

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

OCTOBER 7, 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 7:30 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 [P] Eisenberg Knegten [P] Jubin [P] Martino [P] Hayeck [P]

Mayor Balla offered an apology to the residents whose questions have gone unanswered. He offered his email address and advised residents that anyone can email him any questions. Mayor Balla also mentioned that at this time the borough will move forward with the annual harvest festival at Mobus field on October 23rd with certain limitations to ensure the safety of all attendees.

REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES

1. Administration & Finance – Councilmember Jubin said the Committee met this past Friday and discussed matters relating to budget planning related to the Capital Ordinance on tonight’s agenda. He also mentioned the Elsinore culvert repair contract was discussed. Lastly, Councilmember Jubin said CFO Bill Hance is starting to prepare documents for the upcoming budget sessions.
2. Police – Council President Robinson reported on two accidents which occurred on Friday September 27th. She gave some brief background information on the officers receiving promotions on tonight’s agenda. Mayor Balla gave an update regarding the particular flashing light being used at the crosswalk at Stirling Road. Councilmember Martino spoke on the Weldon family and their generous donations / assistance to the Borough for many years.
3. Public Works / Buildings and Grounds- Councilmember Eisenberg Knegten spoke on the funds approved designated specifically for sidewalk repairs. She also mentioned a representative from Gametime came out to review the repairs necessary at Mobus playground. She commented on pursuing Somerset County’s open space grant for improvements to Mobus playground. Councilmember Eisenberg Knegten also said she received a request from the Traffic and Beautification Committee asking to use some of their budget to brighten the gazebo on Mountain Blvd. Lastly, she reported that the gates and bollards conversation is still in discussion. Council President Robinson advised she has contact information of an electrician to assist with installing solar panels on the gazebo.

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Councilmember Martino asked for an update on the retaining wall along Somerset Street. Administrator Damato stated he took pictures of the damage done after storm IDA and forwarded to the County Department of Public Works supervisor. He also said the wall is under the jurisdiction of the Department of Transportation and a work order has already been submitted. Councilmember Martino suggested a construction fence be placed there so that no slips occur.

Councilmember Martino gave an update on the catch basic cleaner which was discussed at the last Council meeting. He stated the machine is still in existence but since 2012 has broken down. He also said this machine has sat in the Warren Township Public Works garage for the past 9 years without any repairs and as a result it is very difficult to find parts for its repair. He also discussed the updates this Council has made so far to the Library and the Arts Center buildings such as painting, tree removal, landscaping, security system upgrade, cleaning the gutters, etc. He mentioned the roof repair completed at the Police Station and renovations made to the court house vestibule. Lastly, he stated all these repairs were done within current expense of our budget.

4. Public Affairs:

Environmental – Council President Robinson said the Environmental Committee met on September 27th and spoke on the tree report submitted. She mentioned that trees are now being inspected by our Borough Engineer. She reported on the Green Fair event held on Saturday, September 25th and asked Green Team chair Charlie Neiss to give the statistics on all of the collections of all the recyclable items. Council President Robinson said the Committee discussed the importance of educating the public on the importance of trees in our community. Mayor Balla asked the Committee to prepare a list of what is best to plant along the streams and brooks in our town.

Recreation – Councilmember Hayeck thanked the Mayor for his earlier comments in support of the Harvest Festival. He also said the Recreation Committee was unable to meet last night due to scheduling conflicts.

Historical – Councilmember Martino thanked Administrator Damato for making sure the Texier House Museum will be open this weekend for the Somerset County weekend journey event. He also mentioned his family donated 300 Texier House reusable bags to promote our museum and enhance our environment. He thanked individuals that provided historical knowledge for the September 24th event.

Board of Health – Councilmember Jubin said the Committee met on September 22nd and discussed a sewer line on Ridge Road improperly discharged. He also mentioned the Board of Health is down a member and the board is requesting the vacancy be filled as soon as possible. He said the next Board of Health meeting will be held on November 17th.

5. Fire – Councilmember Goodloe spoke on Capital Ordinance 21/11 listed on the agenda for introduction. Councilmember Martino inquired on bonding for all breathing apparatus items instead of just ten. Administrator Damato advised this Ordinance is for short-term borrowing and they are not bonding for these items. Councilmember Martino recommended financing for all items and not just a portion of them. Administrator Damato recommended the Council vote on this Resolution as is and amend it at the next meeting to not delay these purchases.

