

**Borough of Garwood Workshop Meeting of
The Mayor and Council
WORKSHOP
MINUTES
March 14, 2019**

Start Time: 7:00 p.m.

Adequate notice of this meeting was provided to the Westfield Leader, advertised on January 3, 2019, notification was sent to the Star Ledger and prominently posted on the municipal public bulletin board and filed in the office of the municipal clerk informing the Public of the time and place according to the Provisions of the Open Public Meeting Law (Chapter 231, P.L. 1975).

Mayor Todisco	P	Councilman Ince	P
Councilman Benoit	P	Councilman McCormack	P
Councilwoman Blumenstock	P	Council President Lazarow	P

Also present Clerk/Stenographer Kathleen J. Wierzbinski, Borough Attorney Thomas C. Jardim, Esq. and Borough Engineer Michael Disko.

Borough Administrator/Municipal Clerk Christina M. Ariemma was excused.

Mayor Todisco along with Councilwoman Blumenstock presented Mayor's Awards for Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service.

Borough Engineer Michael Disko reported on sinkhole repairs on Union Street, a mailbox slab at the cost of \$850 and the ongoing American Water project. He reported on the 2018 DOT project. He mentioned the Union County Grant has been filed for New Street, repairs for Borough Hall and the Firehouse roof project. He stated seven bids have been picked up so far for curbing improvements on Spruce Avenue. Mr. Disko reported he inspected the retaining wall under the railroad bridge. He said he spoke with contractor concerning the cracked ramp on Center Street. He said the contractor will repair the ramp. Mr. Disko stated the Annual Storm Water Permit is due in May and he is working with the Administrator.

Mayor Todisco stated a mailbox on the corner of Fourth and Union was removed and not replaced. She said she will contact the post office.

Councilwoman Blumenstock stated water is ponding at the park and asked Mr. Disko to follow up with contractor regarding re-paving and finishing off the work. Mr. Disko said as it gets warmer the work will be completed.

Councilman McCormack discussed the water company project and expressed his dissatisfaction with the way they have patched the roads. There was lengthy discussion concerning the water company and the patching and paving of roads affected by the digging.

Mr. Disko suggested considering a longer moratorium. Mr. Jardim stated Westfield is looking into this. Discussion continued on the matter.

There was discussion concerning updating the borough's web-site. It was agreed to have the resolution on the next agenda.

Borough Attorney Thomas C. Jardim commented on the borough's road opening fees. He reported on RVSA matters. He mentioned the two ordinances on the agenda.

Administrator/Clerk Christina M Ariemma – ***Excused***

Mayor Todisco's Report:

1. Community Spirit Award - I plan to announce the first-ever Community Spirit Award winner at our next Council meeting. There is still time to nominate someone who you feel has gone above and beyond to help make Garwood the "small town with a big heart." The short, easy to fill out nomination form can be found on www.garwood.org by clicking on the "From the Mayor's Desk" tab on the left side of the website and you may email me a copy of the completed form. Also, paper copies can be found in the hallway display at Borough Hall and completed and returned to the Clerk's Office.

2. Local Government Week - I am very excited about the program we've put together in celebration of Local Government Week, an initiative many towns around the State will be participating in, from April 7th to 13th. The full program list is the Borough homepage at www.garwood.org. We also have copies on the table here tonight. We really tried to gear it to residents of all ages, so there are more kid-friendly events like Touch-a-

Truck as well as more adult-friendly ones like the bingo night. I want to thank Councilwoman Blumenstock for all her help in planning these events. Also, I want to thank all the members of this Council for their willingness to join me in donating small gift baskets to award as prizes to the bingo winners. I think this is a really clear example of how this Council works together as a team and I thank you.

3. Transit - Last week, NJ Transit and the DOT held a "listening session" at the Westfield Train Station at 5pm, which clearly was not well-fitted to the schedule of a commuter. Over 100 people attended and I know Councilman Graham, former Councilman Nierstedt were present along with our municipal attorney who even took to the microphone as someone who has long-serve on the Raritan Valley Rail Coalition and was actually one of its founding members. The next night, I attended a meeting of the Raritan Valley Line Mayors Coalition, which I am proud to be a member of as we work together to fight for more equity along our rail line. Frankly, we are a really energetic and determined group that will continue to fight for restoration of the off-peak one-seat rides we once had, a fair allocation of peak one-seat rides, same platform transfer in Newark, and the advancement of the Gateway Tunnel project. We are looking to involve the public more in our advocacy efforts. For starters, I would encourage everyone, commuter or not (as this issue affects all our property values), to follow the Raritan Valley Line Mayors Coalition on Facebook and check out the website rvlmayors.org where there is a "citizen action" tab that links to ways to contact your legislators and a sample script.

