

**Borough of Garwood Workshop Meeting of
The Mayor and Council
WORKSHOP
MINUTES
July 11, 2019**

Start time: 7:06 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 Borough Administrator/Municipal Clerk Christina M. Ariemma and Attorney Scott Salmon, Esq. and Borough Engineer Michael Disko.

Borough Engineer Michael Disko reported that N.J. Dot 2020 has been filed. Mr. Disko updated council on roadwork underway. He reported on a pre-construction meeting with Elizabethtown Gas. Mr. Disko reported on the work they will be doing in the project. Mr. Disko reported on other road jobs ongoing. Councilman Graham commented on the possible freezing of DOT funding. Mr. Disko commented he does not believe that DOT funds are affected. Mr. Disko commented on the notification process by utility companies. Council President Lazarow commented on the Spruce Avenue project.

Attorney Scott Salmon, Esq. reported on the successful sale of flow rights to Springfield. He reported that preparation of an ordinance is underway for electronic submission of planning/zoning applications.

Administrator/Clerk Christina M Ariemma reported that she and Mr. Disko visited the recreation complex to prepare an estimate for the 2019 Union County Kid's Recreation Trust Grant for netting for the east side of the soccer field.

Mayor Todisco's Report:

Paperboard - As everyone knows by now, Garwood faced one of its biggest challenges in some time last week when at approximately 8:20 in the morning last Wednesday, a portion of the Paperboard factory on North Avenue collapsed and fell partially onto North Avenue. First and foremost, we were all very fortunate that no one was injured as a result of this accident. Our Police and Fire Departments responded quickly and secured the scene. They worked effectively and professionally from the time they were dispatched throughout the process as the demolition of the remainder of that building took place, the power was restored, and North Avenue was reopened. Our DPW even provided assistance by barricading off the necessary streets. We intend to hold the developer accountable and we will be seeking reimbursement for all the work our first responders put in.

PSE&G arrived shortly after our first responders with dozens of trucks and workers working hard to restore power to the affected businesses and residents. We also received support from the State Department of Transportation, the County, and the Building Department. I want to thank everyone who assisted in the response to this emergency. In particular, I want to recognize and thank our volunteer firefighters, some of whom even missed work, to be on scene. That includes our Fire Chief, Allan Tweedle, who did not go to work in order to be at the scene.

Personally, I spoke with our Police Chief and the Paperboard owner as soon as I heard about the fall, then went to the scene myself. I spent several hours walking up and down North Avenue and on the phone with business owners, workers, and residents about the incident and our projections for when power would be restored. I also spoke with the head of the Cranford Building Department, which we use in a shared service agreement, and who stated the permits and insurance were all in order. I want to be clear that the Garwood Planning Board and this Council do not have oversight over the paperwork as that is handled by the Cranford Building Department between them and the developer. Scheduling decisions are handled by the contractor and property owner. They are not handled by the Borough. To be clear, the Borough did not postpone any of the demolition. The reason the demolition work was delayed was due to weather forecasts for the two dates previously set for the work to occur overnight and was determined by the contractor and developer. Those dates were June 25th and July 2nd.

Considering the magnitude of the incident, it was impressive to see power restored and the street reopened just 12 hours after the collapse. This is thanks to the swift efforts of all involved.

Our departments and Borough Administrator are currently compiling the expenses incurred by the Borough as a result of this emergency as we move forward in seeking reimbursement from the property owner. I am directing that this happen to insure that there are no costs incurred by the Borough as a result of this collapse.

I requested a meeting, which took place yesterday, between the property owner, the contractor, environmental consultants, our Borough Administrator, Borough Planner, Council President Marc Lazarow, and myself. The contractor told us that since the large structure was taken down the day of the collapse, no other portions of the building are at risk of collapsing onto North Avenue. The property owner has hired a structural engineer to investigate the historic castle building tomorrow and will prepare a report, which we will get a copy of, to ensure it will be able to remain on site and be incorporated into the new development as planned. Currently, a portion of the sidewalk remains closed as it was damaged during the collapse, but it will be repaired and reopened by the end of next week. I requested mesh to be put on the construction fence and the owner agreed, which should act as an additional safety precaution. The demolition of the small building to the left as you are facing the castle along with all of the piles of debris is expected to be removed by the end of August. The environmental consultant retained by the property owner is in the process of writing reports on the condition of the site, which we were told we will get in about a week. Air quality monitoring has been ongoing at the site since the very start of demolition and we will be getting a copy of that data. The contractor said there were no instances of abnormal dust exceedances. An engineer from Harbor Consultants will be reviewing that data on behalf of the Borough and will be making site visits as the demolition and debris removal continues.

This was clearly a major situation to have occurred in our town. However, I firmly believe that it was handled with professionalism and efficiency by our first responders and based upon my conversation with the property owner, I am confident that we are going to get reimbursed for the expenses incurred by the Borough. We will make the reports I mentioned earlier available to the public once they are provided to us by the property owner. I will continue to keep everyone informed as we move forward.

NJ Transit - I have some good news to share from our NJ Transit government representative who emailed me yesterday to let me know they will begin working to spruce up our Garwood train station in the near future. This work will include power washing and painting of some fixtures. Also, crews will be doing concrete repair, and making other improvements. The work should take about two weeks to complete.

