

**BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG  
MAYOR & COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES**

**SEPTEMBER 22, 2021 | 7:30 P.M.**

***[THIS MEETING WAS HELD VIRTUALLY FOR ALL PARTIES]***

**MAYOR'S OPENING STATEMENT:** Mayor Keith S. Balla called the meeting to order at 7:31 P.M. and stated the following “ *In order to comply with all NJ Executive Orders and to protect members of the public, this meeting will be held virtually for all parties. Public Comments will be accepted through zoom or by email to the Borough Clerk. For those joining through Zoom, please note that upon arrival you are automatically muted. If you wish to speak during the public portion, you will need to click on the “raise your hand” feature. For those joining us through the conference call line, you will need to press \*6 to unmute yourself. 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 Revised Annual Meeting Notice to the Courier News, Echoes Sentinel, the Star Ledger, posted at Borough Hall and on 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 ] Goodloe [Absent] Eisenberg Knegten [P] Jubin [P] Martino [P] Hayeck [P]

**PROCLAMATION**

Mayor Balla read the following proclamation: Fire Prevention Week

Mayor Balla read the following proclamation: World Ostomy Day

Mayor Balla called upon Attorney Denis Murphy to provide a summary of the history of the Bonnie Burn project as the vote for this project is coming before the Planning Board at their next regular meeting.

Attorney Murphy explained the procedural history this application has gone through from 2015 to present.

Mayor Balla advised everyone the vote for this site plan will occur at the October 19<sup>th</sup> Planning Board meeting. Councilmember Martino asked for clarification of the builder’s remedy and Attorney Murphy proceeded to explain this.

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**PUBLIC PORTION / AGENDA ITEMS ONLY**

- 1) Debra Joren, asked Councilmember Martino to provide his opinion on the Bonnie Burn development project. Attorney Murphy recommended Councilmember Martino not make any comments at this time as he is a member of the Planning Board.

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**DISCUSSION**

- ❖ Unauthorized Vehicle Barrier(s)

Mayor Balla provided background on this subject. There is a proposal to place barriers in certain areas around the Borough. He said the first location would be at the drive at Best Lake towards the bridge off of Valley Road, second location would be at the bridge to library off the parking lot and lastly one at Mobus

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field. He advised these barriers are generally for the public safety of pedestrians in the area and to keep unauthorized vehicles out of these driveways. Council Members expressed their concerns on this subject.

Administrator Damato provided comments on the cost and installation of the barriers. He feels the Council should come up with a decision that is both aesthetically appealing and practical. Administrator Damato asked Borough Engineer, James Hutzelmann, to comment on the comparison of quotes for equipment and on the installation of bollards versus gates. Mr. Hutzelmann spoke on the pros and cons of having bollards or gates in the areas mentioned. Council Members discussed this item further and questioned the diameter and size of proposed bollards and the concern of certain locations being flood areas.

❖ IDA Storm Damage Follow Up

Mayor Balla asked Administrator Damato to provide an update on IDA storm damage. Mr. Damato discussed the damaged locations caused by the storm and how the Borough plans to go forward in restoring these areas. He mentioned the insurance company will soon issue a report documenting the damages. He advised residents that until this report is received the playground is out of use. He commented he will ask GAME TIME to submit two proposals for comparison. Administrator Damato also reported that the Borough will be submitting reimbursement claims through FEMA once all the damage costs are fully assessed.

Councilmember Jubin asked if the solid surface will be ADA compliant in reference to the quotes for Mobus Field. Administrator Damato discussed the issues with ADA compliancy at the playground. Mr. Hutzelmann expanded on the storm cleanup for residents. Administrator Damato discussed the damage and cleanup process going forward to the Texier House and Elsinore Drive. He strongly recommended the Council approve R11 on tonight's agenda to authorize the emergency contract for the Elsinore Drive culvert repairs.

Councilmember Martino asked if all the other culverts and bridges in town were evaluated. Mr. Hutzelmann commented that numerous locations were inspected and only a couple of locations need immediate repairs. Councilman Martino also questioned if the two pump stations in the Borough have been inspected. Mr. Hutzelmann replied he had not inspected them yet but would do so as soon as possible.

