

BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG

RE-ORGANIZATION MEETING

MINUTES

JANUARY 6, 2018

12:00 P.M.

OPENING STATEMENT: Mayor Stephen K. Pote called the meeting to order at 12:10 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 meeting was given by way of annual notice to the Courier News, Echoes Sentinel, and Star Ledger, and posted at Borough Hall.

Mayor Pote welcomed the dignitaries who were present: Assemblywoman Nancy Munoz, Freeholders Pat Walsh, and Brian Levine, former Mayor Al Ellis, former first ladies: Fran Ellis and Diddy Addario; and also Bd. of Adjustment Chair Dan Cronheim and Reverend Barbara Peters .

Council President Joren said Assemblyman Jon Bramnick sent his regrets for not attending since he had a previous commitment.

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

Mr. Cruz read the following resolution and asked for a motion. Council President Joren moved the resolution with a second by Councilman Black and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Joren, Black, Nehls, Gibbs, Mobus, Sopko, "aye."

R1:01/06/18 Authorizing an Emergency Meeting in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act

INVOCATION- The Invocation was given by Reverend Barbara Peters, Wilson Memorial Church.

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE AND OFFICE

Stephen Black – Councilmember

Mayor Pote administered the Oath of Office to Councilman Black.

Robert Gibbs – Councilmember

Assemblywoman Munoz administered the Oath of Office to Councilman Gibbs.

ROLL CALL

Joren [P] Black [P] Nehls [P] Gibbs [P] Mobus [P] Sopko [P]

Also present were Administrator Tom Atkins, Attorney Albert Cruz, Engineer Tom Herits, Chief Joe Cina, Clerk Michelle DeRocco, and Deputy Clerk MaryAnn Hance.

There were 26 members of the public present

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE AND OFFICE

Mayor Pote announced that Fire Chief Charles Pivnichny and Assistant Fire Chief Albert DeSandolo were not able to attend this afternoon's meeting, however, he will administer their Oaths of Office at their meeting Monday, January 8, 2018.

Rescue Squad Captain – Michael Vala

Mayor Pote administered the Oath of Office to Rescue Squad Captain Michael Vala.

Rescue Squad First Lieutenant Nicholas Falcicchio was unable to attend this meeting.

NOMINATION FOR COUNCIL PRESIDENT

Councilman Black nominated Councilman Gibbs for the position of Council President, with a second by Councilman Nehls. No other nominations were made. Nominations were closed and the motion carried unanimously on roll call.

Council President Gibbs thanked Councilwoman Joren for all her work during her time as President.

NOMINATION OF CLASS III PLANNING BOARD MEMBER

Councilwoman Joren nominated Councilman Sopko as the Class III member of the Planning Board, with a second by Councilman Black. No other nominations were made. Nominations were closed and the motion carried unanimously on roll call.

Councilman Sopko thanked the Mayor and Council for this appointment and their trust in him.

APPOINTMENT OF STANDING COMMITTEES

Mayor Pote announced the following Committee assignments:

Administration & Finance

Chair Mobus
Gibbs
Sopko

Public Works

Chair: Nehls
Joren
Mobus

Laws & Ordinances

Chair: Joren
Black
Gibbs

Public Affairs:

Board of Health (Black)
Environmental Commission (Sopko)
Open Space (Sopko)
Recreation Commission (Mobus)
Historical Committee (Mobus)

Police

Chair: Joren
Nehls
Gibbs

Fire

Chair: Black
Nehls
Mobus

Rescue Squad Liaison: Sopko

Youth Services Commission Liaison: Pote

9/11 Memorial Liaison: Mobus

Library Advisory Committee Liaison: Black

Planning Board, Class III Member: Sopko

Wildlife Advisory Committee Liaison: Gibbs

CONSENT AGENDA RESOLUTIONS

Council President Gibbs moved the following resolutions with a second by Councilwoman Joren and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Gibbs, Black, Joren, Nehls, Mobus, Sopko, “aye.”

