

**BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG  
COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES**

**OCTOBER 1, 2020 - 7:30 P.M.**

*[THIS MEETING WAS HELD IN PERSON AND VIRTUALLY]*

**MAYOR'S OPENING STATEMENT:** Mayor Keith S. Balla called the meeting to order at 7:31 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 the Annual Meeting Notice to the Courier News, Echoes Sentinel, and Star Ledger, and posted at Borough Hall and the Borough's website.

**SALUTE TO THE FLAG and a MOMENT OF SILENCE FOR OUR SERVICE MEN AND WOMEN, SERVING HOME AND ABROAD.**

**ROLL CALL:**

Robinson [ P ] Black [ P ] Goodloe [ P ] Eisenberg Knegten [P ] Jubin [ P ] Martino [ P ]

Mayor Balla read resolution honoring Chief Cina adopted at the last council meeting. Chief Cina was present and thanked the Mayor and Council. All Council Members took turns and spoke highly of Chief Cina's contributions to the Borough.

Council President Robinson motioned to change order of business to bring forth R5, second by Council Member Eisenberg Knegten. Upon Roll Call the votes were as follows: Robinson, Black, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, Jubin, Martino "aye."

Council President Robinson motioned to adopt resolution R5, second by Council Member Black. Upon Roll Call the votes were as follows: Robinson, Black, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, Jubin, Martino "aye."

R5:           Appointing Acting Police Chief

Oath of Office was administered to Acting Police Chief William Kelly

Mayor Balla made a statement on inquiries he received both in favor and against the proposed resolution limiting the use of personal electronic devices during council meetings. Mayor Balla further clarified the intent of the proposed resolution, to limit the use of personal electronic communication devices of Council Members during council meetings and executive sessions. At the next meeting, Council Members will be provided Borough issued laptops with will have all agenda items and supporting documents. This will allow them to take notes on the laptop and take a flash drive with them, Mayor Balla explained that this would be done to offer a greater level of transparency as Council Members would not be using their personal devices to communicate. At the request of Council Member Jubin, the proposed resolution was pulled pending the outcome of the investigation of the possible ethics breach.

**REPORT OF AD HOC COMMITTEE**

Council President Robinson reported on webinar opportunities regarding diversity and inclusiveness that this committee took advantage of and expressed some challenges the Census Bureaus is having that would limit information on this same subject. She also reported that the voluminous police reports received are still being reviewed and plans are forthcoming to schedule to meet with the Board of Education.

**REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES:**

1. Administration & Finance – Council Member Jubin reported on the discussions of the last A&F meeting in which Police personnel came on to discuss their future vehicle needs. Council Member Martino made some inquiries on the last special budget workshop held and on camera surveillance issues on borough facilities.
2. Police – no update provided; Council Member Martino made several inquiries on the security surveillance procedures of borough facilities, Council President Robinson asked that he provide a list so that it may be brought up during the Police Departments budget review.
3. Public Works / Buildings and Grounds – Council Member Black reported that the Department of DPW would be dressed in pink to show support and raise awareness of breast cancer; shirts were purchased for all staff members. He also reported on the usually activities done in addition to being responsible for covid related sanitization procedures on borough facilities. Council Member reviewed the salt inventory and the various measures taking place to prepare for the fall/winter seasonal changes. He also thanked Council Member Martino for his assistance with the drainage at the library.

Council Member Martino inquired on switching over to LED lights at the Library parking lot, he asked that someone reach out to public utilities for possible assistance with funding this expense. He also mentioned that the rain garden's location may be an issue, it might serve best if it can be moved

in order to properly maintain it; he also inquired on the Green Brook Flood Control Commission and obtaining assistance from them. Council President advised she would look into as that would benefit with the borough's sustainability certification.

Council Member Jubin inquired on acquiring additional deer signs to be placed in a more visible place. He asked for a borough map that identified the hot spots of deer sightings and touched upon the upcoming FEMA grant for flood control and flood mitigation.

Council Member Black explained that he was a representative of the Green Brook Flood Control Commission years ago and that a study was done to analyze where the water flowed and ended up, because they originally wanted to develop a detention basin. The study conducted by the Army Corps of Engineers, concluded that the majority of water that enters in Plainfield, North Plainfield area is in the upper basin and Watchung's lakes were not determined to be a part of the development occurring at that time.

4. Public Affairs: Council Member Goodloe asked for Council Member's input on developing safe practices for Halloween activities in combination with Board of Health and Office of Emergency Management.

Environmental – Council President Robinson reported on the commission's activities and discussions of the spotted lanternfly which was spotted on Johnson Drive, reviewed the commissions tree report and gave an overview of discussions on the tree bank ordinance; she also went over their suggestions on their review of the master plan and touched upon the Stormwater Management ordinance that will have to be adopted by March 2021. President Robinson also reported on the State passing the plastic bag ban and informed that it would go in effect in about 18 months.

