

BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG

COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

APRIL 21, 2020 - 7:30 P.M.

(THIS MEETING WAS A VIRTUAL MEETING)

MAYOR'S STATEMENT: Mayor Keith S. Balla called the meeting to order at 7:31 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 RESDIENTS 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 Knegten [P] Jubin [A] Martino [P]

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

There were 20 members present virtually.

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DISCUSSION / COVID-19 UPDATES

Mayor Balla asked Carolyn Solon our Office of Emergency Management Coordinator to give us an update on COVID-19, procedures, food, supplies and any area in need of improvements.

Carolyn Solon reported there were no food donations dropped off today. She said she went to Somerset County to pick up PPE consisting of N95 masks, reusable face shields, surgical masks and various sized nitrate gloves. She also said the volunteer paperwork is 99 percent complete at this time.

Administrator Damato said Kevin Sumner reported two new COVID cases in Watchung today, totalling 63 today all together but no new deaths. He said in regards to the conference call with Somerset County, Doctor Reddy stated there were some downwards trends reported but they aren't based on complete information and should not be relied upon. He said in response to Dr. Jubin's question, Dr. Reddy said the number of positives verses numbers tested at Raritan Valley Community College testing site will be made public in a couple of days. Doctor Reddy also stated that there are four tests on the FDA website that have been approved as experimental antibody tests. She cautions that these tests have not fully been vetted by the FDA, so she cannot attest to their reliability or effectiveness. Administrator Damato reported the food banks in Somerset County have reported a 50% increase in clients served. He also said on the conference call today one of the callers indicated that he had heard that there were ICE agents at the food banks. Prosecutor Robertson said there is absolutely no truth to that rumor that people should feel free to go to the food banks. Administrator Damato said the Raritan Valley test site performed about 98 tests today and 56 people are registered to be tested tomorrow. He also stated some municipalities in Somerset County are planning to amend their Declaration of Emergency to require that any people in public use face coverings. He will advise the Council of any municipalities that make this change. Pros-ecutor Robertson also stated that the Governor stay at home order is still in effect so unless what you're doing is essential or you need food, please stay home.

Council President Robinson stated the Mayor asked her to prepare a plan for our own make noise cele-bration honoring essential workers and first responders. She said the Mayor thought it would be a great idea to hold this celebration next Friday, May 1st in conjunction with May Day.

Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten feels it would be nice for our residents to continue to participate in the Thursday celebrations in conjunction with our neighbors.

Council President Robinson also said she was approached by a few residents who feel Watchung should have their own celebration.

Councilman Martino said resident Lori Wood reached out to him and has been producing her own safety equipment. He said she has been producing face shields from her home and thanked her for donating a dozen of them. He said the problem she is having now is she is running out of the raw materials needed to produce these. He asked if we could reach out to the Board of Education because he believes they may have some of these raw materials in the schools. Mayor Balla asked Councilman Martino to get the exact description of what raw materials the resident needs.

Ms. Solon advised she spoke with this resident a few weeks ago along with the Borough Clerk and the resident was supposed to submit an email requesting the raw materials she needed the Borough to purchase but an email was never received. Ms. Solon said she will submit the request for raw materials once she receives it.

Councilman Martino said he doesn't believe it is an issue of funding he believes it is the lack of finding the raw materials which is why he recommended we reach out to the schools to see if they have what she is looking for. Councilwoman Eisenberg Knechten said she would follow up with the Board of Education on this issue

PUBLIC PORTION

Ray Barratt, Valley Road, asked if our emergency services have everything they need in terms of PPE and also asked how many days worth of PPE they have. Carolyn Solon said all our first responders to date have a sufficient amount of supplies. She said we anticipate as of right now about 8 weeks worth of PPE supplies for our first responders.

Councilman Martino asked if we are giving some of the PPE supplies we receive to the long term health care facilities also. Ms. Solon said the long-term care facilities go through their own process and get their own stock pile of PPE.

Ms. Solon said twice a week she participates in OEM conference calls with Somerset County and the New Jersey State Police. She mentioned on today's call our Human Services Department reported that they are seeing a 20 percent increase in domestic violence calls. She feels it would be beneficial if the Council approves to publish some information regarding the Safe and Sound Association on our Borough website or Facebook page.

Councilwoman Goodloe feels we should defiantly publicize that information.

Councilman Martino asked that the Department of Health and Human Services flyer that was circulated to the Council also be posted on the Facebook page or Borough website.

Councilwoman Goodloe asked what the consensus was on the day we were going to make noise. She asked if we decided on doing it this Thursday or May 1st. Council President Robinson said she loves the idea of Watchung having their own celebration on May 1st or even if we could do both days. Mayor Balla said rather than rush getting the idea out to our residents he feels May 1st is a better day. Councilman Martino feels if our residents want to join in with our fellow Warren residents they should be allowed to do so but he thinks May 1st is also a great idea.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Council the meeting was adjourned at 8:01 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 22, 2020 at 7:30 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Regina Angelo, RMC
Deputy Clerk