



Mayor Brindle's COVID-19 Update July 14, 2020



The following remarks were made at the July 14, 2020 Westfield Town Council meeting.

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 175,915 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in New Jersey, with another 644 still under investigation. Currently, the County has 16,537 cases, with Westfield reporting no new cases yesterday, and 12 new cases reported today-- bringing our total to 325 from my update on Sunday. The recent upward trend over the last two weeks is not news to most of you, and I will address it in more detail shortly. I am also saddened to report an additional fatality, an 82 year-old male associated with a long term care facility. This death occurred back in May, but was only now reported to us due to an error in the lab's system. Regardless of the timing, let's remember that this is another life tragically lost as we keep this resident and his family in our thoughts.
- For a more detailed breakdown of statewide numbers, visit the NJ Department of Health COVID-19 Dashboard.

STATE AND COUNTY UPDATES

- Governor Murphy today advised individuals traveling to New Jersey from additional states with significant community spread of COVID-19 to quarantine for a 14-day period from the time of last contact within the identified state. The updated advisory includes four additional states -- Minnesota, New Mexico, Ohio, and Wisconsin -- with Delaware removed from the list, for a total of 22 states. Full details can be found here: <https://bit.ly/2WI77Hf>.

- New Jersey is one of only 12 states currently meeting its testing targets. The Governor reiterated that testing is more important than ever to help protect New Jersey against a resurgence of COVID-19 and continue moving forward with reopening. For details on statewide testing sites, visit covid19.nj.gov/testing.
- The Governor signed an Executive Order yesterday lifting the 50% capacity limits currently enforced on NJ Transit and private-carrier buses, trains, light rail vehicles, and Access Link vehicles. The order also requires face coverings in all NJ Transit and private-carrier indoor stations.
- The Union County Freeholder Board announced yesterday the initial round launch of the Union County COVID-19 Relief Grant Program for small businesses that have been impacted by the health emergency. The grant program will make available a total of \$2 million in CARES Act relief funds. Out of this funding, the program will provide grants up to \$20,000 to eligible small businesses to cover three months' rent, property mortgage, utility and insurance expenses. The grant will be available to small businesses located within the boundaries of Union County with 25 or less employees prior to the COVID emergency. For more information, visit the Union County website (<https://ucnj.org/coronavirus-update/grant-program-for-small-businesses>).

LOCAL UPDATES

- Yesterday, I participated in a Zoom call with NJ Transit, along with other members of the RVL Mayors' Alliance and the Raritan Valley Rail Coalition, as they presented the results of the RVL one-seat ride feasibility study. We were very disappointed with their findings, which were limited in the options and the ridership data that they had considered. The report concluded that there is additional capacity to add trains during the off peak shoulder period, but it would take six years and \$125M to do so, which doesn't seem credible. As disappointed as we were, this is just the beginning of a political and legislative process that will evolve as the transit situation becomes more certain post-COVID. I spoke to Congressman Tom Malinowski yesterday, who is also advocating with the Governor's office in addition to pushing for Gateway funding. Stay tuned. Just know that the RVL Mayors will not give up on this fight for equitable service.
- The Westfield Memorial Library has postponed its limited re-opening that had been scheduled for yesterday out of an abundance of caution, following the recent increase in local COVID-19 cases. The library will continue to provide its curbside service with expanded hours, now available 10:00 - 6:00 Monday through Thursday, and 10:00 - 4:30 on Friday and Saturday. For full details, visit the library's website at www.wmlnj.org.
- On tonight's agenda, we will be taking an exciting step in the implementation of the Strategic Parks Plan, as the Council votes on a resolution to award a contract for Planning & Design services for the development of a master recreation plan on the Edison School property which includes two turf fields. This plan will determine the best ultimate use of the property to help address the high priority of expanded field capacity identified by the Parks Plan. This contract is being awarded after a publicly advertised RFP process and in collaboration with the Board Of Education, and will be funded by the Park Improvement Fund.

