

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

MARCH 3, 2022

[THIS MEETING WAS HELD IN-PERSON AND BROADCASTED VIA ZOOM]

MAYOR’S STATEMENT: Mayor Balla called the meeting to order at 7:30 P.M. and stated the following *“This meeting is being held in compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act. 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 on the Borough’s website. Public Comments will be accepted in-person, through zoom or by email to the Borough Clerk. For those joining through Zoom, please note that upon arrival you are automatically muted.”*

SALUTE TO THE FLAG and MOMENT OF SILENCE to REMEMBER SUPPORT AND HONOR THE UKRAINIAN PEOPLE and OUR SERVICE MEN AND WOMEN, SERVING HOME AND ABROAD

ROLL CALL

Jubin [P] Robinson [P] Martino [P] Hayeck [P] Dahl [P] Ead [P]

PROCLAMATION

Mayor Balla read the following proclamation onto the record:

❖ Women’s History Month

MAYORS REPORT

Disclosures: Mayor Balla spoke on changes he implemented since taking office to ensure transparency, he noted that prior to his term, draft resolutions were not posted online prior to a meeting. After taking office, drafts of resolutions were posted online and he was under the impression that so were any accompanying attachments, however this was not the case. He noted that going forward all resolutions and accompanying documents would be made public when the agenda is posted to the website.

Budget: Mayor Balla commented that since taking office, budget hearings were open to the public and noted that the financial caution exercised during covid has resulted in the largest surplus in the history of Watchung. He noted the boroughs finances were quite healthy and having a \$6.7 million surplus would allow for much needed infrastructure improvements.

Library: Mayor Balla spoke on the borough’s history in dealing with the library and noted his own suggested plan. He suggested a construction that would include parking underneath the first floor, a 1st floor space for the Arts Center, a community center and commercial space, a 2nd floor and /or above would be residential apartments including some affordable housing units. The Mayor announced he was establishing an Ad-Hoc Committee comprised of the following:

Facilities Ad-Hoc Committee: David Checchio, Hans Juette, Curt Dahl, Joan Plasner, Gail Tafaro, Bibi Taylor, Stephen Pote, and Bradford Leigh.

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

MARCH 3, 2022

Sidewalks: Mayor Balla provided background information on this matter and noted the property was vacant for a long time.

REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES:

1. Administration & Finance: Council Member Jubin reported on the committee meeting held on February 25th in which matters regarding the 2022 Municipal Budget and other projects were discussed. Grant opportunities regarding infrastructure were also discussed.

Council Member Martino inquired on a preliminary budget increase and reimbursing residents for special assessment late fees. CFO Bill Hance stated a resolution is needed for resident reimbursement.

2. Police: Council Member Robinson noted that resolution R1 on tonight's agenda has an item for the desk replacement which was damaged in the small fire at Police headquarters. She also mentioned postcards would be arriving in all mailboxes outlining steps residents can take to reduce the possibilities of thefts. Lastly, she reported that Tuesday, March 8th at 10:00 A.M. there would be a ceremony at Police headquarters commemorating the anniversary of Matt Melchionda's passing.

Council Member Martino requested there be a discussion relating to safety within our Borough and the establishment of neighborhood safety at our next meeting.

3. Public Works / Buildings and Grounds: Council Member Ead thanked the DPW employees for all their hard work throughout the Borough. She proceeded to discuss several items, most notably the flashing light at Verona near Valley View School is up and running, tree management, and anchors needed for the fountains to function correctly will be made by our DPW employees. There were discussions held relating to the spotted lantern fly and milk weed planting. The new cleaning service for the Borough will begin on March 7th. Everyone is working diligently to get Mobus Field back up and running for our kids. She discussed the upcoming road projects, Ness Farm updates as well as the culverts and bridges in need of repair.

Council Member Martino inquired on the status of the DPW Interim Manager. Administrator Damato advised that applications were being reviewed. Council Member Martino also inquired on the Texier House patio. CFO Hance advised the bricks are on back order but he will reach out to the company again. Administrator Damato confirmed the fields will be open in the Spring.

Council President Jubin inquired on the geese addling process. Administrator Damato advised the permit to addle was applied for and also mentioned the DPW has been using laser technology to try and keep the geese off the lawn but the effects are not for long periods of time

4. Public Affairs:

Environmental: Council Member Robinson reported on the commission's February 28th meeting, she proceeded to provide the number of trees to be removed and replaced. The Styrofoam Collection program was very successful in collecting 300 pounds of Styrofoam. She also advised the New Legacy project and Farmers market will be moving forward. She noted the Board of Adjustment sent the project proposal for 1375 Plainfield Ave to the Commission for review.

