

**Borough of Garwood Workshop Meeting of
The Mayor and Council
WORKSHOP
MINUTES**

November 14, 2019

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 Benoit	P	Councilman Ince	P
Councilwoman Blumenstock	P	Councilman McCormack	P
Councilman Graham	P	Council President Lazarow	P

Also present Borough Administrator/Municipal Clerk Christina M. Ariemma and Borough Attorney Thomas C. Jardim, Esq. and Borough Engineer Michael Disko.

Mayor Todisco presented Foodstock Challenge Awards.

Presentation by New Jersey American Water Company. Mike Bange provided information regarding a recent article concerning water quality. Scott Bakester, representative of NJ American Green Water, responsible for water quality testing. He provided information on the testing process. Questions from the Council and public were answered.

Borough Engineer Michael Disko: Mayor Todisco handed out maps and a list of road work that is being done by utility companies. Mr. Disko mentioned the New Street project is moving along nicely. Sidewalk was discussed. Mr. Disko said it will cost approximately \$11,000 to put in a sidewalk. Mayor Todisco mentioned that she supports the installation of the sidewalk. Ms. Ariemma was asked about funding and she said there is sufficient funding for this change order. Mr. Disko mentioned the complete streets grant funding. He explained it's actually a study. Brief discussion regarding timing took place. Chief Wright commented on the grant. Council supports the study grant. Councilwoman Blumenstock mentioned to camera the sewer lines. Council directed Mr. Disko to compile the potential cost to camera sanitary sewer lines.

At 8:07 p.m. a motion was by Councilman Graham, second by Councilwoman Blumenstock to enter into Executive Session.

RESOLUTION NO. 19-279A

CLOSED SESSION RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING AN EXECUTIVE SESSION FOR THE PURPOSE OF DISCUSSING CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN TEAMSTERS LOCAL 11 AND THE BOROUGH OF GARWOOD AND MATTERS OF ATTORNEY-CLIENT PRIVILEGE RELATING TO THE ABOVE AND IN ACCORDANCE WITH N.J.S.A., 10:4-12, Closed session, Meetings open to public; exclusion of public; subject of matter.

WHEREAS, it is necessary for the Mayor and Council of the Borough of Garwood to conduct an executive session closed to the public in order to discuss the above listed matter.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Council of the Borough of Garwood hereby move to go into executive session in accordance with the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 et. seq., for the purpose of discussing the subject stated above; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the matters discussed in and minutes of the closed session shall be disclosed to the public when the reason for confidentiality no longer exists

At 8:45 p.m. a motion was made by Councilman Graham, second by Councilwoman Blumenstock to resume the regular order of business.

Borough Attorney Thomas C. Jardim – NO REPORT
He mentioned he supports the resolution concerning OPRA.

Administrator/Clerk Christina M Ariemma discussed her bulk program memo. All agreed to set the cost for bulk in 2020 at \$100.00.

Council discussed the Recreation Commission and requirements of commission vs. committee. The Public Information Officer was discussed. Salary was discussed. \$2,500 - \$5,000 approximately 5 hours per week. Council supports the idea of a Public Information Officer.

Mayor Todisco's Report:

Revaluation - While the current revaluation of all properties in Garwood is being handled completely by an outside company, Realty Appraisal, I wanted to speak a bit about it tonight because I understand there have been some questions and concerns now that the new assessment letters have been mailed. It's important to reiterate that the purpose behind revaluation is tax fairness and Garwood was ordered by the Union County Board of Taxation to conduct this revaluation. The assessment you received in the mail was intended to reflect current market values. This will be your new assessment for 2020, but your taxes are not affected by

the new tax rate until quarter 3 of 2020 because it cannot be set until the 2020 budgets of the school, county, and municipality are adopted. The tax rate will be absolutely be adjusted, so that while the average home saw an approximately 4x increase in assessment, the taxes will not go up by 4x. To be specific, the average residential assessment prior to revaluation was \$102,395 and I have found out that now (for 2020) it is \$403,567. Also, the current average residential taxes are \$10,363, so that might be helpful to determine if you are within a reasonable assessment. My recommendation is a call or an appointment with Realty Appraisal can never hurt, so I would encourage any resident to do so by calling (732) 571-4941 or going online at www.realtyappraisal.net/hearings. Also, there is an appeal process for a reason, so I would encourage anyone who feels their assessment is wrong to use the appeal process.

Gas Company Paving Negotiations - As I've mentioned before, our engineer, Mike Disko, and I met with representatives from Elizabethtown Gas to negotiate the maximum amount of curb to curb paving for Garwood's north side, which has either already undergone or will undergo infrastructure work by the gas company. We kept in mind the streets we already have planned for paving in our State DOT applications and the current condition of the roads during the negotiation. Before you tonight is the final product of that negotiation--a list of the streets and who was determined to be responsible along with a map of the work outlined by the gas company, which they gave to us in the past. The swap negotiated resulted with a small amount of paving square footage in favor of our municipality, but it was close enough to even that the gas company agreed. While this means some roads will be left to the municipality to pave curb to curb even after some gas company work, Mr. Disko and I felt since it is always technically the municipality's responsibility, we should make the most efficient use of this opportunity to increase curb to curb paving. It is really more efficient in the long run as we've heard concerns from residents about the condition of their road when the utility company only paves from the curb to the center line. Also, when they pave half a road, it does not really help extend the life of the road and ends up with the municipality coming back at some point in the future to re-do the entire road anyway.