- R2: Adoption of Rules of Order
- R3: Designation of Official Newspapers – Star Ledger, Echoes Sentinel, Courier News
- R4: Adoption of Annual Calendar of Meeting Dates
- R5: Designation of Depositories – Investors Savings Bank
- R6: Re-establish Petty Cash Funds – Borough Clerk, Police Chief
- R7: Payment of Property Taxes and Establishing Payment Procedures
- R8 Appointment of Professional Service Officials, 1-year terms /
Auditor – Suplee, Clooney & Co.
Bond Counsel – Rogut & McCarthy, LLC
Engineer – Maser Consulting PA
Labor Attorney – Ruderman & Glickman, P.C.
Public Defender – James Loewen
- R9: Appointment of Fire Chief, Assistant Fire Chief / Charles Pivnichny,
Albert DeSandolo
- R10: Authorizing Execution of Professional Service Agreement for 2018 Risk
Management Consultants / Meeker Sharkey & Hurley
- R11: Appointment of JIF Commissioner / Tom Atkins
- R12: Authorize Borough to Continue as a Member of the Municipal Pipeline Group,
and Extend Retainer / John M. Scagnelli – Scarinci Hollenbeck
- R13: Recognizing Sondra Fechtner / 36 (+) Years of Service – WHRHS Board of
Education Member
- R14: Authorize Expansion of Contract / Animal Control Services – St. Hubert’s Giralda,
Inc.

NON CONSENT AGENDA RESOLUTIONS

Councilman Mobus moved the following resolution with a second by Councilman Sopko and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Joren, “Abstain”, Gibbs, Black, Nehls, Mobus, Sopko, “aye.”

- R15: Appointment of Official, 1-year term / Borough Attorney – Albert E. Cruz

Councilman Sopko moved the following resolution with a second by Councilman Mobus and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Joren, “Abstain,” Gibbs, Black, Nehls, Mobus, Sopko, “aye.”

- R16: Authorize Borough Attorney to file Tax Appeals and Petitions on behalf
of the Borough for 2018

Council President Gibbs moved the following resolution with a second by Councilman Nehls and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Gibbs, Black, Joren, Nehls, Mobus, Sopko, “aye.”

- R17: Appointments - Boards, Committees, Commissions

Mayor Pote said not all openings have been filled at this time and there will be future appointments at the next meeting.

Councilman Mobus moved the following resolution with a second by Councilman Sopko and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Gibbs, Black, Joren, Nehls, Mobus, Sopko, “aye.”

- R18: Temporary Budget

Councilman Mobus moved the following resolution with a second by Councilman Sopko and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Gibbs, Black, Joren, Nehls, Mobus, Sopko, “aye.”

R19: Payment of Bills

RECOGNITION OF EMPLOYEE SERVICE

Mayor Pote read the following employee milestones and congratulated all, stating the Borough could not do without them:

30 Years: Anita Nappa, Police Aide
Andrea Meyer, Police Administrative Assistant

25 Years: Daniel Lorimor, Police Department

15 Years: Joseph Nicastro, Plumbing Sub-Code Official
Dave Melchionda, Police Department
Helder Peixoto, Police Aide

5 Years: Justin Bowman, Police Department
Arthur Wright, Public Works
Anthony Vitelli, Public Works

MAYOR'S ADDRESS:

The following is Mayor Pote's 2018 address:

Greetings to everyone who is here with us this afternoon, including several members of my family.

Good afternoon. Again I welcome you all to Borough Hall as we look back at our accomplishments this past year, and we position ourselves for the year ahead.

Let me first highlight some of the many accomplishments of the Borough in 2017.

Most visible of accomplishments to our residents is the beautiful 9/11 memorial which now stands firmly on our Village Green. We appreciate the work of the 9/11 Memorial Committee, as well the many contractors and residents who provided materials, labor, and financial support. We look to continue work on the sidewalk which will extend and connect our current walkway around the lake to the Memorial. There is still time to purchase an engraved brick in support of this effort. We should all be proud of this achievement.

