

BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG
COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

MAY 7, 2020 - 7:30 P.M.

(THIS MEETING WAS A VIRTUAL MEETING)

OPENING STATEMENT: Mayor Keith S. Balla called the meeting to order at 7:35 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 meeting was given by way of Annual 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 PANDEMIC.

ROLL CALL:

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

Although not present at Roll Call, Councilman Jubin entered the meeting at 7:45 P.M. Also present were Administrator James Damato, CFO William Hance, Clerk Michelle DeRocco, and Attorney Denis Murphy.

REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEES:

1. Administration & Finance – Councilman Jubin said the Committee has held many meetings to try and find ways to potentially save money in regards to our budget for the 2020 calendar year.

2. Police – Council President Robinson said the lake parking lots have been closed in accordance with the Council vote and signs are posted on the surrounding streets to prevent people from using local streets for parking instead of the parking lot.

3. Public Works / Buildings and Grounds – Councilman Black said everyone in the Department is back to work on a normal schedule. He advised residents to be on the lookout for bucket trucks coming around clearing any branches. He also said Public Works will be disinfecting and cleaning Borough Hall and other areas. He said the team is becoming a positive force. Mayor Balla agrees that the DPW is doing a great job and has really stepped up. Councilman Martino said the DPW is going to be using an ultra violet light disinfectant also. He said if anyone needs woodchips to contact the Public Works Department. Councilman Black said the Department will also be assisting Traffic and Beautification by prepping the triangles to get the flowers in for the Spring time.

4. Public Affairs – Councilwoman Goodloe had no report.

Environmental – Council President Robinson said the Environmental Commission held a tele-conference meeting on April 27th. She mentioned the Engineering Department is working diligently on their large amount of calls in regard to tree permits. She reminded everyone about the many Ash trees dying due to the Emerald Ash Borer Beetle and also advised residents if they see the Spotted Lantern Fly to please make sure they report it. The recycling programs have been temporarily suspended. She said the bench attained through recycling plastic bags has been received and the recommendation was to place it by the 911 memorial. She suggested getting a resolution together for Council approval. Council President Robinson also said the Green Fair scheduled for Saturday, May 16th has been cancelled. She asked Carolyn Solon, OEM Coordinator to speak on the Rain Garden issue. Carolyn Solon reported the grant for the water garden project has been extended. She said there's been discussion about previous sites submitted to Rutgers for soil and drainage analysis. Rutgers recommended a site by Best Lake at the bottom is Hillcrest Road and Bayberry and Valley View Schools. She said OEM, the Environmental Commission and Traffic and Beautification will be getting together and deciding what site would be the best for the Borough and then have our soil analysis completed by Rutgers. Councilman Martino asked if the Ash trees could be exempt as part of the Tree Ordinance. He suggested the permits and fees for these trees be waived so people could take them down within their budget. Council President Robinson said she will bring the suggestion back to the Environmental Commission.

Recreation – Councilman Black had no report. Councilwoman Eisenberg Knechten said tomorrow wraps up week seven out of eight in regards to the Watchung Photo Contest. She said this week the theme was giving thanks to our first responders and essential workers. Administrator Damato said they are awaiting guidance from the Governor within the next few days in regards to holding the summer camp.

Historical – Councilwoman Goodloe said the Committee is in the process of scheduling a virtual meeting for next week.

Board of Health – Councilman Jubin had no report.

5. Fire – Councilman Martino had no report.

6. Laws/Ordinances – Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten said the Committee reviewed the resolution sent by the Mayor with his suggestions for speed reductions along the major arteries in town. She said the Committee also recommended a change in our fence Ordinance. She mentioned there will be another Laws and Ordinance meeting next week to discuss outdoor dining in the Borough and the treatment of decks as impervious coverage.

REPORTS - OTHER:

7. Engineer – Borough Engineer Bruce Koch said he checked the DOT grant letter and there are 24 months for the Council to award a contract. He stated July 1st is the deadline for the new submission of the DOT grant. He recommended the Council pick two roads to continue forward with.

