



## Mayor Brindle's Opening Remarks May 12, 2020

Good evening, everyone, and thanks for joining us virtually tonight. Once again, I am joined by the entire Town Council here on video, as well as Town Administrator Jim Gildea, Town Clerk Tara Rowley, Chief Battiloro, Town Planner Don Sammet, Town Attorney Tom Jardim, and Town Engineer Kris McAloon, with our remaining department heads listening in with all of you. 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. For those of you who receive my regular COVID-19 emails, tonight's comments here will also serve as today's update.

### **CONFIRMED CASES**

- Today, there are 140,743 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in New Jersey, with another 704 still under investigation. Currently, the County reports 14,203 cases, with Westfield reporting two new cases (one of which is more than 30 days old but newly reported to us), for 253 in total. 15% of those total cases are associated with long-term care facilities. For context, the last time we held a Town Council meeting, two weeks ago, there were 113,856 cases of COVID-19 in New Jersey, with 216 in Westfield.
- As I mentioned yesterday, the growth rate of cases is another metric we continue to monitor and analyze as one of many indicators informing our decision making. It's impactful to see the growth rate slowing in recent weeks, which is a testament to the dedication you've all shown in following the stay at home order from the Governor.
- We also continue to receive good news from Overlook Hospital about the COVID-related trends they are seeing. As of yesterday, they have 77 COVID hospitalizations, down from a peak of 311 just over a month ago on April 10, and with significant declines in the last few days.
- As always, a more detailed breakdown of statewide numbers is available online at the NJ Department of Health COVID-19 Dashboard.

### **STATE UPDATES**

- Governor Murphy spent most of his update today focused on testing and contact tracing, both of which are critical components for a re-opening plan. New Jersey is well on its way to its next goal of being able to provide at least 20,000 tests a day by the end of the month, compared to just 6,000 tests a day back in March. The expansion of testing means that more people will know their health status, and will also provide more data that can inform decisions.
- The New Jersey Department of Health will issue a directive requiring that all residents and staff at long-term care facilities be tested no later than May 26th – with follow-up testing not more

than one week later. They will also be issuing a standing order expanding access to testing without a prescription for residents with possible exposure who fall in priority categories and lack access to a primary care practitioner. Mobile testing units and testing sites within institutions of faith are other components that are included in the expansion plans.

- The Governor also announced plans to build Community Contact Tracing Corps – an entire community of contact tracers to help those already on the ground and centralize these efforts. He plans to sign an Executive Order to ensure that local health departments and state health officials are all using and working off of the same information platform. Additionally, the Department of Health will soon sign a memorandum of understanding with the Rutgers School of Public Health to establish the first group of the new contact-tracing workforce. Those interested in becoming contact tracers should visit [covid19.nj.gov/forms/tracer](https://covid19.nj.gov/forms/tracer).
- In other state news, the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission is adding more online services in response to COVID-19, including registrations and renewals for more vehicle types, license renewals, address changes, lost licenses and registrations, and suspension restorations by email. For more information, visit [NJMVC.gov](https://NJMVC.gov) and select online services.

#### **LOCAL UPDATES**

- More locally as it pertains to testing, the County is establishing a process for all municipal employees to be tested, which is a key step in anticipation of fully re-opening Town Hall when the guidance allows. In addition to other protective measures we have in progress, like the upcoming installation of plexiglass panels and ongoing intensive sanitizing protocols, it's imperative that all of our employees interacting with the public be tested in order to maximize a safe environment when we are permitted to re-open.
- As our data continues to drive our decisions, we are looking at the next phase of our parks being opened, which will entail opening the tennis courts for limited play in accordance with current USTA guidelines. We are aiming to have protocols finalized for the full Council to review by tomorrow, in anticipation of opening by this weekend along with the parks parking lots. We are striving to ensure safety and adherence to social distancing with details coming later in the week.
- In other news, tonight we will vote on a resolution to designate the Downtown Special Improvement District as an area in need of rehabilitation, which follows a detailed study prepared by Town Planner Don Sammet and Town Engineer Kris McAloon that was referred to and approved by the Planning Board earlier this month. As I've mentioned before, we pursued this designation following input from downtown property owners and businesses. It allows for agreements with property owners to encourage them to improve their properties through five year tax abatements on the value of their improvements, and would ensure that all downtown stakeholders have an opportunity to participate in and benefit from the revitalization of our downtown.

This designation is a separate but complementary effort to our recent resolution studying our municipal lots, the Lord & Taylor site, and the Rialto property as areas in need of redevelopment. Overall, this pandemic has reiterated what we already knew, which is the clear need for a strategic approach -- one that maps out our future and diversifies revenue sources that allow us to make necessary improvements in line with the findings of our recent Master Plan Reexamination.

In closing, I just want to take another opportunity to extend my thanks to all of you. We have asked a lot, and you have really stepped up by making sacrifices to shift your everyday lives for our collective well being. We have made so much progress because of your commitment. That said, our work isn't yet finished, and I think that even as we return to variations of normalcy in the coming weeks, there is still much uncertainty at hand. I don't have all the answers -- nobody does -- but I will continue to prioritize information sharing and communication about the decisions we make that impact your lives, and will always proceed with the interest of public health above all else.