Across the street we see that Texier House roof, siding, and foundation repairs have been made, and the home to our great history has now been painted to reflect something closer to its original colors.

Still around the circle, the rock wall in front of Borough Hall as you enter the circle from Mountain Blvd has been repaired. We also have planted several trees along Somerset Street, to pilot again our ability to sustain vegetation in a very confined area that is subject to the exhaust of thousands of cars along Somerset. We continue to work with owners of the gas station next to Spratford Park; we are frustrated by the careless treatment of our property through unnecessary fuel spillage; we hope to get this resolved soon.

Historical Committee has been a catalyst for some of the repairs at Texier House – but they also have been a catalyst behind the saving of the historic mural recently removed from the now closed Sears.

In regards to the Sears property, meticulous work on the part of the Planning Board has resulted in the approval of plans with the Seritage Corporation to build 5 new retail stores and 4 pad sites where the Sears building is today. Across Terrill Road, where the Sears Auto Center has been, is the future site of a 10 movie cinema complex, from what we have reviewed, a state-of-the-art movie theater that will draw patrons from all over.

It took almost two years to finalize, but the Planning Board, along with the town's strong partnership with Weldon Materials, has worked to complete plans that will continue to permit Weldon for decades to come to operate its quarry, while protecting the interests of our Watchung residents. I am extremely pleased with the efforts of our Planning Board and Weldon to protect the existing landscape where possible along Bonnie Burn Road, while putting in place an extensive and I think impressive reforestation of the area, especially where the now closed Colorado Café exists. Speaking of Weldon, we are working with them to ensure that a home for the town's much needed emergency services communication antenna continues to exist somewhere on Weldon property where reception can be optimized. Weldon is also working with us to sign a long-term 25 year agreement which will allow the Borough to store salt and other materials on Weldon property, no longer requiring our DPW employees to have to go back to Somerset street to get salt for the East side of town.

Our borough continues to maintain a responsible budget, and we continue to work to balance the needs of the community with the need to remain within the current 2% levy cap. Our bond rating was elevated this past year from a rating of "AA" to an "AA+" rating. One of those balancing acts this past year was the signing of a four-year contract with our Police Department. I know that both sides are generally pleased not only with the results, but with the process for getting us there. Our Police force knows how much I, the Council and Administration, and residents value their services – as we are of all emergency services – and I believe they are appreciative of our efforts to work with them to ensure a fair and responsible contract.

We received some much needed Somerset County support on Hillcrest Road, putting down slip-resistant materials that have significantly improved traction at the upper part of Hillcrest. I believe more work is needed in regards to signage and surveillance, to maintain slower speeds and to better forewarn drivers of this treacherous area.

In 2017 the Mayor and Council, Administration, members of the Planning Board, and hired consultants, have collectively spent hundreds and hundreds of hours on the Affordable Housing issue which affects every municipality in this state. We are defendants in this affordable housing litigation and the plaintiff is the Fair Share Housing Center. We are working extremely hard to come up with a compromise solution. While understandably there are many residents in town, as in other towns, who are resistant to this change, make no mistake to think that this issue can or will go away; it is a reality we are making every effort to work through.

We made some progress this past year on renovations to the firehouse, and we look to resolving some issues and completing that work in 2018. In the past year we took the time to discuss in great detail the deer situation in town, and after both an aerial and ground count, as well presentations, discussions, and debate, some mutual agreement was reached. Among the accomplishments of our Environmental and Green Teams is an electric car charging station which will be installed right outside Borough Hall at the lower level over the next few weeks. And this year with the help of the Recreation Committee we restored our kids summer program at Brook Hill, and it was a great success.

