

BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG
COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

MARCH 19, 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 meeting was given by way of the Annual Meeting Notice to the to the Courier News, Echoes Sentinel, and Star Ledger, and posted at Borough Hall.

Mayor Balla said: *Borough Officials have been actively planning and coordinating a response for the Coronavirus. Several Executive Orders have come from President Trump at the Federal level and from Governor Murphy at the State level. We also have directives from Somerset County, all to help slow the spread of this pandemic. We have, along with the State of New Jersey and other surrounding communities, declared a State of Emergency. We must impress upon every individual to take the precautions set forth by the CDC and New Jersey Department of Health, washing hands and avoiding contact with others which helps protect you and protect others if you are carrying the virus. We are continually updating our website as we obtain new information. We encourage you to visit the CDC & NJ Department of Health's websites, and those links are posted on our website. Because of the uncertainty of the Covid-19 outbreak, we are having our meeting via conference calling to best protect our residents, employees, and elected officials. All the information regarding signing into tonight's meeting has been posted on the Borough's website. If you experience problems with the transmission, please be patient and indicate the problems to the Borough's offices so that future virtual meetings may be better.*

SALUTE TO THE FLAG and a MOMENT OF SILENCE FOR OUR SERVICE MEN AND WOMEN, SERVING HOME AND ABROAD, AND FOR OUR FIRST RESPONDERS WHO ARE CHARTING UNPRESIDENTED WATERS, AND FOR THOSE AMERICANS AND OTHERS WHO HAVE BEEN KILLED BYTHIS VIRUS.

ROLL CALL:

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

Also present were Administrator James Damato, CFO William Hance, Deputy Clerk Regina Angelo, Borough Attorney Denis Murphy and Engineer Bruce Koch. Also present was OEM Coordinator Carolyn Solon.

There was no one from the public present in the Council Chambers, however, several were logged into the Virtual Meeting.

REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEES:

1. Administration & Finance – Councilman Jubin had no report.
2. Police – Commissioner Robinson said she has been in touch with Chief Cina however, there was nothing to report.
3. Public Works / Buildings and Grounds – Councilman Martino reported Charles Gunther is making progress as he reviews the policies and procedures for Public Works, and also the equipment replacement schedule. He said through out this emergency, Mr. Gunther will be providing a situation report as it pertains to the Department. He also said Mr. Gunther met with the Engineer and discussed holding off on the paving of Elsinore, until after the pipe can be repaired in the most efficient way.
4. Public Affairs: Councilwoman Goodloe had nothing to report.

Environmental – Council President Robinson said the Commission met via conference call and discussed their budget for the upcoming year, and projects they would like to address, which include a shed for styrofoam collection, blue bird houses, two wood duck houses, a pollinator garden, some deer whistles, a bat shelter, and guest speakers for presentations at the High School and Arts Center.

Recreation – In Councilman Black's absence, Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten announced that most upcoming Recreation events such as the Easter Egg Hunt and the Community picnic are being canceled, due to the Coronavirus outbreak. Administrator Damato said that in place of these events the Borough will be sponsoring a "Photo Contest" weekly, with prizes for different age groups and different themes, the first week's theme being "outside my window." He said full information will be posted on our website.

Historical – Councilwoman Goodloe had no report but announced the meeting planned for March has been cancelled and will be rescheduled as soon as it is safe to do so.

Board of Health – Councilman Jubin thanked all for understanding the need to limit people gathered in one location and the need to cancel events. He read some statistics from the CDC to reiterate the seriousness of this virus for the young and old. He said those 65 and over have a 50% chance of being hospitalized and those age 20 to 54 have a 38% chance of being hospitalized however he pointed out

that the fatality rate for the older is much higher and more of the younger ones who contract the virus will survive. He stressed the importance of younger people following the rules of social distancing as they can carry it to the older people, who have less of a chance of surviving it, so he urged young people to think beyond themselves. Councilman Jubin said we can really reduce the spread by washing our hands, not touching our faces, keeping surfaces clean and socially distancing ourselves. He said he is not trying to scare anyone and believes we will come out of this, however, this virus will have to run its course. He said drug and vaccine trials have been initiated and that the coordination of the efforts of every facet of the health and medical fields is astounding and he is proud to be a small part of it. He said although the Board of Health meeting has been cancelled he is in constant touch with Health Officer Kevin Sumner and Bd of Health President Bruce Ruck. Councilman Jubin also announced the blood supplies are very low and confirmed that giving blood is very safe and if you are able to do so, to please donate.