Volunteer Rewards Card - We are eager to continue the Volunteer Rewards Card program, which was started in early 2018, so we are in the process of reaching out to our local businesses for participation. The purpose of this program is two-fold. Firstly, it's a way to thank all those that volunteer and give back to Garwood. Also, it helps to promote and support shopping local. While we know no volunteers serve for the thank you, it's still nice to show appreciation. As in the past, we will be distributing these cards to all volunteers from our first responders to all those who serve on town or school related committees or organizations, such as the Education Foundation, Knights of Columbus, Lions Club, and many more!

Rescue Platform Ladder Truck - Speaking of first responders, I must take a moment to share how proud and excited I am that the new rescue platform ladder truck arrived today. I was honored to say a few words at the "push in" ceremony before tonight's Council meeting. I don't want to repeat all of what I said earlier at the firehouse, but I want to thank this entire Council for supporting this important purchase for our Volunteer Fire Department and especially, Fire Commissioner McCormack for his partnership with me on this endeavor. However, the major reason it has become a reality is because of the time and real education our Fire Chief Allan Tweedle and Assistant Fire Chief John Scalzadonna gave us as elected officials, but just as important, that they gave the public earlier this year. Another reason is every single volunteer firefighter we have--from the ones who joined in recent years to those who have served for decades. Without all of them, we wouldn't have the robust department we do that answers 100% of our calls, responds to mutual aid, keeps our firehouse and equipment up, and more. As volunteers, they risk their lives in the service of others. Lastly, I just want to say that I ran for this office, I ran on bringing the town together, increasing public input, and making Garwood stronger. I believe the arrival of the ladder truck today does all three.

Mayor's Wellness Campaign - Last week, we held the first Union County Mayor's Wellness Campaign Consortium meeting here in Garwood. I'm grateful to former Mayor Charles Lombardo for being our liaison to this committee. We also had Westfield, Scotch Plains, Rahway, and Elizabeth represented as we shared ideas about how our various programs work. I look forward to us finding opportunities for collaboration as we move forward. Additionally, the next Mayor's Wellness Campaign 3K Walk will be Saturday, November 23rd at 10am at the Recreation Complex. Laura Billotta, a 10-year Garwood resident, will be the guest walker. She has run 10 marathons to date, including the New Jersey, Atlantic City, and Boston marathons, and runs the Rutgers half marathon every spring. Although we aren't quite ready for a Garwood marathon yet, we are very happy to have Laura join us for the walk. Hope you will, too!

Streamlining Initiatives - We all know that sometimes government can make seemingly easy tasks difficult. Here in Garwood, we pride ourselves in trying to streamline government wherever possible to make things easier. After serving 7 years on Council and now almost one year as Mayor, I see other opportunities on the horizon for Garwood.

First of all, we can see how the demand for more communication between the town and the residents has increased. Specifically, social media and website demands have gotten bigger. Also, all our volunteer committees are responsible for creating their own events and promoting them by designing flyers and spreading the word. I commend them for their hard work, but I understand how hard it can be to fit these seemingly simple tasks into their busy lives, full of jobs and families. I want us to better support them so our volunteers can continue to do the job without getting worn out by the mundane tasks. While we have a calendar on our Borough website and our Administrator does her best to keep up with it, it would be more efficient to have one person in charge so we can better coordinate schedules between all our fantastic departments and committees. Therefore, I would like to recommend the Council establish a position of Public

Information Officer. Once established, I hope we can advertise the position and get the position filled by early 2020.

Secondly, for those who are unaware, our Recreation Commission is highly regulated by the State, in a similar way to this Council or the Planning Board, and it has certain abilities, including to buy land. Recreation volunteers are required to file financial disclosure statements, which other than them only elected officials and Planning Board members have to do by law. Our Recreation Commission is a group of wonderful volunteers just looking to help promote sports and recreational opportunities for our youth--very similar to the volunteers on the Celebrations or Historical Committees in their respective areas. I want to make their jobs easier and to keep all recreational activities the same. For instance, the summer recreation program, basketball program, instructional soccer, and game nights will all continue. In fact, I think this may even allow for the expansion of recreation programs. Rather than limiting Recreation to just 7 full members and 2 alternates, I would like to recommend it to be a committee with unlimited membership and one year terms rather than four or two year terms. Therefore, if the Council agrees, I'd like to ask our attorney to create ordinances to establish Recreation as a Committee rather than a Commission, so we can hit the ground running with a new, streamlined format at the start of the new year.

Comments or matters for discussion from members of Council:

Councilman Benoit Stated it was an honor to be at the push ceremony for the new firetruck.

