

**BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG
RE-ORGANIZATION MEETING MINUTES**

JANUARY 7, 2021 - 6:00 P.M.

IN ORDER TO COMPLY WITH ALL NJ EXECUTIVE ORDERS AND TO PROTECT MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC, THIS MEETING WAS HELD VIRTUALLY FOR ALL PARTIES.

OPENING STATEMENT: Mayor Balla called the meeting to order at 6:03PM and stated the following: “I would like to welcome everyone; this is the first meeting of the year. 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 Courier News, Echoes Sentinel, the Star Ledger, posted at Borough Hall and the Borough’s website. In order to comply with all NJ Executive Orders and to protect members of the public, this meeting is held virtual for all parties. Public Comments will be accepted through zoom at the designated time or in writing. For those joining us 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. I’d also like to welcome our visitors and other elected officials who are joining us this evening for our reorganization. Governor DiFrancesco, Senator Thomas Kean, Assemblyman Jon Bramnick, and Assemblywoman Nancy Munoz; welcome. May we all rise for the salute to the flag and a moment of silence for the services of our frontline health, hospital workers during the pandemic and the first responders who tirelessly help save lives during the past 11 months.”

SALUTE TO THE FLAG and MOMENT OF SILENCE FOR OUR SERVICE MEN AND WOMEN, SERVING HOME AND ABROAD

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE AND OFFICE

Mayor Balla informed all that Former Governor Donald DeFrancesco administered the oath of office earlier that day to newly elected Council Member Freddie Hayeck and to Council Member Ronald Jubin.

Council Member Jubin expressed his gratitude for his appointment to his previous term and looks forward to continuing to work alongside all other Council Members and the Mayor towards the betterment of the Borough.

Council Member Hayeck thanked former Council Member Black for his years of service and thanked the residents of Watchung for their vote and looks forward to the next three years.

INVOCATION – The Invocation was given by Reverend Monsignor William Benwell, St. Mary’s Church – Stony Hill

ROLL CALL

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

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE AND OFFICE

Mayor Balla administered the Oath of Office to:

Matthew King	Rescue Squad Captain
Jeiner Betancourt	Rescue Squad First Lieutenant

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NOMINATION FOR COUNCIL PRESIDENT

Council Member Jubin nominated Council Member Robinson for Council President, with a second by Council Member Goodloe. No other nominations were made. Upon roll call the vote was as follows: Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, Jubin, Robinson, Hayeck “aye”; Martino “absent”.

APPOINTMENT OF STANDING COMMITTEES

Mayor Balla announced the following Committee assignments:

Administration & Finance

Chair: Jubin
Goodloe
Robinson

Fire

Chair: Goodloe
Eisenberg Knegten
Jubin

Laws & Ordinances

Chair: Martino
Robinson
Hayeck

Police

Chair: Robinson
Eisenberg Knegten
Martino

Public Works

Chair: Eisenberg Knegten
Goodloe
Jubin

Public Affairs:

Chair: Hayeck
Martino
Robinson
Board of Health Liaison: Jubin
Environ. Comm. Liaison: Robinson
Recreation Comm. Member: Hayeck
Historical Comm. Liaison: Martino

Rescue Squad Liaison:	Robinson
Youth Services Commission Liaison:	Robinson
Library Advisory Committee Liaison:	Goodloe
Planning Board, Class III Member:	Martino
Wildlife Advisory Committee Liaison:	Jubin
Municipal Alliance:	Hayeck
Board of Education Liaison:	Eisenberg Knegten

ORDINANCE ON FIRST READING

Introduction of Ordinance OR 21/01 entitled “**ORDINANCE AMENDING SECTION 2-15 OF THE CODE OF THE BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG AMENDING AND SUPPLEMENTING THE APPOINTMENT, POWER, DUTIES, AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PRINCIPAL PUBLIC WORKS MANAGER OF THE BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG,**” Public Hearing to be held January 21, 2021.

R1: Introduction of Ordinance OR:21/01 – Creating the Position of Director of Public Works

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Council Member Jubin moved the above ordinance be given its first reading; after reading the full title she motioned the ordinance be adopted on first reading with a second from Council President Robinson. Upon roll call the vote was as follows: Robinson, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, Jubin, Hayeck “aye”, Martino “absent.”

Council Member Hayeck inquired with Legal Counsel if he should abstain from selected resolutions on this agenda, given his membership as a Fire Volunteer.

Mayor Balla also welcomed Somerset County Commissioner Sara Sooy.

