

**BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG  
MAYOR AND COUNCIL  
MINUTES  
MARCH 5, 2020 - 7:30 P.M.**

**OPENING STATEMENT:** Mayor Keith S. Balla called the meeting to order at 7:35 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 and a MOMENT of SILENCE for FALLEN WATCHUNG POLICE OFFICER MATTHEW MELCHIONDA and HIS FAMILY and all of OUR LAW ENFORCMEN OFFICERS for the RISK THEY TAKE EVERY DAY IN SERVING US.**

**ROLL CALL:**

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

Also present were Administrator James Damato, Attorney Denis Murphy, Clerk Michelle DeRocco, Engineer Bruce Koch and Deputy Clerk Regina Angelo.

There were 35 members of the public present.

**SPECIAL:**

Council President Robinson 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: Authorize Appointment - Sergeant / Sherif Zaiton

Mayor Balla administered the Oath of Office to Sergeant Sherif Zaiton as his wife held the bible.

**REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEES:**

1. Administration & Finance – Councilman Jubin said the Committee held a meeting last week structured around the budget discussions.

2. Police – Council President Robinson said the Committee met on March 2<sup>nd</sup> and one of the topics discussed was the Sergeant promotion. She said they have also made the decision to not replace Administrative Assistant Andrea Meyers’ position due to technology advances. She said there was continued discussion about posting an officer on Bayberry Lane. Chief Cina is going to look into the possibility of school zone signs to reduce the speed at that location during the morning and afternoon hour. Council President Robinson also said using volunteers as crossing guards were discussed but a lot of training and background checks would be required. She also mentioned security details for large events held at the school was being discussed and said a policy is being looked into. She said the traffic unit has been very pro-active and issued 66 summonses to truck drivers traveling down Hillcrest Road.

3. Public Works / Buildings and Grounds – Councilman Black said our new interim Public Works Manager Charlie Gunther has made a fantastic transition and is getting along well with the staff in the Department. He said Mr. Gunther has evaluated many of the streets in town and reviewed the equipment maintenance programs.

4. Public Affairs – Councilwoman Goodloe had no report.

Environmental – Council President Robinson said the Commission met on February 24<sup>th</sup> and discussed the Trex plastic bag recycling program. She said the Commission has met their goal and will be receiving a bench soon, recommending having the bench placed at the 911 Memorial vicinity. She said there was further discussion about a facility for the collection and storage of recycled styrofoam and the DPW garage is being considered. She said the Green Fair is scheduled for May 16<sup>th</sup>. She also stated that the Environmental Commission has ordered reusable shopping bags which are very strong and durable. Council President Robinson said potential locations for the installation of a rain garden were discussed and noted the current balance in the “tree bank” is up to \$30,000.

Recreation – Councilman Black said the Commission met and talked about the itinerary of events for the year and he is looking forward to working with such an energized group of people. He asked the Council for a consensus on allowing the Recreation Department to use the Arts Center for yoga classes, and Councilwoman Goodloe responded that thse Arts Center already host their own yoga classes that they charge for and advised Councilman Black to reach out to them in case there is a conflict. Councilman Black said he will have the Recreation Coordinator Linda Monetti reach out to the Arts Center to discuss this matter.

Historical – Councilwoman Goodloe said the next Historical meeting will be held on March 16<sup>th</sup>.

Board of Health – Councilman Jubin stated that the COVID-19 outbreak has appeared in New Jersey boarders. He advised everyone that we have many healthcare professionals in the field on top of this situation and asked residents to remain aware of their surroundings and follow the daily updates regarding this virus. He said he has been closely monitoring all the updates from the CDC and the State Government. He also said if anyone has any questions to please feel free to contact him. Councilman Black mentioned resident Bruce Ruck is a top State official in the CDC and our Board of Health President, and suggested the Council invite him to a meeting to answer any questions. Councilman Jubin said we have the best experts in the state working for us.

5. Fire- Councilman Martino said the Committee is trying to get together with the Construction Department to address their out-dated ordinances regarding fee schedules and review lost revenue that has been falling through the cracks.

