



Mayor Brindle's
COVID-19 Update
June 9, 2020



Good evening, everyone, and thanks for joining us virtually tonight. Please remember that public comment will only be accepted via Zoom, although we are live streaming for viewing only on Facebook. The replay will also be available afterwards on Facebook, YouTube, and TV 36.

CONFIRMED CASES

- Today, there are 164,796 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in New Jersey, with another 680 still under investigation. Currently, the County reports 16,302 cases, with Westfield reporting three new cases since my last report on Friday (zero on Saturday and Sunday, two on Monday, and one today), bringing our total to 279. This is an increase of just five cases since we last met here two weeks ago -- which is great news and a testament to the commitment you've all shown with social distancing protocols.

STATE UPDATES

- Today, Governor Murphy lifted New Jersey's stay at home order, based on the ongoing trends in the statewide health data. He also increased maximum gathering limits for both indoors (25% of capacity, or 50 people, whichever is lower) and outdoors (100 people). Outdoor gatherings of more than 100 persons are allowed for First Amendment-protected outdoor activities, such as political protests or outdoor religious services. The Governor anticipates raising the limit on outdoor non-protest and noreligious gatherings to 250 people on June 22 and to 500 people on July 3.
- All outdoor recreational and entertainment businesses that were previously closed may reopen – with the exceptions of amusement parks, water parks, and arcades.
- Yesterday, the Governor announced that municipal and private pool clubs are allowed to open on June 22, with guidance that requires capacity to be capped at 50%, as well as sanitizing protocols and other best practices to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. As always, the safety of our employees and members remains the top priority at Memorial Pool, and the Recreation Department and Commission await the State's full guidance to determine a final opening date -- which we expect to be soon after June 22.

Similarly, Recreation is evaluating the specific guidance issued yesterday from the NJ Department of Health regarding day camps, as well as the guidelines from the State Department of Education that will prevent us from using local school facilities this summer. All of these factors are being discussed to determine the Recreation Department's summer camp offerings in the near future.

LOCAL UPDATES

- Thank you to all who came out to the #BlackLivesMatter peaceful protest on Sunday in Mindowaskin Park. The passion and courage demonstrated by the Westfield High School student organizers was nothing short of inspiring. Our future is in good hands with this generation leading the way.
- I was very happy to see that nearly every single person in that park was wearing a mask, and many did their best to keep their distance from others. That said, we need to ensure that your collective sacrifice over these last few months keeps our public health trends moving in the right direction. If you attended the protest, I urge you to get tested so that we continue to operate from a place of responsibility and information. Remember that any Union County resident can be tested for free, with or without symptoms, at the Kean University testing center. All details, including how to make an appointment, are available at www.ucnj.org.
- Even though Sunday's protest was extremely successful in expressing a collective desire to rid our community and country of racism, I hope we can all agree that it means our work is only just beginning in order to make Westfield a place of equality and inclusion for all. Concrete action steps are required to ensure that racism of any kind is not tolerated here.

To that end, I held the first meeting of our Human Relations Advisory Commission, whose members are being formally appointed tonight. In addition to these appointments, the HRAC will also have several public liaisons, including Police Chief Battiloro, Fire Chief Tony Tiller, School Superintendent Margaret Dolan, Ministerium representative Rabbi Ethan Prosnit, and representatives from the Seniors and Public Arts Councils, and a high school student representative. The HRAC is in the process of refining their mission and identifying priorities which will then be shared with the community and additional volunteers will be sought.

Regarding police policy, I am going to ask Chief Battiloro to address policy reforms that are already underway, many of which he has instituted as part of the accreditation process and his transition to community policing. I want you to know that this Council is prepared to have frank discussions and take meaningful policy action in collaboration with the Chief, who has expressed his desire to work with our Public Safety Committee to examine data and recommend policies to address any issue that may be considered discriminatory. We are incredibly fortunate to have Chief Battiloro at the helm who is now going to speak about many of the reform initiatives he has already initiated or has planned.

- In addition to the proclamation declaring June LGBTQ Pride Month, we wanted to also find a way to visibly commemorate the month. You may recall that last year we raised the Pride flag at Town Hall for the first time in Westfield's history, something which didn't seem appropriate this year with flags flying at half staff statewide to honor the victims of the pandemic. This year we will be painting rainbow crosswalks at the intersection of Elm and Quimby. Not only does this honor Gay Pride Month, but longer term it memorializes rainbows as a symbol of hope that we've seen all over town the last few months. This initiative will be led by the Westfield High School LGBTQ Club, who will work with a local artist and Town officials to bring this vision to fruition.
- And now for some good news! Westfield High School's graduation will be taking place on July 8 (with a rain date of July 9)! I spoke to the Governor's office and Superintendent Dolan about it this morning, just prior to the announcement that 500 people will be allowed at outdoor gatherings in early July. I'll be speaking to WHS principal Mary Asfendis tomorrow to discuss arrangements.
- Thank you to the Reopening Task Force for their work in developing our initial downtown reopening plan. Based on their diverse range of experience, as well as the input from 2,000 survey participants, the plan balances the importance of public health with the needs of both local business owners and consumers. Beginning next Monday, retailers will be permitted to expand their footprints by utilizing outdoor sales space; our restaurants will be able to use sidewalks for expanded outdoor dining capacity; 15 minute parking designated for curbside pick up will be expanded to all of Quimby and Elm between North Ave and East Broad; and Quimby Street will be closed to vehicular traffic on weekends for additional outdoor dining space to be accommodated. As I said when we began looking at our reopening possibilities, our plan must be adaptable to feedback and flexible in its implementation so that we can continue to make any necessary changes as we go. This is the first step in approaching our new normal in Downtown Westfield, and I know I can continue to count on the support of the community for our beloved local businesses.

- Lastly, I want to address some of the important work we are proposing in tonight's ordinances -- which are products of months of work by the Town Council's various committees and, more broadly, a reflection of what I promised when I was elected: a commitment to historic preservation efforts, a greener and sustainable community, broader representation on issues like mental health, and a transformative, strategic plan for revitalizing our downtown reflected in the "area in need of rehabilitation" designation. As I've said previously, charting the course for our town's future means embracing change and making bold decisions to reflect the values of our community and the feedback we've consistently heard from residents on quality of life issues that matter to us all.

Thank you all for your ongoing engagement, especially in the midst of unprecedented challenges presented by the pandemic. We are not out of the woods by any stretch, but I'm thrilled that we can resume some functions of our lives as gatherings increase and our downtown reopens next week.

Let's continue to be compassionate and respectful of our neighbors by wearing a mask when in proximity to others, maintaining social distancing, and washing our hands. These are the only tools at our disposal to make sure we maintain the progress we've made.

And now, let's move onto the business at hand.