



Town Council Opening Remarks January 11, 2022

(The following remarks were delivered by Mayor Brindle at the January 11, 2022 Town Council Meeting via Zoom.)

Good evening, everyone, and thanks to all who are joining us online tonight for the first regular meeting of the Town Council this year. While we certainly hoped to keep our meetings in-person, we, like many nearby municipalities, are temporarily pivoting back to Zoom as we ride out the current COVID surge driven by Omicron. I am hopeful that this is a short-term change and that we are back in the Council Chambers sooner rather than later.

Since it has been a while, I want to remind everyone that, in this format, public comment will be accepted only via Zoom, and we are live streaming for viewing only via Facebook. As always, the replay will also be available afterwards on Facebook, YouTube, and TV 36.

COVID-19

COVID cases continue to climb in New Jersey as a result of the Omicron variant, with state officials saying that current models suggest 20,000 to 30,000 daily cases for the duration of January and about 8,000 hospitalizations by early February. At last night's Board of Health meeting, Regional Health Officer Megan Avallone reported that Westfield has seen 428 cases since the beginning of January, following the 1,107 cases reported for the month of December. As always, we will have Westfield's weekly numbers to report on Friday with respect to cases and vaccination rates.

Today, Governor Murphy announced he has declared another public health emergency to keep measures in place to help curb the spread of the virus. I want to thank all of our residents for their ongoing resiliency as we weather this current surge that is expected to peak in the coming weeks.

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR DAY

The Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Association of Westfield invites the community to join in an outdoor commemoration of Dr. King on Monday, January 17 at 1:00 at the bandstand in Mindowaskin Park. Having canceled their regular annual commemorative service due to COVID concerns, MLK Westfield is going forward with a short outdoor event to commemorate the day and Dr. King's legacy of racial, social, and economic justice. The Association is also continuing its long tradition of marching to the annual service from the MLK Monument on the South Avenue Circle. Marchers will leave the monument at 12:30 and march to Mindowaskin Park – all are welcome.

The Association is also hosting, in partnership with the Human Relations Advisory Commission, a community discussion entitled *Disrupt Hate – Working Toward an Inclusive Westfield*, which will be held on February 3 at Westfield High School. This panel discussion will engage the community on how we can promote inclusion and disrupt the atrocious acts of hate we continue to see.

You are welcome to attend in person or via live stream, with more details to follow in the coming weeks.

COUNTY SCHOOL OPENS AT LORD & TAYLOR

As you may recall, we were thrilled to help facilitate the temporary use of the Lord & Taylor property by Lamberts Mill Academy and Hillside Academy South – both of which are schools for special needs students throughout Union County that were devastated by flooding from Tropical Storm Ida.

I'm pleased to report that the schools went into session at Lord & Taylor on January 3, and will remain there through June, thanks to the support of the property owner, Streetworks Development, working in partnership with Union County.

You can join me on Facebook Live this Friday at 3:00 as we walk through the school's use of the building, including the amazing murals completed by local artist Sam Mooney to brighten up the space for these deserving students and faculty members. I'm very proud of this public/private partnership and wish the school community a wonderful remainder of the academic year in their new space.

TONIGHT'S AGENDA

We have several important items on the agenda tonight – most notably, a resolution supporting community solar projects, which the Green Team covered in detail in our 7:00 PM conference session, as well as resolutions referring three more properties to the Planning Board for historic designation.

As I've discussed many times, voluntary historic designation is one of this administration's top priorities. I want to thank the Historic Preservation Commission for their ongoing dedication to this cause as they work with property owners to help us preserve the treasured properties of Westfield's past. With their recommendation, tonight we are voting on the next steps to designate two private properties – 23 Stoneleigh Park and 112 Ferris Place – as well as the historic coffee kiosk owned by the Town at the South Avenue Train Station.

I'd like Councilwoman Habgood, as her last act as HPC Council Liaison before transitioning it to Councilman LoGrippe, to share some of the incredible details of the HPC reports about these properties, which can also be found in full on our website at westfieldnj.gov/historicpreservation.

The HPC's report indicates that [the train station kiosk](#), which dates back to 1893, is one of the last remaining exterior newsstands in the country, and represents a time when newspapers controlled the

flow of information and the railroad controlled the country's mobility. After a recent extensive renovation, we look forward to Boxcar beginning its coffee and concierge services there with a ribbon cutting ceremony scheduled for next Tuesday.

[23 Stoneleigh Park](#) is known as the Jed Smith Foster House. Built circa 1905, it's an example of the first period of Colonial Revival in Stoneleigh Park, a planned residential development with park-like features. Today, it's owned by Robert and Anastasia Harrison, who asked the HPC to examine the home's history for potential designation, and I'd like to thank them for taking this step to ensure this exquisite home is preserved for future generations to admire.

The home at [112 Ferris Place](#) is considered a pre-revolutionary homestead. Known as the Mills-Ferris-Pearsall House, the original portion of the property was built circa 1750 and is one of the oldest houses in Westfield. It was built by one of the earliest settler families in the state, and has been included in every Town survey of important buildings. Currently owned by James Ward, the home's historic designation is a key part of the redevelopment plan for the corner of Prospect and Ferris that was recently adopted unanimously by this Council, ensuring its preservation.

With the Planning Board's approval, these three properties will increase the number of historic designations to nine under this administration, the most in Town history. As always, I encourage any resident with an older property to reach out to the HPC to discuss the benefits of historic preservation to help us maintain these pieces of Westfield's history for many years to come.

With that, let's get to work.

Thank you.