Councilmember Eisenberg Knegten commented that the Borough needs to have a better plan in place for resident debris pick up for future storm. She also gave her full support relating to Mr. Bisignano's generous offer.

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**UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

Motion by Jubin to open public hearing on below item/ Second by Robinson

RC: Robinson [Y] Goodloe [Absent] Eisenberg Knegten [Y] Jubin [Y] Martino [Y] Hayeck [Y]

Public Hearing of Ordinance **OR: 21/09** entitled **“AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND THE CODE OF THE BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG CH. 5-12.76 ET SEQ., THEREOF, AN TO FIX AND DETERMINE MINIMUM AND MAXIMUM SALARIES AND COMPENSATION TO BE PAID TO CERTAIN EMPLOYEES.”**

R1: Adoption of Ordinance **OR:21/09** – To Fix and Determine Min/Max Salaries

No one appearing

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Motion by Jubin to close public hearing and adopt / Second by Martino  
RC: Robinson [Y] Goodloe [Absent] Eisenberg Knegten [Y] Jubin [Y] Martino [Y] Hayeck [Y]

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**NEW BUSINESS**

Approval of the following Council Meeting Minutes:

Regular Meeting Minutes	July 15, 2021
Special Meeting Minutes	August 5, 2021
Regular Meeting Minutes	August 12, 2021

Acknowledging Receipt of the following Borough Reports:

Board of Adjustment Minutes	August 12, 2021
Building Department Monthly Report	August 2021
Engineer Capital Status Report	September 2021
Environmental Commission Minutes	June 30, 2021
Library Advisory Board Minutes	July 21, 2021

Motion to Adopt the above by Robinson/ second by Eisenberg Knegten  
RC: Robinson [Y] Goodloe [Absent] Eisenberg Knegten [Y] Jubin [Y] Martino [Y] Hayeck [Y]

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**CONSENT AGENDA RESOLUTIONS:** The resolutions listed below were adopted by one motion.

- R2: Authorizing Purchase Orders over \$2,000 – Pinto Brothers (*PW- 2021 bulk pick-up*)  
Communications Specialists (*PD- yearly maintenance contract*)  
Cooper Technology Group (*ballot drop box camera system*)  
Emergency Reporting (*FD-recurring subscription fee*)  
J. Guerriero, LLC (*excavation for ballot box*)  
Always Safe Sidewalks (*sidewalk repairs*)  
Westchester Environmental (*asbestos survey on ness property*)
- R3: Authorizing Refund for Construction Permit / 180 Stirling Road (Permit #05-02333)
- R4: Authorizing Participation with the State in the SFY-21 Body-Worn Camera Grant Program
- R5: Authorizing Budget Insertion of Special Items of Revenue (Ch. 159) - Body-Worn Camera Grant
- R6: Authorizing Refund Pursuant to Stipulation of Settlement – PSE&G Tax Dept. T6B v Watchung Borough, Docket No. 012795-2018
- R7: Authorizing Bill List

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Motion by Robinson to Adopt\* above / Second by Jubin

RC: Robinson [Y] Goodloe [Absent] Eisenberg Knegten [Y] Jubin [Y] Martino [Y] Hayeck [Y]

\*For R2, CM Hayeck [Abstain]

Councilmember Jubin requested clarification on the dates for the Pinto Brothers purchase order. Councilmember Martino also inquired on the purchase order for sidewalks repairs. Administrator Damato explained the repair process relating to the purchase order for safer sidewalks around the Borough.

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**NON-CONSENT AGENDA ITEMS:**

R8: Authorizing Contract for Professional Appraisal Inspections & Related Services for 2022 Borough Reassessment – Appraisal Systems, Inc.

Motion to Adopt by Jubin/ second by Robinson

RC: Robinson [Y] Goodloe [Absent] Eisenberg Knegten [Y] Jubin [Y] Martino [Y] Hayeck [Y]

Councilmember Eisenberg Knegten inquired on past services; Councilmember Jubin explained that the former vendor was no longer in service and that this vendor was actually less than prior vendors, per the Tax Assessor.

