



Town Council Opening Remarks June 29, 2021

(The following remarks were delivered by Acting Mayor Linda Habgood in Mayor Brindle's absence at the June 29, 2021 Town Council meeting via Zoom.)

Good evening, everyone, and thanks for joining us virtually tonight. I will be presiding over tonight's meeting, as Mayor Brindle is out of town with her family. 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.

As we await completion of the roof replacement work above the Council Chambers, we are targeting a return to in-person meetings next month on July 13!

Tonight's agenda includes resolutions to award a contract for the purchase of Public Works equipment, as well as resolutions to award street paving contracts for Willow Grove Road and a section of Prospect Street -- both funded through grant money and part of the nearly 18 miles of roads we expect to have paved this year.

Handler Building Redevelopment Plan

Tonight we will also be introducing an ordinance on first reading for a redevelopment plan for the Handler building at 610 North Avenue, located next door to Westfield Lumber. The Handler building is a 100 year-old building which has been used as a manufacturing facility since 1971, most recently making dental equipment, until the company was recently sold and relocated to Connecticut.

Last year, Greg Redington, CEO of REDCOM, and architect Michele Modestino came to Town Planner Don Sammet and the Mayor expressing an interest in buying the Handler Building and turning it into an indoor, vertical, hydroponic farm.

Their concept, called REDI-farms, was to restore the building to its historical grandeur, provide year-round produce for the community and our local restaurants, operate a mostly plant-based high end restaurant, a teaching kitchen, an event space, and include a large not-for-profit component that includes a potential education partnership with our schools and a collaboration with local food banks. Their vision reflected many of the priorities of this administration and our community: historical preservation and adaptive reuse of an older building, sustainability, equity and inclusion, and economic development -- all wrapped into one proposal!

There was one glitch, and it was significant. The Handler Building was included in our Affordable Housing plan, and zoned for residential use. This meant that if the site didn't continue to operate as a manufacturing facility, the only development allowed was residential, and at the maximum permitted density -- a 27-unit residential apartment building that included six affordable housing units could be built conforming with the current zoning. After consulting our affordable housing attorney, Jon Drill, who then consulted with the Fair Share Housing Center, Jon advised us that Fair Share would be open to transferring the six unit affordable housing obligation to another site, as long as the development of that new site was imminent. A promise to add the six units to a yet to be identified site was not sufficient.

Concurrently, the Town received a call from the prospective developer of the Williams Nursery Site, who was readying their application to the Planning Board for site plan approval to allow for the construction of 130 apartments there, as permitted by the Town's Affordable Housing Plan and zoning ordinance. Through discussions with the developer and their representatives, the Town, and Fair Share Housing Center, an agreement was reached to modify the allowable density on the Williams Nursery site to accommodate a total of 162 apartments -- thereby allowing the transfer of the six unit affordable housing obligation units from the Handler site, all without increasing the Town's affordable housing obligations.

As a result, over the past few meetings this Council adopted an ordinance allowing for the transfer of the units and passed a resolution amending our Fair Share Housing settlement, which is what is enabling the Handler vertical farm redevelopment plan that we are introducing tonight. I'd like to thank this Council, the Planning Board, and staff for their extraordinary efforts to make this happen.

The net result of the six unit affordable housing transfer is one less apartment building in Town, while not changing our affordable housing obligation at all. Additionally, Westfield is gaining a local vertical farm which will be an economic development driver with significant social impact potential, and the opportunity to create a green corridor along North Avenue, bookended by the new EV auto dealership Karma on one end, and REDI-farms on the other. This is a win-win for our community!

Downtown Happenings

Don't miss the return of the [DWC's Sweet Sounds Downtown Music Festival](#), now in its 24th year, which will be held every Tuesday night in July and August from 7:00 to 9:00PM. Musicians will perform on Central Avenue, at the corner of Quimby and Elm, and in Foundation Park. Please come out and support our local businesses while enjoying one of Downtown Westfield's most beloved traditions.

Speaking of our local businesses, our newest additions include Custom Ink, Dulce - The Art of Hair, Balanced Corrective Chiropractic, Salon Peak, and Face Aesthetics. Other openings in the coming weeks and months include the new Westfield Pharmacy on Quimby, Barre 3 in the former Westfield Liquor Store on North Avenue, a second Spice Bazaar location serving a vegan menu on Quimby, and the Karma EV dealership on North Avenue. In addition, Robert Anthony Jewelers is moving to a more prominent space on Elm and East Broad St. (formerly Alex and Ani), and G Lab Aesthetics is moving to a larger space on Elm Street by the end of the year. I know you'll join me in extending best wishes to all!

Edison School Fields Project

Thanks to the many residents who have provided their feedback, suggestions, and questions on the proposed Edison School Multipurpose Fields Project, which would add new turf multi-purpose fields through an unprecedented partnership with the Board of Education. As a reminder, we are in the initial stages of the public input phase, which will continue over the next few months -- beginning with the homes in the vicinity of Edison School, where outreach is well underway, and followed by broader public meetings on July 21, September 1, and September 20 at Edison. Comments are also being accepted via email at edisonfields@westfieldnj.gov. You can review the details and FAQs related to the proposal [on the Town's website](#).

Kris McAloon Retirement

Finally, we will read a proclamation honoring Kris McAloon, our Town Engineer, who joins us for his final Town Council meeting tonight before retiring. To say that Kris has played an instrumental role in the Town's operations is an understatement. He has been responsible for planning, design and construction of capital improvements for the Town -- including road improvements, right of way acquisition, storm water and utility system improvements, thoroughfare planning, and management of development contract and easement releases. In addition, he has been in charge of the curbside recycling program, sat on the Planning Board, and on the Tree Preservation Commission. If you've ever contacted the Town about any of these issues, chances are you've spoken with Kris and, and likely saw him drive out to personally look at the concern and address it. He will be greatly missed, and we wish him all the best in his retirement.

With that, let's get to work. I want to remind everyone that I will be enforcing Robert's Rules this evening to ensure we stay on topic and the meeting runs efficiently.

Thank you.