6. Laws/Ordinances – Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten said the Committee met and discussed topics such as outdoor dining, sheds, decks and pools, and the Borough's position on cannabis, just to name a few. She said the Committee has discussed an Ordinance which would set guidelines for business registrations in the Borough. She would like Watchung to become a "business friendly" community and asked the Council to take time to welcome new businesses when they come to Watchung. She also mentioned that the Mayor and Council will discuss the possibly of restructuring our meeting agendas to list "agenda setting" as an item. She said the Council has held two Monday evening "office hours" sessions at Borough Hall, and encouraged everyone in the community to come and utilize this time in the upcoming sessions.

## **REPORTS - OTHER:**

7. Engineer – No report.

8. Police Chief – No report.

9. Fire Department – Chief Desandolo said the Fire Department responded to 19 calls for the month and reported 432 man hours. He said several members participated in Trench Rescue Awareness training over the last month. He reported the new apparatus is underway and making good progress. He also said they are planning a dedication event for July 25<sup>th</sup> at Mobus Field. He said the Committee is excited to work with Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten in planning this event, and he anticipates that it will be a fun and exciting community event for all. He gave a report on the details of the structure Fire that occurred on February 14<sup>th</sup> at 60 Nottingham Drive.

10. Rescue Squad – No report

11. Emergency Management- No report.

12. Attorney – No report.

13. Clerk – Clerk Michelle DeRocco reminded everyone that January was Radon Awareness month and the Clerk's Office still has plenty of radon kits available at no charge.

14. Administrator – No report.

Wildlife Committee- Councilman Jubin said the Committee received a quote from Raritan Valley regarding a deer count survey and it is being reviewed, and that the Committee would review any other quotes that are obtained. He reported "Goose Stoppers" sprayed, as authorized, on March 2<sup>nd</sup> and as a result it looks as though there are already fewer geese around the lakes.

Youth Services – Council President Robinson said there are 14 Youth Services Commissions in the County. She said the programs the Commission supports are for children and are geared towards prevention and not intervention. She stated there are competitive grants they can apply for with a 4 to 6 week turnaround period. She also said the next meeting will be held on March 17<sup>th</sup>.

Planning Board –Councilman Martino announced that the Special Meeting scheduled March 10<sup>th</sup> has been cancelled.

Board of Education – Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten thanked the PTO leadership for joining the Council meeting this evening and also for being such a wonderful group of volunteers. She said the Board of Education received a \$5,000 grant from the Somerset County Youth Services Commission. She also mentioned that two additional meetings were added to the Board of Ed calendar, April 16<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 P.M. and the retreat on June 15<sup>th</sup>. Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten also reminded everyone about the ongoing food drive running through May 20<sup>th</sup>. She stated that the preliminary budget will be presented at the next Board of Education meeting scheduled for March 16<sup>th</sup>.

Municipal Alliance – Councilman Black had no report but said the next meeting is scheduled for March 11<sup>th</sup>.

Library Advisory Committee – Councilwoman Goodloe said the Library Advisory Board has changed their meeting time to 4:00 P.M. on the third Wednesday bi-monthly. The Board also discussed that the Friends of the Library are now accepting donated books to resell and use for funding the library.

Mayor Balla said he raised concerns about the traffic patterns and accidents on certain streets in Watchung and Congressman Malinowski for help in alleviating traffic and congestion. The Congressman's staff communicated back that the administration would reach out to Union County and other neighboring towns to see what could be done. Mayor Balla also said he attended the Eagle Scout Awards Ceremony

for two Watchung Eagle Scouts, Alex Ruta and Michael Mattiassi and thanked them for their service to the community. He also thanked the staff for attending the Budget Workshop on Saturday. Mayor Balla said he had the opportunity to read to the first graders at Bayberry school and it was a great experience.

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## **PUBLIC PORTION / AGENDA ITEMS ONLY**

Dorothy Addario, Rock Avenue, advised everyone the Texier House Museum is open anytime by appointment for tours.