- Tonight, we also have an ordinance on first reading out of the Code Review and Town Property Committee to amend certain sections of the Land Use ordinance relating to the definitions of pet care facilities, and allowing them as permitted uses in certain zones districts. As we continue to identify ways to adapt to shifts in the marketplace, this is an opportunity to accommodate future use of certain spaces for a high-growth industry that currently would not be permitted under the existing Land Use ordinance.

Lastly, I would like to take some time to talk about the recent upward trend in our COVID-19 cases. At our last Town Council meeting just two weeks ago on June 30, I was thrilled to notify everyone that Westfield had not reported any new cases in the previous 13-day period. Since then, we have reported 43 new cases out of our 325 in total. While we of course expect some fluctuations over time as restrictions are lifted, I think the last few days have, if nothing else, served as a wake up call that we cannot let our guard down amidst what is still an active pandemic.

As you know, these recent cases signify a demographic shift, with the majority of those under age 25. Some are attributed to July 4th parties, while others stem from group house rentals as well as recent travel to out of state hot spots. That being said, I want to reiterate that this spike in cases should not be an impetus for public shaming. In fact, I am grateful for the proactive and responsible posture that many of these young adults in our community assumed -- not only by getting tested upon realizing they had been exposed, but also by conducting outreach to let others know of their positive test results. I learned that yesterday the Kean testing center tested about 120 Westfield residents, whereas on days just prior they tested about 20. So thank you for taking action!

Anyone who feels they may have been exposed should do two things: Immediately quarantine, and get tested. It's important to do both because you may test too early after exposure and receive a false negative result while continuing to expose others. I know we are all grateful that, by all accounts, none of the current cases in these young adults appears to be serious -- but that does not mean these cases can't contribute to community spread and potentially infect those who are more vulnerable. We must all continue to take the appropriate precautions.

I continue to receive numerous messages from residents concerned by friends or neighbors not quarantining after traveling to known hot spots. Please take the quarantine advisory seriously if you have traveled to one of the 22 states identified by the Governor. In addition, I want to clarify that the outdoor and indoor maximum gathering numbers permitted by the Governor also carry additional requirements:

- Indoor gatherings must be limited to 100 people or 25% of a room's capacity -- whichever number is lower. All attendees at indoor gatherings must wear face coverings and stay six feet apart.
- Outdoor gatherings must be limited to 500 people and social distancing must be practiced. Individuals must wear face coverings outdoors when social distancing is difficult to maintain.

Gatherings without these precautions in place carry significant risk of community spread, and so I implore all of you to continue to follow the guidelines properly and help us contain this current spike. I know, from the ongoing commitment you've all made to our collective public health over these past few months, that we have it in us to get back on track.

I want to thank our Health Department, led by Megan Avallone, for the tireless work they are doing to obtain accurate information about the cases in our community through contact tracing, seven days a week. They have reported instances of non-cooperation by infected residents who won't provide details about any relevant interactions or whereabouts. This data is not only protected by HIPAA, but also serves a very valuable purpose in informing our knowledge of virus trends and helping to notify others who may be at risk of infection. Please cooperate fully and respectfully with our employees who are doing important work for the benefit of us all.

I also want to thank all of the residents who have expressed their concern, offered their support, and redoubled their commitment to the proper precautions that will help us continue to reclaim our pre-COVID ways of life. I know that I can count on all of you to once again demonstrate the very best of our community, as you have done time and time again.

On a final note, I want to acknowledge that there have been several interruptions in prior meetings that have lengthened them unnecessarily and caused them to be somewhat inefficient. So I'm going to insist that any comments that are not relevant to the particular business at hand, meaning the resolution or ordinance we are discussing, be deferred to after Council committee reports and not in this meeting. As the presiding officer, I have an obligation to manage the Council meetings and make sure we stay on agenda so we don't finish up our meetings, like the last one, on the next day.

With that, let's get on with the business at hand.