As it relates to the environment, the Borough continues to play a leading role in defense against the Pilgrim Pipeline. To our advantage, the process has been slowed up in NY State, and many affected Mayors in NJ have mobilized our Councils to ensure that our voice continues to be heard in Trenton as it relates to protecting our watersheds, aquifers, and our residents. Today's agenda included a resolution approving the continued use of existing funds made available in 2017, to provide continued support of this effort as needed.

In 2017 several roads were milled and paved, including Washington Drive and Valley Drive, Acorn Road, Glenview Drive, Crestwood Drive, and a portion of both Scott Drive and Winter Lane. We also did important drainage work on Crestwood Drive, Shawnee Drive, Will Lane, and Ellisen Road.

On a lighter note, in 2017 one of our jewels in Watchung, The Watchung Arts Center, celebrated its 40th anniversary this past year. For decades, this establishment has brought great artistry and talent to the area. The Art Center has contributed greatly to making Watchung a better place to live. Congratulations to both groups.

And speaking of congratulations, at the end of December, Sandy Fechtner concluded 36 years as one of Watchung's two representatives on the Watchung Hills Regional High School Board of Education. We thank Sandy for her commitment and accomplishments on this Board, in addition to the 40+ years she has served on, and continues to serve on, Watchung's Board of Adjustment. In December on behalf of the Council I presented Sandy with a proclamation before the High School Board of Education, but Sandy is here today and I would just like to recognize her.

In 2017 we also had some good discussion around the library and its reconstruction. As we enter 2018, this topic will be among several important issues that have to be addressed by the Mayor and Council. We will have more to discuss on this issue in near future meetings, but as I have stated for seven years, to improve the lives and sense of community in our town, a library consistent with the means and needs of Watchung needs to be built. A library is a basic service, with an investment return to all of its residents that I believe far outweighs its cost. With the recently passed \$125 Million Bond Referendum to rebuild our State's libraries, the State of NJ will be giving Watchung the opportunity to have its investment in a library potentially matched 1:1. State Senator Kip Bateman, who helped to sponsor and shepherd this bill, has given our town a great opportunity to have a significant portion of the library paid for – and the Borough should be asking whatever it can from the State to offset the cost of a much needed library. Watchung residents pay their taxes, and Watchung deserves its fair share of this referendum in return, and we need to go after this grant money when the application becomes available.

As stated, we in 2018 will need to continue to address the Affordable Housing issue in Watchung. We will be going to court early in the year in an attempt to come to some resolution. Along these lines, while we greatly understand Berkeley Heights' similar Affordable Housing commitments, we will need to continue to reach out to our neighboring town as we have done to get their assistance to help us with the consequential traffic concerns resulting from their commercial buildings, gym, new hotel, and affordable housing that will be put in the Connell area, all of which is affecting traffic on New Providence, Bonnie Burn, Valley, Somerset and Hillcrest Roads. We need to work together on this problem.

In 2018, we will be evaluating what needs to be done to dredge Watchung Lake, as well restore its shoreline along Mountain Boulevard. We continue to work on the remediation of the Ness property. We also will be looking to assist Watchung Little League with renovations to Phillips Field.

We have started investigating our options around a Park'n Ride; we will likely be issuing a survey to residents in the first quarter. We also are in conversations with Warren to understand their plans. Also in 2018, our Planning Board will have no respite following their work on Weldon and Sears/Seritage properties. The Board will continue assisting us on the Affordable Housing issue, and now will be taking on another important look at the Master Plan.

Our work on over a dozen other committees continues as well, and

We also could not get this done without our administration. Tom Atkins, our Borough Administrator, Michelle DeRocco, our Borough Clerk, Bill Hance, our CFO, and Joe Cina, our Police Chief – they and their teams have done tremendous work and have accomplished a great deal when considering what is asked of them and their teams, day-in and day-out, throughout the year. And special thanks to our contracted services whose expertise and talents we appreciate.