CONSENT RESOLUTIONS

Council President Robinson moved the following resolutions, with a second by Council Member Goodloe and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Robinson, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, Jubin, Hayeck “aye”, Martino “absent,” with the exception of resolution R20, to which Council Member Hayeck “abstain”

R2: Designation of Official Newspapers – Star Ledger, Echoes Sentinel, Courier News, and TAP into Watchung (Electronic News Source)

R3: Adoption of Annual Calendar of Meeting Dates

R4: Designation of Depositories – Investors Savings Bank

R5: Re-establish Petty Cash Funds – Borough Clerk, Police Chief

R6: Adoption of Temporary Budget

R7: Payment of Property Taxes and Establishing Payment Procedures

R8: Appointment of JIF Commissioner

R9: Awarding Professional Services Contract – Borough Engineer, CME Associates

R10: Awarding Professional Services Contract – Borough Attorney, Weiner Law Group

R11: Awarding Professional Services Contract – Labor Counsel, Chasan Lamparello
Mallon & Cappuzzo

R12: Awarding Professional Services Contract – Tax Appeal Attorney, DiFrancesco Batemean
Kunzman, Davis, Lehrer & Flaum, P.C.

R13: Awarding Professional Services Contract – Prosecutor, DiFrancesco Batemean
Kunzman, Davis, Lehrer & Flaum, P.C.

R14: Awarding Professional Services Contract – Bond Counsel, Wilentz, Goldman & Spitzer, P.A.

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- R15: Awarding Professional Services Contract – Auditor, Samuel Klein & Company
- R16: Awarding Professional Services Contract – Risk Manager, Reliance Insurance Group
- R17: Awarding Professional Services Contract – IT Consultant, Marmic Associates
- R18: Awarding Professional Services Contract – Health Insurance Broker, Reliance Insurance Group
- R19: Awarding Professional Services Contract – Conflict Attorney, Shain Schaffer PC
- R20: Appointment of Fire Chief and Assistant Chief

NON-CONSENT RESOLUTIONS

- R21: Appointments of Volunteers to Boards, Committees, Commissions

Council President Robinson moved the above resolution with a second from Council Member Jubin and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Robinson, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, Jubin, “aye,” Hayeck “abstain”, Martino “absent.”

Council Member Eisenberg Knegten thanked all the volunteer for their dedication.

- R22: Authorizing Program Year 2019 CDBG-CV3 Project

Council Member Jubin moved the above resolution with a second from Council President Robinson and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Robinson, Goodloe, Eisenberg Knegten, Jubin, Hayeck “aye”, Martino “absent.”

RECOGNITION OF EMPLOYEE SERVICE

Mayor Balla read the following employee milestones and congratulated all for their service to the Borough.

- 30 Years: Joan Estrella, Police Department
- 20 Years: Brad Sporer, Police Department
- 5 Years: Christopher Beam, Police Department
Brennen Gaiser, Police Department

MAYOR'S ADDRESS

The following is Mayor Balla’s 2021 address:

Happy New Year and welcome to all of our residents, friends, relatives and elected officials who have come to join us at this reorganization of the Watchung Municipal Governing Body. I want to welcome newly elected Council member Dr. Ron Jubin and Council member Freddie Hayeck who join the Watchung Governing Body to govern with honesty, integrity, humility and in the best interest of Watchung.

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I am extremely thankful for the opportunity and privilege to serve as Mayor of Watchung. As elected public servants we have been entrusted by our residents to manage the affairs of the Borough to create and keep a safe environment for all people who live, work and visit Watchung. This responsibility includes our police, fire, emergency services as well as safe streets and roads and quality education programs for children and activities for our resident's health, education well-being and enjoyment.

2020 was a year filled with challenges regarding the public safety of our residents during the COVID 19 pandemic. This unprecedented worldwide pandemic required an all-hands-on deck joint effort among all of our employees and residents and businesses to work together to maintain order, safety and help all in need due to loss of employment, remote education, closures of businesses and health, medical and basic necessities needed within the community and actions to help stop the spread of the virus.

I thank all of our employees, volunteers and residents and businesses for rallying to help us all get through these difficult times. I look forward to working with all of my Council colleagues, Daryl Eisenberg Knegten, Lindsay Goodloe, Ron Jubin, Pietro Martino, Wendy Robinson and Freddie Hayeck and our new Municipal Clerk Edith Gil and our new Chief of Police William Kelly and all of our employees as we move forward into the future to make Watchung the best it can be.

