



Mayor Brindle's Opening Remarks December 11, 2018

I would like to begin by thanking the Downtown Westfield Corporation and to everyone who came out to the Christmas tree lighting and the menorah lighting to kick off the holiday season. Please shop downtown, enjoy the holiday entertainment throughout the month, and participate in our first gingerbread house contest which gets underway this week. And, don't forget – the Town is providing free parking from December 15 through January 1 to encourage everyone to shop local and support our Westfield merchants. If we want to see our Downtown continue to thrive, we all have to play our part.

DOWNTOWN BUSINESS OPENINGS

On that note, I want to welcome some new additions to Downtown Westfield: Warby Parker, The Oils Room, and Compassionate Therapy and I am thrilled to learn that Addams Tavern is re-opening this week, just in time for the holidays. In the near future, we will also see the following businesses open: Atlantic Health, Bareburger, Buddha Sushi, Cinnaholic, Innovasion Taco, Osteo Strong, Orgreen Poke, Portokali Modern Grill, and Signature Realty.

Regarding downtown, I remain focused on the long-term, which includes improving the general business climate that will enable businesses to succeed, whether it's creating events like AddamsFest and Second Sundays to drive foot traffic, to passing ordinances that enable new experiences like rooftop dining, or to reducing the bureaucracy of opening a business by granting more latitude to our zoning official to avoid unnecessary BOA applications and expense for aspiring business owners.

I do not buy into the narrative that rents are too high, and I will resist any attempt to demonize the property owners who also happen to be significant taxpayers. As a municipality, I believe we have a responsibility to adequately invest and innovate our downtown so that we can attract top tier tenants, which is what is beginning to happen with plenty more needing to be done. It's also the responsibility of the landlords to adequately invest in their properties, and incumbent upon retailers to innovate and evolve to stay relevant in changing times. It is a three way partnership and we all need to do our part. So resist the tendency to place blame or overreact when a store closes. We are playing the long game, and a new master plan is the first step.

MASTER PLAN

And speaking of our Master Plan, we officially kicked off the process last week, as our Steering Committee and consultants, H2M, met for the first time to map out this important process. Please be on the lookout early next year for invitations to participate...either through online surveys or attending a series of public meetings. It's a very exciting time to re-imagine all that is possible for the Town's future, and we need you to participate. I also encourage you to follow the Town's social media channels (now on Instagram!) and to check the Town website for updates.

ADDAMSFEST RECAP

There is some good news to report on AddamsFest, as we close the books on this year and begin to think about 2019.

As you may recall, the Council voted 7-2 to approve this year's budget which included a \$25k appropriation for AddamsFest. Since there was some discussion about this expense specifically, I want to take a minute to talk about the strategy behind creating AddamsFest. It was always intended to be more than a "Halloween party" and envisioned as an annual event with potential to be revenue neutral over time, consistent with the long-term approach I am taking to most initiatives as Mayor.

In fact, last year, I chose not to move forward with a previously approved \$30K expense for 12 months of promotion in a Westfield print publication as I was concerned over instituting a potential recurring expense with limited long-term benefit to the Town.

AddamsFest was created specifically with long-term benefit in mind: to increase community engagement, to showcase Westfield by promoting our unique history, and to improve the business climate in town. I'm thrilled to be able to confirm that it succeeded on all fronts.

Our town received significant free publicity and promotion in numerous print and digital publications, regional cable news, and social media outlets whose reach went far beyond Westfield, including:

- NJ Family
- NJ.com
- NJ News12
- My Central Jersey
- Njkidsonline
- H Mag (Hoboken)
- Tap Into Westfield (over 13 articles alone)

Our own social media, initiated by our Public Information Officer Kim Forde, reached over 3600 people/day on average, in addition to the countless residents who posted about it and shared it on their own social media. The value of all of this free promotion cannot be overstated.

Additionally, it is estimated that over 12,000 people participated in one or more AddamsFest activities, of which 75% of them were sold out, with the art exhibit alone attracting over 2000 visitors.

We have just wrapped up reconciling AddamsFest financials, and when all is said and done, AddamsFest exceeded expectations. It generated a net profit of just over \$20K, even after accounting for overtime costs for police, fire and DPW, an expense we typically incur for many Town events, which in this case was \$24K. Even better, of the original \$25k seed money that had been appropriated, only \$4K was needed.

These financials don't even take into account the number of visitors that came into Town, shopped in our stores, and ate in our restaurants. The economic benefit to our merchants was significant. The benefit to celebrating something that is uniquely ours as a community, was priceless.

