



Mayor Brindle's Opening Remarks November 10, 2020

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 COVID-19 CASES

- Today, there are 260,430 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in New Jersey to date, with another 598 still under investigation. Union County has reported 22,584 cases in total, with Westfield reporting two new cases since my last update on Friday (one on Saturday and one today).

STATE UPDATES

- Governor Murphy announced new indoor dining restrictions yesterday, which go into effect on November 12.
 - No indoor dining between 10:00PM – 5:00AM at restaurants, bars, clubs, and lounges.
 - Outdoor dining, takeout, and delivery services may continue past 10:00PM.
 - Casinos must stop serving food/drinks at 10:00PM
 - All barside seating will be prohibited.
 - Restaurants may place tables closer than six feet only if separated by barriers.
 - Individual fully-enclosed dining bubbles may be set-up for outside use.
- The Governor also announced that, starting this Thursday, all interstate games and tournaments for indoor youth sports – up to and including high school – are prohibited.
- Phase II of the New Jersey Economic Development Authority's PPE Access Program is now open, allowing New Jersey-based businesses and non-profits to receive a 10% discount on PPE. For more information, visit www.covid19.nj.gov/ppeaccess.

LOCAL UPDATES

- I am incredibly grateful for the high level of participation by our residents in last week's election resulting in 83.7% of Westfield ballots being returned, the highest in Union County. We will share the final election tabulated results once they are certified by the County on November 20.
- Thanks to everyone who has already submitted their applications to volunteer for our 2021 boards and commissions. As we've done for the past two years, the information and application are available online to provide broad access to the community. Please visit westfieldnj.gov/volunteer to submit an application before next Friday's deadline, November 20.

- Tonight, we have a full agenda, which includes the ordinance on second reading for a downtown redevelopment plan, following last week's approval by the Planning Board. As a reminder, this redevelopment plan, which includes the properties we recently designated as areas in need of redevelopment, is not a specific proposal for these properties. Rather, it is simply a framework to explain what type of investment the Town is seeking on those properties, and paves the way for us to collaborate with commercial property owners, investors, and developers on meeting our mutual goals.
- As I've mentioned many times, I have maintained an open line of communication over the last two years with Hudson's Bay Company, the owners of the Lord & Taylor properties, which encompass the site of the store and the two lots across North Avenue. As our largest property tax payer, they have asked to be part of the ongoing dialogue about our proposed redevelopment efforts. We are very fortunate to have members of their Executive Team here with us tonight, and they will speak a little later in the meeting about their approach to the shifting retail landscape as well as their continued interest in being a part of reimagining Downtown Westfield.
- Lastly, I'd like to address the feedback I've received from many residents about the increasing number of community COVID cases and the resulting extended closure of Westfield High School and its extracurricular activities. Many of us on this Council, including myself, have students at WHS that participate in various activities, so we can empathize with your disappointment and frustration. I want to thank the many residents who continue to take this virus seriously and do their part, for which I remain grateful every day. I, like all of you, am fatigued by the ongoing restrictions on our daily lives and their implications on important milestones and celebrations. This is not easy -- for parents, for students, for teachers, and for coaches. It is also not easy for decision makers who must balance multiple considerations when, above all, trying to protect the public.

I take my stewardship of this community very seriously, and there is no greater responsibility than the health and safety of our residents. I know that Dr. Dolan and Regional Health Officer Megan Avallone approach their roles in the same manner, and that every decision is made from a place of protection and responsibility, not one of punitive action or consequence. Megan is an experienced licensed public health officer and a registered nurse, as is much of her staff, and her expertise is relied upon not only in the eight communities serviced by the Westfield Regional Health Department, but also at the state level in her role as the President of the New Jersey Association of County and City Health Officials. She speaks regularly with the New Jersey Department of Health to ensure that the right decisions are being made when it comes to COVID-19 and its impact on our town. It's important to remember that our Health Department, by extension, is an arm of the State Health Department, making it critical to follow their guidance.

While residents of course may have differences of opinion about these decisions, I am disheartened to see some members of the public, across the spectrum, attempting to diminish the vital role that our Health Department plays and the dedication its employees have put forth

in the face of unprecedented circumstances. These health professionals have been working tirelessly for nearly eight months managing a pandemic -- focused solely on the best interest of the community, while facing increasing levels of resistance to contact tracing cooperation -- and I am disturbed and dismayed to see some of the public commentary being directed at them.

Like many of you, I feel deeply for the student athletes who are unable to finish their seasons, particularly as seniors, and I appreciate them voicing their concerns as responsible young adults. I have read their letters and saw yesterday's demonstration, and I know how important it is that they feel heard, and are heard. They have demonstrated leadership, strength and maturity as they diligently observed COVID protocols and ultimately advocated for themselves. I have tremendous empathy for those who are missing out on these important moments they have worked hard to prepare for over many years, similar to how I felt about last year's graduating class missing so many of their milestones.

But it's important to remember that empathy should be extended to everyone in our community, including the many residents who have reached out to me expressing their concern and anger over the rising number of cases, especially among teens who have been less diligent in following COVID protocols than the student athletes I have heard from. I would also like to see the same empathy extended to our Health Department staff faced with making the tough decisions that others don't have to undertake. They take no joy in making these difficult decisions. Some have experienced a personal COVID loss, which only reinforces their desire to ensure that no one else has to. We are extremely lucky to have them working unbelievably hard, at extreme personal sacrifice during an unimaginable situation, and they continue to have my full support, and that of this Council and Administration, as they help us navigate this pandemic in the critical weeks and months ahead.

That being said, I appreciate the fact that many want and need additional context for the closure decisions, and would like some reassurance that the extent of their commitment to safety has been understood and appreciated. To that end, I've asked Megan to be here tonight to talk briefly about the current state of COVID across New Jersey and why this trend is so disconcerting.

Before getting to tonight's business agenda, I want to remind everyone that I will once again be enforcing Robert's Rules this evening to ensure we stay on topic and the meeting runs efficiently.

Thank you.

And Happy Birthday to Councilman David Contract!