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6. Laws/Ordinances – Councilmember Martino said the Committee met on October 6th and finalized two Ordinances. He discussed the first Ordinance relating to fire prevention in regards to non-life hazard commercial registrations and Chapter 22 relating to residential rental property registration. He also said the final drafts will be dispersed to the Council for review and discussion once they are complete. Councilmember Martino said the Committee is tailoring the model noise Ordinance in order to be in compliance with the State. Councilmember Martino asked Mr. Damato if he has heard from the Board of Education in regards to the Ordinance prohibiting overnight parking on school property. Administrator Damato advised he has not received a response back as of yet.

REPORTS – OTHER:

7. Engineer – Bruce Koch stated the 2020 combined with the 2021 Roadway improvements are out to bid. He commented on the award of contract resolution listed on tonight’s agenda to Black Rock Enterprises in regards to the Elsinore Drive Culvert Emergency and is confident in their ability to complete the project. Replacement Project. He mentioned the Department of Transportation will soon announce the 2022 state aid programs and also the storm water management plan is finished and will soon be released and posted to the website. He said in regards to the Ness farm, a draft remedial action report has been issued to Mr. Damato for review and comment. Mr. Koch also said one of the firms structural engineers took a look at the Phillips Field Bridge after storm IDA and suggested it only be used by light vehicles at low speeds. Lastly, Mr. Koch recommended the bridge near Best Lake be replaced.
8. Police Chief – Chief Hart spoke on the open house event held on September 18th with around 200 attendees. He thanked everyone who attended and participated to make the event a success. He also congratulated the three officers on receiving their promotions tonight.
9. Fire Department - No report provided.
10. Rescue Squad – No report provided.
11. Emergency Management – Carolyn Solon stated there was a debrief meeting held in regards to Hurricane IDA. She discussed recommendations for possible future storm response changes.
12. Attorney – Attorney Murphy had no report.
13. CFO – CFO Hance spoke on updates made to the website and resident communications.
14. Clerk – Clerk Gil commented on the updated Borough website and encouraged residents to explore and welcomed any feedback on improving the site. She mentioned the ballot drop box is now installed and can be found between the Fire House and Exempt Hall. She also encouraged residents to sign up for the new email system if they wish to receive Borough communications and important alerts. She went over what Chapter 28 allows in terms of political signs. Clerk Gil reminded everyone that the Borough did adopt and extend a resolution allowing temporary outdoor dining and the sign restrictions were relaxed for this purpose. She recommended the Borough remain neutral on this matter and feels they cannot allow one person or business to display these signs on their property and not do it for all. Lastly, Clerk Gil mentioned that the early voting period is from October 23rd to October 31st with more detailed information listed on the Borough website.

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15. Administrator – Administrator Damato gave an update on the COVID-19 cases in Watchung. He discussed the repair of the Philips Field bridge and said he met with the manufacturer to discuss their recommendations as far as maintenance goes. He also said the supports holding the bridge up are going to need to be repaired. Mr. Damato met with a contractor to discuss the library retaining wall and is expecting a written proposal within the next couple of days. He also stated the sidewalk trip hazard repair is underway and should be completed by next week. Mr. Damato also said the Borough is applying for a grant at Mobus playground in hopes for a better layout. He also mentioned any work done in the playground has to be completed by certified playground installers. He discussed the 30-day time period in relation to the Elsinore Drive project. Councilmember Martino inquired on the deadline for the award of a grant. Mr. Koch explained the process of awarding this contract which needs to be done by November 21st.
16. Youth Services – Council President Robinson mentioned that next Tuesday is the last day of the Farmers Market however all the vendors have the desire to return next year. She also said the bylaws will be changing and implemented by the next meeting. She also said the pursuit of excellence program had a great turn out.
17. Planning Board - Councilmember Martino reminded everyone that the Planning Board will be voting on the preliminary site approval on Tuesday, October 19th. He stated this redevelopment is regarding our 2020 affordable housing obligation adopted in 2018. Councilmember Martino explained the development plan in further detail. He also said the Planning Board is reviewing the site plan as they agreed to do and once they get through the 2020 plan they will be moving onto the 2025 affordable housing plan.
18. Municipal Alliance – Councilmember Hayeck spoke on the field permit application for the annual 5k walk and run around Watchung Lake scheduled for approval on tonight’s agenda. He feels this is going to be a great event for the community and hopes everyone will attend.
19. Library Advisory Board – Councilmember Goodloe spoke on the exciting upcoming County Library System events. She also took a moment to welcome Matthew King, our new Public Works employee devoted to janitorial maintenance in all of the Borough buildings.
20. Traffic and Beautification – Councilmember Goodloe said the committee met this past Monday and they are renewing their request to eliminate the gazebo on Mountain Blvd at Watchung Lake. They are also firming up their capital request related to next year’s budget as they would like the Borough to purchase some new winter and holiday seasonal items. Councilmember Goodloe said the Committee will be putting up their annual decorations on November 15th.