5. Fire – Councilman Martino announced some issues with local establishments having closed fire exits and said he has brought this to the State of New Jersey’s attention and they confirmed that they are not lifting any restrictions, so he asked the public that if anyone sees any violations, to please call it into the Borough. He also said he recently attended a meeting with the OEM Coordinator and reported that we are getting up to speed, and we can use some funding. He said the virus outbreak is like a wrench thrown into the operations, but hopefully we can get OEM what they need, and the respect they deserve. He thanked OEM Coordinator Carolyn Solon for taking the time to meet with him.

6. Laws/Ordinances – Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten announced the Committee met on March 13th to review the Ordinances pertaining to the “order of business” at Council meetings, as well as the Ordinances for standing Committees.

REPORTS - OTHER:

7. Engineer – Engineer Bruce Koch highlighted the written report he had submitted earlier, and also said in regard to the Elsinore Drive culvert repair that Councilman Martino spoke of earlier, he was able to get a ball-park quote of \$85,000. and when things calm down, this repair can be considered. In regard to roadway improvements, Mr. Koch said the Borough was awarded a DOT Grant, however the amount is not enough to cover all of the roads that were submitted, however, it would cover Hill Hollow and Nottingham Drive. He said if the Council wants to move forward with the other 4 roads – Friar Lane, Sherwood Drive, Johnston Drive (Woodledge to PSE&G R-O-W), and Elsinore - using the Morris County co-op pricing the cost would be approximately \$504,000.00.

8. Police Chief – No report.

9. Fire Department – No report.

10. Rescue Squad – Council President Robinson read the highlights of the monthly report, submitted by Squad Vice President Katrina Dumapit. She reported on March 1st the Squad held an Open House and at their March meeting, introduced their newest cadet member, Richie Mistichelli. Council President Robinson also read that, due to the recent and sudden outbreak of the Coronavirus, Captain Jeiner Betancourt has created and implemented a COVID-19 Response Plan to be followed by all members of the Watchung Rescue Squad. She said during these complicated and difficult times, Jainer has been in contact with Watchung OEM, police, fire and council members, and has also been in collaboration with EMS in Warren, Berkeley Heights, and Atlantic Health. The Rescue Squad will continue to stay up to date as information is released regarding COVID-19 and will make changes as needed. In the meantime, the Squad will continue to respond to calls as usual while taking extreme precautions to protect crewmembers as well as patients. Also noted were the total calls for February were 21 and the top responders were Matt King and Katrina Dumapit.

11. Emergency Management – OEM Coordinator Carolyn Solon said that during these restrictive times, residents should be comforted to know that Watchung employees and first responders have all put plans in place to protect our residents during this difficult time. She said we continue to discuss ways to assist our community through this unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic. Ms. Solon said there are many un-knowns when it comes to this virus and information is being updated continually, stressing that we all have to work together. She reported we are adapting our policies and procedures regularly in order to ensure the safety of our residents. She said the CERT Team has been activated and Watchung OEM is in constant contact with the Somerset County OEM, the County Health Department and the Watchung Health Officer. Ms. Solon said that her and Mayor Balla signed a Declaration of Emergency on March 17th which will help procure additional resources and supplies that may be needed.

12. Attorney – Attorney Murphy had no report.

13. Clerk – No Report.

14. Administrator – Mr. Damato announced that Borough Hall is open, however, we are limiting any access to the lower door by the Tax Office. He said we are limiting staff and phone numbers are posted on the doors for anyone who needs assistance or a permit or has a question. He said he is there everyday and also reminded the Public to continue to check the Borough’s webpage as information is being posted as soon as it is available, as is the Facebook page. Mr. Damato says the Borough has implemented a Help Line number which is manned from 7:am to 7:pm by several Council members and said if you need any assistance or have any questions, they are there to help.

Wildlife Committee- Councilman Jubin had no report.

Youth Services Commission – Council President Robinson said the Commission did not meet.

Planning Board – Councilman Martino said the Planning Board meeting has been cancelled.

Board of Education- Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten reported effective March 16th, the Watchung School District has transitioned to remote learning through April 12th. Students will engage with their teachers via Google Classroom and will follow a 1-session schedule each day. For Bayberry, that is 8:40-12:55 and for Valley View, that is 8:15am-12:30pm She announced that there was a BOE meeting on March 16th and the preliminary budget was introduced, and tonight, a revised budget was being introduced. Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten said their budget overview is available on the district’s website, watchungschools.com. She added that Watchung Hills and all four of its sending districts will also use online learning platforms.

Municipal Alliance – No report.

