

BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG

COUNCIL MINUTES

APRIL 16, 2020 - 7:30 P.M.

(THIS MEETING IS GOING TO BE A VIRTUAL MEETING- SEE SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS BELOW ON HOW TO PARTICIPATE.)

To call into the meeting, dial 1 (872) 240-3412. It will prompt you for an access code. Type 592870653#. You do not need an audio pin, so just press #.

To access the meeting using an iPhone or iPad, you can download the GoToMeeting app from the app store for free. You have to type in the meeting ID 592870653. You can enter your name. Council Members should enter their name so everyone on the call will see you as present.

To access the meeting with a PC, go to

<https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/592870653>

Agenda is available for download from the Borough website or will be emailed upon request. You may request a copy of the agenda by emailing jdamoto@watchungnj.gov

MAYOR'S STATEMENT: Mayor Keith Balla called the meeting to order at 7:36 P.M. and read 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 the Annual Meeting Notice to the 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. Mayor Balla asked also for a moment of silence for our first responders working under this pandemic and for our friends and relatives who died as a result of this virus.

ROLL CALL:

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

Also present were Administrator James Damato, CFO William Hance, Attorney Denis Murphy, Engineer Bruce Koch, OEM Coordinator Carolyn Solon, and Clerk Michelle DeRocco. Although not present at Roll Call, Councilman Martino logged into the meeting at approximately 7:40 P.M.

There were 6 members of Public logged into the meeting virtually.

REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEES:

1. Administration & Finance – Councilman Jubin said the Committee met on April 9th and the main focus was on Covid-19 and planning ahead for its financial impact. He reported that the Borough does have significant cash reserves however CFO Bill Hance provided past history from the 2008 mortgage crisis and how the loss of revenue impacted taxes at that time. He said the next Committee meeting is scheduled for April 27th and we will continue to delve into the different aspects of the budget including assessments not only for residents but for businesses. He said we are looking at all discretionary non-essential spending. Administrator Damato said we intend to introduce the 2020 budget at the first meeting in May so at the next Committee meeting we will be working through different scenarios and the impact on the full budget. Councilman Jubin said he will reach out to the Committee and see if schedules allow for the next meeting to be moved up and also if Assessor Ed Kerwin can attend. Councilman Black asked Mr. Hance what the amount of surplus is and Mr. Hance responded that it is at \$4 million and we had intended to use about \$1 million to off-set taxes. Councilman Martino asked if we were going to offer our residents an extended grace period on the May tax payment and Mr. Hance said the State has to authorize that and to date they have not. Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten said she is getting many inquiries on the “Help Line” from people who do not come into Borough Hall to pay their taxes and Mr. Hance explained that everyone can pay “on-line” which is preferred however there is a tax “drop-off” slot next to the entrance to the Tax Office.

2. Police – Council President Robinson reported Chief Cina said the Department is involved in several initiatives and working with the Administration in regard to the forms for the volunteers who want to assist other residents during this time of need, and the food donation collection.

3. Public Works / Buildings and Grounds – Councilman Black said he spoke to Charles Gunther and the Department is very busy cleaning up trees after the storms. He reported that Mr. Gunther has a great rapport with all of the employees in the Department of Public Works and they are meshing very well and we have a very strong unit right now. He said the Engineer’s report refers to an announcement by the NJ DOT that the grant application process for 2021 is open, and Mr. Koch is recommending that we apply for the balance of any roads that the 2020 grant cannot cover.

4. Public Affairs:

Environmental – Council President Robinson said that Chair person Rachel Funcheon is planning a virtual meeting of the Commission for the end of the month.

Recreation – Councilman Black thanked Rec Coordinator Linda Monetti for running the Photo Contest for our residents, and announced that an Art Contest will begin shortly. He noted the goose stoppers are applying another treatment to the area by the Lake, which seems to be working nicely. Councilman Black said the Camp registrations are on hold at this time, until we can get a better feel for where we will be with this pandemic. Council President Robinson asked how much, if any, expenses has the Camp incurred to date and Councilman Black responded that at this point, no Counselors have been hired and no trips have been paid for.

Historical – Councilwoman Goodloe had no report. Councilman Black asked if there was an update on the status of the Mural and Councilwoman Goodloe responded that there has been some discussion and she is waiting for a formal recommendation to bring back to the Council.

Board of Health – Councilman Jubin said the Board of Health has not formally met, however, he is in touch regularly with MiddleBrook Regional Health Commission and commented that our Health Officer, Kevin Sumner, is doing a phenomenal job. Councilman Jubin urged everyone to wear their masks and to continue social distancing. He announced more testing sites are opening, particularly at Raritan Valley for residents of Somerset and Hunterdon Counties. He said he has been in the pharma for 30 years and said he has never before seen such global unity. He said he is optimistic that before the end of the year we will see good progress.

5. Fire – Councilman Martino said he had no report, however, he noted that the traffic safety issue in town needs to be resurrected. He asked the Mayor to host a Town Hall. He also said that we should be using the Reverse 911 and that he had reached out to Bill Stahl at the County who said he would be glad to help us in getting public information out. Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten said she was going to work to get a team of volunteers who could help where needed. Councilman Black thanked Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten for handling this by herself and said she is incredible.

6. Laws/Ordinances – Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten had no report however, said so far she has 16 residents interested in volunteering and reminded all of the Help Line number – 908-745-2111.

REPORTS - OTHER:

7. Engineer – Bruce Koch said he has submitted his report, and highlighted that with the Municipal aid granted in 2020 to the Borough by the DOT, we should be able to do 2 roads, and suggested that the Council may want to consider requesting money for the balance of the roads in the 2021 DOT application. He said he provided estimates for the repairs for the Elsinor culvert and Carrar Drive.

