

BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG
COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

APRIL 14, 2020 - 5:30 P.M.

(THIS MEETING WAS A VIRTUAL MEETING)

MAYOR'S STATEMENT: Mayor Keith S. Balla called the meeting to order at 5:38 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 Special Notice to the Courier News, Echoes Sentinel, and Star Ledger, and posted at Borough Hall.

SALUTE TO THE FLAG and a MOMENT OF SILENCE FOR OUR RESDIENTS WHO HAVE DIED FROM COVID 19 COMPLICATIONS, AND OUR FIRST RESPONDERS, DOCTORS, NURSES AND GROCERY STORE WORKERS SERVING IN THIS PANDEMIC.

ROLL CALL:

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

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 16 members logged-on virtually.

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DISCUSSION / COVID-19 UPDATES

Mayor Balla asked Carolyn Solon our Office of Emergency Management Coordinator to give us an update on food and supplies.

Ms. Solon said we dispatched PPE equipment to our Public Works Department and our Fire Department today. She said no food or monetary donations came in overnight that she is aware of.

Administrator Damato said the statistics in Somerset County regarding COVID-19 are at 1742 cases with 78 new cases and 87 deaths. He said Somerset County will have the test site up and running by Thursday at Raritan Valley Community College. He said unfortunately the test site will only have a 10 to 14-day supply of test kits. He said it will be difficult to open the site and keep it open with such limited test kits available. He said at this point they are not using the saliva test kit even though it involves less PPE and is a quicker test. Mr. Damato said Watchung Borough cases are at a number of 46 today and still only 2 fatalities. Mayor Balla asked if the test site at Raritan Valley is by doctor appointment only. Administrator Damato said you need an appointment and a prescription to be seen and there will most likely be a wait. He said this test site is just for Somerset County and Hunterdon County residents. He also said they are seeing patients by appointment only so they do not have long lines of people standing around. Councilman Jubin wanted everyone to be aware, now that we are testing in our County 25 to 50 percent of those tests will come back positive and our numbers will increase.

Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten asked Administrator Damato if he was still receiving the breakdown of numbers from our Health Director Kevin Sumner consisting of the positive numbers, age range, and gender breakdown. Administrator Damato said he has not yet received one today. She said other municipalities are making this data public and she thinks we should also make these numbers public for our residents to see. Councilman Jubin said as numbers come in it is a possibility to they could be slightly off. Mayor Balla asked if we could just post the link to the Somerset County website which has the breakdown of data for every municipality in the County. Councilman Jubin said all statistics for residents are useful. He also said if these numbers are going to be posted from Middlebrook Regional Health Commission directly, they may not receive numbers every single day and they could contain discrepancies compared to Somerset County's number. Ms. Solon said Somerset County Department of Health revamped their website as of today so the statistics Councilwoman Eisenberg Knegten are referring to are now currently updated on the website.

Councilman Martino said he spoke with the Director of Public Safety at the County and he has no problem doing a Reverse 911 message for us. Councilman Martino suggested we take them up on that offer and get one out regarding our helpline for residents. Councilman Martino said he drafted up a message to use for the Reverse 911 alert and asked if he should read it now or send it through email.

Mayor Balla asked the message be emailed instead of discussed. Attorney Murphy said if the email is going to a quorum of the governing body and there are comments it could be viewed as a violation of the Open Public Meetings Act. Mayor Balla asked Councilman Martino to email his message to the Administrator. Attorney Murphy recommend the draft message be sent to the Mayor and the Borough Administrator.

Councilman Martino asked if we could reach out through our liaison to the Board of Education in regard to sending this message out through their calling systems as well. Mayor Balla said we will look into this. Attorney Murphy recommended Councilman Martino also include the Council President in his email to the Mayor and Administrator. Councilman Martino agreed to include the Council President and also the Police Chief.

Councilwoman Goodloe asked Ms. Solon if there is now a tub and a sign outside of the Police Department for food donations, and Ms. Solon said it was put outside the Police Department today.

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PUBLIC PORTION

Ray Barratt, Valley Road, asked if the number 46 being mentioned does imply the Borough is flattening the curve and Councilman Jubin said it isn't a curve change yet but it's encouraging to see the level has stayed the same. He also stated his two concerns are have we reached a plateau or are people not being touched. He believes for a small Borough we are doing a good job as long as we continue social distancing. Councilman Jubin also said he is going to crunch the numbers from Somerset County and look at the percent of infected, not affected, and those who are infected and depth rates as well. He said that will give us a better understanding of the data and what is going on in Watchung.

Maureen Hemsworth, 75 Cedar Road, said she is thrilled to hear we will be using the Reverse 911 alerts to reach out to those residents who are not on the internet and the elderly. She questioned why what Councilman Martino drafted to go out as the Reverse 911 message can't be read and discussed now while everyone is here to listen.

Councilman Martino was asked by Mayor Balla to read his draft for the Reverse 911 message intended to go out to all residents.

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ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Council the meeting was adjourned at 6:05 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 15, 2020 at 6:30 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Regina Angelo, RMC
Deputy Clerk