Recreation – Council Member Black reported on the specifics of the pumpkin decorating contest, which is expected to be held on October 26<sup>th</sup> from 9-2pm at Mobus Field. Council Member Martino motion to authorize this event, second by Council Member Eisenberg Knegten. Upon roll call, all members voted unanimously in favor of this event.

Historical – no report provided

Board of Health – no report provided

5. Fire – Council Member Martino thanked the Mayor and Council for attending the Fire workshop on Saturday, September 26<sup>th</sup> and reminded everyone that October is National Fire Safety month. He also inquired about outstanding fire prevention fees and the possibility of waiving back fees for Watchung's business given the current pandemic. Councilman Martino brought up Chapter 27, residential property registration and made several inquiries and suggestions on the enforcement of this chapter. He suggested several revisions and suggested they be forwarded to the Laws & Ordinances committee.

Council Member Martino addressed the Council and made a statement about the allegations heard at the previous council meeting aimed at him and hateful statements that later on targeted his family and aimed at hurting his career. He stated that the recently established WIDER Committee was the perfect body to investigate these accusations against him and unearth the truth; he also mentioned that to avoid any potential conflict, he would be stepping down from the committee.

Council Member Black urged Council Member Martino to reconsider his decision on stepping down and Council President Robinson suggested that Council Member Martino recuse himself from the Committee if/when they reviewed any information on this incident. Council Member Jubin spoke on this matter and offered similar comments to Council Member Martino, who decided to remain on the Committee for the time being.

6. Laws/Ordinances – Council Member Eisenberg Knegten reported that they have an upcoming meeting and will be prepared to take on the items discussed tonight and to begin conversations about making the WIDER Committee a permanent committee.

## **REPORTS – OTHER:**

7. Engineer – Bruce Koch provided a written status report to the Mayor and Council and advised that Carrar Drive was being handled by the borough directly and that he would soon send out a memo on stormwater ordinance.
8. Police Chief – Acting Chief William Kelly was physically present and reported that the County would begin their striping project and begin just north of Hillcrest Road and he has also been in touch with retail establishments to review any Black Friday events.
9. Fire Department – Administrator James Damato advised that Chief DeSandolo was at the motor vehicle crash and Mr. Damato provided a status report on his behalf. During September there were 15

calls, 8 alarm activations, 2 gas leaks, 1 elevator emergency, 1 water leak, and 3 calls for mutual aid. 6 new members have been sworn in.

- 10. Rescue Squad – no report
- 11. Emergency Management – OEM Coordinator Carolyn Solon reported that a large food donation was received and any food items that would be expiring in the next couple of months was donated to a North Plainfield church running a food bank. She also reported that she has been in communication with Rutgers regarding the rain garden repairs and they will be reviewing the installation and possible repairs with their management team. Today FEMA released guidelines on reimbursements regarding covid expenses and shortages on masks and she reported that the State also released a covid exposure notification app. Lastly, Coordinator Solon advised that she reviewed the covid plan for the borough’s pumpkin decorating activity, however changes to its covid plan would be required and she will be working with the Board of Health and Recreation Coordinator Linda Monetti to finalize those changes.
- 12. Attorney – Borough Attorney Denis Murphy was physically present and provided a status report on the affordable housing litigation, he mentioned that he along with the property owners of the Karka Investment (Bonnie Burns property) and the Affordable Housing Center appeared before the Judge who wanted to know what the status of the settlement was. In line with this, he informed that the Midpoint Review report was published to the borough’s website. Attorney Murphy also reported on a lawsuit, resulting from a prior dismissal, in which the borough’s planning board is named.  
  
Attorney Murphy also reported that the Local Finance Board released a recent notice #2020-21 providing further guidance on municipalities holding virtual meetings. He reviewed these changes with Council and informed Council that as a result, a resolution adopting standard procedures would be necessary. He mentioned he will be meeting with Attorney’s from the Zoning and Planning Boards to review these requirements and so that an appropriate resolution can be adopted.
- 13. Clerk – Clerk Edith Gil informed that the County has advised that by October 10<sup>th</sup> every voter should have received their ballots via mail, anyone that has not is encouraged to reach out to the County Clerk’s office. The Clerk reported on the various methods in which the ballots could be returned to the County.
- 14. Administrator – Administrator James Damato provided an update on covid cases, reminded everyone on the importance of returning census data because a lot of grant formulas are tied with that data.
- 15. Wildlife Committee – the next meeting is schedule for October 5<sup>th</sup> and thanked the Administrator and Council Member Martino on the data gathered regarding deer hunt.
- 16. Youth Services – no report
- 17. Planning Board – no report
- 18. Board of Education – Council Member Eisenberg Knegten reported on the Board of Educations last meeting, they sworn in a new member and accepted the resignation of another member. Both seats would be filled until the end of 2020 and discussions took place on the possibility of a referendum regarding their capital budget. The BOE Administration is looking into the possibility of alternating cohorts days versus a full remote schedule.
- 19. Municipal Alliance – no report
- 20. Library Advisory Board – Council Member Goodloe thanked the Department of Public Works for their assistance and reported on new planters coming soon. Council Member Martino inquired on getting the library grant documents on the Borough’s website, Administrator Damato mentioned he would have Mr. Hance confirm that a link was available as the documents were too large.

