



## Town Council Opening Remarks July 13, 2021

*(The following remarks were delivered Mayor Brindle at the July 13, 2021 Town Council meeting.)*

Good evening, everyone, and welcome back to the Council Chambers! After 16 months, it's so nice to be back in person as our lives return to some sense of normalcy.

The last time we were all gathered here was on March 10, 2020, when, as part of our meeting, we formally recognized the promotion of several members of the Westfield Police Department. In my opening remarks that night, I spoke about the Coronavirus briefing the Town Council had received from our Regional Health Officer, Megan Avallone, and about the newly launched Coronavirus Information Center on our website. Just two days later, I sent out my very first COVID update, communicating that there were 29 cases of COVID in New Jersey, including one death, and one case in Union County. I wrote about Megan being in regular contact with Dr. Dolan to make determinations about potential school closures. Governor Murphy had declared a State of Emergency and had restricted outdoor gatherings to 250 people. I communicated that all Town-run programs and events were postponed until April 19, at which time we would reassess the public health situation. Two days later, on March 14, we had our first confirmed case in Westfield.

Since then, there have been 2,420 lab confirmed cases of COVID and 57 COVID deaths here in Westfield. This was unimaginable the last time we sat here together. So much has happened in that time span, and I think it's important to look back at where we were and how far we've come. On March 10, 2020, we could not have fathomed the need for a national COVID vaccination roll out. Today, Westfield's vaccination rate is 68% for our entire population (87% for those 18 and over, and 89% for those 65 and over).

But more than anything else in the last 16 months, our community has demonstrated its compassion, humanity, and resilience, and I thank each of you for doing your part. While COVID is not gone, and certainly the new variants remain a concern that we must watch closely, I am very proud of the way Westfield came together during a truly unprecedented time.

And so, thanks to everyone who came out tonight to join us, as it signifies more than just a meeting. For all of those here in person, please remember that, in accordance with CDC guidelines, those who are unvaccinated are strongly encouraged to wear a mask to protect themselves and others in the room.

Just as we did prior to the pandemic, our meetings continue to be live streamed for viewing only on Facebook, and public comment will be accepted in person only. As always, the replay will also be available afterwards on Facebook, YouTube, and TV 36.

### Update on Cell Tower Proposal

I thought it would be helpful to update everyone on the current status of the cell tower proposal at Houlihan/Sid Fay Fields that I've previously discussed. We are currently working with our consultant -- who, as a reminder, is retained at no cost to the Town -- to finalize the public call for bids that we expect to issue in the next few weeks. We will then evaluate any responses we receive and solicit public input for consideration before any final decisions are made. Any cell tower proposal would include a requirement to install bathrooms and substantial additional parking at the field complex as recommended in the Parks Strategic Plan. More information about this proposal can be found [on our website](#).

### Edison School Fields Project

We continue to receive very helpful feedback and questions from residents regarding the proposed Edison School Multipurpose Fields Project, and I want to thank everyone who has taken the time to provide their thoughts. As a reminder, this plan is in concept phase only, and will ultimately be driven by the public input we receive -- knowing that hearing from the public is the most important driver of a successful outcome for neighbors, user groups, and the community as a whole.

Our public input phase continues with ongoing outreach to the neighbors in the vicinity of Edison School, as well as broader public meetings on July 21, September 1, and September 20 at Edison at 7:00PM. Comments are also being accepted via email at [edisonfields@westfieldnj.gov](mailto:edisonfields@westfieldnj.gov). You can review the details and FAQs related to the proposal at [westfieldnj.gov/edisonfieldsproject](http://westfieldnj.gov/edisonfieldsproject).

### Downtown Happenings

After last week's weather-related cancellation, DWC's Sweet Sounds Downtown Music Festival returns tonight for its 24th year, and will be held every Tuesday night in July and August from 7:00 to 9:00PM. Musicians will perform on Central Avenue, at the corner of Quimby and Elm, and in Foundation Park.

Don't miss the Westfield Community Concert Band Concert on Thursday, July 15 at 7:30 in Mindowaskin Park. Following a COVID-driven hiatus, the band returns for its 109th year and will feature selections of popular American music.

Also this week, don't miss the annual Sidewalk Sale event from July 15-18, when downtown streets will be lined with some of our local retailers' best products. Sidewalk Sale days are a perfect opportunity to shop local and support Downtown Westfield!

### Tonight's Agenda

We have another busy agenda tonight. We will vote on resolutions to award on-call traffic review, circulation planning services, and parking consulting services for our redevelopment sites. These

services, which will be paid out of developer escrow accounts, continue our relationship with the firms that prepared details within the Traffic and Circulation element of the Master Plan. Importantly, their purpose is to ensure that we thoroughly address traffic and parking concerns as part of any redevelopment projects in Westfield.

We will also vote on a resolution authorizing the extension and expansion of the contract with Spiegle Architectural Group, who have served as the consultants on the Edison Fields project. This contract expansion includes their participation in the upcoming public input meetings as well as an initial parking assessment.

Tonight, we will also hold the public hearing and vote on the Handler Building redevelopment plan, which was approved last week by the Planning Board. If you missed the presentation by Topology at the last Town Council meeting, it's absolutely worth a look, and you can find it on the [redevelopment portion of our website](#).

Westfield residents Greg Redington and Michele Modestino purchased the Handler Building on North Avenue and plan to launch Redi-Farms, a vertical hydroponic farm that will produce locally grown organic produce year-round, in addition to education classes about indoor farming, an eatery, and an event space. Their vision reflects many of the priorities of this administration and our community: strategic economic development, historic preservation and adaptive reuse of an older building, sustainability, equity and inclusion.

While I'm very excited about the potential of this new Westfield business, I'm most proud of how we've gotten to this point through the innovative mindset of our Planning and Zoning team and our good standing with the Fair Share Housing Center in order to allow for the transfer of the affordable housing units originally designated for this site.

The net result of the six unit affordable housing transfer is that, in lieu of an apartment building on North Avenue, Westfield can instead gain a local vertical farm to serve as an economic development driver with significant social impact potential. It's also very gratifying that Redi-Farms is being created by two Westfield residents who are also successful business owners and employers as Founder/CEO of REDCOM. In a significant vote of confidence, they are investing in Westfield for a second time, validating our strategy to use the tools of redevelopment for the first time in Town history to signal to business owners and investors that Westfield is open for business!

The Redi-Farms redevelopment plan provides Westfield an opportunity to be a leader in the growing green economy, having demonstrated our commitment to sustainability by attaining silver certification by Sustainable NJ for the first time ever this past year. We are furthering those efforts as we activate six new EV charging stations in municipal parking lots this week, and will soon be welcoming Karma, a new EV auto dealership on North Avenue scheduled to open next month. Redi-Farms will only further burnish our reputation as an environmental and economic development leader by making Westfield an eco-destination in the region.

With that, let's get to work. I want to remind everyone that I will be enforcing Robert's Rules this evening to ensure we stay on topic and the meeting runs efficiently. Thank you.

