

BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG

COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

SPECIAL MEETING OF MAY 20, 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, CFO Bill Hance, and OEM Coordinator Carolyn Solon

There were 26 members present virtually.

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PUBLIC PORTION

None

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DISCUSSION / COVID-19 UPDATES

Mayor Balla asked Administrator Damato to give an update regarding his County conference calls.

Administrator Damato said that, as reported from the Middle-Brook Regional Health Commission, between May 15th to today there have been no new COVID cases and no new deaths. He said that with regard to the Somerset County Conference Calls, the New Jersey Department of Health is trying to ramp up the testing to meet the State goals. He mentioned that new testing procedures have been implemented in jails, correctional facilities, long term care facilities and in State hospitals. He said Doctor Reddy indicated the data trends show decreases in the total number of cases and deaths, and she is very optimistic about the months of May and June. However, our OEM is planning for the resurgence of COVID and convergence of COVID influenza and hurricane season.

Mr. Damato mentioned on May 30th there will be a household hazardous waste day scheduled in Somerset County at the South County garage in Hillsborough.

Mr. Damato further stated that the State has been asked on numerous occasions if they were going to put out guidance on how to open the camps, or whether or not to open the camps or pools. He said we are still awaiting guidance on that topic. He also said Somerset County tennis courts are still closed because they are unable to fully staff and disinfect the areas involved. He said the Assembly acted on bill 3969 which was signed into law this week extending the certification renewal period for CFOS, Public Works Managers, QPA's, and Municipal Clerks. He said the bill also established a procedure to provide notice to taxpayers of the extension of grace periods by Municipalities. This Bill also allows the County to waive interest charges to Municipalities for the delay of scheduled tax payments. He mentioned the County CFO gave a brief explanation of the County budget. He explained that the County budget increased by 2.4% in the tax levy and the County tax levy increased by 2.7%.

OEM Director, Carolyn Solon said in the past week, there were no PPE or food donations, so she requested that food pick up trips be reduced to one time a day. She said she received a media release from the Governor's office advising that seven Wal-Mart stores across New Jersey will open for COVID drive through testing sites, beginning on May 22nd. These sites will test adults who meet the CDC, State and local criteria on who should be tested, including first responders, healthcare providers, others with symptoms, and those in the high risk groups without symptoms. She said testing will take place on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 7AM to 9PM weather permitting in the parking lot.

Ms. Solon also said looking at the Governors' stage plans for restoring the economic health through public health, we are just entering stage one. She said Under Stage two, the guidance is summer school and summer camps may have limited in person engagement if health conditions improve. She mentioned under stage three that day and summer camps will likely open for all with safeguards and modifications. She also said there is no guidance yet when we will enter into stage two.

Ms. Solon also discussed the anticipated plan for opening the parking lots as per Executive Order 133 Directives that the Borough of Watchung has to follow. She said Mobus Field parking lot will be open up at 50 percent capacity which would ensure social distancing between each car. Stirling Road parking lot would open at a 50% capacity. She said the Watchung Exempt Hall and Texier House parking lots

will remain closed for parking. Best Lake parking lot would be reduced to one lane of parking along the perimeter, so that we can restrict parking at 50 percent. Ms. Solon also said all bathrooms at Mobus Field will remain closed. She also said the tennis courts will open with restrictions such as no playing of doubles. She also stated the picnicking area and playgrounds are to remain closed as per the Executive Order.

Mayor Balla asked the closest Wal-Mart to Watchung that's going to have the drive through COVID testing? Ms. Solon said the closest will be the Wal-Mart on Route 31 in Flemington.

Councilwoman Goodloe reminded everyone the Cupa Café parking lot is off limits to park in and asked residents to please abide by all Borough restrictions. Councilman Jubin said it's time to open up the lots for our residents based on the trend of numbers. He said Warren Township is also opening up their tennis courts and has a list of suggestions and requirements for residents as well. He reminded residents we are not out of this pandemic yet and encouraged everyone to still continue to take measures to protect themselves. He also advised residents to still practice social distancing and good hygiene. He feels for our own safety, and more importantly other than those who are in high risk groups, for those who lost the battle in our prayers, it's up to us to work together.

Councilwoman Goodloe commended Councilman Martino on his great idea to put flowers up at the Texier House, the Police Department and also the War Memorial. She asked if we're agreeing to do that if we could we also put flowers up at the Rescue Squad to honor our First Responders and all the hard work that they've been doing throughout this pandemic.

RESOLUTIONS

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”

R1:05/20/20 SP Certify that Permission has Been Granted to Apply for the Project entitled
New Jersey Library Construction Bond Act

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

R2:05/20/20 SP Testimonial Resolution / Michelle DeRocco, Borough Clerk

Council President Robinson thanked Ms. DeRocco for always being kind and caring towards her. She mentioned Michelle was a friendly face at Council meetings even before January. She advised her to enjoy retirement and spending lots of time with her grand-daughter.

Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten thanked Ms. DeRocco for being a delight to work with for the last couple of years. She said she has a tremendous amount of love and knowledge for Watchung and she will be truly missed.

Councilwoman Goodloe said we wish you nothing but the best in your retirement and we hope you're going to be spending lots and lots of time with your kids and your grandchild Violet.

Councilman Jubin thanked Ms. DeRocco for always showing thoughtfulness and wished her the best of luck in her retirement.

Councilman Martino thanked Ms. DeRocco for all of her service and wished her happiness and prosperity.

Mayor Balla thanked Ms. DeRocco for all of her guidance especially in regards to his new role as Mayor. He said it was a real blessing for him to have her to provide that guidance and direction. He said her work ethic goes beyond what she does at Borough Hall and it's always in a positive way. He also said her intentions were always to help every elected official look and do their best and do what was best for the Borough.

Administrator Damato thanked Ms. DeRocco for always being a team player and her non-stop work ethic.

Ms. DeRocco thanked everyone for their kind and wonderful comments. She said after working for the Borough of Watchung for the last 17 years her departure is bittersweet. She said she has grown to love this town and has put her heart and soul into everything she has done for Watchung.

Mayor Balla asked Attorney Murphy if they need to do a resolution making Deputy Clerk Regina Angelo the Acting Borough Clerk until the new Clerk begins.

Attorney Murphy said the Deputy Clerk becomes the acting Municipal Clerk as operation of law in the case of a vacancy and the Council does not need to pass a resolution.

PUBLIC PORTION

None

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Council the meeting was adjourned at 8:12 P.M. to the Call of the Chair. The next Regularly scheduled 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