Councilwoman Blumenstock: Stated it was an honor to be at the push ceremony for the new firetruck. This past Monday, the Garwood Municipal Alliance and the Garwood Police Department held a special information session at the Firehouse called "Don't Get Vaped In" by Prevention Links, about the pressures of vaping and how we can prevent it in the juvenile population. This has truly become an epidemic, and I think as any parent of teens or pre-teens can attest, weighs heavily on us. Thank you to the Alliance and the PD, with a special shout out to Barbara Tweedle and Lt. Sam Rocco for putting this together. Please look out for another great program from the Alliance and the Police Department called In Plain Sight, again about the vaping dangers in juveniles. When the date is set for that I will let everyone know. Also, as you can see on the agenda, one of our DPW employees is resigning. We thank him for his service to Garwood and also wish him well. Due to all the holidays, we would not be likely to find a replacement until January or maybe possibly February. There is a worry however, that with winter almost upon us, we could be stuck shorthanded during a snowstorm. So in the meantime, as you will also see on your agenda, the decision was made to hire someone for seasonal work until a new employee can be hired. He happens to be a retired employee which is useful for the department in case of a weather event. That is all for my report, Mayor.

Councilman Graham: Stated it was an honor to be at the push ceremony for the new firetruck. On November 10, I was invited by Congressman Tom Malinowski along with my wife Julie to attend this event at American Legion Post 12 in Somerville. I had the honor, along with many other Vietnam War veterans, of being pinned by the Congressman in the ongoing recognition of the 50th anniversary of the war. I also received a proclamation signed by President Obama that proclaims May 28, 2012 thru November 11, 2025 as official commemoration of that anniversary.

The resource fair featured:

Representatives from Congressman Malinowski's office who offered a Constituent Services Guide

Representatives from the Alzheimer's Association

Reps from Equine Assisted Psychotherapy offering services for veterans and service members suffering from trauma. Reps from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

I was also given the opportunity to share my personal story with the group of about 60 veterans and their family members that attended. I talked about my experience as a baby-faced 18 year-old that went off to war. I also talked about other veterans from New Jersey who were even younger than me when they paid the ultimate price.

UNION COUNTY TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPEMENTS PRESENTATION

Joseph Venezia, a member of the planning board for Union Township, made a presentation on the main street redevelopment in Union Township and the Russo Vermella project under construction at the former Merck location on Morris Avenue.

The improvements include:

Mid block cross walks that are clearly defined

Added light fixtures

Sidewalk bump outs intended to shorten cross walks

Rain gardens in main intersection bump outs

REPORTS FROM COUNTY STAFF

Liza Betts reported that 7 mid week off peak one-seat rides out of 8 have been restored on the RVL.

Liza also reported that NJT will be sprucing up the areas along the railroad tracks and that the RVL will be first to receive attention.

Liza asked the group if their town engineers would be interested in giving presentations to the TAB during future meetings.

Liza also advised that she must be informed who next years rep will be by early January.

Councilman Ince: Stated it was an honor to be at the push ceremony for the new firetruck.

Councilman McCormack: Stated it was an honor to be at the push ceremony for the new firetruck. Yes I would like to say a little something about the PTA truck this event has marked its 2nd year being held at the Colombian club/Knight of Columbus here in Garwood. This is also my 2nd year as a member of the KOC to volunteer my time to help in a small way make sure I'm the first to arrive and the last to leave so this fun filled day can happen. With this being said I must give all credit to Garwood's PTA and special credit to Ms. Barnes for her hard work for providing Garwood with such a wonderful fun filled day. It was great to see the children dressed in their costumes & having fun, it was also nice to see so many residence walking around inside & out to view the decorated cars & tables at this event. A big thanks to our First Responders, Police, Fire, First aid for being Visible & Participating in the event, and lastly it was very nice to see our Elected officials being present this only makes our community feel more confident in the interest we have in our community we Represent.

Council President Lazarow: Stated it was an honor to be at the push ceremony for the new firetruck. Also commented on volunteering*Gumbert Ice Rink Meeting Update: Rink has been opened for the last 11 days.

- The owner of the complex made changes to the rink complex with new signs, lighting, and aesthetic updates.
- Acoustic walls will be finished being installed by early next week to help mitigate sound
- Complaints about why the complex could not be enclosed were answered by the fact that Green Acres locations have certain rules about what can be built on Green Acres parks so the rink was following the legal stipulations.
- Some early complaints have consisted of cars idling on the street, in the lot, or in other side streets. Westfield police will be attending the site more often to issue warnings and tickets for idling longer than what is in Westfield code.
- The complex has used signage to help direct traffic and limit impact on neighbors.

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.

Bruce Paterson, 325 Willow Avenue commented on the lack of attendance at the meeting. He commented on Belgium block being installed in Garwood.

A motion was made by Councilwoman Blumenstock, second by Council President Lazarow to close public comment. All in favor.

Mayor Todisco responded to Mr. Paterson's comments

ADJOURNMENT:

At 9:45 p.m., a motion was made by Councilman Graham, second by Councilwoman Blumenstock to adjourn the workshop session. All agreed.

Respectfully submitted:



CHRISTINA M. ARIEMMA, Municipal Clerk
Borough of Garwood