Library Advisory Committee – Councilwoman Goodloe said the Somerset County Library System and our Library will be closed until April 5th, and the County continues to compensate the employees through this time. In regard to the Library Grant the due date has been moved to June 5th, which is a 60-day extension due to the State of Emergency.

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PUBLIC PORTION / AGENDA ITEMS ONLY

None

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UNFINISHED BUSINESS

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NEW BUSINESS

CONSENT AGENDA: The Consent Agenda Items listed below were unanimously adopted following a motion by Council President Robinson and a second by Councilman Nehls and upon Roll Call the vote was as follows: Robinson, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, Jubin, Martino, “aye”.

Approval of the following Council minutes:

February 20, 2020 –Regular Meeting

Acknowledging Receipt of the following Borough Reports:

Library Advisory Board – January 8, 2020
Environmental Commission Minutes – January 27, 2020
Police Activity Report – February 2020
Board of Adjustment Minutes – February 5, 2020
Recreation Commission Minutes – February 12, 2020

Acknowledging Receipt of the following Correspondence:

- #11 Township of Scotch Plains 3/3/20 Notice of Introduction of Ordinance; #2020-6
Re: This Ordinance will Rezone 2650 Route 22 from an R-2 Residential Zone to the B-3 Highway Zone. Public Hearing to be held on March 24, 2020 C: M & C, TEA, Pl. Board
- #12 Governor Phil Murphy 3/16/20 Executive Order #104 / Covid19 Task Force c: M&C, JD
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CONSENT AGENDA RESOLUTIONS: The Consent Agenda Resolutions listed below were unanimously adopted following a motion by Council President Robinson and a second by Councilman Nehls and upon Roll Call the vote was as follows: Robinson, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, Jubin, Martino, “aye”.

R1:03/19/20 Purchases Over \$2,000 – Watchung Board of Ed (Youth Services Programs)
N.J.S.A.C.O.P. (PD – Promotional Exams)
Atlantic Tactical (PD – Bulletproof Armor)

R2: Authorize Appointment of Summer Intern – Christina Tillinghast

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NON-CONSENT AGENDA ITEMS: Items listed below will be individually addressed and acted upon accordingly. Council reserves the right to refer an item to Committee for further review and discussion.

Councilman Jubin moved the following Resolution, it was seconded by and upon Roll Call the vote was as follows: Robinson, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, Jubin, Martino, “aye”.

Councilman Jubin moved the following Resolution, it was seconded and upon Roll Call the vote was as follows: Robinson, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, Jubin, Martino, “aye”.

R4: Payment of Bills

Items for Discussion:

- Continued 2020 Budget Review

Council President Robinson said she would like an increase to the Environmental Commission’s budget of \$5,000. so they can provide the projects she spoke about earlier in her report and work towards enhancing the Borough’s profile as a “green community.”

Councilman Martino said he would like to see an increase in the Board of Health’s budget for purposes of educating and communicating, not just during this virus but throughout the year. Councilman Jubin agreed and said the Board has always had a minimum budget and has been very prudent and he said extra funding will be used towards the health and wellness programs he planning on implementing which will be even more important when we are done with Covid-19.

Councilman Martino said he would like to see an increase in the Traffic & Beautification Committee’s regular budget, aside from the capital monies they were allocated last year because he always felt they could use a little more and maybe now working with the new Public Works Manager they can bring the circle up to speed.

Council President Robinson said since our centennial will be here before we know it, she suggested putting about \$10,000. away annually so when the time comes there will be enough to have a great event. Councilman Jubin agreed that this is fiscally responsible. Council President Robinson also said that since Dorothy Addario and the Historical Committee will be an intrical part of the planning of this event, recommended reducing the Historical budget and use that money towards the planning of the centennial.

Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten said she agreed with all of the budget recommendations.

Mayor Balla asked CFO Bill Hance where we were with the budget introduction and he responded that we will be ready to introduce at the first meeting in April.

Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten added that she has noticed a reduction in goose droppings while walking around the lake with her family (and socially distancing from others) and Councilman Jubin agreed he saw a reduction confirming that the new treatment appears successful. He said another application is scheduled for April.

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PUBLIC PORTION - GENERAL DISCUSSION

Councilman Martino received a text message (unknown) from someone asking about emergency food provisions and Carolyn Solon responded that she is working with Somerset County on plans for mass feedings if necessary and they are currently reaching out to food vendors and investigating transportation options. She also announced that social services are available to all residents and they can dial “211.”

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ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Council, the meeting was adjourned to the Call of the Chair and to the next meeting scheduled to be held on April 2, 2020 at 7:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Michelle DeRocco, RMC
Clerk