

**BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG**  
**COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES**

**APRIL 9, 2020 - 5:30 P.M.**

*(THIS MEETING WAS A VIRTUAL MEETING)*

**MAYOR'S STATEMENT:** Mayor Keith S. Balla called the meeting to order at 5:35 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 Annual Notice to the Courier News, Echoes Sentinel, and Star Ledger, and posted at Borough Hall.

Mayor Balla said: *Borough Officials have been working 24/7 to ensure that our residents are safe and protected. We are also adapting to the ever changing landscape of events and Executive Orders and measures to protect the health and well-being of our residents from the Coronavirus. Under the current State of Emergency we understand that it is difficult to stay at home and be patient and help bear each others burdens. I plead with my council colleagues and residents to please help encourage and support one another. We all have the best intentions to help our residents and neighbors as well as protect our first responders who are on the front lines along with our doctors, nurses, and supermarket workers. We each have free will to do what we want. I ask that everyone work together to do what is best for the health and safety of all in our community. Every elected official here is special and important to the well being of Watchung. Every resident is precious and special to each of us and the community at large. . We are continually updating our website as we obtain new information and we encourage you to visit the CDC and NJ Health web sites which are posted on our website and we are sending a mailer to every household to ask for the name . address, phone number and email of every resident and to send back the information to the Borough or fill out the form online so we can be available to help all of our residents. Due to the uncertainty of the COVID 19 outbreak we are having our meeting conducted via conference calling to best protect our residents , employees and elected officials. All information about signing on to the meeting has been posted on the Borough website. If you experience problems with the transmission please be patient and communicate the issues by email to the Borough office so that future virtual meetings may be better.*

**SALUTE TO THE FLAG and a MOMENT OF SILENCE FOR OUR RESIDENTS WHO HAVE DIED FROM COVID 19 COMPLICATIONS OUR SERVICE MEN AND WOMEN, SERVING HOME AND ABROAD, OUR FIRST RESPONDERS SERVING IN THESE UNCHARTED WATERS.**

**ROLL CALL:**

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

Also present were Administrator James Damato, Attorney Denis Murphy, Clerk Michelle DeRocco and CFO Bill Hance. Also present was OEM Coordinator Carolyn Solon.

There were 28 members present virtually.

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**DISCUSSION / COVID-19 UPDATES**

Mayor Balla said at this time we will have a general discussion regarding COVID-19 procedures, supplies and responses to protect our residents and improvements.

Mayor Balla reported there was an LEPC meeting held which was attended by various officials where they discussed the various departments, operations and areas where there is a need for PPE. He said also discussed were protocols for how they should handle services for EMS, Fire and Police. He mentioned in order to better serve our residents, there is a flyer going out to all residents requesting them to fill out information such as their name, address, phone number email and asking if they are in need of any medical equipment or assistance. He said this information will be used to create a Borough database and advised residents to please respond back expeditiously. He also said discussed were procedures for receiving donated food, supplies and PPE. Mayor Balla also mentioned they are working on putting together volunteer procedures and protocols for those who want to assist vulnerable residents in picking up groceries and supplies.

Carolyn Solon, OEM Coordinator, said the Borough received a delivery of PPE donations from Somerset County as well as a generous Watchung resident. She said food donations and financial donations started coming in and she thanked residents for their generosity towards the COVID-19 food drive. She said our goal is to have food in place for residents in need as well as future potential issues. She said regarding the protocol for volunteers they are reviewing a plan submitted by another Municipality to see if the Borough can adopt it. Ms. Solon said any donations of PPE we receive get Lysol wiped down by one of our CERT team members and stored in our storage facility. Council President Robinson asked if the DPW vehicles are being sanitized with the fogging type sanitizer. Ms. Solon responded she was unaware of how the vehicles are being sanitized. Administrator Damato stated all employees dealing with the

public are now are wearing masks on the job in addition to gloves. He said no one so far has displayed any symptoms and employees are being monitored every day when they come to work.

Mayor Balla said he would like to keep our lakes open and feels it is a good outlet for people but encouraged all residents to respect social distancing guidelines and safety protocols. He encouraged residents to walk in their neighborhoods as first choice.

Councilman Jubin agreed and said avoiding contact indoors and outdoors is very important and recommended. He asked all residents to try and stay in their neighborhoods and to please make sure when they are out in public to wear protective equipment.

Council President Robinson said she asked Chief Cina to have his patrolmen drive by the lake and to pay attention for excessive numbers of pedestrians visiting. She said he reported to her that the foot traffic around the lake has been significantly reduced.

