



Town Council Opening Remarks November 23, 2021

(The following remarks were delivered by Mayor Brindle at the November 23, 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.

VOLUNTEER APPLICATIONS

Thanks to the many residents who have already submitted applications to serve on our 2022 Boards, Commissions, and Mayor's Advisory Councils. Applications are open through Monday, November 29 at westfieldnj.gov/volunteer and, as always, I encourage you to get involved!

HOLIDAY EVENTS

We're ready to kick off the holidays in Downtown Westfield! As you get your holiday shopping done, please be sure to support our local businesses after a particularly challenging 18 months of this pandemic, as their success is very dependent on these coming weeks each year. To help entice you to shop local, the DWC Holiday Welcome Center will be open at the North Avenue train station starting on Black Friday with free gift wrapping, and our annual free parking will be in effect from November 26 through January 2.

In addition, don't miss our annual Christmas tree lighting ceremony on Sunday at 5:00, and the menorah lighting Monday at 6:30, followed by several other seasonal events throughout the downtown area this season. Full details can be found on our website.

WHS GIRLS SOCCER

Congratulations to the Westfield High School girls soccer team on their amazing season and first state title since 1988! I was thrilled to be at the big game on Sunday and witness this fabulous achievement, as well as the tremendous community spirit to cheer on these athletes. The state champion Lady Blue Devils have been invited to attend our next Council meeting on December 7 so that we can recognize them publicly.

SUSTAINABLE JERSEY SILVER CERTIFICATION

Last week, while at the New Jersey League of Municipalities conference, several of us, including myself, Town Administrator Jim Gildea, Councilman Contract, and members of the Green Team attended the Sustainable Jersey awards ceremony where Westfield received Silver Certification for the second consecutive year. Thanks to our Town employees and Green Team members who have continued to prioritize sustainability across a wide range of our operations to achieve this distinction. Congratulations to all!

TEMPORARY USE OF LORD & TAYLOR

You can expect to see some activity at the Lord & Taylor property in the coming weeks and months. You may recall the flooding devastation incurred by the school located on Lamberts Mill Road that serves special needs students throughout Union County. I'm happy to report that two of those schools, Lamberts Mill Academy and Hillside Academy South, will be temporarily relocating to the Lord & Taylor site until the end of the school year, thanks to the support of Streetworks Development working in partnership with Union County. When I accompanied Chief Battiloro on a tour of the devastated school with FEMA and school administration in early September, I suggested Lord & Taylor as an option, which they agreed was a good alternative. Thanks to Streetworks for jumping through hoops to make this happen, and for providing an opportunity for our neediest students to get back into the classroom.

TONIGHT'S AGENDA

We have several important items on the agenda tonight.

On the public safety front, we will be voting on a resolution to award a contract for the expansion of body worn cameras for the Police Department to now provide this equipment for every officer, as well as upgrade our mobile video recording systems in the police cars by adding automatic license plate readers for all patrol vehicles. As I mentioned in a recent update, securing additional resources and new technology for the Police Department is one of our areas of focus as we implement additional public safety measures. Chief Battiloro has made clear that the equipment in tonight's resolution, the cost of which will be offset by grant funds, will be valuable to his entire force as they continue to address the statewide issue of car burglaries and thefts.

This administration, which has implemented full staffing levels of the Police Department, remains firmly committed to ensuring that they are able to utilize every resource necessary to protect the community. You can expect additional information in the near future about additional public safety efforts.

On the sustainability front, we'll vote on an ordinance on second reading to align our electric vehicle infrastructure regulations with those at the state level. While we had previously drafted and adopted EV regulations far ahead of the state, we now have the opportunity to further strengthen these requirements as part of our ongoing focus on green initiatives.

Lastly, we'll also hear from Chris Colley of our redevelopment planning firm, Topology, to present a redevelopment plan that we'll hear on first reading tonight for the property at the corner of Prospect Street and Ferris Place.

This property is owned by Westfield resident and business owner James Ward, and tonight represents a milestone in what has been a multi-year process. In fact, this plan is the first to be presented that reflects the new guidelines for development in Westfield per our recently adopted Master Plan Reexamination Report. James worked closely with the Historic Preservation Commission in the design of this project, also ensuring the preservation and restoration of the neighboring historic property at 112 Ferris Place -- which was presented for historic designation at last night's HPC meeting.

As you'll see in tonight's presentation, great care has also been taken to incorporate considerations for parking and mobility, as well as sustainability measures -- including required bicycle parking spaces, streetscape improvements, and an 8,000 square foot green roof space.

A portion of the units in this building will go toward the unmet need of our Affordable Housing obligation, generating further good will with our partners at the Council on Affordable Housing.

It's also worth noting that a redevelopment agreement is required of this site, which allows the Town to have significant input, and there are no plans for a PILOT for this project. It's very gratifying to see a Westfield resident and business owner not only reaffirm his commitment to our town, but also take the time and care to work closely with multiple stakeholders to produce a plan reflective of the Town's priorities.

In terms of process, after tonight's reading, the ordinance will be forwarded to the Planning Board for review of consistency with the Master Plan. It will then come back to the Council on second reading for adoption to set the zoning. Once the redevelopment agreement is negotiated with the specific details of the project, the final detailed site plan application will go back to the Planning Board for public hearing and review.

With that, let's get to work. Before we get to the agenda, I will turn the meeting over to the new director of the Westfield Memorial Library, Allen McGinley, who will provide us with a brief overview of the library's initiatives.

I wish you all a safe and happy Thanksgiving with family and friends!

Thank you.