R9: Authorizing Extension of Temporary Outdoor Dining

Motion to Adopt by Eisenberg Knegten/ second by Robinson

RC: Robinson [Y] Goodloe [Absent] Eisenberg Knegten [Y] Jubin [Y] Martino [Y] Hayeck [Y]

R11: Authorizing Emergency Contract Procedures for Elsinore Culvert Repair and Replacement Project

Motion to Adopt by Eisenberg Knegten / second by Jubin

RC: Robinson [Y] Goodloe [Absent] Eisenberg Knegten [Y] Jubin [Y] Martino [Y] Hayeck [Y]

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**PUBLIC PORTION - GENERAL DISCUSSION**

- 1) Christine Ead, Washington Drive, spoke on allowing local children to fish again at Best Lake. Administrator Damato advised this request was submitted by Mr. B to extend the permit for his fishing season. Mr. Damato stated this request could move forward as there were no apparent major safety concerns fishing in certain areas of Best Lake. Mr. Damato suggested Mr. B reach out to our Recreation Coordinator Mrs. Monetti again to reactivate this request.

Councilmember Martino asked if our lakes have been tested by the Board of Health. Councilmember Jubin said according to our BOH the lakes have never been inspected. He also stated if this is something the Mayor and Council feel the Board of Health should monitor then they would need proper training in order to conduct those tests. Councilmember Martino feels it's important to confirm our children are not fishing in contaminated waters first. Councilmember Jubin agrees and advised if the Council is in agreement, he would be glad to discuss this further at the next Board of Health meeting.

- 2) Catherine Leigh, Guinard Drive, expressed her disappointment in the way the Borough handled communication with residents after storm IDA. She also expressed concerned for a

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Councilmember and his family's safety in regards to fixing up the Texier House after the storm. She questioned why a better plan was not yet in place.

- 3) Frank Bisignano, Jared Court, stated that as a result of Phillips Field not being accessible, the towns' youth baseball teams have had to travel to Warren for practice. He also mentioned there has been no cleanup done at the library and he asked the Council to commit to a better plan for future storms.

Mayor Balla agreed to make the post storm IDA meeting discussion with Emergency Services and the Public Works department available for public inspection. Mr. Bisignano feels a more strategic plan is necessary for how we will defend the Borough against future storms.

Councilmember Martino asked for clarification on the status of the Phillips Field Bridge. Mr. Damato responded that after evaluation it was determined the supports on the bridge were severely damaged in the storm. He advised the report was provided for discussion to the Superintendent of schools and school Business Administrator. He said a plan needs to be put in place in partnership with the Board of Education in order to reopen the Phillips Field Bridge due to bridges specific restrictions.

Councilmember Martino requested the report be available on the Boroughs website. Administrator Damato deferred to Attorney Murphy for guidance on this request.

- 4) Bruce Ruck, Lakeview Avenue, mentioned that as a result of storm IDA the exit off Route 78 for Diamond Hill Road is now closed and causing excessive amounts of traffic backup on exit 40 and exit 41. He feels this exit closure is very dangerous as it is causing cars to drive aggressively and could possibly cause a fatal accident. He requested the potential danger of this exit closure be relayed to the State. Mr. Ruck also commented on the lake monitoring and advised the Board of Health has never been asked to do anything in the past in terms of a lake after a storm. He feels if there is a concern with fishing at the lake after a storm it should be an all or none concern.
- 5) Peter Hockmeyer, Stirling Road, stated it has been three years since the town was promised a new or fixed library. He asked for an explanation of the cost analysis, expenditures already endured and the plan moving forward for the new or existing library in Watchung.
- 6) Marianne Candiloros, Nottingham Drive, asked Councilmember Eisenberg Knegten to repeat her earlier statement in support of Mr. Bisignanos request to add additional sidewalks in Watchung.
- 7) Debra Joren, Stirling Road, asked for clarification from Borough Engineer on an ongoing shared service agreement with the Borough of Warren for the catch basin cleaner.