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

MARCH 3, 2022

Recreation: Council Member Hayeck reported on the commissions meeting that took place just last night. He discussed the upcoming Summer Camp program, international family day and possibly having national night out.

Historical: Council Member Ead reported on the committee's January 26th meeting, she noted the upcoming events, planning weekend journey through the past and working on archiving historical information. They are looking to schedule opening hours consistent with the 1st and 3rd Sundays from 2:00 P.M. to 4:00 P.M. Legend of Watchung mural locations are still being discussed.

Council Member Martino spoke on the upcoming birthday of Charles Aubrey Eaton on March 29th, a very famous resident of Watchung.

Council Member Martino motioned that March 29th be declared as Charles Aubrey Eaton Day / Second by Council President Jubin.

RC: Jubin [Y] Robinson [Y] Martino [Y] Hayeck [Y] Dahl [Y] Ead [Y]

Board of Health: Council President Jubin stated the board has not met since the last Council meeting but updated everyone on the down trending COVID-19 numbers and updates to the Mayors Wellness Campaign.

5. Fire: Council Member Dahl reported the committee did not meet, but conversations were initiated about a possible corn hole fundraising event.
6. Laws/ Ordinances: Council Member Martino hopes they will finalize the pending ordinances at the next meeting and discussed reviewing the wildlife Ordinance. Council Member Robinson reminded all to keep in mind that vultures are a protected species. Council Member Martino mentioned the Ordinance will be general to feeding the wildlife.

REPORTS – OTHER:

7. Engineer: Professional Engineer Jason Cline, RVE, noted items such as the emergency repairs to various culverts and DOT Projects. Mr. Cline went on to describe other projects being planned.
8. Police Chief: Chief Andrew Hart reported on the departments February figures. He also discussed the speed sign management program.
9. Fire Department: No report.
10. Rescue Squad: Council Member Robinson reported on the members who recently passed their exams and noted the figures from January.

CM Martino requested a proclamation for long-time resident Vera Stine, whose birthday falls on March 24th and most notably she was the first female captain of the Watchung Rescue Squad.

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

MARCH 3, 2022

Motion to declare March 24th Vera Stine Day by Martino / Second by Council Member Robinson.
RC: Jubin [Y] Robinson [Y] Martino [Y] Hayeck [Y] Dahl [Y] Ead [Y]

11. Emergency Management: Carolyn Solon spoke on updates relating to FEMA and the Hurricane Ida damage throughout the Borough.
12. Attorney: Attorney Sordillo had no report but stated there is no conflict of interest in regards to Council Members receiving campaign donations.
13. Finance: CFO Bill Hance reported that he completed the annual financial statement which will be filed with the State and after forwarded to all members of Council.
14. Clerk: Clerk Edith Gil reported on the egg addling permit, election deadlines and the resolution on tonight's agenda partnering with Hometown Press to produce the next borough newsletter.
15. Administrator: Administrator James Damato commented pursuing more Shared Services Agreements.
16. Youth Services: Council Member Dahl noted the Committee has yet to meet.
17. Planning Board: Council Member Martino informed the public of the upcoming meeting and discussed the final application approval for 744 Mountain Blvd.
18. Municipal Alliance: Council Member Hayeck reported on their last meeting of which upcoming events were discussed.
19. Library Advisory Board: Council Member Robinson had no report.
20. Traffic and Beautification: Council Member Ead reported on the commissions February 21st meeting and spoke on Operation Pride, the scarecrow stroll idea at the upcoming Harvest Festival and new banners which will replace the Winter Banners around town.

PUBLIC PORTION / AGENDA ITEMS ONLY

- 1) Virginia Hartmann, Ellisen Road, asked if the Council plans to fix the current Library. Mayor Balla responded that his plan is to build a new Library and Arts Center together as a new structure but it's premature to say what will happen to the existing building. Ms. Hartmann thanked Council member Martino for all his continued assistance with the many Library issues. Councilmember Martino expressed his gratitude for all who helped with this process.
- 2) Lynda Goldshein, Sherwood Drive, expressed her feelings regarding the condition of the barn property. She also does not agree with Council giving away Borough property. She spoke on the process of adverse possession and stated she does not support the paving of Best Lake. She also questioned how many people have requested a sidewalk in the last two years.
- 3) Tracy DiFrancesco, Templar Drive, spoke on how well the Recreation Basketball teams are doing.

