

BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG
COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

APRIL 28, 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 [A] 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 17 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 PPE or food donations made. She said a few additional volunteers signed up through the website.

Administrator Damato said there were no new COVID positive cases in Watchung and no new deaths. He said on today's conference call with Somerset County, Senator Booker made a presentation to the group assuring everyone he is doing everything he can to introduce another stimulus bill called COVID 4. He was trying to accomplish a direct aid bill to the Municipalities, State and County governments. He said there is no established timeline for this but he is aware local governments are suffering from revenue shortfalls. Senator Booker also mentioned the US Post Office is experiencing all kinds of problems as a result of this pandemic and they are operating in crisis mode. He reminded everyone to please fill out the Census forms. He said it was reported on the conference call that Somerset County only has a 50 percent response rate in regards to the Census. Administrator Damato also said there were some new Executive Orders issued by Governor Murphy on his plan to re-open New Jersey. Executive Order 131 created the Commission known as the Governor's Restart and Recovery Commission. He said the Commission is responsible for reviewing the ideas and principles which will set forth how to restart and recover New Jersey. He also said Doctor Reddy mentioned that hospital admissions are declining, and that discharges are increasing. Administrator Damato also mentioned Governor Murphy signed Executive order 130 today authorizing Municipalities to extend the grace period for the collection of second quarter taxes to June first from May first. He mentioned part of the Executive Order specifically does not extend the statutorily mandated dates for the payment of taxes by a Municipality to a County School District or other Taxing District. He advised the Council that factor needs to be taken into consideration if they are considering any delay or extension of the grace period. Administrator Damato said Dr. Reddy reported there is a great deal of testing that's required before these re-opening orders will be put into place. He said as per the Freeholders this Saturday the County will re-open their drop off recycling for recyclables and electronics.

Mayor Balla asked if anyone on the conference call mentioned when there might be paid mass testing. Administrator Damato said the testing sites still don't have enough test kits to test any many people as they would like which is why they are still testing by prescription only.

Councilman Jubin said it is a strong indicator we are in a better place if the number tested versus number of positives drops below 10 percent. Councilman Jubin commented on the type of testing going on now. He mentioned the RNA test means your body got exposed to the virus and the antibody test, means your body recognized it. Councilman Jubin also said it's good to have antibodies, if you have been exposed to the virus you want the antibodies. He cautioned everyone from believing what they hear in terms of who has short term and long-term immunity from the virus.

Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten urged the Administration and Finance Committee to sit down and figure out what we can do to extend the grace period for our residents to June 1st. She also suggested a Council discussion on the most effective ways to remind residents about the census and how important it is they respond. Councilman Jubin asked when the census deadline was and also agrees we need to remind the residents the importance of their participation in this process.

Administrator Damato said they send a mailer to each and every house and once the resident responds to that, that information develop lists for Census takers that actually go out to visit the homes, and try to finalize the data. Attorney Murphy stated there is a big push to get the results of the census by mail so they can eliminate the requirement of having Census takers actually go to people's homes. Councilwoman Goodloe reminded residents that they can also respond to the Census online or by phone, but the code that's contained in the written letter is needed.

Council President Robinson asked if the County brought up anything on the call that could be done to support our post offices. Administrator Damato said the post offices have been losing so much money recently. He said the federal government has been subsidizing the post office every year, and they continue to lose money every year. He feels part of the next stimulus package will go towards the post offices.

Councilman Martino asked if there were any additional mailers for the helpline sent out to the non-taxpaying population of our town. He also asked for an update in regards to the public parks being closed or reopened. Administrator Damato said flyers were distributed to the Point residents regarding the helpline. He also spoke with Chief Cina who said he would like to have a meeting with the Police Committee to discuss the park issue before any decisions are made. Councilman Martino asked if the Police Committee could get a list of the Chief's concerns to review before they have this meeting to eliminate any research that may need to be done. Council President Robinson said they are still in the process of setting up a Police Committee Meeting.

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PUBLIC PORTION

Ray Barratt, Valley Road, said regarding the Census he suggested the Council send something out thanking the percent of residents who have already completed it and reminding the other percent of residents to please participate.

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ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Council the meeting was adjourned at 8:08 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 29, 2020 at 7:30 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Regina Angelo, RMC
Deputy Clerk