



Mayor Brindle's Opening Remarks September 22, 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 200,580 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in New Jersey to date, with another 326 still under investigation. Union County has reported 17,505 cases in total, with Westfield reporting four new cases since my last update on Friday (one on Sunday, one on Monday, and two today) -- bringing our total to 389 since our first reported case in March.

STATE UPDATES

- Governor Murphy has re-added Arizona, Minnesota, Nevada, Rhode Island, and Wyoming to the list of states included in New Jersey's travel advisory. There are now 35 states on the list, which can be viewed in full at www.covid19.nj.gov/travel.
- Yesterday, the NJ Department of Human Services opened up the window for the new COVID-19 child-care tuition assistance program. Families with children ages 5-13 and incomes of up to \$75,000 a year can apply online at ChildCareNJ.gov.

LOCAL UPDATES

- I'd like to remind everyone that today is National Voter Registration Day. The deadline to register to vote in New Jersey for the upcoming General Election is October 13. Please visit nj.gov/state/elections to register or to confirm your registration. Because this is primarily a vote by mail election in our state, it's important for everyone to have complete information about this process. I encourage all residents to visit the Union County Board of Elections website, which provides details about registration, ballot drop boxes, mail-in ballots, voting in-person by provisional ballot, and more. As a reminder, there will be a secure ballot drop box located at the Fraser building on North Ave. Please review the information at www.ucnj.org/boe to familiarize yourself with all procedures and related deadlines.
- You may have seen today's very disconcerting news about a reported home invasion and assault early this morning on Park Street. Chief Battiloro has reported that this does not appear to be a random act, and that there is no ongoing threat to the community following the arrest of four individuals. Thank you to Officers Bagan, DiBella, Popleik, Santangelo, and Shaughnessy for their swift response to what was potentially a very dangerous call. We are very grateful for their exceptional work and, above all, their safety. Let's keep today's victims in our thoughts as they recover from their injuries.

- Shifting gears, I'd like to talk about Brightwood Park. As I've said numerous times, we all want to save Brightwood from years of neglect which has resulted in unsafe and damaging bike trails that currently exist in the park, as well as an abundance of invasive species that has destroyed much of the original natural habitat. I'm thrilled with the attention that the bike trail discussion has brought to Brightwood, and the outpouring of interest from many residents in improving the park. In particular, I want to thank those that have organized the Friends of Brightwood, and give this group a shout out for their recent clean up efforts. There is another cleanup scheduled by the Green Team for October 11 if you want to rally your neighbors to participate. The sign up is available here: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/8050d4facaf2aa3fe3-earth2>.

I want to reassure everyone that there is no plan to move forward on any changes to Brightwood, bike trails or otherwise, without doing our required due diligence with the NJ DEP and Green Acres. Once we have that information, which will take time, we can all work together to discuss the best path forward for enhancing and beautifying the park to ensure it is safe and accessible for all of our residents. As a result, I don't anticipate any additional discussion on potential enhancements to Brightwood for at least six months.

- Tonight, as a next step to the resolution we passed at our last meeting, we will hear an ordinance on first reading providing for the implementation of the Five Year Tax Exemption and Abatement Law. This ordinance amends the tax abatement previously implemented for the Downtown's Special Improvement District and will expand it to include historically designated properties within the Town. As a companion to the recently passed Historic Preservation ordinance, this approach allows us to implement the feedback we received about providing tax incentives for qualifying historic properties. Incentivizing homeowners to voluntarily designate their historic homes continues to be the primary goal and focus of the Historic Preservation Commission, and I'm pleased that this ordinance can provide some additional assistance to further that cause.

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. Any comments that are not relevant to the particular business at hand, should 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 for a specific ordinance, or later in the general comment portion, but can speak only once on a particular topic. I have an obligation to manage the Council meetings and will do all that I can to ensure we stay on topic this evening.

Thank you, as always, for your engagement on the issues that matter to all of us.