8. Police Chief – No report.

9. Fire Department - Chief DeSandolo reported the Fire Department responded to 20 calls in the month of April. He said writing assignments have been reduced in order to maintain social distancing. He also said no non-essential meetings have been held and trainings have been held virtually when possible. He said the new rig final inspection is scheduled for tomorrow and should be transported to New Jersey in the upcoming weeks. He also said the new Fire Department equipment is certified to remove viruses as well as other types of Fire contaminants.

Fire Prevention - Chris Czuba reported the State Division of Fire Safety has provided guidance on conducting inspections during the pandemic. He said our local process for obtaining a certificate for a smoke alarm, carbon dioxide and fire extinguisher certification for residential home sales has been modified. He said all certificates are now issued through submitting an affidavit in lieu of inspection. He said this process is listed on the Borough website. He also reported over the last six weeks complaints were received and investigated regarding essential businesses developing procedures that as a result lock or block off exits. He said he responded to at least five of these instances and reached out to the management companies regarding their procedures.

10. Rescue Squad – Council President Robinson reported the Rescue Squad is currently operating on a five night a week schedule with three members on the ambulance at a time to accommodate the social distancing guidelines. She also said since mid-March the Rescue Squad received over nine new applicants for membership. She mentioned the non EMT probationary members will start training as soon as possible and rotate into the schedule alongside their existing probationary members. She said the total number of calls for the month of April were 16 and year to date are 76.

11. Emergency Management – Carolyn Solon, OEM Coordinator said the Borough is still receiving food donations from residents. She said we utilized our volunteers today for two residents who called and were in need of food shopping assistance. She mentioned the Somerset County conference calls have been cut back to one time a week. She also said the State reported 68 percent of deaths from COVID-19 have been located at the long-term care and healthcare centers. Somerset County is working with the State Department of Agriculture regarding food shortages and ways we can provide support to farmers. She said a lot of food did not get to the grocery stores due to transportation issues. She also mentioned that Somerset County is surveying municipalities to introduce the concept of the Grab and Go farmers market, possibly utilizing Somerset County parks or municipality locations. She said our long-term care facilities are doing fine. She also said she has been monitoring the lake parking area. She received notification from the County Department of Health regarding a pediatric, multi system inflammatory syndrome potentially associated with COVID-19 affecting children under 21. She feels this is something the Borough needs to be on the alert for. Councilman Jubin encouraged residents to maintain social distancing and to either stay home or walk down their own streets. He also said this disease is progressing. He said we all need to work together to reduce the infection rate. Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten asked what the Council's parameters were in regards to opening the parking lots back up. OEM Coordinator, Carolyn Solon said we are looking for a steady decrease in numbers in order to open up the parking lots. She said she would look at opening the lakes back up when the numbers start to go down and when she feels it is safe for our residents to walk around the lake without possible exposure.

12. Attorney – Attorney Murphy had no report.

13. Clerk – Clerk Michelle DeRocco reported that COVID-19 has affected the production of the spring newsletter. She advised residents that bulky waste pickup will still take place the first two weeks in June, and that the application be available online. She said this year residents will now be able to pay online for the permit using PayPal.

14. Administrator – Mr. Damato said the budget is scheduled for introduction tonight and thanked everyone for the hours spent analyzing each section. He said the Borough is going to be looking into partnering with the Watchung schools for shared services and co-operative purchasing. He feels the borough needs to review the health benefit plan with a view toward modifying the plan or getting into a joint insurance fund like we are with our general liability policy to save some money with health benefits. He said on May 5th there was one new case reported and no new deaths in Watchung. He mentioned sometimes the amount of cases or deaths gets misreported and then reclassified. He said as of today May 7th there were three new COVID positive cases reported and one new death. He mentioned the people at Unemployment said that one million unemployment claims have been received by the State of New Jersey in one month. He also mentioned the New Jersey National Guard has been activated to assist New Jersey's hardest hit long term care facilities. He believes they were activated in regards to the long-term care facilities having a lot of members of their staff become ill and therefore, they don't have the ability to man their facilities as they as they did. He mentioned there is also a bill pending S2392, which