Jessica Ingrassia, High Oaks Drive, questioned the necessity of holding another Town hall in order to make our roads safer. She said we have already had multiple Town Halls regarding road safety. She also said neighboring towns are taking action on road safety and mentioned a state wide initiative called “Slow Down in Our Town”. She asked to have a resolution put forward to address the deadliest roads first. She said she understands why Town Halls are a noble thing to do but said feels it is the Council’s job is to take the obvious and necessary action to reduce speed limits, like many other towns have.

Martin Carroll, Valley Road, said back in the day truck drivers used trucker atlases to see what roads they can and can’t go down. He mentioned now they all use GPS for directions and the GPS does not specify which roads are prohibited for trucks. He said signs are needed on Route 78 so the truck drivers are aware they cannot travel off that exit. Council President Robinson commented she agrees there needs to be signs placed before the exit so truck drivers are informed. She also said Chief Cina also agrees and is trying to get this in place.

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## **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

The Mayor and Council discussed a day that would work best everyone to meet for another Budget Workshop meeting.

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## **NEW BUSINESS**

Prior to Council President Robinson moving the Consent Agenda items Attorney Murphy asked the February 6, 2020 Minutes be revised to say, “Attorney Murphy said although I am not Bond Counsel it may have just been authorization to bond for a certain amount and there were no actual bonds issued.” Council President Robinson moved the following Consent Agenda items as amended with a second by Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten and upon Roll Call the vote was as follows: Robinson, Black, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, Jubin, Martino, “aye.”

Approval of the following Council minutes:

January 16, 2020 – Executive Session  
February 6, 2020 – Regular Session

Acknowledging Receipt of the following Borough Reports:

Planning Board Minutes – December 17, 2019, January 21, 2020  
Transcripts of Special Meeting of January 29, 2020  
Fire Prevention Report – January 2020  
Recreation Commission Minutes – January 8m 2020  
CERT Minutes – February 25, 2020  
Building Department Report – February 2020  
Police Activity Report – January 2020

Acknowledging Receipt of the following Correspondence:

None

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**CONSENT AGENDA RESOLUTIONS:** Council President Robinson moved the following Consent Agenda Resolutions, with a second by Councilwoman Goodloe and upon Roll Call the vote was as follows: Robinson, Black, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, Jubin, Martino, “aye.”

R2:03/05/20 Authorize Clerk to Issue (2) Raffle Licenses / The Father’s Club of Mt. St. Mary’s

R3: Authorize Payment of Accumulated Benefits – Robert Burns

R4: Purchases Over \$2,000 – Maser Consulting (Cap – GIS Conversion to SDL)  
Harty Bros. (B&G – Stair Treds @ Borough Hall)

R5: Authorize Waiver of Chapter 20, Section 1.7c – Saturday Construction / Bayberry School

R6: Authorize Appointments – Green Team, Youth Services

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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.

Items for Discussion:

- Town Hall / Library
- Town Hall / Speed Limit Reduction

Town Hall / Library Discussion

Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten said upon coming to terms with the Exempt members the Council has instructed architect Anthony Iovino to begin with library plans at the new location closer to Mountain Boulevard. She said the Council gave the revised plans to the Ad-Hoc Committee to review and there were a few revisions made. She said as soon as we finish with all the feedback from our Library Committee, Mayor and Council, and Administration, and we have elevations from our architect, we will have a Town Hall for the public to review and discuss. She said this process is moving very swiftly to get this plan up and running. Mayor Balla asked when the next meeting was with the Grant Writer and Architect, and Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten said it has not been scheduled yet because we are still compiling data for the grant. Eisenberg Knegten said we hope to have a somewhat finalized version from our architect as soon as the final feedback from everyone comes in. Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten asked if the date for the Town Hall regarding the library would be towards the end of this month. Mayor Balla said the date is contingent on the architect getting us the finished plans back.

