

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

**FEBRUARY 15, 2024**

**MAYOR’S STATEMENT:** Mayor Ronald Jubin called the meeting to order at 7:30 P.M. and made the following statement: *“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.”*

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

**ROLL CALL**

Ead [ P ] Dahl [ P ] Fischer [ P ] Marano [ P ] Abi- Habib [ P ] Gibbs [ P ]

**PROCLAMATION**

Mayor Jubin took a moment to acknowledge the passing of a dear member of the Watchung community, Betty Jean Aldrich.

Mayor Jubin read the following proclamation onto the record.

- ❖ Black History Month

**SPECIAL PRESENTATION**

- ❖ Library Renovation

Mayor Jubin provided a statement on the history of the existing Watchung library and explained that we would hear from other Professionals on the upcoming library renovations and expressed the many benefits it would have on the community.

Brian Auglier, Somerset County Library, expressed how happy he was that the Borough asked for the County’s input in renovating the library. He introduced Manny Miracle, Director of the Watchung Library Branch.

Manny Miracle, thanked the Mayor and Council for including members of the Somerset County Library system into this process. She commented on the upcoming library renovation and the many ways it would benefit the community.

Thomas Potter, Potter Architects, Bridgewater resident, stated that in April 2023 he started studying the library building for approximately 9 months by making measured drawings, examining the existing conditions, reviewing recommend improvements and learned about the history and structural capabilities. He presented a plan to bring the building modern standards for a community-based facility that serves as a Library as well as a central hub for community use. He discussed responses from the library survey sent out in 2022. He also spoke on specific items lacking in the current structure and discussed new updates made to the building. Mr. Potter presented the different proposed floor plans, square footages of the building and discussed multiple project upgrades.

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Manny Miracle, envisioned on how the newly renovated library could flex time by offering 24/7 book holds/pickup. She commented on a new service: reservable community meeting space before, during, or after library hours and how it would benefit the community.

Anthony Inverso, Phoenix Advisors, presented on the financial impacts of the proposed library renovation. He also stated there was minimal financial impact on tax payers because of the phased in approach and the structure of the Boroughs existing debt.

John Cantalupo, Archer & Greiner, broke down the bond ordinance authorizing the library renovations. He spoke on the \$2,000,000.00 downpayment and stated it returns a lot of built-up reserves back to tax payers. He mentioned the project could be financed over a 15-year period and provided more details on this process.

CFO Bill Hance elaborated on the financial components of the bond ordinance listed on tonight's agenda authorizing the library renovations.

Mayor Jubin stated the Borough is in a very good financial position to take on a project of this scope and scale and he appreciates all the hard work that has gone into the upcoming renovation.

Administrator Damato commented on a temporary space needed for the library. He mentioned the owners of 20 Stirling Road are willing to lend out space while the library is being renovated at no cost to the Borough. He feels this is a wonderful space and would benefit the community tremendously.

Mayor Jubin thanked everyone involved with this project for all their hard work and dedication.

Council President Ead thanked all for attending. She recited a Henry Ford quote, "coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress and working together is success". She expressed her thanks to everyone who worked together on this renovation.

Councilman Fischer thanked the Administration and Finance Committee, and the Boroughs financial advisors for coming up with a solution that is in the best interest for our community and residents.

Councilman Dahl stated the team assembled to take on this project has far exceeded his expectations.

Councilwoman Abi-Habib-thanked the experts for all their guidance and for being present to explain the project in detail. She expressed her excitement for all the new updated programs, educational opportunities and resources the new Library will offer the community.

Councilman Marano inquired on the turn around time of the library construction. Administrator Damato advised the construction should take around a year and half. Councilman Marano expressed his excitement for the upcoming library design and feels it fits well with the community.

Councilman Gibbs feels the new library design is a perfect space and will satisfy all the community needs. He commented that the cost of 58 dollars per year to residents is doable and said the \$2,000,000.00 down payment is an investment and a return of tax payer money into the community.

Mayor Jubin expressed his thanks to everyone in the past and present who has worked on the library project

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and welcomed all to the Watchung community connection.

Clerk Gil clarified the corrected version of the Ordinance scheduled for introduction was sent to the Mayor and Council and posted online however, the title shown on the agenda inadvertently was not updated.

**PUBLIC PORTION / AGENDA ITEMS ONLY**

- 1) Stephen Pote, Resident, provided comments on the importance of a library to the community and expressed his gratitude to the Council for what their leadership has pulled together.
- 2) Gail Tafaro O'Donnell, Resident, thanked the Mayor and Council, library staff and the community for coming together to make a newly renovated library possible. She questioned if any grants were received to help fund this project. Administrator Damato advised no grants were received but there will be fundraising opportunities for the outdoor spaces and also private donations. He also mentioned they plan to seek energy efficient grants through PSE&G. Mrs. Tafaro O'Donnell discussed the idea of solar with Administrator Damato as a way to receive funding back.
- 3) Virginia Hartman, Resident, questioned the ceiling height of the libraries lowest level and if there will be a generator in the case of the Library losing power. Administrator Damato stated there is no generator in the plan but there is a donor of an industrial size generator that may be incorporated into the plan. She also questioned who will overlook the construction to make sure the project is on time and on budget.