will allow a municipality under certain conditions to delay payment of tax receipts to the County and local Boards of Education. He said this is still pending in the legislature and has a lot of restrictions attached. He said the Raritan Valley Community College testing site is still up and running on a Tuesday and Thursday schedule. He also said Somerset County Library has begun a limited service in the Bridgewater branch only.

Wildlife Committee- Councilman Jubin had no report.

Youth Services – Council President Robinson reported Superintendent Alexis felt the program conducted at the Middle School was a very nice event. She also reported the Pursuit of excellence is not currently running but the Superintendent and the Middle School Principal are discussing ways to have it in the fall.

Planning Board –Councilman Martino had no report. Mayor Balla said the next Planning Board meeting will be held virtually on May 19th.

Board of Education – Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten said he Board of Education presented their budget on Monday, May 4th and the presentation is available on the district website. She encouraged all residents to review it. She also said the budget currently has an estimated increase for the average household at around \$90.00. She announced the next Board of Education meeting will be held virtually on Monday, May 11th. In regard to the Feed to Give fundraiser, the Borough raised over \$5,300.00 for the Somerset County Food Bank. She said it was a very successful event. She asked for the Councils support to hold this same event next month with a tentative date of June 10th. Councilwoman Goodloe also encouraged the Council to support holding this event again next month.

Municipal Alliance – Councilman Black said he is waiting to speak with the Municipal Alliance coordinator, Alicia Carmen but as of right now all events have been suspended as of March 23rd.

Library Advisory Committee – Councilwoman Goodloe said the special April 15th Library Advisory Committee meeting was cancelled due to COVID-19 but they will be holding a virtual meeting on May 20th at 4:00 P.M. She also said the library has a great deal of online resources available for adults and children. She said a reopening plan is being developed but no date has been set at this time.

Councilwoman Goodloe also reported on behalf of Traffic and Beautification. She said they are very pleased the Watchung signs will be installed at six locations at our town's border within the next couple of weeks. She said the signs were meant to embrace our culture and capture the attention of people entering the Borough.

Mayor Balla reported he will be moving the completion of the 911 walkway back to the Administration and Council. He said we have volunteers who are waiting to complete the project. He also said we have businesses that have committed to donating a lot of the supplies. Mayor Balla thanked everyone who stepped up and helping their neighbors, their friends, and a special thank you to everyone who donated food supplies and volunteered their time during this pandemic.

PUBLIC PORTION / AGENDA ITEMS ONLY

No one from the Public desired to be heard.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

The Consent Agenda items, were unanimously adopted following a motion by Council President Robinson and 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 5, April 30, 2020 – Executive Sessions
April 13, 14, 15, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 27, 28, 29 & 30, 2020 – Special Meetings (Virtual)

Acknowledging Receipt of the following Borough Reports:

Environmental Commission Minutes – February 24, March 12, 2020
Building Department Report – April 2020

Acknowledging Receipt of the following Correspondence:

None

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

R1:05/7/20 Purchase Orders Over \$2,000. – EA Medical LLC (Rds. UV-C Disinfection Lamp)
General Code (Clerk – Code Updates)
~~First Battalion Firefighting ((FD- House Gear Dryer)~~
~~Bold Electric (C- Radio Tower Electric)~~

R2: Establish 2020 Sewer Fees

R3: Insertion of Special Item of Revenue /Chapter 159 – Safe and Secure Grant

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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.