This year has clearly demonstrated that our residents with their diverse experiences, expertise and abilities are the greatest asset in our community. I look forward in 2021 to working together as a unified Watchung community in bipartisan collaboration to strengthen the bonds between us and help each other as we live, work, educate and raise families in Watchung. Our number one responsibility is public safety for all of our residents, businesses and visitors. Through our persistence working with Somerset County Officials, we improved public safety on our county roads in Watchung by having the speed limits lowered. We still have more work to do to get Hillcrest Rd safer.

I want to thank and recognize the sacrifices made by our many volunteers in Watchung who serve in various capacities on the Rescue Squad and Volunteer Fire Department as well as the many committees and commissions all which make Watchung a great community. As we come out of the State of Emergency later in the year, I plan to work with the Rescue Squad and Volunteer Fire dept. to create more opportunities to have activities in the community to bolster the enthusiasm and strengthen the numbers of volunteers for our Fire Department and Rescue Squad. I encourage volunteerism within our community for all of our residents to recognize the value and importance of helping our neighbors and friends and bringing unity among the community.

Second, we keep improving technology and communications, with postings on the website, and Facebook and Nixle alerts; transparency of information with live streaming of the council meetings and migration to zoom meetings for the Council and the planning board and board of adjustment to provide residents with the ability to keep informed and to interact with all Borough officials about information that affects their lives and our community even during the pandemic. We are retaining experts to update and redesign the Borough website and incorporate a public information and communications plan to better inform our residents and improve responsiveness of the Borough to meet the needs of the community. We continue to improve the technology in our borough to have records more accessible electronically by having the records digitized.

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Third I formed the WIDER Ad Hoc committee to investigate and address issues and acts of racism, discrimination, and inequality in Borough activities and operations. We investigated complaints and held 6 community meetings to speak with all residents to gather facts and information to be used in the establishment of a standing Watchung Inclusion, Diversity, Equality and Respect committee. Through our leadership, WIDER which will continue to review our policies, procedures and operations regarding recruitment, retention, training, support, advancement and recognition in all operations of the Borough including our volunteer committees to best ensure that Inclusion, Diversity, Equality and Respect are adhered to.

Fourth we continue to work with our grant writers to apply for phase 2 of the New Jersey State Library grant to move forward with planning and overseeing the process for building a new state of the art library which will include space for the arts center/technology and community center activities. The financing for the cost of construction of the new Library/Arts/Community Center is anticipated to be 50% from the State of New Jersey Library Grant Program; 25% from the sale proceeds of the current library and arts center properties to be sold for redevelopment and creation of future tax ratables for Watchung; and 25% from donations, major benefactor gifts and bond proceeds.

Fifth, we are identifying properties and areas where the Borough can look to meet its future affordable housing obligations. We are proactive to develop solutions for the affordable housing requirements so that they are beneficial to the community in meeting the mandates well before the deadlines.

Sixth, unfortunately 2020 called for the cancellation of almost all community events due to the pandemic. For 2021 I plan to have more community activities for our residents of all ages include organizing a seniors committee to develop group activities for our Watchung seniors; a family sports challenge competition with various events; an international foods night to bring residents together to sample foods from different cultures around the world; a community band concert and music on the green; arts and crafts fair on the green; community barbeque; a chili cook-off contest; and development of a community garden.

We have and will continue to embrace thoughtful dialogue and communication and input from our residents to share in the molding of critical agendas so that we provide the best solutions by utilizing the experience and talent from within our community. We thank our retired Council Member Stephen Black for his 25 years of service to the residents and businesses of Watchung, the hard work of our Historical committee and 9-11 committee and army of volunteers brought about the completion of the 9-11 memorial, brick pavers, the sidewalk and plantings all who we thank and especially grateful for all of the time and talent of Seth Alexander the Artist and project facilitator.

Special thanks to Carolyn Solon our Emergency Management Coordinator who has helped keep all of our residents safe during this State of Emergency addressing the safety measures and needs during the pandemic. I also thank our Borough Administrator James Damato, Edith Gil, our Borough Clerk, Bill Hance our CFO, Charles Gunther our Public Works Manager and all of our dedicated employees and volunteers who have put in countless additional hours to best serve our residents during the pandemic. On behalf of our entire community, I thank our frontline medical workers and emergency services, police, fire and EMTs for dedicating their lives to preserve the lives of others. I ask all of our residents to please be patient, forgiving, respectful, and provide encouragement as we move forward in 2021 so we can work together in peace and harmony for the good and well being of everyone in Watchung.