**PUBLIC PORTION / AGENDA ITEMS ONLY**

- 1. Ray Barratt, Valley Road, appeared in person and thanked the Council for seeing the Borough through this pandemic and informed the public that the debates for the candidates will be held and broadcasted next week.

No one else appearing wishing to be heard

**DISCUSSION**

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

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## NEW BUSINESS

**CONSENT AGENDA:** Motion to accept the items below by Council President Robinson, second by Council Member Goodloe. Upon roll call the votes were as follows: Robinson, Black, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, Jubin, Martino “aye.”

Acknowledging Receipt of the following Borough Reports:

Library Advisory Minutes	May 20, 2020
Environmental Commission	August 24, 2020
Planning Board Minutes	August 18, 2020

Acknowledging Receipt of the following Correspondence:

- #30- Township of Warren 9/18/20 OR:20-21 Notice of Adoption of Ordinance OR:20-21, Amended and Restated Redevelopment Plan Regarding the Former King Georges Inn Property c: M & C, JD
- #31- Somerset County 9/24/20 Resolution Authorizing Submission of the Revised Septic Management Plan c: M & C, JD, Pl. Board
- #32- Borough of North Plainfield 9/28/20 Notice of Introduction of Ordinance; #2020-10 Re: Amend, Revise, Supplement Chapter 22 Entitled “Water Run-Off Control” Public Hearing to be held on November 17, 2020 c: M & C, JD, Pl. Board
- #33- Borough of Beach Haven 9/28/20 R#149-20 Resolution Supporting High Speed Internet Accessibility, Approved July 30, 2020 c: M & C, JD
- #34- Plainfield Area Regional Sewerage Authority 9/28/20 Regular Meeting Minutes (Virtual) 9/3/2020

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**CONSENT AGENDA RESOLUTIONS:** Motion to adopt the items below by Council President Robinson, second by Council Member Goodloe. Upon roll call the votes were as follows: Robinson, Black, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, Jubin, Martino “aye.”

R1: Authorizing Tax Collector to waive delinquent interest on sewer bills / 352 Stirling Road and 205 Washington Rock Road

R2: Authorizing Tax Collector to waive 2020 Sewer Usage Fee / 64 Lakeview Avenue

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## NON-CONSENT AGENDA ITEMS:

Council Member Jubin motioned to introduce the item below, second by Council President Robinson to adopt under first reading. Upon roll call the votes were as follows: Robinson, Black, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, Jubin, Martino “aye.”

Council Member Martino inquired on the Custodian title that was not listed on this ordinance and on the salary steps listed for the employees of the Department of Public Works. Administrator Damato explained the step process. Council Member Eisenberg Knegten also pointed out the current minimum wage and suggested the ordinance be updated to be in compliance.

Introduction of Ordinance OR:20/05 entitled "**AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND THE CODE OF THE BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG CH. 5-12-12.76 ET. SEQ., THEREOF AND TO FIX AND DETERMINE MINIMUM AND MAXIMUM SALARIES AND COMPENSATION TO BE PAID TO CERTAIN EMPLOYEES.**" Public Hearing October 15, 2020.

R3: Introduction of Ordinance OR:20/05 – Amend Code/ Salary Ordinance

Council Member Black motioned to adopt the item below, second by Council President Robinson to adopt under first reading. Upon roll call the votes were as follows: Robinson, Black, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, Jubin, Martino “aye.”

R4: Appointing Foreman to the Department of Public Works

Council Member Black motioned to adopt the item below, second by Council President Robinson to adopt under first reading. Upon roll call the votes were as follows: Robinson, Black, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, Jubin, Martino “aye.”

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### **PUBLIC PORTION - GENERAL DISCUSSION**

- 1) Bianca Martino, Sunbright Road, would like to make a request to see if there is a way to connect the Best Lake sidewalk with the Watchung Circle sidewalk

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### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Council, the meeting was adjourned at 9:48 PM to the Call of the Chair. The next Regular meeting of the Mayor and Council to be held on October 15, 2020 at 7:30 P.M., preceded by a Special Meeting at 6 P.M.