



Mayor Brindle's Opening Remarks April 20, 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

- Yesterday, all New Jerseyans age 16 and above became eligible to be vaccinated, and the state is more than halfway to its vaccination goal of 70% of adults by the end of June.
- The seven-day average for confirmed COVID-19 cases in New Jersey are down 8% from a week ago and down 12% from a month ago, and the rate of transmission is .92. More than 2.5 million people have been fully vaccinated in the state, representing about 37% of the state's 6.9 million adult residents. As always, more detailed information about statewide numbers is available on the NJ COVID-19 Dashboard.

LOCAL UPDATES

- On the local front, we have great news from the library, which has announced it will re-open on Monday, April 26 to Westfield residents. You must provide ID to show proof of residency and masks are required at all times. For full details about available services in-person, as well as curbside, visit the library's website.
- Don't miss the Third Annual Earth Day Fair and Free Market this Saturday at the South Avenue train station lot! The Green Team has secured a number of vendors to provide information on various topics related to sustainability, including an appearance by Karma, which will open its EV dealership on North Avenue. For more details, visit our website.
- I'm looking forward to the return of Autism Family Day this Sunday, hosted by the Police Department, with support from the Fire, Public Works and EMS teams. Thank you to Chief Battiloro and his department for continuing to prioritize community policing in new and innovative ways to ensure inclusivity. I'm going to ask Chief Battiloro to provide a few more details about it as well, and address some public safety questions that have recently come up related to license plate readers and pedestrian safety downtown.
- Thanks to everyone who joined our two most recent Facebook Live discussions -- one with Chief Battiloro, and the other with a panel of experts about the impact of public spaces and what could be possible for Westfield. Both are available for replay on the Town's Facebook page, and plans are in the works to make the panel discussions with Streetworks an ongoing series -- more info will be available shortly about our May panel!

- We have another productive agenda tonight. Importantly, we will vote on the adoption of the 2021 municipal budget, capping many months of hard work by the Finance Policy Committee, led by Councilwoman Habgood, and our Town employees. I'd like to thank them all once again for their diligence in producing a budget that reflects both the pandemic-driven revenue challenges faced by many municipalities, as well as the substantial opportunities ahead for Westfield.

Also on second reading is an ordinance memorializing the salary guide portion of the newly negotiated five-year collective bargaining agreement with our PBA Local #90.

We'll also vote on resolutions to approve the DWC annual budget, another to refer a report and recommendations to the Planning Board to designate 923 Central Avenue as historic, and one to award a contract for a wireless communication consultant to assist the Town with a cell tower proposal at Houlihan/Sid Fay fields and whose cost will be covered by the provider fee. The purpose of this consultant is to advise the Council on formulating an RFP for the cell tower to ensure we derive the most value from interested wireless providers. The original FAQ about this initiative is on our website.

- On a final note, I would be remiss if I didn't mention the significance of today's guilty verdict in the Derek Chauvin trial for the murder of George Floyd. Today, justice was served, marking an important milestone towards healing -- not only for our country but for our community. It was almost a year ago when Governor Murphy and Congressman Malinowski joined thousands of us in Mindowaskin Park to protest the murder of George Floyd and express our support for the Black Lives Matter movement. We were fortunate to be joined by Police Chief Battiloro and members of the Westfield Police Department in solidarity.

While today's verdict was an important step forward, we still have significant work to do to address the racial divide in our country. Here at home, I'm grateful to have Chief Battiloro leading our police department at this critical juncture as he works to redefine their relationship with the community to one that is inclusive, collaborative, and participatory.

I'm also grateful to the Human Relations Advisory Commission for taking the lead on important conversations about race and inclusivity that need to be had in order to keep this topic an ongoing point of discussion and focus in our community.

And most importantly, I'm grateful to this community for understanding how far we still need to go. For us to become the more inclusive, anti-racist community we aspire to be, the work begins in our own homes and neighborhoods. I hope today's verdict sparks an opportunity for all us to have these important and sometimes difficult conversations.

With that, let's get to work. 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.

Thank you.