Martino
Wildlife Advisory Committee Liaison: Jubin
Municipal Alliance: Black
Board of Education Liaison: Eisenberg Knegten

RESOLUTIONS

Councilwoman Goodloe moved the following Resolution with a second by Councilman Black and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Robinson, Black, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, Jubin, Martino “aye.”

R1: Adoption of Rules of Order

Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten moved the following Resolution with a second by Councilwoman Goodloe and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Robinson, Black, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, Jubin, Martino “aye.”

R2: Designation of Official Newspapers – Star Ledger, Echoes Sentinel, Courier News, and TAPinto Watchung (Electronic News Source)

Councilman Black moved the following Resolution with a second by Councilman Jubin and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Robinson, Black, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, Jubin, Martino “aye.”

R3: Adoption of Annual Calendar of Meeting Dates

Councilman Jubin moved the following Resolution with a second by Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Robinson, Black, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, Jubin, Martino “aye.”

R4: Designation of Depositories – Investors Savings Bank

Councilman Martino moved the following Resolution with a second by Council President Robinson and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Robinson, Black, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, Jubin, Martino “aye.”

R5: Re-establish Petty Cash Funds – Borough Clerk, Police Chief

Council President Robinson moved the following Resolution with a second by Councilwoman Goodloe and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Robinson, Black, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, Jubin, Martino “aye.”

R6: Payment of Property Taxes and Establishing Payment Procedures

Councilman Black moved the following Resolution with a second by Council President Robinson and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Robinson, Black, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, Jubin, Martino “aye.”

R7: Appointment of Judge - Brian Levine, Esq.

Councilwoman Goodloe moved the following Resolution with a second by Councilman Martino and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Robinson, Black, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, Jubin, Martino “aye.”

R8: Appointment of JIF Commissioner - James Damato

Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten moved the following Resolution with a second by Councilman Jubin and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Robinson, Black, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, Jubin, Martino “aye.”

R9: Temporary Budget

RECOGNITION OF EMPLOYEE SERVICE

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

65 Years: Donald Scotti, Fire Department

30 Years: Bob Burns, Public Works Department

25 Years: Stephen Black, Council Member
Bill Hance, Chief Finance Officer, Tax Collector
Rob Winston, Rescue Squad

20 Years: William Stankan, Police Department
Arlene McCoy, Assistant Engineer
Stephen Carlucci, Fire Department

15 Years: Maria Fittipaldi, Administrative Assistant
Michael Dolinski, Police Department
David Miller, Fire Department

10 Years: Sean Bouchard, Police Department
Kyle Poulsen, Police Department
Sherif Zaiton, Police Department
Jonathan Erber, Fire Department
Timothy Erber, Fire Department
Charles Pivnichny, Fire Department and Rescue Squad
Steven Speeney, Fire Department

5 Years: Spencer Adriananse, Fire Department
Vickram Kissoon, Fire Department
Adrian Klige, Fire Department
Anthony Nappe, Public Works and Fire Department
Richard Sloyan, Fire Department
Anthony Vitelli, Fire Department
Ben Dorkin, Rescue Squad

MAYOR'S ADDRESS

The following is Mayor Balla's 2020 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 want to welcome Councilman Ron Jubin as a new Council member who was sworn in at our last meeting and newly elected Council member Wendy Robinson and Councilman Pietro Martino who join the Watchung Governing Body to govern with honesty, integrity, humility and in the best interest of Watchung.

I am extremely thankful for the opportunity and privilege to serve as Mayor of Watchung. As elected public servants we have an awesome calling and responsibility to serve all residents of Watchung. 2019 was a year filled with challenges regarding public safety on our roads; quality education for our children in the schools and retirements and transitions of both Watchung employees and elected officials. I look forward to working with all of my Council colleagues Stephen Black, Daryl Eisenberg Knegten, Lindsay Goodloe, Ron Jubin, Pete Martino and Wendy Robinson and our new Administrator James Damato and Municipal Clerk Michele DeRocco and all of our employees as we move forward into the future to make Watchung the best it can be. Our residents with their diverse experiences, expertise and abilities are the greatest asset in our community. I look forward in 2020 to working together as a unified Watchung community in a bipartisan collaboration to strengthen the bonds between us and help each other as we live, work, educate and raise families in Watchung.

