



Mayor Brindle's Opening Remarks January 12, 2021

As we recite the Pledge of Allegiance, I think it's important to reflect on what that sacred pledge really means in light of the horrific events of last week, when the Capitol was overrun by a group of domestic terrorists who called themselves patriots. Every American should be appalled at the desecration of our flag in their feeble but deadly attempt to upend our democracy. I am heartbroken for every service member and veteran who has proudly served defending our flag and the American values and ideals it represents to have to bear witness to this assault on our democracy.

This moment in history is one that will live far beyond us and show the deep divides that exist in this era of American democracy. It is my fervent hope that our country can begin to come together and heal in the weeks and months ahead. My biggest wish, above all else, is that we can set that tone here in our own community, and recommit ourselves to living up to the American ideals of freedom and tolerance. I pledge to do my part as the leader of this governing body. We have differences, and we always will, but we can not allow them to destroy our civility and erase our commonalities. Westfield has always prided itself on a very strong sense of community -- perhaps never more so than in the last year amidst this pandemic -- and I know that sense of community will continue to see us through. We are, and will always be, One Nation, Under God.

COVID-19 UPDATES

- On a statewide basis, the COVID-19 rate of transmission declined slightly for the first time in a week to 1.08, while hospitalizations for the virus rose for the third consecutive day. The seven-day average for daily positive tests in New Jersey is up 18% from a week ago and 7% from a month ago, when the state was witnessing an increase in cases after Thanksgiving. Governor Murphy warned that the impact of indoor Christmas and New Year's Eve gatherings will continue to be seen in the coming days.
- The most recent positivity rate reported, on Thursday, for tests administered statewide was 11.32%. The positivity rate has been at 10% or higher since December 22.
- More locally, COVID-related hospitalizations at Overlook are up approximately 11% since the beginning of January, but thankfully have not climbed back to the mid-December levels seen post-Thanksgiving. Here in Westfield, the total number of cases reported to date by the Department of Health is 1,260 as of January 6. As I shared in my Friday update, the first week of January unfortunately brought the highest number of weekly cases, at 137, seen since the start of the pandemic. I will continue to report the latest numbers from the Health Department each Friday, and more detailed information about statewide numbers (which now also includes antigen/rapid tests) is available on the NJ COVID-19 Dashboard.

- On the vaccination front, New Jersey has received 651,000 doses of coronavirus vaccines, with 233,555 doses administered to date -- 212,069 first doses and 21,289 second doses. Currently, only health care workers, people who live in congregant settings and police and fire professionals are eligible to receive shots in New Jersey. The NJ Department of Health anticipates the vaccine should be available for the general public by April or May, with the hope of vaccinating 70% of adult residents by the end of May. More information about vaccination plans, including a link to pre-register, can be found at www.covid19.nj.gov/vaccine.

LOCAL UPDATES

- Please remember that first quarter property taxes are due on February 1. As the Office of the Tax Collector remains closed to the public, payment can be made online, by mail, or by using the drop boxes at Town Hall. The last date to pay without penalty is Wednesday, February 10.
- As Martin Luther King Day approaches, please consider participating in the third annual MLK Day of Service. Although the traditional gathering to assemble kits won't be possible due to COVID, residents can still make a big impact by donating cold weather packs to be distributed to those experiencing homelessness through Bridges Outreach. To participate, place hand warmers, foot warmers, lip balm, new socks and a blanket in a plastic bag and place in the drop-off bin in the Police Department entryway between now and January 22. For more details on the day's events and other ways to participate, be sure to follow @MLKDayWestfield on Facebook.
- On January 19 at approximately 5:00PM, we plan to honor those we lost to COVID-19 as part of a broader, nationwide moment of remembrance which is being planned in collaboration with the ministerium. Thanks to those in the community who have reached out to provide the names of family members lost to the virus, which we will incorporate into our ceremony. This information is being collected by email at covid19@westfieldnj.gov. Final service details will be confirmed later this week.
- In closing, I do want to let you know that I, like many of you, remain deeply concerned over the potential for more unrest in the coming days as the transition of power in our country approaches. Here at home, please be assured that Chief Battiloro has been in constant communication with his law enforcement counterparts and colleagues across New Jersey. While he reports there are no specific threats to our area, he and his extraordinary team will operate from a position of preparedness as they continue to monitor the situation.

Thank you, and may God bless President-elect Biden and the incoming administration, and our great country. Now onto tonight's agenda.