Mayor Balla reminded residents that our Rescue Squad numbers are very light right now and they are heavily dependent on Atlantic Healthcare at this time for assistance with calls.

Councilmember Eisenberg Knegten acknowledged a resident who has been sewing homemade masks and distributing them to Watchung Borough entities. She said so far this resident has made over 530 masks to date and thanked her for her hard work and dedication to keeping people in our town safe.

Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten asked to discuss potentially moving these Special Virtual Meetings to a later time and possibly conducting them as zoom video calls.

Although not present at roll call, Councilwoman Goodloe joined the meeting at 5:50 P.M.

Councilwoman Goodloe agreed with Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten's request to move the meeting time until later in the evening and holding them as zoom video calls. She also advised all residents to sign up to receive emails from the Borough in order to stay connected.

Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten questioned the letter we are intending to send out to the residents, and said we are expecting to include a postcard for residents to mail back with their contact information and specific needs they have. She asked if we already have a database of this information so we can start actively calling our residents to see if they are in need of assistance. She asked how we are having our residents contact us for help.

Mayor Balla said right now the hot line is the number for residents to call if they need assistance but the postcard will help us better understand who are vulnerable residents are. He said he is open to sending out two different mailers. He stated one mailer will be the alert to get the number out there and the second the postcard to gather resident contact information for the database.

Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten said she is concerned with the delay in the process between the printing, the mailing, residents receiving the postcard and then sending it back to us. She said she would like to be proactive in calling our residents now to see if they need assistance and asked if there is any current data we can use to start that process.

Clerk Michelle DeRocco said she is unaware of any database other than the tax books which does not include phone numbers.

Carolyn Solon said right now in Somerset County across the board in each municipality is dealing with the same issue regarding what the best way is to reach out to the community. She said we are aware not all residents have internet access and feels a mailer would be the best way. Ms. Solon said some towns are utilizing their voter registration lists or school lists as a way to reach out to residents. She feels it is beneficial to ask residents to provide some type of contact information for the Borough to have to make sure all information is updated.

Councilwoman Goodloe agreed if we could use voter logs to reach out to residents we should try and do that as soon as possible.

Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten said she would like to see the incident reports the Council are receiving to be more specific and a detailed record of every interaction our employees have with residents whether it is COVID related or not.

Administrator Damato said the incident reports were specifically deemed for COVID related incidents.

Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten asked if after Hurricane Sandy a list was prepared of people with special medical needs. Carolyn Solon said there is a program run by the State called Register Ready that holds that information but only certain people by law have access to viewing. Ms. Solon said she is not authorized to release that information to the public but she has already made contact with the residents on that list living in Watchung.

Council President Robinson questioned how many Watchung residents are in this program. Carolyn Solon said we have about 4 or 5 residents involved in the Register Ready State program with special needs. She said new participants can register online or call 211 if they need assistance with the registration process. Council President Robinson asked if the State sends out a mailer to encourage people to sign up for this program. Carolyn Solon said the State is actively working on new forms of outreach.

Councilwoman Goodloe asked if online resources in terms of links to sign up for the Register Ready program could be made available for our residents. Carolyn Solon said the sign-up page is already included on our Borough website and also information on Register Ready will be included in our Spring Newsletter.

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### **PUBLIC PORTION**

Bruce Ruck, reminded everyone in addition to the medical hotline, 211 is another hotline and they have a lot of resources for food and labor related information.

Bill Hance, CFO, said a resident called today and said she can't get to her post office and she does not have a computer to pay her property taxes. She does not want her tax payment to be late so she asked if someone could come and pick up her tax payment. Mayor Balla advised this question of assisting residents with their tax payments will be addressed tomorrow morning.

Michelle DeRocco, Borough Clerk, said that an email was sent out to all employees reminding them about the Employee Assistance Program. She said this program is in place to help anyone who may need help dealing with the stress of the pandemic situation.

Wendy Robinson reminded everyone to please participate with one device only during the Virtual Meeting.

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### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Council the meeting was adjourned at 6:17 P.M. to the Call of the Chair. The next Special Meeting of the Mayor and Council is scheduled to be Virtually held on April 11, 2020 at 5:30 P.M.

Mayor Balla thanked all residents for adhering to the safe distancing practices and stay at home orders until such time that we can all safely congregate. He wished everyone a Happy and Healthy Holiday and said to embrace this opportunity to shine as a light of hope and love for each and every one.

Respectfully Submitted,

Regina Angelo, RMC  
Deputy Clerk