Joint Committee Meeting - On Tuesday, our joint committee of the Council, Planning Board, and Board of Education met. While much of the conversation included updating one another about matters underway with each of our entities, I am pleased to report our meeting earlier this year yielded a positive outcome. There has been some questions raised in the past why the Board of Education charged the town's Recreation Department for use of the gym for basketball games, even though the amount is relatively small at \$250. This was instituted years ago because the Board noticed some games were played by two outside of town teams. However, that is no longer occurring. So we decided that moving forward the Board of Education has agreed not to charge Recreation and in return, the Recreation Commission will not begin charging the school for use of the turf field. While the amounts are nominal, I think this shows cooperation between our groups, rather than going down a tit-for-tat path and I thank the Board of Education and Dr. Quigley for their support. We will be meeting again in October.

Mailbox - After hearing from residents who missed the mailbox, which had been removed from its location at the corner of Fourth Avenue and Union Street, I set out to see how we could get it back. I learned it was removed because it was not secured to the ground, but the Cranford Postmaster was very receptive to helping us get it put back. Our DPW laid a concrete slab and the mailbox was installed in the past week. I want to thank our DPW and the Postmaster for their help as I know this has made a number of residents happy.

FoodStock Challenge - I am excited to announce that I am working with Fanwood Mayor Colleen Mahr to participate in a FoodStock Challenge between our two communities. While we will be competing to see which one of our towns can collect the most, everyone really wins here. Foodstock is a grassroots 501c3 organization that was formed in 2010 to assist with the needs of our less fortunate community members who are struggling to put food on their tables. Over 220,000 pounds of food and \$54,000 has been raised for area food pantries to date. We are looking to launch this challenge as the summer winds down and I look forward to getting the word out there once the details are worked out.

Comments or matters for discussion from members of Council:

Councilman Benoit: Thanked all for efforts on the building collapse. He suggested that residents contact the Mayor and Council for information rather than social media. He reported on picketing. All agreed with the concept and Councilman Benoit will be preparing more information. Attorney Salmon commented on the matter. Councilman Graham commented on the matter and made some suggestions. Councilman Benoit announced he will not be present at the July 25th meeting.

Councilwoman Blumenstock: Just wanted to take a minute to thank the PD, FD and the DPW for their quick response last week to the Paperboard incident. They were on the scene so quickly and got everything under control so efficiently. As a Garwood resident, I couldn't be more proud of our first responders. It was a long, hot day and they really put in their all. And on that note, I couldn't be more proud of our whole community. Immediately, I saw so many residents on social media offering up their air conditioning or their freezer space and making sure everyone was ok. Just once again, I saw how great our town is at coming together.

Also, a couple of announcements for the Green Team: We continue throughout the summer to weed and keep the JFK Plaza and Georgiana Memorial Park looking great. In addition, we have put another dog poop station over at Georgiana right by the gazebo on 4th Avenue. So anyone walking their dog on the north side now has the opportunity to use the bags up there. Please use the garbage can next to the station to dispose of the used bags.

Also, I'm proud to announce a new initiative that the Green Team will be taking on. We will be participating in the TREX plastic recycling challenge. TREX, the outdoor decking company, has a six month program designed to incentivize municipalities to help recycle plastic bags and wrappers. In the next couple of weeks we will be receiving recycling bins, at no cost to us, that will be placed around the borough. We will be publicizing the locations and encouraging residents to drop off their plastic grocery bags along with other types of plastic wrapping. Each month the amount of plastic dropped off will be weighed and then dropped at a local grocery store that will recycle it for the borough. Should we collect more than 500 lbs. of plastic, Garwood will receive a TREX composite park bench to place wherever we would like. It's a real win-win for Garwood, perhaps a nice prize at the end, but also a way to ensure that these plastic bags don't end up in the garbage. Please keep an eye out in the next few weeks on Garwood's Facebook page and website for all of the details, including the bin locations as well as the many types of plastic that can be collected. I'm really looking forward to this challenge.

That's all for me, Mayor.

Councilman Graham thanked all for efforts on the building collapse.

Councilman Ince thanked all for efforts on the building collapse.

Councilman McCormack thanked all for efforts on the building collapse.

Council President Lazarow thanked all for efforts on the building collapse. I am happy to report about the amazing leadership we have in our current mayor. Not only was she hands on at the scene as soon as the collapse occurred, but she quickly made sure to hold the owner of the property accountable. I was in attendance at a meeting with the redevelopment company and the demolition company as well as the environmental engineers for the former Paperboard sight. Upon request from our mayor, the owner agreed to fully compensate our overtime police officers and some of our volunteer emergency personnel. In addition, as mentioned before and most importantly a clear plan to remove all debris with the exception of the castle part of the building will be completed by the end of August. A weekly update will be provided until the demo has been completed and a quarterly status update will also be shared to be disseminated to the public by the mayor. We should be grateful that no one was hurt and that our entire emergency personal did their job effectively and efficiently to return things to business as usual. But most importantly, I am grateful to our Mayor who has lead the charge to hold the developer accountable and I will also continue to do the same.

Board of Chosen Freeholders Liaison Report: **No 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.

Steve Greet, 401 Brookside Place thanked Mayor and Council and professionals for their handling of the building collapse.

Bruce Paterson, 325 Willow Avenue commented on picketing.

Motion followed by a second to close public comment. All in favor.

ADJOURNMENT:

At 7:47 p.m., a motion was made by Councilwoman Blumenstock, second by Council President Lazarow to adjourn the workshop session. All agreed.

Respectfully submitted:



CHRISTINA M. ARIEMMA, Municipal Clerk
Borough of Garwood