PUBLIC PORTION / AGENDA ITEMS ONLY

- 1) Frank Bisignano, Jared Court, questioned the expectation of the library bridge repair and the timeframe. He recommended adding some signage near the bridge for those that aren’t aware of the entrance changes. Mayor Balla explained the process of public bidding. Administrator Damato stated the Borough is able to add signage. He asked Mr. Koch the timing from date of authorization to the time when construction documents would be ready to go out to bid. Mr. Koch said he plans

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to have a proposal for the Governing Body at the next meeting. Councilmember Martino asked if the Borough could install railings and make the library bridge into a footbridge.

- 2) Debra Joren, Stirling Road, inquired on the Borough policy in relation to Borough employees accepting donations. She mentioned a resident attempted to donate sandwiches to the Department of Public Works and was told the municipality cannot accept private citizen donations.

Mayor Balla stated that under the policy and procedure manual, employees are prohibited from accepting gifts for doing their job.

- 3) Christine Ead, Washington Drive, questioned if the sewer connection for Bonnie Burn Road has been confirmed. Councilmember Martino directed Ms. Ead to reach out to the Planning Board in regards to her question.

DISCUSSION

❖ Design of Veterans Park

Council President Robinson asked for a description of the shrubs being placed at the park. Councilmember Martino discussed details of the sketch / survey submitted to the Council for their review. Councilmember Martino stated the design of the park is a work in progress and hopes to enhance the appearance over time.

❖ Library Bridge

Mayor Balla discussed having our Borough Engineer draft a proposal relating to the overall design and type of bridge. Mayor Balla asked if the Council had any additional recommendations on this topic. Councilmember Eisenberg Knechten advised she supports Councilmember Martino's comments to make the bridge an accessible footbridge as soon as possible. Administrator Damato recommended the library bridge be open as a footbridge after the construction and demolition work occurring there is complete.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

Acknowledging Receipt of the following Borough Reports:

Board of Health Meeting Minutes	May 19, 2021
CERT Meeting Minutes	September 28, 2021
Environmental Commission Meeting Minutes	August 30, 2021

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Green Team Meeting Minutes	August 16, 2021
Plainfield Area Regional Sewerage Authority (PARSA) Meeting Minutes	September 2, 2021
Planning Board Meeting Minutes BNE Transcript of Proceedings	August 10, 2021 (Special Mtg) August 10, 2021 August 17, 2021
Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes	June 2, 2021
Traffic and Beautification Meeting Minutes	September 13, 2021
Youth Services Commission Meeting Minutes	June 15, 2021

Acknowledging Receipt of the following Correspondence:

#41- Letter and Resolution regarding Special School District Election on December 14, 2021, Watchung BOE - received 9/30/21 c: M&C, JD

Motion to Adopt by Robinson/ second by Jubin

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

Clerk Gil advised all in addition to her earlier report, the Board of Education has called for a Special Election on December 14th and further details will soon be posted on the Borough website.

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

R1: *Authorizing Purchase Orders over \$2,000 – BIS Digital, Inc. (PD -*Contract for Record Voice Logging System*)
Ocean Resort (2021 *League Conference*)
Sparta Discount Tire (PD – *Tires*)
Motorola Solutions (FD-*Portable Radios*)
MD Radio Services (FD – *Equipment*)
Park Avenue Cleaning (PD- *Janitorial exps*)

R2: Accepting Donation for Renovation of Veteran’s Park from Old Chester Road Associates

Motion to Adopt by Robinson / Second by Eisenberg Knegten

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

*For R1, CM Hayeck [Abstain]

Councilmember Eisenberg Knegten questioned if the Board of Education was going to strip and wax the Police Department floors as previously discussed. Administrator Damato stated the Board of Education was originally scheduled to do this project before the departure of the former Buildings and Grounds supervisor.

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Administrator Damato also stated the Chief of Police is eager to have this project completed as soon as possible.

