



## Mayor Brindle's Opening Remarks May 25, 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

- Yesterday, Governor Murphy announced some of the most significant reopening measures to date. On May 28, the indoor mask mandate in public spaces will be lifted, as well as the six-foot social distancing requirement in both indoor and outdoor spaces, the prohibition on dance floors at bars and restaurants, and the prohibition on ordering and eating/drinking while standing at bars and restaurants.
- Additionally, effective Friday, June 4, indoor gathering and capacity limits will be lifted. It's important to note that businesses and entities overseeing indoor spaces may continue to require face masks for employees, customers, and/or guests. Full details are available at [covid19.nj.gov](https://www.covid19.nj.gov).
- The seven-day average for confirmed COVID-19 cases in New Jersey is down 34% from a week ago and down 81% from a month ago -- its lowest point since September 23. The rate of transmission is .70. The state has set a goal of having 70% of New Jersey's 6.9 million adults vaccinated by the end of June; about 57% have been fully vaccinated so far, with more than 194,000 children between the ages of 12 and 17 vaccinated.
- In Westfield, as of May 21, 91% of those 65 and older, 86% of the adult population (18+), and 65% of the entire population has been vaccinated with at least one dose. In terms of those fully vaccinated, the data shows 85% of those 65 and older, 76% of adults (18+), and 56% of the entire population. As always, more detailed information about statewide numbers is available on the [NJ COVID-19 Dashboard](#).

### LOCAL UPDATES

- Town Hall will fully reopen to the public on Tuesday, June 1. I want to thank our employees, who didn't miss a beat when we were forced to pivot to serving our residents virtually -- and have continued to do so over the past year. That said, it will be a nice change to have in-person interactions once again as we get back to normal. In addition, we anticipate in-person Council meetings resuming in July, pending the conclusion of the upcoming roof replacement over that portion of the building and the Council Chambers upgrade work.

- I hope you'll join us at the Memorial Day ceremony at 9:00AM at Monument Circle to honor those service members that made the ultimate sacrifice for our country. The ceremony is open to all, and is a wonderful way for us to come together and pay tribute to our fallen heroes. Although we aren't able to pull off the parade this year due to limited advance notice, we look forward to a bigger and better parade next year.
- We will be kicking off June Pride Month on Tuesday by raising the Pride flag at Town Hall at 6:00PM, which will be followed by a walk to the rainbow crosswalks for a celebratory gathering. Everyone is welcome to attend!
- Please join me on June 7 at noon for a Facebook Live discussion with Town Administrator Jim Gildea and Town Planner Don Sammet as we talk about affordable housing, what it means for Westfield, and the current status of our obligations. It's important for residents to have background and context for the apartment complexes that are appearing in Westfield and surrounding communities, and share how we are committed to meeting our court-mandated obligations in a way that works best for our community.
- We have an important Planning Board meeting coming up that will inform much of our future redevelopment efforts. Over the past year, we forged ahead with finalizing the Master Plan Land Use and Circulation Elements in order to maintain the momentum for our redevelopment efforts. This document, driven by the Master Plan Reexamination recommendations and your input, provides guidance on future zoning for our downtown, and addresses critical issues like building height, density, architectural standards, streetscapes, and more. The final recommendations are expected to be presented to the Planning Board on June 7, and once adopted, will drive the next stage of the redevelopment planning process, including a public and exciting new chapter with Streetworks Development.
- Thanks to everyone for your ongoing diligence in locking your cars to deter criminal activity. Our Police Department continues to work tirelessly to address this ongoing issue, and I'm going to turn it over to Chief Battiloro to speak about what he's seeing in Westfield and in surrounding towns.
- We have another busy agenda tonight, which includes an ordinance on first reading to opt-out of the new cannabis law. I know that the Cannabis Commission chairs, Councilmen Parmelee and Dardia, have some comments to make before the vote, but I would first like to thank them, as well as all of the Commission members and the many residents who voiced their opinions. While I have heard from many residents on this matter, many assuming that we should have acted in one way or the other, I am proud that a hallmark of this administration is soliciting and incorporating public input for many pertinent community issues, which is consistent with how we handled this decision. We received significant resident feedback, and I was grateful for the range of opinions brought forth. I support the opt-out recommendation, given the uncertainty around the implementation of the new law, and think it's prudent to pay close attention to this emerging space and revisit it as the landscape evolves.

- Lastly, tonight we are introducing a resolution to approve a redevelopment agreement as well as an ordinance introducing a financial agreement with Elite Properties for the Westfield Crossing project slated for the former Sevell's property on South Ave close to the Garwood border.

