



Mayor Brindle's Opening Remarks November 24, 2020

Good evening, everyone, and thanks for joining us virtually tonight. Please remember that public comment will only be accepted via Zoom, although we are live streaming for viewing only on Facebook. The replay will also be available afterwards on Facebook, YouTube, and TV 36.

CONFIRMED COVID-19 CASES

- Today, there were 4,383 new cases of COVID-19 reported in New Jersey, with another 711 still under investigation and 313,863 total cases statewide to date. Union County has reported 26,752 cases in total, with Westfield reporting 18 new cases through the State system since my last update on Friday (three on Saturday, five on Sunday, two on Monday, and eight today). I expect these numbers to increase significantly when the updated Health Department data, which includes rapid tests, becomes available. This may be delayed due to the holiday, and I will report the information as soon I receive it.

STATE AND COUNTY UPDATES

- Governor Murphy announced that small businesses will be eligible for a total discount of nearly 70% off purchases of PPE through the New Jersey Economic Development Authority's PPE Access Program. Applications are open until December 10 at covid19.nj.gov/ppeaccess.
- The Governor also announced that, in anticipation of the approval of a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine, the Department of Health is working with state, federal, and local agencies to plan for a fast and equitable distribution to New Jersey communities, with the goal of vaccinating 70% of the adult population in six months.
- The Union County Board of Commissioners announced the new "Rest Easy Caregivers" grant, which provides opportunities for families in need of assistance in caring for children with disabilities and special needs during the COVID-19 outbreak. Approximately \$1 million of Federal CARES Act dollars will fund the grant program. Details can be found at ucnj.org/rest-easy-caregiver-grant.

LOCAL UPDATES

- Are you or anyone you know interested in opening a restaurant/bar in our north side train station? We provide the liquor license! A revised RFP has recently been posted on our website, which now includes blueprints courtesy of local resident Greg Redington from REDCOM Design & Construction LLC. The deadline for submission is January 12, 2021.
- Speaking of transit, last week I attended a meeting with NJ Transit executives to represent the RVL Mayors' Alliance along with members of the Raritan Valley Rail Coalition to discuss and

advocate for the expansion of one seat ride service along the RVL. In light of the potential long-term COVID impact on overall ridership, it seems that now is the right time to reassess and equitably allocate one seat rides. NJ Transit committed to providing potential options in 1Q21 once their Positive Train Control obligations are met by year end.

- The Lifelong Westfield team invites seniors to a Zoom webinar with Chief Battiloro on December 9 at 11:00AM to discuss scams that target the senior population and how to avoid them, especially during the holiday season.
- Join me next Thursday, December 3, at 12:00, for a Facebook Live with Town Planner Don Sammet; Phil Abramson from our redevelopment firm, Topology; and Richard Heapes from Streetworks Development, who presented at the last Town Council meeting about their approach to smart redevelopment as they consider the future of their Lord & Taylor property. Our panel discussion will address how other communities have handled notable inflection points and transformations, the power of community input, and the potential impact of COVID on Westfield's future as we analyze how to best position the Town for success. I'm looking forward to moderating this discussion and hearing from different fields of expertise as we continue to collectively define the best path forward for our downtown. We will accept questions in advance at www.westfieldnj.gov/FBLive in the coming days, as well as on Facebook during the discussion.
- Today we announced that we are kicking off the holiday season with a significant town wide initiative, "Be the Light," to raise awareness and funds for hunger and food insecurity here in Union County. We are extremely fortunate to have Goo Goo Dolls front man and Westfield resident John Rzeznik willing to use his large platform to promote this event, an idea he initiated after he successfully kicked off our fundraiser for We Love Local in the spring. We will be doing a livestream performance on the Town's Facebook page Sunday night at 6:00PM, which will be followed by an online auction for donated items such as a personal backyard performance, a signed guitar, and autographed copies of the Goo Goo Dolls' new Christmas album. Donations will be made to the Westfield United Fund with proceeds going to the Westfield Food Pantry and Community FoodBank of New Jersey. I can't think of a better way to celebrate the spirit of the season. Details are available on our website.
- And although our holiday festivities will look different this year in many respects, there is still plenty of cheer to enjoy in Town. Our annual tree lighting and Menorah lighting will still be taking place, albeit virtually, due to the restrictions on outdoor gatherings. DWC liaison Councilwoman Dawn Mackey will provide an update later on many of the planned activities in store, including a Gingerbread Contest, a Holiday Light Contest, free parking, gift wrapping, and more. I would simply like to reiterate how much our businesses need your support over these critical weeks ahead, which will make or break many of them.
- I presume your Thanksgiving gathering will be smaller than usual this year, much like mine is going to be. It's just one more sacrifice we all must continue to make to keep everyone safe, especially as COVID cases continue to surge. But there is light at the end of the tunnel with the

recent positive developments surrounding vaccines which should give us all hope. We just have to stay vigilant until we get there.

- And lastly, I must conclude these remarks on a very sad note. Last night, long time Westfield resident and Planning Board Chairman Robert Newell passed away after a courageous battle with cancer. Robert's dedication to this community knew no bounds and I am grateful for the opportunity I had to get to know him. I had the benefit of his warm embrace when I was a new member of the Planning Board and he patiently taught me the ropes. As a long time Westfielder, he surprised me with his openness to new ideas which only seemed to energize him. He was the consummate volunteer, a gentleman's gentleman, a man who lived his life with honor and grace. Please join me in a moment of silence in honor of Robert Newell.

Thank you. We will now move on to tonight's agenda.