



Mayor Brindle's Opening Remarks February 9, 2021

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.

COVID-19 UPDATES

- The seven-day average for confirmed COVID-19 cases in New Jersey is down 22% from a week ago and 39% from a month ago. On a statewide basis, the rate of transmission decreased once again to 0.83, down from 0.85 on Monday and 0.87 a day earlier, representing the lowest transmission rate since late August. Governor Murphy indicated that the metrics continue to point in the right direction, and that New Jersey's health care system remains in a strong position in terms of treating those currently in its care. He added that if these trends continue, additional steps can be taken to further reopen our economy.
- The number of new cases of the highly-contagious COVID variant from the United Kingdom continues to be on the rise in New Jersey. To date, it has been identified in 31 cases within 11 counties, although not yet in Union County.
- On the vaccination front, New Jersey has administered 1,085,595 vaccine doses to date, with more than 240,000 residents now being fully vaccinated. CVS Pharmacy will begin accepting vaccination appointments on Thursday, February 11, with vaccinations beginning on Friday, February 12. To sign up for an appointment, use the CVS app or visit cvs.com/immunizations/covid-19-vaccine. For those without online access, CVS has set up a customer service line at (800) 746-7287. On a local level, we continue to seek solutions for vaccinations as the supply continues to increase.
- As always, more detailed information about statewide numbers is available on the NJ COVID-19 Dashboard.

LOCAL UPDATES

- I'd like to once again extend my gratitude to our Public Works, Police, and Fire Departments for an excellent job of maintaining public safety during the two snow storms in the past week. I also want to thank all of our residents, as well as business and property owners, for the patience and cooperation exhibited -- not to mention the hard work of clearing all that snow from sidewalks.

- Thanks to everyone who has paid their first quarter property taxes. As a reminder, tomorrow is the last day to pay without penalty. Payment can be made online, by mail, or by using the drop boxes at Town Hall.
- I'd like to offer a big congrats to Lion's Roar Brewery for their very successful grand opening this past weekend. While they had a long road to opening due to the bureaucracy of ABC licensing and an unforeseen pandemic, I'm very proud of the role the Town played in their opening, reflecting our goal of becoming one of the most business friendly municipalities in the state.

As background, brewery owners Tim and Corinne Grant had reached out in June 2018 expressing their desire to open a local brewery, which I knew would be a home run in our beer thirsty town. Working with Councilwoman Dawn Mackey, the Grants scoured locations, and once they landed their current location, we met with Town Planner Don Sammet to identify a path forward. At the time, our zoning laws did not allow breweries in our Central Business District so Councilwoman Mackey, as Chair of the Code Review Committee, had an ordinance drafted to amend our Land Use Law to allow for it, which the Council approved just three months later, paving the way for the great beer we are enjoying today.

I only share this story as an example of the "get to yes" culture we are cultivating in my administration. If there is a good idea which is aligned with our overall goals and vision for the Town, we will figure out a way to make it happen. I'd like to express my gratitude to Town Planner Don Sammet for his support and flexibility, to the Planning Board for their enthusiastic support, especially to the late Chairman Robert Newell, and to this Council for responding so quickly in adopting not only this ordinance, but to others that respond to opportunities in the marketplace.

- There is good news on the traffic safety front! Two new traffic lights are starting the installation process next month. The first is at the intersection of Rahway Avenue and Lamberts Mill Road, the difficult intersection next to St. Helen's and Sid Fay/Houlihan fields. I'd like to thank Town Attorney Tom Jardim, Town Administrator Jim Gildea, and Town Engineer Kris McAloon for doing the heavy lifting to bring this to fruition. The Town first had to obtain easements with various adjacent property owners in order to install the light, then work with the County to develop the engineering plans and gain approval. This process has taken several years, but we will finally see a much safer intersection this year.

The second traffic light is being installed at Scotch Plains Ave and W. Broad St, which was a recommendation that came out of last year's Bike and Pedestrian Plan. Thanks to Public Safety Chair Mike Dardia and Councilwoman Dawn Mackey who went door to door in the neighborhood to inform the neighbors and elicit their support. This light installation process will also start next month. Special thanks to the County for obtaining grants for these two traffic light projects on our behalf many years ago and maintaining the funds for us to begin the installation now.

- We received bids today in response to the Energy Aggregation RFP that went out a couple of weeks ago. The bids revealed that in today's market, aggregating our energy supplier would yield no savings to homeowners' energy bills so we are voting on a resolution tonight to reject the bids we received. We will revisit this opportunity as the market shifts and will continue to look for opportunities to create cost savings for residents.
- Speaking of cost savings, tonight we are passing a resolution to authorize an assessment to review the feasibility of sharing court services with Scotch Plains, Garwood, and Fanwood. This simply allows us to work with the state "shared service czars," at no cost to the town, to see if there's an opportunity to increase efficiencies and reduce operating costs in our courts. All four municipalities are passing this resolution which will initiate the process, with recommendations to be available later this year.

I'm sorry to end my remarks tonight on a very somber note by reporting that Jeff Janota, who led our Master Plan Reexamination efforts on behalf of his firm H2M, passed away this morning after unexpected complications from recent surgery. You may recall Jeff from his many presentations at Council and Planning Board meetings. Jeff was not just a planner, he was a long time Westfield resident, and it showed in his commitment and passion for protecting and advocating for our Town's interests in the Master Plan process. But more important than his professional contributions, Jeff will most be remembered as a friend and neighbor to many, a husband to his beloved Toni, and devoted dad to daughter Andy and son Cooper. I'd like to extend condolences on behalf of our community as we keep them in our prayers.

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.