NON-CONSENT AGENDA ITEMS:

ORDINANCES ON FIRST READING

Introduction of Ordinance **OR 21/10**– ***“AN ORDINANCE AMENDING OR:21/02 AMENDING CHAPTER 21, STORMWATER CONTROL, OF THE CODE OF THE BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG, TO ESTABLISH MINIMUM STORMWATER MANAGEMENT REQUIREMENTS AND CONTROL”*** (Public Hearing to be held on October 21, 2021)

R3: Introduction of Ordinance OR: 21/10 –Ordinance Amending OR:21/02, Amending Chapter 21
Stormwater Control

Motion to Adopt by Eisenberg Knegten/second by Goodloe

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

Introduction of Ordinance **OR 21/11** – **BOND ORDINANCE PROVIDING FOR VARIOUS 2021 CAPITAL ACQUISITIONS AND IMPROVEMENTS, BY AND IN THE BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG, IN THE COUNTY OF SOMERSET, STATE OF NEW JERSEY; APPROPRIATING \$198,400 THEREFOR AND AUTHORIZING THE ISSUANCE OF \$188,400 BONDS OR NOTES OF THE BOROUGH TO FINANCE PART OF THE COST THEREOF**

R4: *Introduction of Ordinance OR: 21/11 – Providing for Various 2021 Capital Acquisitions and Improvements

Motion to Adopt by Jubin/second by Robinson

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

*CM Hayeck abstained as this Ordinance relates to some Fire Department purchases

R5: Authorize Promotional Appointments of Sergeants of Police Dept. – Moberly, Sporer & Dunne

Motion to Adopt by Robinson/second by Jubin

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

R6: Awarding Emergency Contract for the Elsinore Drive Culvert Emergency Replacement Project - Black Rock Enterprises, LLC

Motion to Adopt by Eisenberg Knegten/second by Goodloe

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

R8: Authorizing Field and Facility Permit Application – Watchung Hills Regional Municipal Alliance 5k Run and Family Fun Fitness Walk (October 23rd)

Motion to Adopt by Hayeck/second by Eisenberg Knegten

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

PUBLIC PORTION - GENERAL DISCUSSION

- 1) Robert Gibbs, Nottingham Drive, expressed his disappointment regarding the personal attack made against a fellow Watchung resident regardless of her status as a Council candidate. He feels this type of behavior has no place in Watchung and insists all Council candidates stick to the local issues. Mr. Gibbs asked everyone to please keep the demonization out of Watchung.
- 2) Bruce Ruck, Lakeview Ave, spoke on the reappointment of volunteers to the different committees. He asked if the volunteers could possibly receive a letter from the Borough inquiring if they wish to be reappointed. He feels many volunteers do not realize their term is ending and as a result don't apply for reappointment.
- 3) Paul Fiorilla, Washington Drive, questioned why the Republican Party would nominate someone who participated in an anti-democratic and attack on democracy. He feels our community should be represented better.

Councilmember Hayeck asked Attorney Murphy if this is the appropriate venue for the public to speak in relation to political campaigns. Attorney Murphy explained why it is appropriate for the public at this time.

- 4) Janine Riedinger, High Tor Drive, asked Mayor Balla to post the recent Council candidate debates on the Borough website. Mayor Balla deferred to legal counsel on this matter. Attorney Murphy said he would look into this request. Ms. Riedinger also questioned when in-person council meetings would resume? Mayor Balla advised he will discuss this issue further with the entire Council.
- 5) Tracy DiFrancesco, Templar Drive, strongly disagrees with Attorney Murphy allowing the public to speak freely in regards to fellow residents. She does not feel discussing a resident of the town is appropriate.
- 6) Frank Bisignano, Jared Court, thanked Councilmember Martino for his solution to the Library bridge. He discussed the progress the Watchung Board of Education has made in the schools to better our children's future and keep our community united and not divided. He commented on the lack of progress the Councilmembers elected three years ago have made so far in office. He asked the Councilmembers to think more about what they can do for the people.
- 7) Martin Carroll, Valley Road, feels the members of the Council have done a good job so far for our community and does not agree with the comment previously stated.

R7: Authorizing Executive Session: Contract Negotiations, Collective Bargaining Agreements and Attorney-Client Privilege Matters

Motion to Adopt by Robinson/ second by Eisenberg Knegten

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

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Motion to return to open session at 11:37 P.M. by Robinson / second by Eisenberg Knegten
RC: Robinson [Y] Goodloe [Y] Eisenberg Knegten [Y] Jubin [Y] Martino [Y] Hayeck [Y]

ADJOURNMENT

Upon there being no further business before Council, the meeting ended at 11:39 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 21, 2021 at 7:30 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Regina Angelo
Deputy Clerk