Introduction of OR:20/02 entitled: **“ORDINANCE TO EXCEED THE MUNICIPAL BUDGET COST OF LIVING ALLOWANCE AND TO ESTABLISH A CAP BANK WHEN THE COLA IS EQUAL TO OR LESS THAN 2.5 PERCENT (N.J.S.A. 40a:4-45.14)”** Public Hearing to be held on June 4, 2020.

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.”

R4: Introduction of OR:20/02 – CAP Bank Ordinance

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

R5: Introduction of 2020 Municipal Budget

Introduction of OR:20/03 entitled: **“AN ORDINANCE OF THE BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG, COUNTY OF SOMERSET, STATE OF NEW JERSEY, AMENDING CHAPTER XXVIII, ENTITLED, “LAND DEVELOPMENT”, SECTION 28-502, ENTITLED “FENCES AND WALLS” OF THE REVISED GENERAL ORDINANCES OF THE BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG”** Public Hearing to be held on June 4, 2020.

Mayor Balla asked in regards to Ordinance 20/03 section A1c to amend the section to add “or walls.” The amendment would change the section to say fences or walls. Attorney Murphy said the Council has the option to move and second the Introduction of the Ordinance and after they can discuss adding the extra language.

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

R6: Introduction of OR:20/03 – Amend Code / Fences and Walls

Introduction of OR:20/04 entitled: **“AN ORDINANCE OF THE BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG, COUNTY OF SOMERSET, STATE OF NEW JERSEY, AMENDING SECTION 7-34 SPEED LIMITS. AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND, REVISE AND SUPPLEMENT THE BOROUGH CODE OF THE BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG”** Public Hearing to be held on June 4, 2020.

Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten asked to clarify what the consensus was in regards to the agreed upon speed limit. Councilman Jubin said he likes the idea of keeping it at 35 mph and as you approach mid-town dropping it to 25 mph. Councilman Martino said this is a first step to take these five county roads and lower the speed limits through the town, and close to the circle is key. He agrees with the way this Ordinance is written.

Councilwoman Goodloe reiterated the need for lighted crosswalks and signs to help or pedestrians cross safely in the circle.

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

R7: Introduction of OR:20/04 – Amend Code / Speed Limits

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.”

R8: Payment of Bills

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PUBLIC PORTION - GENERAL DISCUSSION

Councilman Black asked someone to please expand on the pediatric syndrome relating to the COVID-19 virus. Councilman Jubin said it is systemic inflammation. He said the viral infection promotes the systemic inflammation of the vasculature in a child. He said it presents differently in different kids but it is a very serious outcome. He also said we don't know if it's going to be an anomaly that affects 0.1% of the pediatric population, or if this is something that is now a rising. He said if you have a child who seems to be showing symptoms that are flu like, but you also notice a rash and itching and the child having difficulty breathing to immediately seek medical attention. He advised parents to make sure their children are wearing masks, wash their hands, not to touch their face and practice social distancing as much as possible.

Councilman Martino said he is aware there is controversy in regards to the Council closing the parking lots around the lakes. He urged everyone in town to email or call Councilmembers to express any of their concerns. He also urged residents to call into the virtual Council meetings so their concerns can be heard. He said the lots around the lakes have been closed for two weeks due to the seriousness of the COVID-19 pandemic. He hopes all the residents understand that the Councils number one priority is to keep everyone safe.

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Council President Robinson 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”

R9: Executive Session: Property Acquisition
~~Personnel – Borough Clerk~~

The Borough Council may take official action on those items discussed in executive session upon completion of the executive session.

Councilwoman Goodloe made a motion to return to public session with a second by Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Robinson, Black, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, Jubin, “aye.”

Upon return to regular session at 9:41 P.M. all Councilmembers previously present virtually, with the exception of Councilman Martino, were in attendance.

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ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Council the meeting was adjourned at 9:43 P.M. to the Call of the Chair. The next Meeting of the Mayor and Council is scheduled to be Virtually held on June 4, 2020 at 7:30 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Regina Angelo, RMC
Deputy Clerk