



Town Council Opening Remarks October 26, 2021

(The following remarks were delivered Mayor Brindle at the October 26, 2021 Town Council meeting.)

Good evening, everyone, and thanks to all who are joining us in person and online tonight.

As a reminder, public comment will be accepted in person only. As always, the replay will also be available afterwards on Facebook, YouTube, and TV 36.

THE RIALTO REIMAGINED

By now, you've all seen the wonderful news that The Rialto is being purchased by the Westfield Arts Collective, a non-profit organization made up of residents in the arts. I'd like to once again congratulate and thank them for taking this leap and investing in this iconic building. The vision for the Center for Creativity at the Rialto is one that prioritizes the arts as both a community anchor and an economic driver for the downtown and, importantly, includes a partnership with the Tee and Charles Addams Foundation.

Interestingly, and what may not be known to many, is that this is a journey whose groundwork was laid even before the theater closed, back in 2018 when we established AddamsFest and began to develop a relationship with the Tee and Charles Addams Foundation through Councilwoman Mackey. That relationship has continued to flourish as Executive Director Kevin Miserocchi has become increasingly involved in our annual festivities to honor both the art and cultural legacy of Charles Addams.

In 2019, we established the Public Arts Commission, also under the guidance of Councilwoman Mackey, providing the foundation for an emphasis on the arts in Westfield and the value of public art through the Ricardo Roig murals at the South Avenue circle, the Art Takes Flight exhibit that provided so much joy during the pandemic, and most recently, the Through the Lens photo exhibit and the newly unveiled murals at the Central Avenue underpass.

I'm also very proud of the relationship this administration has built with Jesse and Doreen Sayegh, the current owners of the Rialto, which began long before the pandemic. They have always cared deeply about the building's fate and its place in Westfield's collective hearts and minds.

Just prior to the pandemic, we formed a Rialto Rising volunteer committee composed of residents across a range of expertise in the arts, commercial real estate and many other fields who stepped up to share their ideas and helped forge a variety of paths about how to drive the best outcome for the building.

In August 2020, by designating the property as an area in need of redevelopment, we required a redevelopment plan to be drafted and adopted by this Council ensuring we would retain control over the site and that any change of use would reflect community desires for the building. As I have repeatedly stated, redevelopment designations do not always merit tax abatements. They simply and importantly give the Town more control over the outcomes, which is the case at the Rialto, and we now have the ability to work directly with the new owners in realizing a new vision for one of Westfield's most iconic buildings.

And finally, in October 2020, we passed an ordinance that changed the zoning in the Town's Central Business district to allow "artisan manufacturing," or the creation of traditional and non-traditional art, which the Center for Creativity at the Rialto states as a key reason that its founding members came together in order to take advantage of this change in zoning law, and began looking for a central location in downtown Westfield that could house such an endeavor.

All of this is to say that this outcome did not happen in a vacuum, and is the result of many collaborations among residents, external foundations, property owners, and stakeholders in the arts. I think it's the ultimate example of using the levers we've put in place that emphasize our priorities of community, inclusivity, art, economic development, and smart growth -- and what an exciting result!

From the huge response to yesterday's announcement, it's clear that the Rialto still holds a place of great significance in the hearts of our residents, and I couldn't be more thrilled for our community as we eagerly await the building's revival and its exciting new future. I encourage you to find out more about the Center for Creativity at the Rialto and get involved by visiting their website at centerforcreativity.art, and join us for the ribbon cutting on Thursday at 5pm.

WESTFIELD SENIOR HOUSING CENTER

I'd like to thank the group of residents from the Westfield Senior Housing Center who recently visited Town Hall to voice their support for the Town's efforts to resolve the current lease dispute, and for bravely sharing their concerns about the diminishing services in their buildings. I reiterated the Town's commitment to maintaining their affordable senior housing, and reaffirmed what they already believed which is that their housing or rents will not be impacted in any way due to this lease dispute. This administration remains resolute in acting in the best interests of these senior residents and our taxpayers and will not be intimidated by the WSHC Board's scare tactics just weeks before an election. I also want to thank the other residents who have reached out to share their knowledge about the WSHC's operations to aid us in our effort to gain additional information that the WSHC has failed to provide.

SOUTH AVENUE TRAIN STATION KIOSK

I'm pleased to report that, at last night's meeting of the Historic Preservation Commission, they voted unanimously to nominate the South Avenue train station kiosk for historic designation. The Commission's report indicates that the building is one of the last remaining exterior news stands in the

country, and represents a time when newspapers controlled the flow of information and the railroad controlled the country's mobility. After a recent extensive renovation, we look forward to Boxcar beginning its coffee and concierge services there in the near future. And, after we introduce an ordinance at an upcoming meeting to designate the building, it will mark the seventh such designation in the last four years.