Mr. Hutzelmann advised that he would look into the details of this inter-local agreement. Mrs. Joren also asked if we reached out to Warren to help the residents with this process. Councilmember Martino replied that the machine has been out of service for about 5 years but feels we should contact the Warren Township Administrator to further investigate the details of this agreement.

- 8) Bradford Leigh, Guinard Drive, stated his disappointing in Council not responding to resident concerns. He also commented on the conditions of the library such as the roof leaking and water damage reported by the librarian. Mr. Leigh questioned if anyone has followed up on these issues.

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Administrator Damato responded the Department of Public Works has already investigated some of these concerns.

- 9) Christine Ead, Washington Drive, asked if the Department of Public Works will have the opportunity to receive overtime in order to assist with the cleanup throughout the Borough. Administrator Damato explained the different claims being made through insurance vs FEMA. He also advised that the overtime for the Department of Public Works and the Police Department would all be submitted to FEMA for reimbursement. Ms. Ead suggested the borough take on additional part time employees to help clean up some of the dangerous areas in town. Mr. Hutzelmann responded the department is addressing the more problematic areas first. Administrator Damato inquired with Mr. Hutzelmann if he believes the Department has an adequate amount of manpower to perform daily tasks as well as emergency storm clean up.

Mr. Hutzelmann requested he have more time to evaluate this matter before properly responding.

- 10) Catherine Leigh, Guinard Drive, requested the large number of rocks at the corner of Spencer Lane be cleared for safety reasons.

Councilmember Jubin questioned the protocol process for residents when they need to report critical safety issues. Mayor Balla advised all residents with critical concerns to please contact Administrator James Damato.

Mayor Balla mentioned the link on the Borough website for IDA assistance if residents need further help and information. Councilmember Eisenberg Knegten mentioned possibly starting an app for residents to download on their phones to submit their concerns quickly.

Councilmember Martino suggested the help line be listed on the front page of the Borough website. Borough Clerk Edith Gil commented the help line has not been active for the last few months, but CFO Bill Hance believes the help line goes to the OEM Coordinator Carolyn Solon. Mayor Balla advised this issue will be looked into tomorrow.

- 11) Christine Ead, Washington Drive, requested the Council come up with a chain of command in regards to the help line process.

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R10: Authorizing Executive Session: Contract Negotiations, Litigation Matters and Attorney- Client Privilege Matters (*Bonnier Burn Redeveloper Urban Renewal, LLC Application for Approval of Financial Agreement and Valley Furniture Sidewalk*)

Motion to Adopt the above by Robinson/ second by Eisenberg Knegten

RC: Robinson [Y] Goodloe [Absent] Eisenberg Knegten [Y] Jubin [Y] Martino [Y] Hayeck [Y]

Motion to return to open session at 12:20 A.M. by Robinson / second by Jubin

RC: Robinson [Y] Goodloe [Absent] Eisenberg Knegten [Y] Jubin [Y] Martino [Y] Hayeck [Y]

Upon return to open session Mayor Balla entertained an additional resolution. Borough Attorney Murphy read resolution R12 in full.

R12: APPROVING THE CONCEPT PLAN AND AUTHORIZING THE NEGOTIATIONS OF THE SPECIFIC TERMS AND CONDITIONS AND THE PREPARATION OF ALL NECESSARY

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DOCUMENTS FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF SIDEWALK FROM THE WATCHUNG  
CIRCLE TO BEST LAKE .

Motion to Adopt the above by Eisenberg Knegten/ second by Jubin

RC: Robinson [Y] Goodloe [Absent] Eisenberg Knegten [Y] Jubin [Y] Martino [Y] Hayeck [Y]

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**ADJOURNMENT**

Upon there being no further business before Council, the meeting ended at 12:28 P.M. to the Call of the Chair. The next meeting of the Mayor and Council is a regular meeting scheduled to be held on October 7, 2021 at 7:30 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Regina Angelo  
Deputy Clerk