Our number one responsibility is public safety for all of our residents, businesses and visitors. We have met with Somerset County Officials to work with us to improve public safety on our county roads in Watchung and seek to lower the speed limit by 10 miles per hour on Mountain Blvd and Valley Rd and look to bring this to fruition in 2020. I recognize the self-sacrifice of our many volunteers in Watchung who serve in various capacities on the Rescue Squad and Volunteer Fire Department as well as the many committees and commissions all which make Watchung a great community. For 2020 I plan to work with the Rescue Squad and Volunteer Fire dept. to create more opportunities to have activities in the community to bolster the enthusiasm and strengthen the numbers of volunteers for our Fire Department and Rescue Squad. We will encourage volunteerism within our community for all of our residents to recognize the value and importance of helping our neighbors and friends and bringing unity among the community. We will continue to improve the technology in our borough to help with public safety and enable our Police department to work more efficiently to enhance our policing needs.

Second we have opened up timely communications, with posting on the website the council agenda information as a draft for residents to better understand the agenda items; transparency of information with live streaming of the council meetings and look to expand the live streaming to the planning board and board of adjustment to provide residents with the activity and information that affects their lives and our community.

Third We formed the Ad Hoc committee comprised of a diverse cross section of Watchung residents from various disciplines for planning and overseeing the process for building a new state of the art library which will include space for the arts center/technology and community center activities. The architect has drafted preliminary drawings for a two story 10,000+ square foot building to be constructed between Borough Hall and the Fire Dept building. The financing for the cost of construction of the new Library/Arts/Community Center is anticipated to be 35% from the State of New Jersey Library Grant Program; 35% from the sale proceeds of the current library and arts center properties to be sold for redevelopment and creation of future tax ratables for Watchung; and 30% from donations, major benefactor gifts and bond proceeds. Each year we retire a portion of the Borough Debt. If needed the planning for the Library seeks to only replace the debt that would be retired thereby not increasing the overall debt or taxes for the Borough based on this plan. We are planning two public sessions for a presentation on the proposed library and for public input. I have met several times with our School Board Officials and Superintendents along with the New Jersey State Dept of Education and the Governor's Office to identify opportunities to improve the education of our children and collaborate with the Borough and schools for overall improvement for all of our residents. We held an affordable housing town hall meeting to provide information to our residents about the past and current affordable housing requirements to develop solutions for the future affordable housing requirements so that we can be proactive and beneficial to the community in meeting the mandates well before the deadlines. We are exploring responsible alternatives in addressing the future impact on our schools and community with regard to our future affordable housing obligations.

For 2020 I am encouraging more community involvement of our residents with plans for increasing the activities for our families including a community band concert and music on the green; arts and crafts fair on the green; community barbeque; and development of a community garden.

We have and will continue to 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 our retired Council President Gibbs, Councilman Nehls, and Councilman Sopko, for their service during 2019. I would also like to thank Councilman Black, Council member Goodloe and Council member Eisenberg Knegten for their hard work on various matters during 2019. We thank our new Borough Administrator James Damato, Michelle DeRocco, our Borough Clerk, Bill Hance our CFO 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 throughout the year.

I thank everyone in Watchung for your encouragement, help and support providing advice and valuable time, talents and treasures to make Watchung a great community. I pray that our community will come together in unity to work with one another and continue to make Watchung the best.

I welcome your help and assistance in making Watchung united for a brighter future for each of us. God Bless You All.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten:

Thank you Mr. Mayor; thank you for your leadership and guidance into this new era; thank you for your vision and moral compass.