In closing, let me at this time wish all of you a happy and healthy new year. I look forward to working with all of you in our collective efforts to maintain and improve Watchung Borough; we continue to strive to improve the quality of our lives and continue to further build a sense of community that we hope can be enjoyed by everyone.

God bless all of you, and God bless this great Borough of Watchung.

Thank you for the honor you have given me to serve as your Mayor.

COUNCIL COMMENTS:

Council President Gibbs wished all a Happy New Year and thanked the Council for choosing him as President. He again thanked Councilwoman Joren for all she has done. He said the Council will continue to focus on being fiscally responsible. He also said other issues will be the infrastructure, affordable housing, the library, and the condition of the lakes. He told residents that the Mayor and Council are always here for them.

Councilman Black wished all a Happy New Year and congratulated Council President Gibbs on his election as President. He thanked the Mayor for covering all the topics in his speech. He also thanked all the volunteers and those in attendance today including the Fire Department, Rescue Squad, and Police Department who help make this such a great town. He thanked all for re-electing him to the Council and hopes he meets their expectations.

Councilwoman Joren said she would like to mention her wish list, which is no particular order. She would like to see the Council meetings televised; have more attention on the green scape including the Watchung signs and tree replanting in the islands on Somerset Street. She would also continue looking into changing the lights on Somerset Street with lower wattage; and have the County consider sidewalks on Mountain Boulevard and continue working on the renovation of the Library. Councilwoman Joren also suggested that residents become more engaged in the Council meetings and contact the Council instead of discussing on the websites.

Councilman Nehls wished everyone a Happy New Year and thanked all for being here and he looks forward to working with everyone. He thanked all Rescue Squad, Fire Department, and Police Department members; and all volunteers on our Committees and Commissions – saying their work and efforts are appreciated.

Councilman Mobus wished all a Happy New Year and thanked everyone for coming. He said Thursdays storm reminded him of the 2012 Super Storm and a fond memory he has of his Dad and told the story of that time and the laugh they had amidst the chaos of the tremendous storm, when he called his Dad and told him he had a serious emergency and when his Dad asked what it was he told him – “I don’t have any celery for my Bloody Mary”. He said his dad had been working tirelessly helping residents, getting the power restored, checking on the elderly and answering questions from distressed residents. Councilman Mobus then said 2017 was a great year and he was proud of all the work done as a group and the Borough has been blessed with many great volunteers. He said all are respectful of each other and their individual opinions and thanked the Mayor and Council for this.

Councilman Sopko wished all a Happy New Year and congratulated Council President Gibbs on his election as Council President. He said he is happy and proud to be a resident and Council member. He thanked all employees, administration and volunteers for all their hard work. Councilman Sopko said his assessment of the Borough is that where all things that are important factors to a municipality are moving in the right direction, tax rates are down, the credit rating is up and significant commercial investment capital is moving into town which puts us in a much firmer position moving forward.

PUBLIC PORTION

Diddy Addario, Rock Avenue, wished all a happy, healthy 2018. She thanked the Mayor and Council for their continued support of the Historical Committee. Ms. Addario said 2018 will continue to be busy time for the Committee and said they have a shortage of manpower – they need more members. She asked if anyone has someone interested in joining please pass their names along. She then thanked the Borough staff for all their help.

Rachel Funcheon, Cedar Road, said there are a lot of safety concerns from residents about the deer hunt which is in progress at this time. She said one site has been temporarily suspended until the State comes to inspect it.

Ray Miller, Valley Road, thanked the Mayor for appointing him to serve on the Wildlife Management Advisory Committee.

BENEDICTION -

The Benediction was given by Reverend Barbara Peters, Wilson Memorial Church.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Pote thanked everyone for coming out to this meeting.

There being no further business to come before the Council the meeting was adjourned at 1:10 P.M. to the Call of the Chair and to the next scheduled Council meeting Thursday, January 18, 2018 at 7:30 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

MaryAnn Hance
Deputy Clerk