



Mayor Brindle's Opening Remarks April 24, 2018

***We are in the process of updating equipment for the Town Hall Live Feed. These updates should be in place by next week. It has been quite a busy few weeks!*

I would first like to congratulate the Greater Westfield Area Chamber of Commerce on their 70th anniversary. Councilwoman Dawn Macke and I celebrated this milestone at their gala last week where we watched ED Gene Jannotti perform a little soft shoe alongside the music of the Dupree's. Congrats to Andrew and Jeffrey Arkin of Adlers Jewelers, and to Dave Williams of Williams Nursery for being recipients of the Founders Award for the successful longevity of their businesses and the impact they've had in our community.

Thanks to BRAKES for hosting the Crossing Guard Appreciation Breakfast where I had the privilege of personally thanking the crossing guards for their work and dedication in guiding our kids safely to and from school.

Thanks also to the 3rd grade Brownie Troop from Washington School for visiting me in Town Hall and asking some great questions regarding how our government works.

I hosted a very productive and well received first meeting for all of the downtown business merchants to get their suggestions on how the Town could best support them, as well as to create a forum for future communication and collaboration.

I was interviewed by several budding journalists, including 8th graders Duke Edmondson and Jordan Ives from Roosevelt's Rough Rider, 8th grader Emmy Wheatley who was writing about leadership, and by 5th grader Alex Nurnberg for Scholastic. Watch out TAP and Leader!

Congrats to the Green Team and Green Team liaison Councilman David Contract for a successful Earth Day weekend that included park cleanups, a ceremonial tree planting, and an afternoon of activities and education at the north side train station. Mother Earth played her part by providing a beautiful weekend.

I would also like to thank Brad Chananie and Phil Michel who are co-chairing a Senior Advisory Council which is exploring ways to enhance services and support for our senior citizen community and the people who care for them. Their first step is to survey our community to understand needs so you'll be hearing more about that soon.

I would also like to provide an update on the status of the turf field project. Town Planner Don Sammet is finalizing the RFQ for the Master Plan consultant which will move forward once the budget is adopted. Recreation Director Don Bogardus will then put together the RFQ for a Parks Master Plan consultant

that will support the overall Master plan process. Additionally, I have had conversations with the Board of Education and Union County to better understand their turf field plans so that all future field capacity is taken into account as we develop our field plans for Westfield. I spent time with Union County Freeholder Chairman Sergio Granados on Friday, reiterated that new fields were a priority, and asked for their assistance in planning and funding any future field initiatives.

In addition to talking to Chairman Granados about fields, I asked for his assistance in obtaining Raritan Valley Line peak one seat rides as well as support for many initiatives involving special needs, seniors, and mental health. Regarding taxes, he is the first County Freeholder Chairman to commit the County to adhering to the same 2% cap that is required of municipalities, and he informed me that the County tax rate increase will be 1.75% this year, the lowest in recent memory.

Which brings me to the important work we're doing tonight which is adopting our 2018 Municipal budget. The fact that this budget delivers the lowest tax rate in decades at .51%, on top of an historically low County rate, is good news for Westfield taxpayers.

First, a reminder about the primary objectives of the budget that we're voting on tonight:

- Minimize tax burden on residents over the short and long-term
- Invest wisely in people, processes and infrastructure that will enable us to deliver better residential services and grow non-property tax revenues over time
- Create a smarter, more efficient government over the medium-term that will enable us to "do more with less"
- Improve our downtown economic climate

Let me also dispel some misinformation that has recently appeared in the press and in questions that we've received:

- This budget does not "grow our government." It includes funding for only one incremental part-time position (Public Information Officer) that was not previously approved by the Council
- Yes! We are using consultants to benefit from expertise that we don't currently have in-house, like any professional organization would do. In this category, the most notable consultant fee is for a \$120K feasibility study to assess relocating or renovating the firehouses, an expense which was approved unanimously by the Council.
- Of course, expenses are increasing. We need to give our dedicated employees raises--which on average are approximately 2%. We also need to pay for non-discretionary cost increases (for example, pensions and insurance), which this year were more than \$1mm. In addition, we are accelerating some one-time capital expenses, investing in technology, roads and equipment so that we can deliver better services to you over time.
- We're saving money too! Our open RFQ process for services, which had never been done before, netted over \$90K in savings. We've also reduced equipment maintenance costs by \$80K which should continue to decline with the purchase of additional equipment, and we were able to offset \$130K in police car purchases through an increased revenue line created by police services to utilities and contractors.

- And yes...we're using \$4.2mm of the \$14.5 mm surplus because we don't believe that you should be overtaxed to build up an excessively large "rainy day fund" that will sit in the Town's account collecting .75% interest. That money should be put to work paving our roads, trimming our trees, improving technology, and enhancing communication. We can wisely invest in the maintenance and services of our town and still maintain a very healthy and robust \$10mm in reserve.

There is a time when austerity is necessary and we are grateful to Jim Gildea and the previous administration for steering us through the financial crisis in 2009 and returning us to sound financial footing. But we are now in a low interest rate environment, sitting on a 30% surplus, with a need to invest in our town as surrounding towns have done with visible results.

I couldn't be prouder of the budget that is being adopted tonight and am grateful for the leadership of Finance Chair Councilwoman Linda Habgood, who applied her decades of financial experience to benefit us all.

I am also grateful to Councilpersons Stokes, Neylan, and Contract for their work on the Finance Committee and the many hours they devoted to the process. I'm hopeful that we can all look beyond partisan politics and do what's best for our residents by voting to approve this budget tonight.