33 years ago, my parents left Brooklyn in search of a suburban paradise to raise their two children. Very quickly, they narrowed their search to Watchung. 24 years later, I went through the same process they did. As commuters to New York City, Paul and I made those very same calculations and moved back to the one place I call home.

Watchung is perfectly positioned to be the most desirable suburb in the tristate area. We are the first affordable town as you drive west from New York City that has large lots of land for our homes. But go any further west and your daily commute becomes just too much. We've got Target. And Walmart. And BJ's. A TJ Maxx, a Marshalls, and a HomeSense (or as we call it in my home, the Trifecta.) You can get to New York or Philly or Boston or DC. And we can still say that we live in the woods. We can walk around our lakes, play Little League on our fields, and have a cup of coffee right across the circle from Borough Hall.

So much of what I loved of Watchung as a child is still here. Our Harvest Festival. Tree of Lights. Sledding down the Village Green.

And yet, we are now in a season of change. As I look across this dais, we are almost entirely new faces from just over a year ago.

After a year as fire commissioner, I am honored to turn the hat over to Councilmember Martino, a lifelong resident, volunteer, and career firefighter who will see our fire and emergency services into this new decade.

As I continue as Board of Education liaison, I hope my colleague, Councilmember Robinson, who served many years on the school board including 4 as president, will lend her wisdom and guidance as we continue to nurture the relationship with our school board to help them drive the success our schools need and our children deserve.

We have a tremendous amount of work ahead of us. We have a library to build. A lake to dredge. Affordable Housing to plan. A school district to support. New residents and new ideas and new ventures. We have a lot of work to do and I'm humbled to sit up here with this fine group of people -- most of us relatively new, so Councilmember Black, we'll be looking to your more than 25 years experience up here serving your neighbors.

Councilmember Jubin, I look forward to your expertise in budgeting and planning to help us execute on our plans in a fiscally responsible way.

And Councilmember Goodloe, I look forward to continuing our longstanding collaboration and

your legal expertise in guiding us forward. All of you are uniquely qualified in very different ways, and that diversity will be an asset in delivering results for our neighbors and for the next generation of Watchung. For Hope, and Emma, and Calee, and Judah, and Calvin.

And for the residents who voted for us to be here, thank you. We won't let you down.

Councilwoman Goodloe:

"Congratulations to Pete and Wendy on their election to the Borough Council. You ran an honest, honorable, and most importantly an issues-based campaign. I am delighted to have you both as colleagues on the Council. I know you will use your many talents to the benefit of Watchung and will always put Watchung first. Pete, your expertise in the areas of construction, public works, and emergency management will inure to the benefit of the residents and the Council's shared goals. Wendy, your experience working in finance, your passion for sustainable living, and your vision for unifying our community around shared goals will be a welcomed edition to the Council.

Ron, welcome aboard. As your former next-door neighbor on Upper Drive, I am grateful that you were selected to serve on the Borough Council. I know you will use your even temperament and sound judgment wisely and independently to ensure Watchung prospers. I look forward to hearing your perspective on issues of public health and fiscal management.

We have much to accomplish this year. While some of the ground work was laid last year, including planning for the construction of a library, achieving greater transparency in municipal government, and making our community more sustainable with increased recycling programs, there is much more work to be done. I look forward to serving you all to accomplish our shared goals of making Watchung a more beautiful, accessible, walkable, commuter friendly, sustainable, safer, and inclusive community. In the vain of being more accessible, I encourage and implore you to email us with your ideas, attend volunteer commissions and board meetings, come or at least watch the live streaming of meetings, and otherwise participate in our local governance. Thank you again for giving me the privilege of serving you."

Councilman Black thanked everyone for allowing him to serve on the Council all these years. He also thanked the volunteers and said they are the backbone of what makes this community great. He applauded the volunteerism throughout the community and congratulated the newly elected councilmembers. He said he enjoys being a part of such an energetic and driven Council.

