



Mayor Brindle's Opening Remarks March 9, 2021

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.

COVID-19 UPDATES

- As you may have seen, yesterday the CDC released updated guidance pertaining to those who have been vaccinated, which states that vaccinated people may gather indoors without wearing masks, and a vaccinated person may gather with members of an unvaccinated household without masks, provided the unvaccinated people are considered low-risk for COVID. This is great and long-awaited news for many, and full details can be found on the CDC website.
- The seven-day average for confirmed COVID-19 cases in New Jersey is down 3% from a week ago and 8% from a month ago, and the rate of transmission is 1.05. On the vaccination front, New Jersey has administered 2,558,570 doses to date. As always, more detailed information about statewide numbers is available on the NJ COVID-19 Dashboard.
- It's important to note that March 14 will mark a year since our first confirmed COVID case in Westfield. I will have more to say about this later in the week, but tonight I just want to say thank you to every resident and business owner for persevering through an unimaginable year. When I ran for Mayor, there were many scenarios I envisioned, but a global pandemic was not one of them. We have asked a lot of you in terms of restrictions, patience, and sacrifice, and you have demonstrated the very best of Westfield. Thank you.

LOCAL UPDATES

- Just a reminder that the Mental Health Council will host a webinar tomorrow at 7:00PM called "Protecting Our Happy," a free one hour program to support mental wellbeing during these challenging times. To find out more or to register, visit <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/protecting-our-happy-pure-resilience-webinar-westfield-mh-council-tickets-141345635601>.
- Registration is now open for Greta's Run, a beloved annual community event to honor the late Greta Schoenemann. The run will be held on May 16 and will be virtual once again this year, with all proceeds benefiting Imagine, A Center for Coping with Loss. For more information and to register, visit www.imagenj.org/gretasrun.
- Have you been downtown to ride the seesaws as part of Glo Downtown? This temporary installation has been wildly successful so far, with great feedback coming in from our downtown businesses reporting a significant uptick in foot traffic. I'm very grateful to the DWC,

Councilwoman Dawn Mackey, and DWC Events Chair Erin Ben-Hayon for bringing some much needed fun to town to help drive foot traffic during a traditionally slow time for our businesses. It has been so popular that the DWC has now added two port-a-potties in the parking lot and hired an ambassador to monitor activity from 5:30-9:30 each evening. With the weather improving over the next few days, we expect even more folks to come out and enjoy this. Please remember to wear a mask and keep proper distancing in place. On a related note, Open Quimby will return in early April to provide our downtown businesses with expanded outdoor seating opportunities and live entertainment. Stay tuned for more details.

- Thanks to everyone who offered comments last week as part of our Police Department's accreditation process. I want to congratulate the department on the glowing report we received from the State accreditation assessors. The next step is a full review at the NJ State Association of Police Chiefs meeting in June, after which time we expect to receive final notification about the outcome of this process.
- Speaking of our wonderful Police Department, I want to once again remind everyone that car burglaries and thefts remain an ongoing issue not only here in Westfield, but in a number of neighboring communities. Nearly every single incident in Westfield is the result of an unlocked car. The police cannot be on every street at every moment. While they do their part, we need you to do yours -- lock up and do not leave your keys or any valuables inside your cars.
- The recent legalization of marijuana here in New Jersey will raise many questions for every community about if and how it plans to move forward with regard to dispensaries on the local level. To address this issue in a holistic and thoughtful manner, I am assembling a Cannabis Commission, led by Councilman Mark Parmelee and Councilman Mike Dardia in their roles as Chairs of the Code Review & Town Property and Public Safety & Transportation Committees to make recommendations to this governing body about how to move forward. This commission will be composed of the following stakeholders, residents, and Town employees:
 - Chris Battiloro, Police Chief
 - Detective Sergeant Lauren Maloney, Juvenile Bureau
 - Tony Tiller, Fire Chief
 - Tom Jardim, Town Attorney
 - Jim Gildea, Town Administrator
 - Dr. Larry Budnick, Chair, Board of Health
 - Darielle Walsh, President, Greater Westfield Area Chamber of Commerce
 - Diane Dabulas, Board of Adjustment attorney/Formal Planning Board attorney
 - Mike Ash, Chair, Planning Board
 - Warren Thompson, Social Worker and resident
 - Peggy Brug, Founder, Ecquinabis and resident
 - Lew Kimble, Vice Chair, Downtown Westfield Corporation
 - Brendan Galligan, Vice President, Board of Education
 - Member (to be named), Human Relations Advisory Commission

Advisors:

- Don Sammet, Town Planner
- Megan Avallone, Regional Health Director
- Rev. Alison Philip, Ministerium

Councilmen Dardia and Parmelee will provide regular updates on their progress at future Council meetings.

On a separate but related note, I was happy to see that bipartisan legislation is being drafted to address the parental notification provision in the marijuana bill that raised concerns among police departments and residents across the state, including myself and Chief Battiloro. The governor has already indicated that he would sign legislation that would restore the ability of the police to notify parents of minors if their children are found in possession of marijuana on a first offense.

- I want to take a moment to remember Patricia Faggins, who passed away on February 28 and was beloved by all who knew her. Pat was a founder of both the Westfield Neighborhood Council and the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Association of Westfield, and her many years of dedication to these vital organizations were instrumental in her ongoing quest for social justice. Not only was she a friend and neighbor to countless Westfield residents in her 78 years here, but she was also a magical pianist and talented vocalist, and most importantly she was a tireless advocate for many, dedicated to making our community a more inclusive place. She will be greatly missed.
- It's now time to move on to tonight's agenda. The first thing we will be doing is accepting public comment and voting on an ordinance on second reading to approve the redevelopment plan for the Elite Property mixed use project at the Sevell's site on South Avenue, which was endorsed by the Planning Board last week, after confirming that the project is in compliance with the Master Plan. I want to share some background first before its introduction.

As I said at our last Council meeting when this redevelopment plan was introduced, this project is part of our Court approved 2017 affordable housing settlement with Fair Share Housing Center. To reiterate, thanks to the efforts of Don Sammet, and former Mayor Andy Skibitsky and the previous Council, they arrived at a well-planned settlement that would enable residential projects to be built in strategic locations (generally along our rail corridor) that would improve blighted areas and benefit the immediate surrounding areas.

I only mention that history to remind everyone that this project should not be politicized, and that my administration voted to fully support the ordinances to enact the settlement negotiated by the previous administration. What's new is that we are taking it one step further by requiring the developer to submit a redevelopment plan to give the Town more control over the aesthetics and public benefits of this project.

After hearing resident concerns regarding the aesthetics of previously built affordable housing projects, namely 333 Central, we concluded that requiring a redevelopment plan on future projects would ensure

a better outcome, namely through mandating the use of higher quality construction materials, the improvement of overall architectural design, specifying public improvements, etc. Thanks to the efforts of our redevelopment planner Topology, in collaboration with Elite, they have successfully negotiated a significantly enhanced project than what was originally conceived, one that will be better for the surrounding neighborhoods and will serve as a beautiful gateway to Westfield from the east side of town.

It's also important to note where we are in the process. This redevelopment plan is the first step, and many specifics remain to be negotiated in a final redevelopment agreement which will follow. Details such as the composition of units, the full scope of public benefits, the specific site plans, parking details and requirements, etc, are still to be finalized. There will be plenty of opportunity for public comment along the way, and we look forward to hearing from you. For now, I am very proud of the almost year long effort that's gone into getting us to this point, and am confident that when this project is ultimately completed in 2024 it will be a significant improvement to the surrounding areas and a huge tax benefit to the Town.

With that as context, we'll move on to the advertised hearing.