It is highly unusual for any event to deliver such positive financials in its first year, especially since many of the start up expenses are fixed and won't be incurred in subsequent years. With a successful first year, it should be easier to obtain future sponsors and participation which bodes very well for AddamsFest becoming an annual Westfield tradition.

All of the financials and documentation will be publicly available on the Town website in the coming days.

MENTAL HEALTH COMMISSION

We have finalized the members of the Mental Health Commission after receiving over 50 applications for the four open resident seats. I was deeply moved not only by the personal experiences shared in the applications, but also by the clear commitment to a cause that impacts so many in our community, and the shared goal of removing the negative stigma around mental health issues. I'm very pleased to announce the following members of this commission:

Steering Committee

- Shelley Brindle, Mayor
- Dr. Margaret Dolan, Westfield Public Schools Superintendent
- Megan Avallone, RN, Westfield Public Health Director

Commission Members

- Liz Jeffery, Mayor's representative, resident
- Councilwoman Linda Habgood, Town Council liaison
- Maureen Mazzaresse, School District representative, Westfield School District Director of Counseling
- Laura Scanlon, RN, Westfield Public Health representative, public health nurse
- Janet Sarkos, Executive Director, Caring Contact
- Dr. Lauren Kaplan Sagal, psychiatrist
- Ron Holmes, resident volunteer
- Patricia (Tricia) DeCotiis, resident volunteer
- Mary Ann Foster, resident volunteer
- Gina Totino, resident volunteer

Steering Committee Liaison

Ellen Devin

I look forward to providing you with an update on our plans over the coming weeks and months.

VOLUNTEER APPLICATIONS

Speaking of volunteerism, it's that time of year when we look to our community to fill the openings on our various Boards and Commissions with terms that will expire at year-end. We are also looking for folks to sign up for broader volunteer roles for ongoing Town events and service initiatives like

AddamFest, Earth Day clean up, etc. The deadline is this Friday for Board consideration but we will also be doing additional asks throughout the year for additional volunteers.

LEGALIZATION OF MARIJUANA

Last week, after state lawmakers advanced a bill that would legalize the possession and personal use of recreational marijuana, I met with Sen. Tom Kean to better understand the process and timing for when this bill may become law. Committees from both the state Senate and Assembly approved the bill, which now awaits a full vote in the state Legislature next week before it's sent for signature to Governor Murphy.

I want to reassure this governing body and the public that no decision on this will be made without broad input from our full Council, public health officials, our police, and most importantly the public, to determine if the sale of legalized marijuana makes sense for our community once all of the facts are known. That includes revenue benefits, health risks, crime impact, and the position taken by surrounding communities. I will be establishing a commission to evaluate it immediately after the new year who will be tasked with soliciting input and making recommendations.

FACEBOOK LIVE DISCUSSION WITH HI'S EYE

Please tune in tomorrow night at 7pm for a Facebook Live discussion moderated by two editors of Westfield High School's award winning Hi's Eye. I'll be reflecting upon my first year as mayor and priorities for 2019, and will answer questions from residents which you can submit via the Town website.

SENIOR SERVICES EXPO

The Senior Services Expo, hosted by the Senior Advisory Council, has been rescheduled to this Friday, December 14 from 9-11am in the Community Room in Town Hall. If you are a senior, know a senior, or take care of a senior, please come so that you can learn about available senior services and fill out a survey regarding services that may be desired. Free breakfast will be provided!

BIAS INCIDENTS

Yesterday, the Town Council and the Board of Education made a joint statement following a recent incident at Edison School. As residents and parents of children in the Westfield schools, we want to make it clear that we jointly condemn all acts of racism, anti-Semitism, bigotry and expressions of hatred targeting any minority group, religion, or ideology. Unfortunately this recent incident is not an isolated event in our schools or even in nearby communities.

We all share your profound concern and sorrow over this hatred and bias and are committed to fostering a respectful culture with a zero tolerance of such acts.

These horrific incidents should serve as a catalyst for us all to fully embrace the spirit of this season. As a community, let's all commit to overpowering hate with an abundance of love, to suppressing intolerance with acts of inclusion, and drowning out bigotry with compassion and kindness.

One of the most rewarding aspects of being Mayor is the vantage point I am privileged to have by interacting with so many different residents on a daily basis. These acts are not reflected in what I see and experience day in and day out, which is a community of committed and kind, compassionate neighbors and selfless volunteers. I am so grateful to all of you, and to my Town Council friends and partners, for a rewarding first year as Mayor. I am very excited about what 2019 will bring for all of us and wish you and your families a wonderful holiday season.