Administrator Damato advised the architect as well as himself, will be on site as much as possible to make sure the project goes according to plan. Lastly, Mrs. Hartmann asked for clarification on the cost per thousand dollar of assessed value.

Mr. Inverso advised the cost is about 7 dollars for every hundred thousand dollars of asessed value.

**DISCUSSIONS**

- None held

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

Motion to open Public Hearing – Second Reading on below by Gibbs second by Dahl

**OR 24/01: AN ORDINANCE AMENDING CHAPTER 27A ENTITLED “SHORT-TERM RENTAL PROPERTY” OF THE CODE OF THE BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG, TO UPDATE AND AMEND THE REGULATION OF SHORT-TERM RENTALS THROUGHOUT THE BOROUGH**

Public hearing was opened.

No one appearing.

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Motion to close Public Hearing and Adopt above by Gibbs, second by Abi-Habib  
RC: Ead [P] Dahl [P] Fischer [P] Marano [P] Abi- Habib [P] Gibbs [P]

Motion to open Public Hearing – Second Reading on below by Gibbs second by Abi-Habib

**OR 24/02: AN ORDINANCE AMENDING CHAPTER 20, NOISE, ENTITLED “NOISE” OF THE CODE OF THE BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG, TO UPDATE NOISE REGULATIONS WITH REGARD TO CONSTRUCTION HOURS OF OPERATION.**

Public hearing was opened.

No one appearing.

Motion to close Public Hearing and Adopt above by Gibbs, second by Ead  
RC: Ead [P] Dahl [P] Fischer [P] Marano [P] Abi- Habib [P] Gibbs [P]

**NEW BUSINESS**

**REPORTS & CORRESPONDENCE:**

Acknowledging Receipt of the following Borough Reports:

Animal Control Solutions	January 2024
Construction Monthly Report	January 2024
Engineers Monthly Report	January 2024
Police Dept. Monthly Activity Report	January 2024

#4: Public Hearing Notice of Somerset County Planning Board Mtg on 2/20/24, Re: Long Range Plan (Part of County Master Plan), recv'd 2/2/24, cc: M&C, JD, CL,

Motion to Accept above by Ead/ Second by Fischer  
RC: Ead [ Y ] Dahl [ Y ] Fischer [ Y ] Marano [ Y ] Abi- Habib [ Y ] Gibbs [Y]

**CONSENT ITEMS**

R1: Authorizing Bill List

Motion to Adopt above by Ead/ Second by Gibbs  
RC: Ead [ Y ] Dahl [ Y ] Fischer [ Y ] Marano [ Y ] Abi- Habib [ Y ] Gibbs [Y]

**NON- CONSENT ITEMS**

R2: Awarding a Contract to Tracks Unlimited, LLC for the Rehabilitation of the Borough’s Library Bridge

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Motion to Adopt above by Ead/ Second by Fischer

RC: Ead [ Y ] Dahl [ Y ] Fischer [ Y ] Marano [ Y ] Abi- Habib [ Y ] Gibbs [Y]

R3: Authorizing Extension of Service to Memorandum of Understanding with Somerset County Prosecutor's Office Relative to the Use of the Borough's Bureau of Fire Prevention Personnel

Motion to Adopt above by Dahl/ Second by Fischer

RC: Ead [ Y ] Dahl [ Y ] Fischer [ Y ] Marano [ Y ] Abi- Habib [ Y ] Gibbs [Y]

R4: Authorizing an Amendment to the 2024 Temporary Budget

Motion to Adopt above by Fischer/ Second by Dahl

RC: Ead [ Y ] Dahl [ Y ] Fischer [ Y ] Marano [ Y ] Abi- Habib [ Y ] Gibbs [Y]

R5: Authorizing the 2024 Temporary Capital Budget

Motion to Adopt above by Fischer/ Second by Marano

RC: Ead [ Y ] Dahl [ Y ] Fischer [ Y ] Marano [ Y ] Abi- Habib [ Y ] Gibbs [Y]

**INTRODUCED ORDINANCE**

**OR 24/03:** BOND ORDINANCE PROVIDING FOR VARIOUS 2024 CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS BY AND IN THE BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG, IN THE COUNTY OF SOMERSET, STATE OF NEW JERSEY; APPROPRIATING \$7,429,000 THEREFOR AND AUTHORIZING THE ISSUANCE OF \$5,379,000 BONDS OR NOTES OF THE BOROUGH TO FINANCE PART OF THE COST THEREOF

Motion to Introduce and Adopt above by Fischer / second by Ead

RC: Ead [ Y ] Dahl [ Y ] Fischer [ Y ] Marano [ Y ] Abi- Habib [ Y ] Gibbs [ Y ]

**PUBLIC PORTION - GENERAL DISCUSSION**

- No one appearing

**ADJOURNMENT**

Upon there being no further business before Council, the meeting ended at 8:57 p.m. to the Call of the Chair. The next meeting of the Mayor and Council will be a Special Meeting on Monday, March 4, 2024 at 7:30 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Regina DeLeonibus  
Deputy Borough Clerk  
*Approved: April 4, 2024*