

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

NOVEMBER 4, 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 [Absent] Jubin [P] Martino [P] Hayeck [P]

Mayor Balla stated the Borough Council will be going back to in person meetings starting on December 2nd. He also reminded everyone about Veterans Day and asked all residents to remember the bravery and sacrifices of our veterans and their families. He advised everyone the Boroughs Veterans Day ceremony will be held on Thursday, November 11th at 9:30 A.M. at the Veterans Memorial.

PROCLAMATION

Mayor Balla read the following proclamation:

Watchung -Warren Rotary Club

REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES

1. Administration & Finance – Councilmember Jubin spoke on the last 2 meetings held; he thanked the Chair of Traffic & Beautification for coming before the Committee to speak on their budget requests. He also reported on the cloud hosting financial tax software which will provide another level of cyber security for the Borough. Councilmember Jubin also spoke on the resolution designating the Police department as Deputy Records Custodian and mentioned the idea of the Borough creating a grant checklist form.
2. Police – Council President Robinson said the Committee had not met but reported the Borough had a quiet mischief night.
3. Public Works / Buildings and Grounds- Borough Engineer James Hutzelmann reported on behalf of the Chair and noted that the Committee had not met, however he proceeded to provide an update on DPW activities. On October 25th, four crews worked in preparation of the anticipated rains. While the jurisdiction lies with the County on some roads, members of DPW kept the catch basins open all night. Mr. Hutzelmann commended DPW Staff for their hard work during the storm to lessen the impact on the borough’s roads. He also reported that DPW Staff assisted with setting up for the Harvest Festival and were instrumental in making the event a success. Lastly, the County is set to be replacing some of

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the sidewalks, perform services on the curb ramp in advance of the paving, and working on providing more visibility and safety access for pedestrians crossing the Watchung Circle.

4. Public Affairs:

Environmental – Council President Robinson stated a consultant had recently provided a presentation on a new program for curbside collection of plastic bags and film to be done once a month and reviewed the tree report for the month of October. Sustainable Jersey will be awarding the Borough their sustainability certification at the League of Municipalities. Council President also mentioned that reusable bags are being ordered and a simpler application for dead diseased tree is being worked on. She reminded everyone the chair of the Environmental Commissions still collecting plastic bottle caps. Council President Robinson added that Doug Speeney prepared an extensive document to consider measures to take to mitigate climate change and each one of those may turn into proposals for the Council. Lastly, Council President Robinson mentioned there is a request for the Environmental Commission to work with the Traffic and Beautification committee to identify locations for trees to be planted from the tree bank fund.

Recreation – Councilmember Hayeck spoke on the Harvest Festival and thanked everyone who participated. He said the Commission would like utilize excess budget funds to replace some items that were damaged during Hurricane Ida. He also discussed the importance of bringing sports back to Watchung and other potential future events proposed by the Recreation Commission. .

Historical – Councilmember Martino summarized the Journey Through the Weekend event held on October 9th and 10th journey to the past was a great event and said over 70 visitors stopped by the museum. He thanked the dedicated Historical Committee members and also Administrator Damato for making sure all necessary building repairs to the Texier House caused by Hurricane Ida were finished. Councilmember Martino stated the committee is in the process of preparing a grant application to AARP. He also mentioned there will be a few vacancies opening up on the committee and advised everyone to check the Borough website for updates. Councilmember Martino inquired on the status of the carriage house repairs and rear patio.

Administrator Damato noted that insurance adjusters are looking into what can be reimbursed and what is covered in regards to the carriage house. He also said the Borough can go ahead and fix the patio but he would like to go over details of how it will be fixed, etc. with the Public Works committee.

Board of Health – Councilmember Jubin responded the Board of Health has not met since the last Mayor and Council meeting but will hold their final meeting on November 17th. He mentioned the school will hold a COVID-19 vaccine clinic on November 12th. Councilmember Jubin also spoke on “no shave” November turning into a non-profit fundraiser for cancer. He also feels optimistic with the COVID numbers and want to reignite conversations to start a Mayors Wellness Campaign going into 2022. Relating to the discussion tonight on Cannabis, Councilmember Jubin is disappointed that there weren’t funds already allocated for education on this matter. He feels the cannabis of today is not the same as the cannabis of yesterday and we need to fully make everyone aware of important items.

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5. Fire – No update provided
6. Laws/Ordinances – Councilmember Martino discussed the three draft Ordinances sent to the Mayor & Council for their review. He thanked the Laws and Ordinances Committee and Attorney Murphy for assistance with this long process. He also mentioned the Committee is working on updating another Ordinance relating to alarms and fire suppression systems.