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I thank my loving wife Karen for all of her love and support and my three children, Jonah, Noah and Hannah for being a tremendous help, support and blessing throughout the year. I thank everyone in Watchung for your encouragement, help and support providing advice and valuable time, talents and treasures to make Watchung a great community. This past year has given each of us time to reflect on the blessings we have and the opportunities to brighten someone day with kind words, a smile, helping hands and a giving heart as we unite to make Watchung the best. I welcome your help and assistance in making Watchung united for a brighter future for each of us. God Bless You All.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Council President Robinson:

Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Good evening everyone and Happy New Year! To state the obvious, we are in a different place now then we were a year ago with the physical location, when we began the year last year at the dais, we could not have imagined that a year later we would be speaking at computer screens from our home; and I say speaking at computer screens because it does not feel as though we are speaking to our fellow Council Members and Mayor or to our residents and our employees the way we would if we were all together. When I look back at what my expectations were for 2020, addressing a public health crisis was definitely not on the list, but that's just one of the many challenges we face this past year and adapting became the norm. I would doubt that at any other time since Watchung's founding there has been only 1 experienced member of the governing body at the new year began. Six of the seven of us had no more than a year's tenure and its turns out that observing and critiquing how the borough is governed from the gallery or our homes is different from the business of governing. And I was under no illusion that it was going to be easy, but when the inexperience of our governing body was compounded with retirement, in some cases suddenly, of long-time employees who ran the every day operations of the borough, like the Administrator, Clerk, Police Chief, Deputy Clerk, Public Works Manager and Engineer, it really was like starting over. Government functions best when there is regular order and at times it was difficult to know what regular order was with all of those challenges. In fact, some of the only ones left with institutional knowledge were those members who have served as volunteers to various boards, committees and commissions and with our emergency services. In many respects, they helped move on forward however slowly we did in this difficult year and for that we are extremely grateful. We have made quite a few changes and that includes how those boards, commissions, committees operate. This year that will also involve modifying the position of those entities and we are anxious to see how passing the torch to new collaborators can bring fresh ideas that will add to the significant contribution some of those long-standing volunteers have made. I want to applaud the Mayor for adding some new faces and keeping some long-term members and to point out he is doing so in a non-partisan way. With the polarization of our country at its peak, I'm glad that in Watchung we can take a stand in how party affiliation can take a back seat to the best interest of the borough. I have found it encouraging that throughout the last year, working with Ron and Steve didn't involve the slightest bit of partisanship and we've collaborated closely on every matter. So, I welcome and look forward to working with our new colleague Freddie, there's no way he can fill the huge shoes Steve left behind, but I think he'll play an integral part in our continuing effort to rebuild the borough. I hope this year we can resume some resemblance of regular order and stay focused on non-pandemic issues; I strongly encourage everyone to become more involved by helping committees, attending and speaking at meetings, or reaching out to us through email. We obviously don't have all the answers and criticism that is presented in constructive and positive ways, working cooperatively with our neighbors, will help all of us to maintain a quality of

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life for all of Watchung residents, business owners, visitors and employees, thank you again for the opportunity to serve all of you. Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Council President Robinson also informed everyone that Council Member Martino had a death in the family and was unable to attend today's meeting.

Council Member Goodloe:

This past year was a difficult year for everybody to say the least. We lost loved ones and friends and we often felt isolated and confined and were full of worry. As a Governing Body, our Council and our Mayor devoted a great deal of time and resources to responding to the pandemic and making sure our residents were safe, healthy and had food on their table. Our borough employees worked a tremendous amount of time and I thank them for their service; particularly our Administrator Jim Damato, Clerk Edith Gil, OEM Coordinator Carolyn Solon and Public Works Manager Charlie Gunther, but everyone really worked a ton and I thank them all so much. Out of these challenges, I'm so proud of Watchung coming together as a community this year to respond to these unprecedented challenges. We raised funds, donated food, answered helpline calls, shopped for groceries for our neighbors, hung balloons, made masks, sold chicken, had visits from the Easter Bunny and Santa, we employed ceremonies and outdoor concerts, marched in support of black lives matter, had food truck Fridays, outdoor dined, unveiled a completed 9/11 Memorial and secured a location for a library, we also decorated Watchung with additional lights for this winter holiday season and importantly our volunteer rescue squad, police, fire, first responders, teachers, health care workers and assembly line workers put their health and safety at risk to serve the public on a daily basis and for that I am forever grateful. There is a lot to do in 2021 and I look forward to continuing this work, hopefully in person, and not over zoom when it is safe to do so, so we can all be together again. And let us continue this neighborly spirit in our pursuit to make Watchung an even better place to live. Thank you.

