

BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG
COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

MAY 4, 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 RESIDENTS WHO HAVE DIED FROM COVID 19 COMPLICATIONS, AND OUR FIRST RESPONDERS, DOCTORS, NURSES AND GROCERY STORE WORKERS SERVING IN THIS PAN-DEMIC.

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, CFO Bill Hance and OEM Coordinator Carolyn Solon.

There were 21 members present virtually.

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PUBLIC PORTION / AGENDA ITEMS ONLY

No one from the public desired to be heard.

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RESOLUTIONS

Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten asked how all the residents would be notified of this tax payment date change. Attorney Murphy said because the Council is not adjusting the interest rate on delinquent taxes and only extending the grace period, individual notice to the tax payers is not required. He suggested this notice be posted on the Borough website and published in the newspaper.

Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten feels the Council should be trying to reach all residents to inform them the grace period has been extended by all effective measures. She suggested they do an email blast, social media post and activate a Nixle Alert regarding this. Clerk Michelle DeRocco said she can circulate this information out to the Borough Facebook page, the webpage and also via resident email.

Councilman Jubin moved the following resolution with a second by Councilwoman Goodloe and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Robinson, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, Jubin, Martino "aye."

R1:05/04/20 SP Authorize Extension of 4th Qtr. Tax Payment Grace Period / June 1, 2020

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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 or PPE donations made today. She mentioned that two volunteers were issued ID cards and are now activated for our residents who are in need of assistance with shopping. She said as per the County the students entitled to the reduced lunch program will be receiving this service until June 18th.

Administrator Damato reported as per our Health Director Kevin Sumner, there were two new confirmed COVID cases in Watchung on Friday and no new deaths. He also said Saturday, Sunday, and Monday there were no new cases or deaths. Administrator Damato also mentioned there were 9 COVID recoveries since Sunday. He mentioned as per the Governors press conference

the requirements of Executive Order 73 have been lifted due to the States anticipated reduction in revenue. He also mentioned schools will be closed for the remainder of the year. Councilwoman Goodloe suggested the resolution passed extending the grace period to June 1st without any interest or penalties on property tax payments be sent out via regular mail to all residents. Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten agreed and suggested they include the helpline number in the letter as an additional reminder to all residents. She also reminded everyone the Feed to Give fundraiser starts Wednesday and so far the Borough has raised over \$4,000 dollars for the Somerset County Food Bank.

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PUBLIC PORTION / GENERAL DISCUSSION

Ray Barratt, Valley Road, asked how many Watchung residents are still being hospitalized due to the COVID-19 virus. Administrator Damato advised they do not get specifics on the number of Watchung residents hospitalized.

Councilman Martino asked how much it costs the Borough to send out a mailer. Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten commented the number provided from our CFO regarding our last mailer was \$1,265.00. Councilman Martino is concerned with spending another \$1,500.00 dollars right now on a letter that might not even reach the residents until after the grace period ends. He feels it's important the Council is also fiscally responsible especially now. Councilwoman Goodloe suggested doing the mailing via EDDM if it would be more cost effective. Administrator Damato said he heard that sometimes EDDM mailing is going out and sometimes they are not. CFO Bill Hance said the cost for EDDM would probably be around \$400.00 for the postage and whatever the printing costs would be. Administrator Damato said they would seek to receive reimbursement from FEMA regarding this expense.

Council President Robinson asked if there are a large number of outstanding tax payments. Mr. Hance said the majority of people who pay individually have not paid yet.

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ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Council the meeting was adjourned 7:53 P.M to the Call of the Chair. The next meeting of the Mayor and Council will be a Special Budget meeting on Wednesday, May 6, 2020. Mayor Balla reminded everyone there is a town hall on speed and traffic scheduled for Tuesday, May 5, 2020 and the Regularly scheduled Meeting of the Mayor and Council is scheduled to be Virtually held on May 7, 2020 at 7:30 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Regina Angelo, RMC
Deputy Clerk