

BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG
COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

APRIL 13, 2020 - 5:30 P.M.

(THIS MEETING WAS A VIRTUAL MEETING)

MAYOR'S STATEMENT: Mayor Keith S. Balla called the meeting to order at 5:36 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 Special Virtual Meeting was given by way of Special 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 RESIDENTS WHO HAVE DIED FROM COVID 19 COMPLICATIONS, AND OUR FIRST RESPONDERS, DOCTORS, NURSES AND GROCERY STORE WORKERS SERVING IN THIS PANDEMIC.

ROLL CALL:

Robinson [P] Black [A] Goodloe [P] Eisenberg Knechten [P] Jubin [P] Martino [P]

Also present were Administrator James Damato, Attorney Denis Murphy, Clerk Michelle DeRocco, CFO Bill Hance and OEM Coordinator Carolyn Solon.

There were 18 people from the public logged-on virtually.

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DISCUSSION / COVID-19 UPDATES

Mayor Balla asked Emergency Management Coordinator Carolyn Solon for any updates.

Ms. Solon said she followed up with Police Chief Cina regarding the reverse 911 alerts and he advised it is a feature which can only be used in emergencies and on an extremely limited basis. Chief Cina said we are not allowed to use those alerts in relation to COVID-19. She said our PPE inventory is currently being evaluated. Ms. Solon also said they have not received any further food donations.

Mayor Balla asked for a follow up on the helpline letter being sent out to residents. Administrator Damato said the help line letter was sent out today and it should be showing up in our resident's mail-boxes by tomorrow. He also said we are in the process of finalizing the paperwork for the volunteers to sign up to assist residents. He said Mr. Hance is looking into making appropriate changes to the website with all our updated information. Mr. Damato said he started to look into the food shopping procedures in Watchung and will have updates for everyone by tomorrow.

Councilman Martino asked if the final draft of the letter going out to the residents was sent to all Council members beforehand for approval and Mr. Damato said the letter was circulated through emails however, was unsure if it received approval from all Council members. Councilman Martino asked if every single resident in town will be receiving the letter, and Damato said we used our tax rolls for resident addresses and only sent out to property owners. Councilman Martino suggested we contact the owners of multiple family dwellings in town and forward this letter to them for distribution to their tenants.

Councilwoman Goodloe asked if we considered using direct mailing instead of using the tax rolls. Mr. Hance said in the past the process we have found most effective has been by a direct mailing. He also said this process is the quickest way to reach our residents. Councilwoman Eisenberg Knechten said her suggestion was to use EDDM and she is disappointed we are using the tax rolls to get this information out to our residents. Borough Clerk Michelle DeRocco said in the past we have used EDDM for mailing out the newsletter and we have received complaints from residents stating they never receive their copy. Councilwoman Eisenberg Knechten suggested we do an EDDM just for the mailing routes for the most highly dense corridor of renters. Councilwoman Eisenberg Knechten also said she would have liked to have seen a final draft of the letter before it went out to the residents. Mr. Damato advised the letter sent out to the residents was not retyped and sent in the same format reviewed by the Committee.

Councilman Martino said he believes there will be extensions or deferred mortgage payments for our residents. He asked if the Administrative and Finance Committee have come together to prepare for reduced revenue and possible overabundance of tax appeals in addition to taxes being paid late. He suggested a letter be drafted to go out to our residents as well as posted on the Borough website advising residents to contact their banks and also advising when the next quarter tax payments are due. Mr. Hance said he is unsure how the mortgage companies are handling this matter. Administrator Damato confirmed the time period to file tax appeals was extended. He also said he had a meeting with Mr. Hance and Tax Assessor Ed Kerwin regarding all the potential tax appeal scenarios that could occur. He said the Governor is planning to sign an Executive Order to delay the payment of commercial rent to the landlords. He said we are not sure how the impact of this will affect our tax revenue. He said he would like to have Mr. Kerwin attend the next Administration and Finance Committee meeting so these scenarios can be

discussed further. Councilman Martino asked if we could get a quick summary from Mr. Kerwin regarding policies, procedures and short falls of what could occur in order for us to develop a strategy to handle the 2020 Budget.

Councilwoman Goodloe said she received a notice that the Middlebrook Regional Health Commission is holding a special meeting on Wednesday, April 15th, and the public are invited to attend by calling in. She asked if we could get that information posted on our website so people can call in if they're interested.

Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten reminded the Laws and Ordinance Committee to please review the draft of the Volunteer Registration Link she sent around in order to make the necessary changes so that the link can be accessible on our website for our residents.

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PUBLIC PORTION

No one from the Public desired to be heard.

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ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Council the meeting was adjourned at 6:05 P.M. to the Call of the Chair. The next Special Meeting of the Mayor and Council is scheduled to be Virtually held on April 14, 2020 at 5:30 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Regina Angelo, RMC
Deputy Clerk