As you may recall, the Council unanimously approved the designation of this site as an area in need of redevelopment in February of last year. The subsequent redevelopment plan for this project was approved this past March which provided the framework for the agreement we are introducing tonight. This project is part of our court ordered Fair Share Affordable Housing settlement that was negotiated by the previous administration which does not give us the latitude to disallow any proposed new developments that were part of that agreement. We are now simply charged with overseeing and enabling its implementation. As provided for in the settlement agreement, this project will include 193 units, of which 32 will count towards our affordable housing obligation.

Westfield Crossing is our fifth affordable housing project, but it is the first one where we are requiring a redevelopment agreement in order to maximize the project's value to the neighborhood and community. A redevelopment agreement allows the Town to assert more control by mandating a higher quality threshold, dictating the allocation of 1, 2, and 3 bedroom units (beyond what Fair Share requires), and requiring specific public improvements. As you will see in the Westfield Crossing presentation, using the tools of redevelopment, the redevelopment team has negotiated a final project that will serve as a beautiful gateway to Westfield from the east side of town and will provide significant benefits to the community that would not have been possible without the use of redevelopment tools.

This agreement includes the creation of a new public park on the site, funded by Elite that will be deeded over to the Town. It also includes a substantial contribution to our Park Improvement Fund that will support a renovation of the Windsor Park playground and other deeply needed improvements at our parks.

A project of this quality, along with the estimated \$750,000 in public improvements we're requiring, would not have been feasible without a PILOT agreement, known as a Payment In Lieu of Taxes. PILOTs are common redevelopment tools used in communities all over the state as a means to spur economic development and pay for public amenities, notably in Cranford, Morristown, Fanwood, and Summit to name just a few. As I mentioned in my remarks in March of last year, a PILOT agreement is beneficial for four significant reasons:

- Provides the Town significant control over a project while enabling the developer to build a higher quality project
- Allows the Town to retain 95% of the negotiated fee, with only 5% going to the County (as opposed to 24%)
- Provides up to 30 years of consistent, recurring revenue to the Town to support enhanced services to taxpayers
- Enables the project to be financially viable as our economic advisor will be explaining further in his presentation of the PILOT agreement

In the case of Westfield Crossing, the negotiated PILOT will result in a \$15MM net benefit to the Town over what traditional taxes would have yielded over the 30 year term, and will support desperately needed improvements such as new turf fields and the construction of a new firehouse.

It's important to note, however, that not every project warrants a PILOT. These agreements make the most sense for projects in challenging locations where building a high quality project can be dis-economic for a developer, particularly projects with a large affordable housing component, or in cases where significant public improvements are required or requested by the municipality.

333 Central is an example of a project that would have merited a PILOT due to its high visibility, the blighted status of the site, and the parking access and easement the project required. Not only could the community have benefited from a higher quality project with required public improvements, a PILOT agreement would have potentially delivered an incremental \$9MM over the term to have been used towards improving our parks, providing new equipment for our first responders, or enhancing our downtown.

I appreciate the concerns raised by some residents about the impact of apartments on traffic and our schools. While it's easy to assume that apartments bring substantially more school age kids, we are finding that is simply not the case. To date, there are only five school aged children living in the 120 units that have recently been built and leased. Residential teardowns and new subdivisions, rather than apartments, are actually responsible for bringing more school age children as young families moving to Westfield seem to prefer home ownership. With projected declines in future school enrollment, there is little concern that apartments will cause school overcrowding.

After tonight's presentation, I hope you'll agree that the Westfield Crossing project is a significant improvement to the neighborhood and community over the blighted area that exists there today, a project only made possible by the terms the Town has required as part of a Redeveloper Agreement, and also by a financial agreement which outlines the terms of the PILOT which is what is making this exceptional project financially feasible.

This is not the time to debate or politicize whether or not Westfield needs more apartments. That has already been decided by the courts. Instead, let's focus on how these new projects can add the most value - by providing needed public improvements to our community and expanding our ratables to enhance services for all taxpayers. Let's also keep in mind the inclusive goals of our state and community, and be prepared to warmly welcome the new residents that will inhabit this beautiful project that we hope will be a catalyst for further investment in this previously neglected area of town.

Again, I would encourage you to tune in to the Facebook live on Monday, June 7 at noon with Town Administrator Jim Gildea and Town Planner Don Sammet where our Affordable Housing obligations will be discussed at length.

With that, let's get to work. 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.