REPORTS – OTHER:

7. Engineer – Engineer Hutzelmann reported on DPW’s activities from mid-October, he commended DPW for their work in patrolling the streets and keeping the storm catch basins clear. He noted that the roads with the most issues were county jurisdiction, but nonetheless DPW staff did an excellent job of keeping the area free of the storm that occurred that weekend. Engineer Hutzelmann also noted that it took about 3 days for DPW to clean up the basins and remove all the rocks and debris and reported on DPW’s assistance in the upcoming borough events.
8. Police Chief – Chief Hart provided an update on police activity for the month of October. He mentioned that mischief night was quiet and that members of the Police Department handed out candy during the Halloween parade and trunk or treat event. He added that some Police Officers are also participating in the “no shave” November cause and lastly commended Lt. Zaiton for updating the Police Department’s website.
9. Fire Department - No update provided
10. Rescue Squad – Council President Robinson spoke on the Tree Lighting Ceremony resolution listed on tonight’s agenda.
11. Emergency Management – No update provided
12. Attorney – No update provided
13. CFO – Mayor Balla inquired if all the Committees had submitted their outlines for the upcoming budget year. CFO Bill Hance noted that most of the larger committees had submitted their budget plans.
14. Clerk – Clerk Gil advised that the Official Certification of the General Election results would take place on November 15th.
15. Administrator – Administrator Damato reported on his work with CME to address environmental issues at the Ness Farm property, such as soil remediation and asbestos removal. He advised Council that the escrow funds could not be used for this purpose and a new funding source would need to be identified for asbestos remediation. He also reported on the playground at Mobus Field and is awaiting a concept plan for a new playground and they hope to apply for a recreation grant through Somerset County. Lastly, he discussed the meeting held with the contractor on Elsinore drive and PSE&G.
16. Youth Services – No update provided

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17. Planning Board - Councilmember Martino advised the preliminary site approval for the Bonnie Burn development project was approved at the last Planning Board meeting held on October 27th. He thanked all members for their dedicated work in reviewing this 2-year long application. He mentioned the next Planning board meeting was scheduled for November 16th at 7:30 P.M.
18. Municipal Alliance – Councilmember Hayeck spoke on the 5k pumpkin walk and run event sponsored by the Municipal Alliance. He also thanked the DPW for their assistance from start to finish with this event. He mentioned Council President Robinson came in 2nd in her class and thanked all those who participated.
19. Library Advisory Board – Councilmember Goodloe discussed some of the upcoming exciting library events. She mentioned the Somerset County Library Commission recently voted to permanently remove library late fees and this policy will officially go into effect on December 1st.
20. Traffic and Beautification – No update provided.

PUBLIC PORTION / AGENDA ITEMS ONLY

- 1) Christine Ead, Washington Drive, inquired on the amount of the grant for the new playground. Administrator Damato advised there is no determined amount yet.
- 2) Catherine Leigh, Guinard Drive, inquired on the tree removal fund process. Council President Robinson mentioned that with the 64 trees that recently came down, no donations went to the tree bank. Mr. Hutzelmann explained the tree removal process and noted that dying or diseased tree do not have the same replacement requirements. Council President Robinson commented on the importance of planning trees and said there is now a link on the website for a list of native trees that will make good candidates for replacing to see what will survive well in our climate. Ms. Leigh also inquired on the holiday banners that Traffic & Beautification wanted to display.
- 3) Frank Bisignano, Jared Court, commented on the recent work done at the library site regarding the lack of protection and the failure to clean-up the debris left during Halloween. Mr. Hutzelmann explained that they removed a failing retaining wall at the library and behind it was a steel insert of a former pool; by removing the bank, they made it a safer. Mr. Bisignano continued to express his dissatisfaction with the way things were handled. Several Council Members expressed their displeasure with how things were handled and noted that in the future this could be handled better.
- 4) Christine Ead, Washington Drive, questioned the total number of over time hours for this project and asked how the rate is determined on weekends and holidays. Mayor Balla advised that CFO Hance could put that information together.
- 5) Curt Dahl, Johnston Drive, noted that he is in the construction field and was amazed at how workers were on the job site until 7pm. He noted that no job should start without a safety plan and commented that he was not in favor of DPW Staff being called away from their families on a Sunday.
- 6) Frank Bisignano, Jared Court, commented that he would like to hear from all Council Members on what recently occurred on his property, he continued speaking on the mess that had been left behind.

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Bisignano continued to express his dissatisfaction and asked Council to comment. Council Members expressed their position on this matter.

Council Member Martino also inquired on the construction job at the circle and noted prior notification had not been received. Administrator Damato advised that the Borough had not received proper communication from the County before starting this job. He noted that Police Chief Hart found out the night before and Council Members expressed their dissatisfaction with the apparent lack of communication.

