

BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG

COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

APRIL 23, 2020 - 7:30 P.M.

(THIS MEETING WAS A VIRTUAL MEETING)

MAYOR'S STATEMENT: Mayor Keith S. Balla called the meeting to order at 7:30 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 [P] Goodloe [P] Eisenberg Knegten [P] Jubin [P] 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 19 members present virtually.

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DISCUSSION / COVID-19 UPDATES

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

Carolyn Solon reported there were no new food donations or PPE received today. Ms. Solon said she transferred PPE material from the trailer to the Police Department to be available for our spontaneous volunteers to use. She also said she checked in with McAuley Hall and Brandywine, our long term care facilities today, and they're both stocked up in regards to PPE. She announced that for the past few weeks, the State has mandated that long-term care facilities complete a daily survey reporting their COVID positive patients, their isolation procedures and their employee status, and as of today she was advised the State now wants this information reported to our local Health Officer. She has been trying to co-ordinate reporting this information between our Health Officer, Kevin Sumner and our long-term care facilities. She reported the CDC confirmed the first COVID positive case in two pet cats in New York State.

Councilwoman Goodloe asked for an update on the amount of money donated to our food drive and CFO Bill Hance said he would send it out to everyone.

Administrator Damato said there are no new confirmed COVID cases in Watchung and no new reported deaths however, Somerset County had 152 new cases for a total of 2,534 cases. He said on the conference call with Somerset County today they mentioned they will be modifying their schedule to only hold conference calls on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Administrator Damato also said the State has approved swab testing at New Jersey State Developmental Disability sites and he will report back to the Council on its effectiveness. He advised the Council that the New Jersey Division of Local Government Services will be providing some guidance on how the COVID-19 pandemic affects budgets, and things to be aware of as well as interest rates. He also advised the New Jersey Department of Labor has implemented a new link on their website providing very useful information on Sick Leave, Disability, Family Leave, and Cares Act. Mr. Damato reported the Raritan Valley Community College test site tested 111 people yesterday and had about 90 appointments today. He said they anticipate being open for testing next week on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. He also said there has been discussion recently about RVCC changing the test in order to test asymptomatic people or people without a prescription.

Administrator Damato mentioned Watchung will not receive a bill for the tremendous amount of PPE obtained from Somerset County. He advised the bill will go to FEMA and Somerset County will seek reimbursement through them. He spoke with the property manager of the rental properties today who said he would pass out flyers to all the apartment doors. Administrator Damato said he dropped the flyers off himself to the property manager and they should be delivered today. He mentioned the concern brought up by Councilman Martino about the noise level in the Walmart parking lot. He said there are two locations in the Walmart parking lot where they play the same tape about every five minutes from a loud speaker system. He said the recording is fairly constant and does have some bells in the beginning to attract attention. He said he met with Carolyn Taylor, our Zoning Officer and our Property Maintenance Inspector Len Young and they are following up with the manager to see if we could get the volume turned down and or the frequency reduced, to try to make it a little bit better for the residents in the Point.

Councilwoman Goodloe asked if we have an ordinance limiting the decibels Walmart is allowed to play their recording. Administrator Damato said as per our Zoning Officer, Carolyn Taylor there is an Ordinance on excessive sound, and excessive noise, however, we need a Noise Officer who is trained in the use of the noise or sound measuring device in order to enforce the Ordinance. He said unfortunately we don't have anyone in the Borough who was trained to operate the equipment.

Councilman Black asked if we could utilize an individual from North Plainfield who has that type of experience or the equipment. Administrator Damato said he will speak to the Administrator of North Plainfield and ask if they have someone trained in that field

Councilman Martino said it was not easy to find the help line number on the Borough's website and asked for it to be placed in a more conspicuous location. He also said he was looking over the spontaneous volunteer application and feels the seven-page document may be a little difficult for our volunteers to understand.

Attorney Murphy explained a lot of the documents regarding the spontaneous volunteer application are specifically related to COVID-19. He said the Laws and Ordinance Committee and the Borough viewed another town's application program and decided they wanted to incorporate those same documents into Watchung's application. He said he believes they utilized five documents, two of which were just sign in and sign out forms. He said from a liability standpoint you can simplify these documents for volunteer services unrelated to COVID-19.

Councilwoman Goodloe stated these documents were consolidated into three documents and that's how they will be sent to the volunteers. She said as stated by our Attorney a lot of the documents were about COVID related procedures and how to properly use PPE in order for the volunteers to protect themselves.

Administrator Damato said our Insurance Broker also reviewed and approved the volunteer documents with minor changes. He said the ideal thing is to get as much of a release from the individualist possible so that the Borough is protected.

Councilwoman Eisenberg Knechten thanked all the residents who went out and participated in the make some noise effort. She said Watchung will be participating in this effort every Thursday evening from 7:00 to 7:05 P.M. along with Warren and Green brook. She also made a suggestion to the Council that Borough communications fall under the Public Affairs Committee in order to streamline the process.

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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 8:10 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 27, 2020 at 7:30 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Regina Angelo, RMC
Deputy Clerk