4. County Voting Machines - The Union County Board of Elections will be bringing new voting machines to Garwood to demonstrate how they work. These were recently tested in the most recent General Election in Westfield and they will be launched here in town for this year's Primary Election and used again in this year's General Election. I encourage everyone who is around to stop by Borough Hall on Saturday, April 13th and Saturday, May 4th between 10am and 1pm to check them out.

5. Revaluation Update - Beginning this Monday, March 18th inspectors from Realty Appraisal Co., the firm hired by the Borough of Garwood to conduct the Revaluation of properties, will begin the inspection process. Every Inspector will carry two forms of identification: a company-issued badge with photograph, and a town-issued letter of introduction. Please make sure to check their identification before allowing them into your home. The inspector is a trained full-time property inspector, not a tax assessor or an appraiser. He or she will not be formulating an appraisal of your house. Inspectors are trained to measure the exterior of the dwelling and to inspect both the exterior and interior. This notice is posted on the Borough website and also includes the photos of all the inspectors who have been assigned to Garwood. Most questions regarding revaluation can be answered by visiting Realty Appraisal's website at <http://www.realtyappraisal.net/>. If you have any concerns about an inspector, (not the inspection process) please contact the Garwood Police Department at 908-789-1500. If you have concerns or questions about the process please contact the Borough Administrator/Clerk at 908-789-0710 or email to garwood@garwood.org

6. Website - discussion from Council, all agreed to have resolution on next meeting agenda

Comments or matters for discussion from members of Council:

Councilman Benoit: mentioned that and Councilwoman Blumenstock attended the Union County Freeholders meeting. He stated there were great presentations awards given out to students in Union County. He reported the new voting machines will be demonstrated on April 13th and May 4th from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at borough hall. Councilman Benoit gave a report on domestic violence and talked about the Union County Family Justice Center in Elizabeth and the things that are offered.

Councilwoman Blumenstock As you see on the agenda, there are two ordinances, 19-03 and 19-04, which are essentially just updating our code. These ordinances were looked at in both 2018 and 2019 by both finance committees. As I was a part of both committees, Councilman Lazarow asked me to speak to them. 19-03 deals with personnel, more specifically employee benefits like vacation and sick days. This update is due to policy changes in federal law and also makes it commensurate with the policies enacted in our union contracts. These changes do not apply to current employees, but to new hires hired after June 1st. 19-04 deals with our borough administrator's role and the update basically allows the administrator better ability to oversee his or her own staff. That's all for my report, Mayor.

Councilman Graham: I attended the meeting on March 6 at the Westfield train station that was led by Transportation Commissioner Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti and NJ Transit Executive Director Kevin Corbett. State Senator Kean and other elected officials were also present. The officials expressed deep concerns about the transit systems performance but other than offering apologies they pointed out that they were both appointed a short time ago and asked for patience.

The Commissioner stated that many of the transits problems are caused by personal shortages, installation of Automatic Train Control (a non-funded federal mandate dating to 2011 and ignored until 2018) and a lack of spare parts that are obviously needed to keep the rolling stock rolling. The good news is that 30 - 40 engineers will graduate from the 20 months training program this year, ATC work is being completed rapidly and spare parts have been ordered or stocked.

The Executive Director underlined the importance of the Gateway project to the future of the Northeast Corridor.

During the open mic period major concerns raised were:

- Mayor Colleen Maher of Fanwood raised a serious concern that approximately 1,500 new or existing housing units have been built or are on the books for the eastern section of the Raritan Valley Line. Her main concern is the impact on rentals and home values if there aren't drastic improvements to service on the line.
- Tom Jardim questioned when One Seat Rides would return to the RVL on off peak schedules. Mr. Corbett responded that it depends on Amtrak and availability of train engineers. The current disruption in service is due to track work at Penn Station in NY whose scope has not yet been publicly announced. The tracks are currently used by LIRR and displaced trains will have a spillover effect on NJ Transit operations. Negotiations with Amtrak are ongoing.
- Many folks complained about the lack of focus on RVL issues and the Commissioner explained that no individual line gets more attention and resources. The approach is always system wide.