Council Member Eisenberg Knegten:

Thank you, Mayor. I will echo the theme of Happy New Year; 2020 was as unpredictable as a year could get. As we sat at our reorganization meeting last year, I don't think any of us knew what would happen in the months to come, but thanks to the resilience of our Watchung neighbors, this town rose to that occasion. We saw a multitude of volunteer efforts as Council Member Goodloe just recounted, we saw neighbors helping neighbors, we had fundraisers, we hung balloons and this town was making noise and making masks, the school restart committee allowed Watchung to be a standout district and this community came together to overcome what is arguably one of the biggest hurdles our town has faced. As I listed to many of you on our helpline who had questions or needed assistance, early in this pandemic, I saw a town come together to help one another and deliver groceries, masks and donate PPE to our first responder workers. There were some lessons learned that we can apply to the future; we have more accessible council meetings allowing residents to participate via zoom from home, I hope this accessibility for residents continues, even when it is safe for us to gather in person again. Through this pandemic, we have formed new connections and awareness of our neighbors needs. As 2021 begins, I look forward to being with our neighbors at gatherings again. Watchung Strong as we celebrate live, as we celebrate community, and as we celebrate new beginnings again. Happy New Year.

Council Member Jubin:

Hi every body and Happy New Year. To continue on the theme, we are all going to feel the same right? The year of 2020 is one of let's put in the books and move forward right. But let's be clear and honest right. Thanks to all of our residents and everybody for your civility and understanding. Thank you for your input, thanks for your cooperation as we worked our way through this challenging year. Your not

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knowing how worse it was going to get early on and not knowing when things would open back up. Certainly, while the vaccine sounds encouraging and promising, it's still a way until we can throw away the masks away. So, with that I finished the year and I'll start the year thanking our public health professionals, Kevin Sumner, Bruce Ruck, Carolyn Solon, who dealt day to day to our researching, cooperating and providing updates to keep us as safe as we could during this pandemic. This is one of those rare times that beyond a truck license or food handler or a dog bite or a septic tank, which is important don't get me wrong, but these times call upon us to step up and I'm proud to work with them and watch them to work to the levels that I know they are capable of. And of course, I would be remised if our first responders, the LEPC Committee, coming together on near daily meetings on covid and through all of this there was always goodness and community feeling that got me through it and I'm proud of Council who had all these great ideas on our town and providing feedback as best we could. As we go forward, we need to have the covid-19 handled and deal with the ramifications of that. We must work with the new forward focus and we must work with that purpose and vision, new directives. We need input from the residents, please be engaged, we appreciate your feedback and hopefully this electronic format makes it simpler to attend and provide comment. We are going to succeed through cooperation and collaboration, things we do are challenging, there are many different ways to keep the same goal, I think if we listen first, contribute second, debate, we will come up with good ideas that will really make this place a greater place to live. I hope that we can maintain this resiliency and I thank all the member of our administrative staff, everybody is new but I always like to say you look back and see what worked and what didn't work and then you fix what didn't work. I have to say it all worked well. There's a new group of individuals, with such challenging dynamics, Edith and Jim and their staff did a phenomenal job, Public Works, Police and Fire, EMS kept us all safe. Its an honor and a privilege to work with you and keep doing it.

Council Member Hayeck:

So I can't reflect as some of you on the Council but to echo the points, the sense of community that came together here in Watchung was really remarkable, through all of the challenges that 2020 faced. I think that strength and resiliency will carry over to 2021 as we overcome the lasting impacts of some of the challenges we faced. Thank you to our staff our DPW, our Police, EMS, Fire, and the community for coming together and showing up for the people and I'm looking forward to continuing on that success. So I'll say thank you.

PUBLIC PORTION

Written public submitted by Sandy Fechner:

Since pickup has not occurred, can someone check with Council with what we have to do with our bins. Will there be pickup this week or should we take back the bins until next 2 weeks? Could you send out a blast? I tried getting this information from the county but the phone went unanswered. Happy New Year to all.

The Clerk informed the public that the County was experiencing delays on picking up recyclable materials and that residents should still leave their bins out since the County would still be picking up as soon as possible.

BENEDICTION – The Benediction was given by Reverend Monsignor William Benwell, St. Mary's Church – Stony Hill

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ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Balla thanked everyone for viewing the meeting. There being no further business to come before the Council the meeting was adjourned at 7 PM to the Call of the Chair. The next scheduled meeting of the Mayor and Council will be held virtually on Thursday, January 21, 2021 at 7:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Edith G. Gil
Borough Clerk