



Mayor Brindle's COVID-19 Update April 28, 2020



CONFIRMED CASES

- As of today, there are 113,856 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in New Jersey, with another 718 still under investigation. Currently, the County reports 12,188 cases, with Westfield reporting two more -- bringing our case total to 216 to date. For context, the last time we held a Town Council meeting, two weeks ago, there were 68,824 cases of COVID-19 in New Jersey, with 146 in Westfield.
- As always, a more detailed breakdown of statewide numbers is available online at the NJ Department of Health COVID-19 Dashboard.

STATE UPDATES

- Today, Governor Murphy introduced the members of his Restart and Recovery Commission, who will advise on issues of public health, workforce development, and transportation; seek ways to maximize federal support; review potential long-term investments; and ensure that restart and recovery works for every family.
- The Governor has also signed an Executive Order permitting municipal governments to extend the grace period for property tax payments due until June 1. Under existing law, municipalities are only allowed to allow grace periods of up to ten days. This information just became available today, and as a result we will be adding a resolution to tonight's agenda extending the second quarter tax payment grace period to June 1.

LOCAL UPDATES

- On the local front, today I signed proclamations to honor the dedication of our grocery store employees in Town as unsung essential workers during this crisis. These employees have been presented with unprecedented challenges – from tremendous increases in demand to social distancing operating modifications -- and have continued to work diligently to enable all of us in the community to secure our basic necessities amidst this pandemic. We will post the proclamations for both Trader Joe's and Stop & Shop on our website as a sign of our ongoing gratitude for their continued commitment.
- I receive a lot of questions regarding our reopening plans, the timing of which will primarily be driven by the state. The Governor unveiled a plan yesterday which provided the metrics that will determine when things can reopen, but the timing of which remains uncertain -- which I know is frustrating for everyone.
- I also receive many questions about the reopening of our parks. Some residents want it to happen now, while many residents are strongly in favor of waiting longer.

I remain concerned that Westfield continues to experience a consistent amount of new cases, with only a small percentage coming from long term care facilities, indicating that community spread is still happening. We are also concerned that if we reopen our parks in advance of the County parks, it will push crowds to ours, particularly as the weather improves. Even now, we are seeing people violating the park closures, and the Police Department has begun to utilize drones with a recorded siren and message for additional enforcement. Once the parks are opened, our police need to be confident that they will have the capacity to manage crowds and ensure social distancing.

That being said, we are discussing a reopening plan for the parks which will most likely be done in an incremental fashion similar to how they closed, which was done in coordination with the Board of Education and in consideration of County closures and other municipalities' practices.

To manage expectations, we are not there yet, but the parks reopening is something I evaluate and plan for on an ongoing basis with input from Administrator Jim Gildea, Police Chief Chris Battiloro, Regional Health Officer Megan Avallone, and members of the Town Council. One of the key indicators we will continue to watch is the prevalence of community spread.

I say this as your Mayor who has been very upfront with the community from day one of this crisis. When you are asked to make sacrifices, you expect nothing but the truth in return, and that is, and has always been, my commitment to you. I will continue to focus on facts, guided by values and principles, not politics or popularity. I'm looking forward to when we can pivot from saving people to serving people, which is just on the horizon if we can hang in there for just a bit longer.