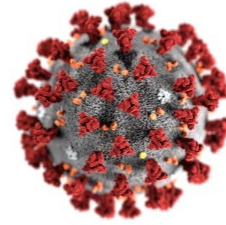




Mayor Brindle's COVID-19 Update August 11, 2020



The following remarks were made at the August 11, 2020 Westfield Town Council meeting.

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 185,475 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in New Jersey, with another 660 still under investigation. Currently, the County has 16,749 cases, with Westfield reporting four new cases since my last update on Friday, one per day -- bringing our total to 355.
- For a more detailed breakdown of statewide numbers, visit the NJ Department of Health COVID-19 Dashboard.

STATE UPDATES

- Governor Murphy announced a proposal today to provide long-term care facilities with \$155 million in additional funding as they reopen to meet COVID-19 challenges, ensure the health and safety of residents and staff, and allow for residents to safely reunite with loved ones. Full details can be found here:

www.nj.gov/governor/news/news/562020/approved/20200810a.shtml

- The state's most recent transmission rate is now .94, after the number had spiked to a four-month high of 1.49 on August 2. In addition, today marks the 11th straight day the state has announced fewer than 500 new cases after seeing a trend in upticks late last month.

LOCAL UPDATES

- On a local level, I want to start by extending my thanks to our Police, Fire, and Public Works departments for their tireless work preparing for and responding to last week's tropical storm, which has been an ongoing effort. As of this morning, Chief Battiloro reported that the remaining few street closures have been resolved, and the PSE&G website reports that all local power has been restored.

I also want to thank the many residents who have utilized the Conservation Center to deposit their storm debris. We will be extending the storm debris drop-off window that does not require a permit through Sunday, August 23 to help ensure broad access to the Center. And thank you to the many residents who made many selfless offers to assist neighbors in need with this clean up. Special thanks go out to the Lifelong Westfield team, especially co-chairs Brad Chanie and Deirdre Gelinne, Councilman David Contract, and Lauren Harmer from the Rec Dept, who coordinated debris pick-up for senior citizens in need of assistance, and picked up quite a few loads themselves. I was out there with my son today and was greeted by many grateful seniors.

I recognize that many residents are upset that the Town is not picking up storm debris, something that we've only done three times in the past nine years, most recently after the nor'easters in 2018. I also recognize that many surrounding towns are doing so, and we fully anticipated the criticism that would come our way if we did not. This was a no-win situation for both the Town and residents based upon our experience in 2018. The decision was based more on our limited capacity than budget constraints, although that was a consideration. It's important to note that every town's issues, resources, and capabilities are different. For example, Westfield currently has over 7,500 Town trees lining our streets that we maintain, in addition to more than 10,000 trees in our Town parks. Our DPW has to secure and do the clean up from our own Town trees, and secure any unsafe park trees in public areas before they can even get to the street debris -- something that would not have been possible for weeks. In that time, landscapers would likely dump non-storm debris in the street, creating piles that become street hazards and inhibiting storm water runoff. This is what happened in 2018 and, if you'll recall, led to a tremendous amount of residential complaints about the piles in the streets and the duration of the pick-up. All other Public Works tasks were put on hold. Quite frankly, it was a nightmare, and one we didn't want to repeat unless absolutely necessary. That being said, I acknowledge that we need to figure this out in the future as the frequency of damaging storms is expected to increase, and will ask the Public Works Committee to assess and make recommendations for the future.

- Thank you to the Westfield Public Arts Commission for coordinating Saturday's official launch of Art Takes Flight to recognize the talented artists behind the butterflies, as well as the generous sponsors who made the exhibit possible. If you haven't already done so, please take some time to check out this beautiful exhibit throughout our Downtown area. A full exhibit map is available on our website at www.westfieldnj.gov/arttakesflight. Speaking of art, you may have noticed that the second half of the mural is nearly complete under the South Avenue underpass. This incredible work by Ricardo Roig will be formally unveiled with a ribbon cutting ceremony in the coming weeks.