Town Hall / Speed Limit Reduction

Mayor Balla asked if the Council could confirm a date to meet for a Town Hall on getting our speed limits reduced and to discuss appropriate speeds on certain roads. Council President Robinson said this should be discussed sooner rather than later. Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten asked what exactly the Council would be discussing regarding changing the speed limits and Mayor Balla said he would like speed limits lowered to at least ten miles per hour on Valley Road, Mountain Boulevard, Somerset Street and Hillcrest Road. Councilman Black said this has been an ongoing problem for decades and feels we need to get the County on board, suggesting that we start having dialogue with the County right away. Mayor Balla said an Ordinance needs to be put in place first, with our community supporting it. Mayor Balla asked if the Laws and Ordinance Committee would start to draft the ordinance, and Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten asked for clarification on the goal number, the number we are looking to reduce the speed limit to and on which streets. Mayor Balla said he believes the streets should be reduced to 25 mph because they are residential areas. Councilman Martino believes we need more community input because changing one road effects another road. He also said we need to be careful changing speed limits because people won't always abide by them. Councilman Martino said we all need to be on the same page and the meeting should happen this month. Councilman Jubin said this should be comprehensive plan including motor vehicle and pedestrian traffic. He feels we need better signage for crossing by our schools. He said there is a lot of data on this topic so part of these discussions should be reviewing the data and reviewing what other towns have done.

It was the consensus of the Council to hold the Town Hall on the Speed Limit Reduction on Saturday, March 21<sup>st</sup> at 10:00 A.M.

Attorney Denis Murphy said the County will not support changing the speed limits unless the town supports it, as well as the Borough Engineer and Traffic Consultant.

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**PUBLIC PORTION - GENERAL DISCUSSION**

Martin Carroll, Valley Road, said he doesn't really see the purpose of holding a Town Hall for speed limit reductions, as these are the types of decisions that we elect a Mayor and Council to make. He also said as part of the Ordinance process the town will have a chance to give their feedback. He asked that the speed limit on Valley Road not be reduced to 25 mph as he feels it is too slow for drivers and could cause more accidents. Council President Robinson said Chief Cina has addressed the concept of one street speed limit effecting another.

Rachael Funcheon, Cedar Road, asked if Stirling Road could be considered in the discussion of streets with speed limits needing to be lowered. She feels by lowering the speed limit on Stirling Road, it would help decrease drivers speeding on other roads and also make it safer for the kids walking home from Valley View School.

Lynda Goldschein, Sherwood Drive, said our Police Department needs to work on enforcing the speed limits in town. She brought up the agreement made three years ago between the Borough and Berkeley Heights. She said there was supposed to be a full interchange at Diamond Hill where we paid for the traffic light and in turn Berkeley Heights was going to do install the interchange and it still has not happened. She asked if the developers submitting the application for the Bonnie Burn Road project have sewer access, and Administrator Damato said there is no agreement with Berkeley Heights for sewerage capacity at this time. He also said the developer is submitting the Planning Board application at their own risk. She said there is still no working light at the top of the stairs in the back parking lot and asked for the light to be fixed. She also questioned how profitable the tickets are that the Police are giving out on Valley Road.

Margaret Ellis, Valley Road, said we have already held three Town Halls regarding traffic safety and doesn't feel we need another one. She also said the public supports greater traffic safety in this Borough.

Jessica Ingrassia, High Oaks Drive, said she understands and respects the thought process that goes into making these important safety decisions. She encouraged everyone to research the "Slow Down in our Town" initiative. She stated the residents put their trust in the Governing Body members they elected to make the best decisions on our behalf.

Lynda Goldschein, Sherwood Drive, asked the Council to advise the Public Works Department that there are trees down at Best Lake preventing residents from walking around the lake and also trees down preventing residents from walking behind Water and Wine.

Council President Robinson 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.”

R8:03/05/20                      Executive Session: Potential Litigation  
Property Acquisition

The Borough Council may take official action on those items discussed in executive session upon completion of the executive session.

Upon return to regular session at 10:22 P.M. all Councilmembers previously present, were in attendance.

## ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Council the meeting was adjourned at 10:24 P.M. to the Call of the Chair. The next meeting of the Mayor and Council will be a Special Budget Workshop meeting to be held on Thursday, March 19, 2020 and begin at 5:00 P.M, followed by the Regular meeting as scheduled on March 19, 2020 at 7:30 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Regina Angelo, RMC  
Deputy Clerk