8. Police Chief – Chief Cina said that his is busy keeping up with the Governor's executive orders, and getting many calls reporting social distancing complaints at the local stores. He said the store owners have been very cooperative. He said he is in constant contact with Administrator Damato and OEM Coordinator Carolyn Solon and is confident we will get through this.

9. Fire Department – No report.

10. Rescue Squad- Council President Robinson read the report submitted by Katrina Dumapit, Squad Vice President. She highlighted that riding members continue to follow strict protocols while at the building and responding to calls during the coronavirus. She reported the online EMT refresher classes did not get state approval; therefore all upcoming EMT license expiration dates will be pushed back. All in person training has been cancelled; the Squad has been working on offering our members a large variety of online training to help accrue the necessary education credits during this time, and that meetings are held as scheduled virtually. The Squad said they appreciate the opportunity to relight the Tree of Lights during this time to honor frontline and essential workers and in remembrance of those lost to COVID-19, and reported the total calls for the month of March were 15, and top responders were Matt King and Chris Monrroy.

11. Emergency Management – Carolyn Solon announced receipt of a huge donation from the Board of Education, and that CERT Member Charlie Delany has been sorting and inventorying all supplies. She said she has been in touch with the long-term care facilities and also thanked Bill Stahl at the County because now, all 21 towns in Somerset County can use Reverse 911. Councilman Black said he would like to expedite radio communications for OEM and CERT. Councilman Martino suggested Mrs. Solon summarize the radio needs in writing and he will help push it along.

12. Attorney – Mr. Murphy said their virtual meeting, the Zoning Board approved the Communications Tower and the Resolution will be memorialized.

13. Clerk – Mrs. DeRocco said the Spring newsletter will still go out however it will not be on time. She said much of the information that was planning on being published has changed, such as the date of the Primary Election, normally held in June is now being held on July 7th.

14. Administrator – Mr. Damato reported on the highlights of the County conference calls and said all schools will be closed until at least May 15th, and the testing sites are working well. Councilman Jubin added that now that more testing is available, expect to see a rise in the numbers because more people are being tested.

Wildlife Advisory Commission – Councilman Jubin said there has been no meeting held recently however, he reached out to Raritan Valley Community College and received a quote to perform a deer density count, similar to the one they did last year. He said there is a concern for an accurate count as now the trees have leaves on them and said due to the current unprecedented health issue that we all are dealing with – we may have to forgo the count until next year. Councilman Jubin added that 17 goose eggs were added, and thanked Charlie Gunther and his crew.

Youth Services – Council President Robinson said the Commission is working on putting a program together that would help children struggling to learn at home, some possible extra tutoring.

Planning Board – Councilman Martino said he has no report and the April meeting has been postponed.

Board of Education – Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten said their retreat is scheduled for the 16th and their regular meeting is on Monday.

Municipal Alliance – Councilman Black had no report.

Library Advisory Committee – Councilwoman Goodloe said they have not met, therefore, there is no report. Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten said the plans reflecting the revised elevations will be ready for the June 6th Grant submission.

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PUBLIC PORTION / AGENDA ITEMS ONLY

Bruce Ruck, Board of Health Chairperson and resident of Lakeview Avenue, echoed Councilman Jubin’s comments in regard to Kevin Sumner and said the Borough is extremely lucky to have him as our Health Officer. He also said 2 of the Borough’s CERT Team members have been volunteering to answer the Center for Disease Control (CDC) Help Line and this has been very helpful.

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UNFINISHED BUSINESS

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NEW BUSINESS

CONSENT AGENDA: Matters listed within the Consent Agenda have been referred to members of the Borough Council for reading and study, are considered to be routine and will be enacted by one motion of the Council. If separate discussion is desired, the item may be removed from the Consent Agenda by Council action.

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

Approval of the following Council minutes:

March 19, 2020 – Regular Meeting (Virtual)
April 9, 11, 2020 – Special Meetings (Virtual)

Acknowledging Receipt of the following Borough Reports:

Fire Prevention Report – March, 2020

Acknowledging Receipt of the following Correspondence:

#16- Township of Scotch Plains 4/13/20 Notice of Public Hearing on Proposed Ordinances 20-9, 10, 11
Creating inclusionary overlay zones in compliance with the Township’s Affordable Housing Obligation
C: M & C, JD, Pl. Bd

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CONSENT AGENDA RESOLUTIONS: The resolutions listed below were submitted to the Governing Body for review and will be adopted by one motion.

Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten asked to Table R2. Councilman Martino seconded the motion and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Robinson, Black, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, Jubin, Martino, “aye.”

Council President Robinson moved R1, with a second by Councilman Black and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Robinson, Black, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, Jubin, Martino, “aye.”

R1:04/16/20 Authorize Revocable License Agreement – 82 Ellisen Road

R2: ~~Authorize Submission of Grant Application – Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Commission / History Partnership Prog.~~
TABLED

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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.

Councilman Jubin 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.”

R3: Payment of Bills

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PUBLIC PORTION - GENERAL DISCUSSION

No one desired to be heard.

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R4: Executive Session: Personnel

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 9:49 P.M. all Councilmembers previously present, were in attendance.

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Councilman Jubin 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.”

R5: Authorizing Clerk Michelle DeRocco to Extend Retirement Date to June 1, 2020

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ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Council, this meeting was adjourned to the Call of the Chair and to the next Special Virtual Meeting to be held on April 17, 2020 at 6:30 PM, and the next Regular meeting to be held on May 7, 2020 at 7:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Michelle DeRocco, RMC
Clerk