I had to leave prior to the conclusion of the meeting so I would ask Tom Jardim if there is anything he would like to add. Discussion followed.

I attended the meeting on March 6. The meeting started with the nomination and appointment of officers. A report detailing county bridge, road and intersection projects was presented by Union County Bureau of Transportation Planning Aide, John Witsch, the county restores 18-20 miles of county road per year. Local bridge and road projects can be bolstered by:

- County aid funds
- Local Bridge Future Needs Program
- NJ TPA – federal funds

*There are no active or planned projects in Garwood at this time.

Ted Ritter of North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority reported:

- There is a \$2 billion federal transportation fund they can tap into
- They have a strategic long range plan out to 2050
- They help develop local safety plans and goals
- Their Web site is NJTPA.org

Liza Betz of UCBTP reported on the Raritan Valley Rail Coalition. It was established in 1998 and it is actively advocating for One Seat Rides. More information about it can be found at RaritanValleyRail.com. She also advised us that there is a page on the Union County Web site for reporting potholes.

Members of the committee made many suggestions about road improvements including adding more dedicated left turn lanes, better timing of traffic lights in order to prevent major backups and extending intersections in order to better protect pedestrians.

I suggested better coordination with utilities whenever repaving projects are to be scheduled.

The next meeting will be on May 1.

Councilman Ince: *No Report*

Councilman McCormack: Yes thank you mayor as to the planning board last night both the mayor and I were in Attendants but because of the restrictions of the variances the applicant requested that the mayor and I recused ourselves from the meeting which means we cannot question or have any voting right So with that I decided to sit in Attendants as a citizen and listen to the testimony of the applications lawyers architects and planners I also had the pleasure of listening to the planning board members and how they have Garwood In the best interests as they move forward with this applicant's request. So too fast forward at the end of the night at the planning board's request they fell best that the applicant's go back to revise the blue print of the proposed building and the Variances and square footage, in which the Applicant Agreed

Council President Lazarow: Along with the mayor, I met again with the Citizens Advisory Council this past Saturday to discuss a number of items that we winded up discussing at the special budget meeting. The Council, expressed again the desire to apply community development fees to defray current operating expenses in this year's current budget. They also were very much in favor of updating the website as a couple individuals expressed how challenging it was to find certain documents on the website, especially when accessing it on a cell phone. Finally, there was huge support for hiring the deputy clerk position that would be used to also be a public information officer as well as someone that could be trained by Mrs. Ariemma, our current Clerk/Borough Administrator.

I also wanted to update the council on one item we discussed for capital improvement projects. We had discussed the request from the Police Department to replace the current 18 year old OEM van at a cost of about \$35,000. I requested an update for mileage and current repairs to the van and have presented that to you tonight. Based on the information, the Police Department has a 1200 dollar estimated repair needed to fix the van. The average yearly repairs have ranged from 1000 to 1500 over the last three years. In

addition, after emailing the Chief for more detailed information, I think it is clear that perhaps we can hold off on this purchase for another year given that we have other big projects that we are considering.

Board of Chosen Freeholders Liaison Report: is in Councilman Benoit's report

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Is there anyone in the audience that wishes to address the mayor and council please step to the microphone, state your full name and address. Please limit your comments to five minutes.

Al DelConte, 545 Locust Avenue reported the Local Government flyer has the wrong date for DARE graduation. Councilwoman Blumenstock responded she will check on that. He thanked the Planning Board, Council and Engineer on doing a great job. He mentioned catch basins should be inspected.

Justin O'Hea, 429 Willow Avenue supports the Mayor's idea of sending letters to NJ Transit. He stated he recommends the initiative "Represent Us", Anti-Corruption Bills. He stated he has the PDF file he can share.

Motion was made by Council President Lazarow, second by Councilman Ince to close public comments session.

Mayor Todisco asked about the inspection of the catch basins. Mr. Disko stated he can inspect them. Councilwoman Blumenstock said will contact the DPW Superintendent concerning the matter.

Mayor Todisco asked that Mr. O'Hea email the PDF to her.

ADJOURNMENT:

At 8:12 p.m., a motion was made by Councilwoman Blumenstock, and seconded by Councilman Graham to adjourn the workshop session. All agreed.

Respectfully submitted:



CHRISTINA M. ARIEMMA, Municipal Clerk
Borough of Garwood

