

BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG
COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
SPECIAL MEETING OF MAY 13, 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 and our POLICE OFFICERS for NATIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT WEEK and for POLICE OFFICERS CANDLELIGHT VIGIL AND THE FAMILY OF OUR OFFICER MATTHEW MELCHIONDA.

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 29 members present virtually.

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PUBLIC PORTION

None

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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 resident Laurie Wood, was able to manufacture two different types of face shields for our first responders. She said they have also received multiple food donations. She said Watchung CERT Team is delivering food for the students on the reduced lunch program. She said they just received information that the New Jersey Human Services has developed a plan to provide children with extra food and assistance benefits. The Department will send the families a financial contribution to offer nutritional support during the time the schools will be closed during the pandemic. She mentioned both long-term care facilities received a large PPE shipment. She said the Somerville YMCA and the Community Food Bank of New Jersey are distributing emergency food boxes on Fridays from 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM. She mentioned each box will consist of five days of shelf stable food items for one person. She also said this information is available on the Borough Facebook page. Ms. Solon updated everyone on the inflammatory disease linked to children. She said so far 13 children have been diagnosed in New Jersey with this inflammatory disease but thankfully all 13 have survived. She said when the children arrived at the hospital some of them were so sick due to extremely low blood pressure, their organs started to shut down. She mentioned this disease effecting children is locally around us, and it's very important for our children we take extra precautions.

Administrator Damato reported as per our Health Officer Kevin Sumner, from May 8th to May 12th there were no new cases and no new deaths. He said unfortunately today there was one new death reported for Watchung. He said in regards to the County conference call Governor Murphy announced they will be hiring contact tracers. He said if anyone is interested they can go to the Department of Health website and sign up or apply for a position. He said the County and the State are expecting to expand asymptomatic testing. He said the goal is to increase the overall testing to 20,000 in May and 25,000 in June. Governor Murphy signed Executive Order 142 today which opened up a lot of construction activity but with conditions attached. He encouraged anyone engaged in construction to read this 40 page Executive Order. He explained some conditions of Executive Order 142. He said in addition other non-essential retail business are permitted to open on Monday however customers still have to have contactless transactions. He mentioned shopping malls are open but for curbside pickup only. He mentioned Raritan Valley Community College test site will continue testing next week on a Tuesday, Thursday schedule. He reminded everyone Shred Day is scheduled for Saturday, May 16th at the Somerset County Public Works Garage in Bridgewater. Administrator Damato stated there are a couple of bills pending in the legislature that deal with the temporary financing and permanent financing of COVID-19 relief bonds. He doesn't believe we will see that legislation until sometime in July or August. He said the Borough will be placing additional signs around the lake tomorrow warning people to stay six feet apart, to wear a mask and to walk in one direction.

Mayor Balla asked if we know the number of construction projects or properties in the Borough that will be affected by this new Executive Order. Administrator Damato said he will have to check with the Construction Office on that number.

Councilwoman Goodloe asked if we should consider re-opening one of the parking lots around the lake at this time. Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten agrees and questioned when we could have another conversation about re-opening the lots. OEM Director, Carolyn Solon said she would like to see more of a consistent downward trend before she considers reopening the lots. Her major concern is when she drives by the lakes and see people walking around without wearing masks. She said she would like to see what the situation looks like in the next week or two and then discuss opening the lakes. She said her concern is if they open the lots too soon they would greatly increase the exposure to residents which is why she recommended re-evaluating the situation in a week or two.

Councilman Jubin thanked everyone in town for their cooperation during this pandemic. He said he was in favor of opening things back up until the Pediatric Inflammatory System numbers started increasing. He feels as a result of those increasing numbers it is the safest for our children that the parks stay closed at this time. He said there's a strain of the virus that came in from Europe and a strain from China so we know this virus is changing over time. He asked everyone to have a little patience in regards to opening things back up until we better understand this in more detail. Councilwoman Goodloe clarified she was only suggesting we re-open the Mobus Field parking lot and defiantly continue to keep all the parks and playground equipment closed.

Councilman Martino questioned the date specified in June the parents will get money from the State for the children enrolled in the reduced lunch program. Carolyn Solon advised the lunch deliveries will stop June 18th. Councilman Martino asked the amount of reduced lunches the CERT team are delivering. Ms. Solon said the CERT team is delivering to one North Plainfield family.

Councilman Martino asked Administrator Damato if the amount of people that can gather changed with the Governors new Executive Order. Administrator Damato said as of right now the number of people that can gather are still limited to ten. Councilman Martino also mentioned he will follow in the direction our OEM Coordinator recommends in terms of opening the parking lots around the lake back up.

Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten thanked the Irving family along with generous donations from the Watchung Republican Committee and the Watchung Democratic Committee in regards to the beautiful rainbow balloon arch now up at Borough Hall. Councilman Martino said as discussed in the past any signs that go on public property need to be approved by the Mayor and Council first. He believes the Council especially needs to follow Ordinances to set the example by approving these locations ahead of time.

Council President Robinson agrees we should follow the advice from our OEM Coordinator in regards to the parking lots re-opening.

Mayor Balla asked everyone on the Council going forward to please follow the Ordinances we have laid out.

RESOLUTIONS

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

R1:05/13/20 SP Executive Session: Personnel / Candidate Interviews – 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, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, Jubin, Martino “aye”

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PUBLIC PORTION

None

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ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Council the meeting was adjourned at 9:15 P.M. to the Call of the Chair. The next Special Meeting of the Mayor and Council is scheduled to be Virtually held on May 18, 2020 at 7:30 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Regina Angelo, RMC
Deputy Clerk