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

MARCH 3, 2022

- 4) Tamara Benc, Lakeview Ave, questioned how often the new Borough cleaner would visit the buildings. Administrator Damato responded that the new cleaning people will visit each building on Monday Wednesday and Friday in addition to doing a deep cleaning of all the buildings. She thanked Council members who have visited the library for a tour. She also discussed the previous Library building plans.
- 5) Kim DiDonato, Johnston Drive, thanked the Mayor and Council for all their hard work. She expressed her feelings on why the Borough does not need a brand-new library building built and also expressed her desire for sidewalks. She thanked Mr. Bisignano for all his hard work and dedication to the Borough.
- 6) Dave Nunn, Dogwood Lane, thanked the Mayor and Council for their hard work and stated he is also in favor of sidewalks. He expressed his appreciation for the Bisignano family. He also asked Mr. Damato for his opinion on R5. Mr. Damato responded in favor of Mr. Bisignano's proposal.
- 7) Gina Coquota, Stanie Brae Drive, commented on the unsafe conditions of the unauthorized trucks driving down Hillcrest Road and asked if the signage could be placed closer to the highway exit ramp. She expressed her gratitude for Mr. Bisignano and all he has done for our children and the improvement of the town.
- 8) Virginia Hartmann, Ellisen Road, questioned if Council President Jubin still planed on touring the library after hearing of the Mayor's plan for a new Library building. Council President Jubin advised his plans have not changed.
- 9) Lynda Goldshein, Sherwood Drive, expressed her concerns with Resolution R5 on tonight's agenda not being discussed in a public session.
- 10) Kim DiDonato, Johnston Drive, discussed the idea of possibly relocating the FEMA playground to the Camp Endeavor Site.

Council Member Martino addressed in detail some of his concerns throughout the Borough. He discussed previous Library plans and hopes all issues come to a conclusion. He feels we are all neighbors and friends and have a great team and community. He also expressed his concern to set Watching's path forward. Council President Jubin expressed his thoughts on the sidewalk and the library as separate issues. He is eager to hear the advice from the Library Advisory Committee.

- 11) Bruce Ruck, Lakeview Avenue, discussed a previous practice in Watchung where different blocks had individuals volunteer to help their neighbors who may be in need of assistance in case of an emergency.
- 12) Martin Carroll, Valley Road, commented on the history of trying to get a new library built in town. He stated it unwise to trade off any land that could be used for a new Library building.

Council Member Robinson expressed her concerns relating to Resolution R5. She suggested using volunteers to fix up the barn and if that isn't possible taking it down but leaving the property available specifically for Library purposes. Council President Jubin discussed the safety concerns relating to the sidewalk issue. Council Member Robinson strongly disagrees with sacrificing Borough property.

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

MARCH 3, 2022

Council Member Ead discussed sidewalks as a safer option for pedestrians but not 100 percent safe. Council Member Martino asked Attorney Sordillo for clarification if the resolution from September was a binding contract. Attorney Sordillo stated the September resolution was not authorizing a contract.

- 13) Marianne Candiloros, Nottingham Drive, spoke on the need for sidewalks in the Borough. She also noted the Police Officer at the top of Hillcrest Road has been very effective. She expressed her disappointment with the amount of money requested in regards to the library grant. She also asked for clarification on the amount of money spent drawing up the previous Library plans. Mayor Balla advised CFO Bill Hance will work on gathering this information.
- 14) Bill Candiloros, Nottingham Drive, advised he submitted an OPRA Request asking for clarification on the amount of money requested for the library grant and plans to make the public aware of this information.

Mayor Balla called for a brief 5-minute recess.

- 15) Isis Jorge, submitted written public comments regarding the Watchung Library that were read onto the record.
- 16) Lauren Wilkos, submitted written public comments regarding the sidewalk project on the former Valley Furniture property that were read onto the record.
- 17) Joan Plasner, submitted written public comments regarding the sidewalk project on the former Valley Furniture property that were read onto the record.
- 18) William Parenti, submitted written public comments regarding the sidewalk project on the former Valley Furniture property that were read onto the record.
- 19) Goldie Gupperman, submitted written public comments regarding the donation made to the fish tank of the Watchung Library that were read onto the record.
- 20) Ray Barratt, submitted written public comments regarding the sidewalk project on the former Valley Furniture property that were read onto the record.
- 21) Diana Churchill, submitted written public comments regarding the sidewalk project on the former Valley Furniture property that were read onto the record.
- 22) Hazel Bell, submitted written public comments regarding the sidewalk project on the former Valley Furniture property that were read onto the record.
- 23) Marybeth Ligo, submitted written public comments regarding the Watchung Library that were read onto the record.
- 24) Margaret Ellis, submitted written public comments regarding the Watchung Library that were read onto the record.