Council President Robinson:

It's an honor to sit here tonight (instead of there) and begin my tenure as your councilmember. I'm grateful for the support so many of you gave during the campaign and I look forward to serving all of Watchung's residents, regardless of how you may have voted, or whether you voted at all.

I just spent time with family for the holidays, as I'm sure many of you did. Now we're all a few pounds heavier. Maybe more than a few.

I was in the Chicago area and one of the discussions we had was about obtaining permits for renovations. I listened to the horror story from my sister-in-law whose contractor had sought a permit for some work they wanted done. At the time, they lived in Southern Cook County, and because of their local government structure, the contractor had to travel to downtown Chicago to apply for the permit. Three times. Why three times? Because they lost the paperwork. Twice. That was not a quick trip, between distance and traffic, and as you can imagine, it slowed their progress immeasurably.

That story drove home, more than ever, the benefits of our (sometimes seemingly crazy) statewide municipal organization. We have 565 municipalities in tiny New Jersey. And while many are quick to point to the inefficiencies and costs associated with our system, we don't often focus on the benefits. Among them, are our schools. Education Week ranked New Jersey's schools number one in the nation last year, partly because of the amount of money we spend on them. So while New Jerseyans like to complain about our high taxes, as someone who is probably famous once said, "you get what you pay for." That doesn't mean we won't be looking closely at our budget to see where we can save meaningful amounts of taxpayer dollars. It does mean that we will be doing that in conjunction with making wise investments that will attract significant returns in the form of new businesses and residents.

One of the other benefits that derives from our mosaic of municipalities is the fact that our local government is so accessible. And in a town our size, that means a lot. It means that when people are dissatisfied, they can come to Council meetings, planning board meetings, board of adjustment meetings, and make their voices heard. It means that they can volunteer to sit on committees and effect change by recommending actions local government leaders can implement. And it means

that if the people in charge don't listen, the voters can communicate their concerns at the ballot box.

I think Pete and I are the product of Watchung's citizens expressing their desire to see our lovely borough move in a different direction, to discard the status quo of "business as usual" — a trend that was begun last year. I also believe that the large number of applications submitted by residents interested in volunteering for committee positions reflects that sentiment as well. It is inspiring and exciting that so many of you are eager to join us in helping Watchung realize its full potential. So I come to this seat grateful for the opportunity to serve our residents and to hear your voices. While I know I will never be able to please everyone, I will do my best to represent you, and to help implement initiatives that hopefully will cause Watchung to be recognized as (at least) one of the top 10 places to live in New Jersey.

Councilman Martino said he feels honored to be sitting up on the dais and is looking forward to working with everyone on the Council as well as the residents. He feels the children of our Borough are our future as they watch and listen to us every single day. He questioned if we are setting the best examples for our children we can. He said it is important to provide them the community environment based on safety, education, recreation and friendships. He would like us to all come together as a community embracing our families, friends and neighbors. He said as a Councilman he can guarantee an additional pair of ears to listen to all concerns, eyes to see what is going on around us and most importantly an open mind with independent thoughts. He said we must move forward as a unified community and thanked everyone who has helped that process along the way. He also thanked everyone who intends to step up and volunteer to help make Watchung what we all want it to be.

Councilman Jubin said he feels Watchung is built off of community and volunteerism. He said his family moved here for the schools as Watchung is the best small town closest to everything. He said we are in a new decade where technology drives most of everything but personal conduct and interaction are the key drivers in a community. He encouraged everyone in the community to bring their voices forward. Councilman Jubin said he will look to his fellow Council members for guidance during this process and is also looking forward to this exciting and challenging year of 2020.

PUBLIC PORTION

Ellen Pyle, Hughes Lane, welcomed the new Council members on behalf of the entire Democratic Committee. She said she is looking forward to their 2020 vision.

BENEDICTION - The Benediction was given by Rabbi Dennis Ross, Temple Sinai

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 7:15 PM to the Call of the Chair and to the next scheduled Council meeting Thursday, January 16, 2020 at 7:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Regina Angelo, RMC
Deputy Clerk