- Did you get “Caught Wearing a Helmet” yet? Our new Bike Safety Task Force, led by Council members Dardia, Contract, and Katz have done a great job of kicking off this initiative to reward residents bicycling with helmets with vouchers to redeem prizes at local businesses. If you are “caught,” remember to upload a photo of yourself and your voucher to our website to qualify for the grand prize of a free bike. Full details are available at westfieldnj.gov/caughtwearingahelmet. Thanks to Outta Hand Pizza, Amoco, Manhattan Bagel, and Jay's Cycle Center for their support of this initiative.
- Thanks to Regional Health Officer Megan Avallone for coordinating with the County to bring their mobile COVID testing unit to Westfield -- first to Westfield Senior Housing, followed by Tamaques Park on August 20. We will post details in the coming days about how to make an appointment to utilize this resource.
- As a reminder, the Brightwood Park Bike Trail Information Sessions will be held on Thursday at 6:00PM and Saturday at 11:00AM. Members of the Recreation Commission, the Town Council, and JORBA (Jersey Off Road Bicycling Association) will be in attendance to discuss the recommendations from the Strategic Parks Plan regarding the possibility of adding safe bike trails in the park that would supplant and not interfere with the existing walking trails.
- We have an extremely full agenda tonight, including the introduction of proposed amendments to the Historic Preservation Ordinance in response to residents’ feedback. We have HPC Chair Maria Boyes and Town Historian/HPC Board Member Robert Wendel here this evening to provide more details. I recognize that some will not think these changes go far enough, and I do find it very unfortunate that the spirit of what we’re trying to do seems to have been lost on many. This ordinance is intended to protect the few truly iconic historic properties that remain from being demolished, and it saddens me to see the cynicism and politicization by some that has turned this into the notion that we’re coming after your homes. As I said in my recent letter, most of us are sick of being known as the “town of teardowns” and having our historic homes demolished without the Town even being notified. I have been asked over and over again why we don’t do something about it. And now we are, as you’ll see in Maria and Robert’s presentation tonight. I realize this ordinance revision may not be politically popular, but I, and most of this Council, remain committed to doing what is right and necessary to ensure the preservation of our Town’s architecture and history for future generations.
- We are also welcoming back our redevelopment firm Topology tonight for a presentation about the eligibility of the Rialto and Lord & Taylor properties to be designated as “areas in need of redevelopment.” Yesterday, I shared a letter about the status of the Lord & Taylor property after last week’s bankruptcy filing by its parent company, Le Tote. Remember, while Le Tote filed for bankruptcy, the L&T property here in Westfield -- totaling almost seven acres -- is still owned by Hudson’s Bay Company, and they ultimately will be making the determination about what they do with their valuable real estate asset. Fortunately, we have had an active dialogue with HBC over the last two years in anticipation of this scenario as the retail landscape shifted, well before the pandemic. Considering they are one of our largest taxpayers, we have a very vested interest in working with them to ensure that we maintain and ideally maximize the potential tax revenue from their site, while capitalizing on its potential to play a significant role in the transformation of our downtown. Tonight’s anticipated redevelopment designation will provide us with the next steps to continue this dialogue and have an ongoing seat at the table with HBC as they explore their options.

- Lastly, thank you to a local student, Michael Naya, who reached out to me to ask if we could honor one of the oldest surviving World War II veterans who had lived in Westfield from 1963-2017. Peter Migliorini, now 94 and residing in Cranford, bravely served our country after being drafted at age 18, ultimately serving as a replacement at the Battle of the Bulge. He and his wife raised four children during their years in Westfield, all graduates of Westfield High School. Thanks to Michael, we recently presented Mr. Migliorini with a proclamation honoring his service in advance of this week's 75th anniversary of the armistice of World War II. We are grateful for his service, and for all of those who served so bravely as part of the Greatest Generation.
- Before getting to tonight's business agenda, I want to remind everyone that I will once again be enforcing Robert's Rules this evening to ensure we stay on topic and the meeting runs efficiently. I'm going to insist that any comments that are not relevant to the particular business at hand, meaning the resolution or ordinance we are discussing, be deferred to after Council committee reports and not in this meeting. The public will only be allowed to comment during the public comment portion, and I will ask the Council to refrain from asking questions or interjecting during the scheduled presentations. As the presiding officer, I have an obligation to manage the Council meetings and will do all that I can to ensure we stay on the agenda this evening.