- 7) Christine Ead, Washington Drive, inquired if this was the normal protocol for projects such as these. Administrator Damato explained that this had not occurred before and was unsure where the disconnect occurred.
- 8) Curt Dahl, Johnston Drive, asked who should have been the liaison between the borough and the County and who decided to put the material by the library. Administrator Damato once again explained that the County had not properly notified the Borough and that all communication would normally go to the Administrator, Engineer and/or Clerk.
- 9) Frank Bisignano, Jared Court, commented that the Borough should commit to protecting the wildlife and noted the activity and exposure during election weekend.
- 10) Tracy DiFrancesco, Templar Drive, commented that a follow up was needed with the County and that a formal report should be made public.
- 11) Bruce Ruck, Lakeview Avenue, inquired on the normal manner in which communication from the county typically occurs.
- 12) Rachel Funcheon, Cedar Road, expressed her frustration on the forested area and noted that now it is unrecognizable. She asked if the Borough had a plan to replant the area.

DISCUSSIONS

❖ Cannabis Locations

Council Member Jubin started the discussions noting the potential revenue that the borough could receive to make the much-needed infrastructure improvements without raising taxes. He stressed the importance of educating ourselves on this topic and welcomed other ideas for significant revenue.

Mayor Balla noted the various licenses that would be available as determined by the State: cultivator, processor, distributor, wholesaler, and deliverer, and retailer dispenser. He went on to provide his comments on areas he deemed appropriate and those types of licenses he would consider. Each Council Member proceeded to provide their comments and concerns on this matter.

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❖ Tree Permit Application

Council President Robinson started the discussions of permit process for dead, diseased, dying and diseased trees. She noted that it was a joint effort with the Environmental Commission and suggested comments from Councilman Martino were incorporated. While it now gives residents 3 types of applications to choose from, it was noted that it would simplify the process. Council Members provided suggestions and commented on the new application.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

Acknowledging Receipt of the following Borough Reports:

Building Department Monthly Report	October 2021
Environmental Commission Meeting Minutes	September 27, 2021
Historical Committee Meeting Minutes	June 16, 2021
Historical Committee Meeting Minutes	August 18, 2021
Planning Board Special Meeting Transcript	September 14, 2021
Planning Board Regular Meeting Minutes	September 21, 2021
Plainfield Area Regional Sewerage Authority (PARSA) Meeting Minutes	October 8, 2021
Engineer Capital Project Status Report	November 1, 2021

Motion to Accept above by Robinson/ Second by Goodloe

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

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

- R1: Authorizing Purchase Orders over \$2,000 – Optimum (*PD –Cable / Internet – 12 Months*)
Auto Rebuilder Collision Specialist (*PD- Vehicle Repairs*)
Emergency Accessories (*PD-equipment new cars*)
Edmunds & Associates, Inc. (*Hosting Services Annual Fee*)
Uline Ship (*6-metal picnic tables & wire shelving*)
- R2: Authorizing Acceptance of Safe and Secure Communities Grant for FY2022
- R3: Authorizing Budget Insertion for Safe and Secure Grant (Chapter 159)

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R4: Authorizing Application for Somerset County Recreation Grant Program

R5: Authorizing Partnership with New Legacy Books for Book Donation Bin

R6: Adopting Borough Policy Addressing the Protection and Safe Treatment of Minors

R7: Authorizing Bill List

Motion to Adopt above by Robinson/ Second by Goodloe

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

NON-CONSENT AGENDA ITEMS:

R8: Designating Alternate Records Custodian for the Police Department

Motion to Adopt above by Jubin/ Second by Robinson

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

R9: Waiving Chapter 6-2.11 of the Borough Code – Rescue Squad Tree of Lights Fireworks Display

Motion to Adopt above by Jubin/ Second by Robinson

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

PUBLIC PORTION - GENERAL DISCUSSION

- 1) Christine Ead, Washington Drive, inquired on resolution R2. CFO Hance provide an explanation of the grant.
 - 2) Bradford Leigh, Guinard Drive, commented on the cannabis discussion and commended Council Members that wanted to review and study this matter prior to taking any action.
 - 3) Catherine Leigh, Guinard Drive, thanked Council for making the decision to go in-person next month.
 - 4) Rachel Funcheon, Cedar Road, inquired on a covid update and the mask policy for borough hall. Mr. Damato provided an update and noted that the information is available on the website.
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R10: ~~Authorizing Executive Session: Contract Negotiations and Attorney-Client Privilege Matters~~

The above resolution was not considered by Council

ADJOURNMENT

Upon there being no further business before Council, the meeting ended at 10:47 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 November 22, 2021 at 7:30 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Regina Angelo
Deputy Clerk