Also in historic preservation news, I was thrilled to attend last week's Devlin Awards, which recognize achievements in historic preservation where Jim Gildea accepted an award for the Mindowaskin Playground. Fittingly, the ceremony was held at Lion's Roar Brewery, which was also one of the award recipients for its wonderful restoration. Thanks to all of the recognized property owners for their commitment to historic preservation, and of course to the HPC for making the Devlin Awards an important annual tradition.

VOTING INFORMATION

I think we're all aware that Election Day is one week from today! Please make sure you have a plan to vote.

- **Vote By Mail:** If you received a vote-by-mail ballot, you must vote by mail; otherwise, if you show up November 2 at your polling location, you will have to vote using a paper provisional ballot.

Return your vote-by-mail ballot to the secure drop box located at the Fraser Building, 300 North Avenue East, Westfield, or mail in your vote-by-mail ballot by 8:00PM on November 2. You can track your ballot at trackmyballot.nj.gov.

If you would still like to apply to vote by mail, you must fill out an application and return it in person to the Union County Clerk's Office by Nov. 1 at 3:00 PM. If you lost, damaged, or accidentally misplaced or discarded your mail-in-ballot, you may request a replacement vote-by-mail ballot from the Union County Clerk's Office.

- **Vote Early in Person:** Early voting is now open and continues through October 31. The polls are open from 10 a.m. - 8 p.m. except Sundays when they are open until 6 p.m. The closest location is at Union County College, 1033 Springfield Avenue, Seminar Room A/B, Cranford.
- **Vote In Person on Election Day:** You can vote at your normal polling location on Tuesday, November 2. A list of Westfield's locations can be found at westfieldnj.gov/elections.

NEW BUSINESSES

We are seeing many new businesses opening in town, and I was thrilled to cut the ribbon for the beautiful new Mimi & Hill pop up shop across the street from Addams Tavern, just in time for the holiday shopping season. Owners Miriam Silver and Hillary Kaplan, like several other local business

owners, have doubled down on their investment in Westfield because they see a future full of promise and possibility. Their new location also joins a growing list of female owned businesses in town, particularly along that block.

On Thursday, we'll be doing the ribbon cutting for the highly anticipated Karma EV Dealership demonstrating the market for sustainability is growing in this area, and tomorrow we're cutting the ribbon for Blissful Beauty, an independent cosmetics and fragrance store in the former Ella Allure space on East Broad Street. Congrats to these businesses on their grand openings!

LONGFELLOW AVENUE ASSAULT CASE

I want to thank everyone for their thoughtful outpouring of compassion for our fellow resident and neighbor on Longfellow Avenue who suffered an unthinkable home invasion and sexual assault last Tuesday. I had the opportunity to meet with her briefly and convey the support of the community as we all continue to keep her in our thoughts and prayers.

As I said last week, this series of events has left all of us very shaken as we try to process how this could have happened to our neighbor in the middle of the afternoon, right in her own home. An act like this preys upon our worst fears and has exposed our vulnerabilities, in a place where no one should ever have to feel unsafe.

I am deeply grateful to the entire Westfield Police Department, who worked swiftly and tirelessly, in partnership with both the Union County Prosecutor's Office and the New Jersey State Police, to bring this suspect under arrest. Through their extraordinary police work, the WPD had the suspect under surveillance within 24 hours of the assault, and with the arrest has brought this case one step closer to the justice that the victim deserves.

I'm going to have Chief Battiloro speak briefly tonight about some of the details and the timeline he is now able to release, but I first want to emphasize that this is a case that still has to go through a fair judicial process, and that means that some details will be preserved for that time.

I had a first-hand inside look at the level of professionalism and commitment that our department brought to this case, reflective of their recent professional accreditation which is attained by only 4% of police departments nationwide. I am proud that this administration continues to fully support Chief Battiloro's leadership and the department's commitment to community policing, not only in words but in deeds, which is why we fully restored their funding for officers and equipment. Our support is also reflected in our confidence in them as they upheld the integrity of an investigation and, ultimately, a legal case they were building, in spite of the community's cries for immediate information because they were legitimately afraid. Our support is also reflected in upholding the department's request for signage about car thefts, and notifications about where and when crime is occurring, in spite of criticism from those who believe that that information should not be shared.

I only say this to reiterate that we have one of the top police department's not just in the state but in the country, reflected in the swift arrest they just made for one of the most heinous crimes a community could ever experience. The best show of support is to place our trust in them and in their professional judgement as to when we can communicate details of a crime. We as a community are very thankful for their incredible work over the past week, and every day.

As a reminder, I will be enforcing Robert's Rules this evening to ensure we stay on topic and the meeting runs efficiently. Thank you.