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

MARCH 3, 2022

25) Kristy Hartmann, submitted written public comments regarding the sidewalk project on the former Valley Furniture property that were read onto the record.

Council President Jubin advised he did not use the former valley furniture site for purposes of his 2020 campaign and noted that his decisions as Council President are based on the Boroughs best interest. Council Member Martino provided comments on prior situations where certain information had to be restricted while discussed in executive session. He suggested that certain information be forwarded to the Local Finance Board for an advisory opinion regarding their position on the sidewalk discussions. Attorney Sordillo noted these are advisory opinions and are not legal advice. Council Member Hayeck thanked everyone for their participation towards the betterment of Watchung.

DISCUSSIONS

❖ Hometown Hero Flags

Council Member Ead discussed in great detail the program to be establish and on donations for the Hometown Hero Flags cause. It is a program that the Borough is looking to roll out for the upcoming Memorial Day ceremony. She also discussed the look and content of the banners and their placement throughout the Borough. All Council members were in full support of this program and praised Council Member Ead for her through research on the matter.

❖ Tree Planting Proposal – Best Lake

Council Member Robinson discussed in detail the tree planting proposal submitted by the Environmental Commission. The Commission has identified an area east of Best Lake as an ideal location for tree planting. They are proposing to plant a mix of native trees to help reduce area flooding. Council Member Martino commented he would like to sponsor a tree. Mayor Balla moved this discussion forward and suggested that Commissioner Doug Speeney put a plan together on this once the trees were ordered.

Council Member Hayeck offered a motion that funds for this be used from the tree bank / Second by Council Member Ead.

RC: Jubin [Y] Robinson [Y] Martino [Y] Hayeck [Y] Dahl [Y] Ead [Y]

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

REPORTS & CORRESPONDENCE:

Acknowledging Receipt of the following Borough Reports:

Board of Adjustment Annual Report 2021

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

MARCH 3, 2022

& Meeting Minutes	December 14, 2021
Building Department Monthly Report	February 2022
CERT Meeting Minutes	February 22, 2022
Engineer's Status Report	February 2022
Green Team Meeting Minutes	January 19, 2022
Fire Prevention Bureau Report	February 2022
Historical Committee Meeting Minutes	January 26, 2022
PARSA Meeting Minutes	February 3, 2022
Mayor and Council Regular Meeting Mins	December 16, 2021 January 6, 2022
Mayor and Council Executive Session Mins	September 22, 2021, October 7 and 21, 2021 January 20, 2022 February 3 and 17, 2022
Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes	November 3, 2021
Rescue Squad Monthly Report	January and February 2022

Motion to Accept above by Jubin/ Second by Robinson

RC: Jubin [Y] Robinson [Y] Martino [Y] Hayeck [Y] Dahl [Y] Ead [Y]

CONSENT AGENDA RESOLUTIONS

R1: Authorizing Purchase Orders over \$2,000 – EvensonBest (*PD-desk replacement*)
General Code (*Borough code supplement updates*)

R2: Authorizing Bill List

R3: Authorizing Payment of 2021 Stipend for Rescue Squad

Motion to Adopt above by Jubin/ Second by Hayeck

RC: Jubin [Y] Robinson [Y] Martino [Y] Hayeck [Y] Dahl [Y] Ead [Y]

CM Martino Abstain from R2*

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

MARCH 3, 2022

NON-CONSENT RESOLUTIONS

R4: Authorizing Publishing Agreement with Hometown Press for the Publishing of the Borough Newsletter and Awarding Concession to Allow for Commercial Advertising within Newsletter

Motion to Adopt above by Jubin/ Second by Robinson

RC: Jubin [Y] Robinson [Y] Martino [Y] Hayeck [Y] Dahl [Y] Ead [Y]

R5: Authorizing Memorandum of Understanding with MAHA At Watchung, LLC – Circle Sidewalk Extension Project

Council Member Martino and Council Member Robinson expressed their reasoning for not supporting this resolution.

Motion to Adopt above by Ead/ Second by Jubin

RC: Jubin [Y] Robinson [N] Martino [N] Hayeck [Y] Dahl [Y] Ead [Y]

R6: Authorizing and Approving the Hometown Hero Banner Program

Motion to Adopt above by Ead/ Second by Jubin

RC: Jubin [Y] Robinson [Y] Martino [Y] Hayeck [Y] Dahl [Y] Ead [Y]

PUBLIC PORTION - GENERAL DISCUSSION

No one appearing to speak.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon there being no further business before Council the meeting ended at 11:36 P.M. to the Call of the Chair. The next meeting of the Mayor and Council will be held on Thursday, March 17, 2022 at 7:30 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Regina Angelo
Deputy Clerk